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THE WAYS OF GOD IN PARADISE LOST

by

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APPROVAL SHEET

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TO
MY WIFE
DORIS ANNE

"For softness shee and sweet attractive Grace"
(IV, 298)

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The narrative poem, Paradise Lost, was written by John Milton to justify the ways of God to man. The poet chose the fall of man as the theme of his epic, which marks the climax of a genre, and penned a story of universal significance. God, if not the hero of Milton's story, fills the central place in the twelve books of this monumental epic and has become the object of extensive criticism since its publication in 1667. The purpose of this thesis is to present and evaluate the points of criticism raised against the God of Paradise Lost.

The criticism accumulated during the centuries may be organized into three areas: criticism of Milton's poetic presentation of God; criticism of Milton's theological concept of God; criticism of the moral nature of Milton's God.

Criticism of Milton's poetic presentation of God is directed primarily against the speeches of God in Books III and V. They are generally regarded as too legalistic and doctrinal. But it is my contention that this emphasis is in keeping with the purpose of Milton's epic. Other critics consider Milton's presentation of God less spiritual than Dante's in The Divine Comedy, but if this is so, it is only because Milton sought to present God in a way accommodated to human understanding. Some critics object to God's attitude of derision, which He displays on three occasions when He indulges in divine laughter, but this derisive laughter also becomes appropriate when it is understood as God's repudiation of the absurdity of Satanic arrogance.

The criticism of Milton's theological concepts emerged after 1825, when his treatise on Christian Doctrine was published. In the light of the unorthodox views stated in the treatise, critics have generally noted three instances of "heresy" in the God of Paradise Lost. He has been accused of Arianism, the belief that Christ was not of the same substance of the Father; pantheism, a denial of God's creation of matter out of nothing; mortalism, the belief that the soul dies with the body. Actually the theological nature of Milton's God in the poem is not clear, but if Milton's theology is not orthodox, it is at least Biblically founded, and this is not heresy for one like Milton who believes that Biblical interpretation is a private matter rather than one to be left to ecclesiastical councils.

The final criticism against Milton's God takes exception to God's treatment of mankind. He is accused of not being merciful in His judgements upon Satan as well as on sinful man. And if one explains that the woes of man are not the result of God's judgements but man's misuse of freedom, then free will is questioned. But a proper understanding of freedom reveals that when man accepts the responsibility of free will, he can enjoy God's ways. This way does not preclude knowledge, but it does demand a proper sense of values. Yet whether one recognizes his responsibility or not, God continues to love him, but this love will never be realized or understood apart from personal commitment to God.

Though Milton's ideas about God are not always appreciated, they are pertinent to life and he is revered as a great poet.

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CHAPTER I

THE WAY OF GOD IN MILTON'S GREAT EPIC

The year 1667 is a milepost in English literature and in the life of John Milton, for that was the year that the poet realized the ambition of a lifetime and published what has been adjudged the greatest of all epics. Emerging out of a literary tradition that goes back to Virgil's Aeneid and Homer's Iliad, Paradise Lost stands at the summit of the epics of the western world. In this poem John Milton reaches the heights of his literary achievements because of his mastery of epic form and also because of his choice of a subject of universal and even cosmic significance.¹

Milton's literary masterpiece arose out of a lifetime of preparation. As a devout student of poetry and literature Milton had perused and digested all of the significant literary works of the classical past as well as of the Renaissance. His devotion to literature and study was as religious as that of one called of God to orders in the church. In a poem "To My Father," the poet, in expressing his desire to dedicate his talents to poetry, describes his high regard for it:

Do not look down upon divine song, the poet's
function, than which there is nothing that more
commends his ethereal birth and heavenly ancestry,
that more commends the mind of man because of its
origin. For song retains the sacred traces of
the Promethean fire. The gods on high love song;

and song has power to stir the trembling depths of
Tartarus and to fetter the gods of the lower
world It is with song that the priestesses
. . . reveal the secrets of the far-distant future. 2

About the age of twenty in a verse "At a Vacation
Exercise in the Colledge," written around 1628, Milton hints
of his hope to write of lofty and "heavenly" things. He is
not content merely to write some minor verses:

I pray thee then deny me not thy aide
For this same small neglect that I have made:
But haste thee strait to do me once a Pleasure,
And from thy wardrope bring thy chieftest treasure:
Not those new fangled toys, and trimming slight
Which takes our late fantasticks with delight,
But cull those richest Robes, and gay'st attire
Which deepest Spirits, and choicest Wits desire:
I have some naked thoughts that rove about
And loudly knock to have their passage out;
And wearie of their place do only stay
Till thou hast deck't them in thy best array;
That so they may without suspect or fears
Fly swiftly to this fair Assembly's ears;
Yet I had rather if I were to chuse,
Thy service in some graver subject use,
Such as may make thee search thy coffers round,
Before thou cloath my fancy in fit sound:
Such where the deep transported mind may soare
Above the wheeling poles, and at Heav'ns dore
Look in, and see each blissful Deitie
How he before the thunderous throne doth lie,
Listening to what unshorn Apollo sings
To th' touch of golden wires, while Hebe brings
Immortal Nectar to her Kingly Sire.

The range of his interests moves from "heav'ns dore" to nature
and days of old:

Then passing through the Spherse of watchful fire,
And mistie Regions of wide air next under,
And hills of Snow and lofts of piled Thunder,
May tell at length how green-ey'd Neptune raves,
In Heav'ns defiance mustering all his waves;
Then sing of secret things that came to pass
When Beldam Nature in her cradle was;
And last of Kings and Queens and Hero's old,

Such as the wise Demodocus once told
In solemn Songs at King Alcinous feast. 3

This poem suggests that Milton is already considering the possibility of writing an epic, because the subject matter which attracts him is similar to that of the great epics of the past. But it is not until 1640, that his intent to pen a song of epic proportions becomes more specific. In "Damon's Epitaph,"⁴ "To Manso,"⁵ and "On Reason of Church Government,"⁶ the poet indicates a desire to write about King Arthur and his royal exploits. Nevertheless, for reasons that can only be surmised, the subject of this grand undertaking was changed from King Arthur to the Fall of Man.

The Cambridge Manuscript of 1640-42, a kind of notebook with a hundred literary subjects from British and Biblical history, reveals that Milton was originally considering the story of the Fall of Man as the subject of a drama; however, that was never completed.⁷ And in the years preceding his retirement as Latin Secretary of State, Milton wrote a variety of lyrics and prose tractates. It was not until after he retired from public office that he undertook the fulfillment of his earlier epic ambition. The precise dates of his beginning and finishing the epic are uncertain, but it is thought that he devoted approximately ten years to the task.⁸ Though the poem was first published in 1667, the epic was revised to include twelve instead of ten books prior to the second edition in 1674.⁹ Miss Gagen suggests four factors which may have contributed to Milton's final selection of his subject:

doubts being raised about the historicity of King Arthur; his preference for truth rather than fiction as a basis or theme for his writing; the thought that a universal theme would be more significant over the years than a national theme; and his reluctance to choose a king as the hero of his epic when he had become intensely opposed to the idea of kingship.¹⁰ And so Milton decided instead to write

Of Mans First Disobedience, and the Fruit
Of that Forbidden Tree, whose mortal tast
Brought Death into the World, and all our woe,
With loss of Eden, till one greater Man
Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat, (I, 1-5)

and in the treatment of this subject to justify the ways of God to man.

Among the many preliminary questions raised over Milton's epic poem is the inquiry, usually put to students by professors, "who is the hero of Paradise Lost?" God, Christ, Man, Adam or Eve, and Satan have all been suggested. Some critics have even suggested a corporate or ideal hero, such as goodness or Milton himself. But it is generally conceded that Paradise Lost has no hero, at least in the sense of a central character who becomes the most important figure or the focus of action. As one critic has said of Paradise Lost, "It does not deal with the fortunes of a single hero, like Odysseus and Aeneas. It has, indeed, no hero, for it is only a quibble to insist, as has been done, that Satan is the hero; a great figure may have heroic qualities without being the hero of a story."¹⁰ It is my contention, however, that Paradise Lost does have a central

figure and it is not Satan. The central figure in Milton's epic is God.

From beginning to end God pervades the twelve books of this poetic story. The Godhead of Paradise Lost touches every problem and facet of John Milton's epic from Book I, where Urania is invoked, to Book XII, where Michael leads Adam and Eve out into the world, and throughout Books II to XI, where the hordes of Hell scheme and rebel against God and Adam and Eve misuse their free will. No one can deny that the "divine overseer" spans the spaces of the universe as well as the "time" before time.

Now had the Almighty Father from above,
 From the pure Empyrean where he sits
 High Thron'd above all highth, bent down his eye,
 His own works and their works at once to view:
 About him all the Sanctities of Heaven
 Stood thick as Starrs, and from his sight receiv'd
 Beatitude past utterance; on his right
 The radiant image of his Glory sat,
 His onely Son; On Earth he first beheld
 Our two first Parents, yet the onely two
 Of mankind, in the happie Garden plac't
 Reaping immortal fruits of joy and love,
 Uninterrupted joy, unrivald love
 In blissful solitude; he then survey'd
 Hell and the Gulf between, and Satan there
 Coasting the wall of Heav'n on this side Night
 In the dun Air sublime, and ready now
 To stoop with wearied wings, and willing feet
 On the bare outside of this World, that seem'd
 Firm land imbosom'd without Firmament,
 Uncertain which, in Ocean or in Air.
 Him God beholding from his prospect high,
 Wherein past, present, future he beholds. (III, 56-78)

The centrality of God, which becomes apparent in Book III, is depicted not only by the description of the Almighty Father's position but by His conversation with the Son. He

foretells man's fall in succumbing to Satan's plot and explains that only grace can save man, to which the Son responds by offering Himself in atonement for man's sin. The need to which the Son responds in Book III begins unfolding in Book I where Satan, along with his cohorts, is seen rousing from the defeat inflicted by heaven's hosts. (Milton in good epic fashion begins his narrative in the middle of his story and later includes a massive battle scene, which is recounted by the angel Raphael in conversation with Adam in Books V and VI.) Satan vows to renew the war against God and to pervert His will and plans. The plan of attack is formulated in a council of Hell where Beelzebub proposes an invasion of earth and the perversion or destruction of man. Book II closes with Satan assuming the responsibility of venturing to earth by departing through Hell's gates and traversing the regions of Chaos as he undertakes to avenge his humiliating fall from heaven.

Man does not come into the narrative until Book IV, where Satan is seen surveying the layout of Paradise, but the angels of God are already on the scene guarding God's world, and after discovering Satan they expel him from the Garden of Eden. In Book V Heaven's High King observes Adam and Eve during their morning worship and afterwards when they engage in a disturbed conversation about Eve's dream of the night before; He sends Raphael to warn Adam of the danger which threatens them. Raphael informs Adam of the reason for his mission;

he also tells of the occasion for the war in heaven (Book V) and its consequences (Book VI), and of the creation of earth and other worlds and heavens (Book VII), to which Adam adds his account of his own creation (Book VIII). With a final warning Raphael departs.

It is in Book IX that the tragedy erupts, when Eve is beguiled by Satan in the form of a serpent and persuades Adam to consent to sin in disobedience to God. Neither God nor His emissaries appear in this book, only the fallen angel and fallen man. But God is still watching in Book X as sin spreads its effects throughout creation and the Son goes to pronounce judgement upon Adam and Eve and Satan and the Serpent. Eventually Adam and Eve repent and turn to God in prayer. In Book XI the Son intercedes on behalf of man before the Father, who sends the angel Michael to drive them out of Eden but also to comfort them with a revelation which may enable them to survive death and enjoy a second life. The earthly pair are last seen at the end of Book XII being led from Eden but enjoying a "Paradise within" as they emerge into the outer world.

Though God the Father appears only in four of the twelve books, His influence is apparent from beginning to end, as the fallen angels react against Him, as the Son goes forth to create a new world in which to house the new creatures of God, as the heavenly angels are instructed to watch over and commune with man, as Satan seeks to pervert God's plans by

tempting man to fall, and as the Son thwarts Satan and redeems man on behalf of the Father. Milton undertakes, through a description of all these varied events, to portray the justification of God to man:

What in me is dark
Illumine, what is low raise and support;
That to the highth of this great Argument
I may assert Eternal Providence,
And justifie the wayes of God to men. (I, 22-26)

Thus the crucial question becomes, not whether God is the hero, but whether Milton succeeds in justifying the ways of God to men. And around this question a great volume of criticism has accumulated, with varying degrees of agreement and disagreement. Those who agree that Milton has failed to justify the ways of God in Paradise Lost typically concentrate on three factors: they claim that God is only a theologian in blank verse and is completely unconvincing as a literary figure; they also say that God is theologically unacceptable, regardless of the poetry, because He is unorthodox; and finally they maintain that the kind of justice God represents is unpalatable.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine these areas of criticism and to show how Milton through poetic accommodation, Biblical theology and his understanding of divine justice does justify the ways of God in Paradise Lost.

CHAPTER II

THE WAY OF AN ACCOMMODATED GOD

One of the earliest objections to Milton's God came from Pope, who wrote, "And God the Father turns a School-Divine,"¹¹ and accused Milton's God of arguing like Milton with unfortunate poetic results. The chorus of opposition to the speeches of God has continued. Criticism against the speeches has focused on primarily two sections of the epic: Book III, 80 ff., where the Heavenly Father begins talking to the Son about the schemes of Satan and the effects on man; Book V, 600-615, where the Father proclaims the exaltation of His Son over all of heaven's hosts.

James Hanford draws attention to the dialogues in Book III, which he considers a cold, theological exposition. He says "On the whole, Book III represents a pause in the onward sweep of Miltonic genius, a space devoted to the transaction of business, unpoetic, but necessary to the larger didactic and philosophic purposes of the epic."¹² However, Hanford answers his own criticism and partially vindicates the dialogues of God, when he says that they are necessary to the purposes of the epic. Exactly! The dialogues of God with the Son are not to show us what God looks like, but to help the reader understand God's ways in solving the problems encountered with man and Satan, members of God's creation. The problem, of

course, is that Satan is about to renew his attack upon God's sovereignty and spoil the new world which God has made in order to house man. The question which the Father raises and the one which mankind has continued to debate is whether God is at fault in permitting Satan to pursue his plans without direct interference from God. Milton, however, by the use of a rhetorical question has God answer the question by placing the blame for man's fall squarely on man himself:

Whose but his own? ingrate, he had of mee
 All he could have; I made him just and right,
 Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall.
 Such I created all th' Ethereal Powers
 And Spirits, both them who stood & them who faild;
 Freely they stood who stood, and fell who fell.
 Not free, what proof could they have givn sincere
 Of true allegiance, constant Faith or Love,
 Where onely what they needs must do, appeard,
 Not what they would? what praise could they receive?
 What pleasure I from such obedience paid,
 When Will and Reason (Reason also is choice)
 Useless and vain, of freedom both despoild,
 Made passive both, had servd necessitie,
 Not mee. They therefore as to right belongd,
 So were created, nor can justly accuse
 Thir maker, or thir making, or thir Fate. (III, 97-113)

Milton not only has God to explain man's responsibility for his fall, but goes on to repudiate any notion of predestination or heavenly determinism:

As if Predestination over-rul'd
 Thir will, dispos'd by absolute Decree
 Or high foreknowledge; they themselves decreed
 Thir own revolt, not I: if I foreknew,
 Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault,
 Which had no less prov'd certain unforeknown.
 So without least impulse or shadow of Fate,
 Or aught by me immutabl'ie foreseen,
 They trespass, Authors to themselves in all
 Both what they judge and what they choose; for so
 I formd them free, and free they must remain,
 Till they enthrall themselves: I else must change

Thir nature, and revoke the high Decree
 Unchangeable, Eternal, which ordain'd
 Thir freedom, they themselves ordain'd thir fall.
 The first sort by thir own suggestion fell,
 Self-tempted, self-deprav'd: Man falls deceiv'd
 By the other first: Man therefore shall find grace,
 The other none: in Mercy and Justice both,
 Through Heav'n and Earth, so shall my glorie excel,
 But Mercy first and last shall brightest shine.
 (III, 114-134)

Broadbent, who is very stringent in his criticism of God's speeches, says: "The Father's speeches accord only too well with the Argument. . . he clears his own Justice and Wisdom from all imputation, having created Man free and able enough to have withstood the tempter!" He adds, "Dramatically, the argument is ineffectual---so far as the poem is concerned, man has not yet been created, has not sinned, and has not imputed injustice or folly to God; so that the speeches are a work of supererogation. From the religious point of view it is vicious: the poet's rationalisings purport to be the expression of Divine reason. . . . The figures of debate, and the literally meant forensic metaphors, are symptoms of a legalism indigenous to Judeo-Christianity."¹³ Broadbent's protest goes beyond that of Hanford's. Broadbent is not simply attacking what he considers the poor poetic presentation of God in the dialogues. He is taking issue with the Judeo-Christian concept of free will and divine justice, which underlies the dialogues penned by Milton, and he seeks to invalidate the poetry by condemning the argument. The nature of the argument God presents is, of course, extraneous to the question of whether Milton's poetic presentation of God in Book III is

creditable. It is, however, pertinent to the question of whether or not the God of Paradise Lost is a moral being and this question is pursued in the concluding section of the thesis.

Rajan adds his accusations against Milton's God by saying that He "is what Satan never is, a collection of abstract properties, or, in his greatest moments a treatise on free-will."¹⁴ Irene Samuel effectively answers this argument. Noting that the main objections to God in Paradise Lost turn on the first episode in Heaven (Book III), she contends that the scene is mistakenly read "as a mere presentation of doctrinal assertions conveniently divided between the Father and the Son, and that to take it thus is to forget both how highly Milton prized poetic economy and how central he made this episode to the action of his whole poem."¹⁵ She suggests that this misconception may have resulted from taking as "dogma what Milton intended as drama" and states that "Any reduction of the drama of the council scene to exposition of doctrine surely distorts Milton's intent."¹⁶ She argues that

Milton intended the statements in the scene to demonstrate that the persons involved are recognizably God, the creator of the universe, and the Son, his 'word, wisdom, and effectual might'. . . . To try to read the dialogue. . . without allowing the first speaker his full nature would indeed make nonsense of the scene. But as soon as we take Milton's God as Being, infinitely beyond all created beings, the scene has dramatic point. The near tonelessness of his first speech at once proves itself the right tone. It has offended readers because they assume that the 'I' who speaks is or should be a person like other persons. The flat statement of fact, past,

present and future, and the calm analysis and judgement of deeds and principles---these naturally strike the ear that has heard Satan's ringing utterance as cold and impersonal. They should. For the omniscient voice of the omnipotent moral law speaks simply what is. Here is no orator using rhetoric to persuade, but the nature of things expounding itself in order to present fact and principle unadorned. 17

Irene Samuel points out that the voice of God is used to destroy the straw figure of tyranny that Satan conjured up in Books I and II and affords the Son an opportunity to refute it. "The Son, unbidden, answers . . . unlike mere assent Unlike the 'yes man' Satan has made of Beelzebub The Son argues In Milton's heaven the independent being speaks his own mind"18 The Son's answer brings to prominence a question (III, 213-16) which further contrasts with the proceedings in Hell. "The question and the moment of silence inevitably remind us of the council in Hell when Beelzebub proposed the voyage to Earth and asked who dared to go (II, 402-426)."19 Irene Samuel's argument gives an answer not only to those who, like Blake and Rajan, find Satan more attractive than God, but clearly justifies the manner and message of the God of Paradise Lost. For she further notes in the final speech of God (in Book III), "That the Father's voice, so cold and logically formal in stating fact and principle, can adopt a tone more warm and loving than the Son's when a deed is to be praised, a reassurance given."20 Warmth begins to be apparent in the second speech (III, 168-172) and is unmistakeably dominant in the third speech (III, 274 ff.).

Nevertheless, Tillyard, who finds "no major flaw in

the poem,"²¹ also notes problems involved in having God speak, particularly in Book V, 600-615:

Hear all ye Angels, Progenie of Light,
Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Vertues, Powers,
Hear my Decree, which unrevok't shall stand.
This day I have begot whom I declare
My onely Son, and on this holy Hill
Him have anointed, whom ye now behold
At my right hand; your Head I him appoint;
And by my Self have sworn to him shall bow
All knees in Heav'n, and shall confess him Lord:
Under his great Vice-gerent Reign abide
United as one individual Soule
For ever happie: him who disobeyes
Mee disobeyes, breaks union, and that day
Cast out from God and blessed vision, falls
Into utter darkness, deep ingulft, his place
Ordaind without redemption, without end.

Tillyard resents the "curt harsh tones"²² of God who expounds on something about which there can be no argument raised. He maintains, however, that Milton meant God to speak severely here because the poet also had Him speak severely in a parallel passage, where God was informing Adam of prohibitions in the garden:

But of the Tree whose operation brings
Knowledg of good and ill, which I have set
The Pledge of thy Obedience and thy Faith,
Amid the Garden by the Tree of Life,
Remember what I warne thee, shun to taste,
And shun the bitter consequence: for know,
The day thou eat'st thereof, my sole command
Transgrest, inevitably thou shalt dye:
From that day mortal, and this happie State
Shalt loose, expell'd from hence into a World
Of woe and sorrow. (VIII, 323-333)

Moreover, Tillyard excuses Milton's "despotic" God because of the "hierarchical ideas on which Milton's thought was grounded."²³ Each being was subordinated to those above him

in a graduated hierarchical scale. But, like Broadbent's argument, this is not so much an accusation against Milton's poetic presentations of God as against his philosophic concept of God. Nevertheless, Tillyard does raise a question that requires consideration. He suggests that since having God speak is inappropriate in sublime poetry, Milton would have done better to let others speak for God, as Michael did in Book XII when he instructed Adam of the future.²⁴

To this objection one must point out that having God speak did not originate with John Milton. The Biblical writers understood it to be appropriate for God to speak. The Book of Job is most notable for its portrayal of God in a heavenly conference, with angels and Satan, and of His coming down to speak with Job; the Old Testament is replete with the pronouncements of God; and Jesus repeatedly speaks of relating the message received from His Father (John 10:19; 14:24; etc.). It appears that having God speak is largely a matter of opinion, and in Milton's opinion it is quite appropriate. A survey of his epic reveals a preponderance of speeches by God on various occasions (III, 56-343; V, 219-245, 600 ff., 711-719; VI, 669 ff.; VII, 139 ff.; VIII, 295 ff.; X, 35 ff., 613 ff.; and XI, 45 ff., 84 ff., 99 ff.). Furthermore, as Irene Samuel has pointed out, to have God speak for Himself is much more appropriate than to interpose a puppet spokesman, as Satan did with Beelzebub. It is apparent, however, that Milton was reluctant to have God to speak outside of His

heavenly abode, for the one occasion when God does appear outside of heaven, it is as in "a dream" so Adam declares to Raphael in retelling his experience of creation (VIII, 292). On other occasions God sends an emissary to earth, to speak for Him, as in Books XI and XII.

Much of what has been said and written about the inadequacies of Milton's poetic presentation of God are the result of comparing Milton's God to Dante's presentation of God in The Divine Comedy. Grierson, who is most severe in his attack upon Milton's God, praises Dante for "wisely" abstaining "from any personal intervention of God or Christ."²⁵ Waldock also prefers Dante's presentation of God and seeks to explain Milton's difficulty as the problem of Adam heightened. "The difficulty is obvious: perfection, quite strictly, is unportrayable, for as soon as the process of portrayal begins we, the readers, begin a corresponding, and quite involuntary and irresistible, process of translation; we translate into the terms of limitation and imperfection."²⁶ But he does not consider the problem only an artistic and theological problem. Part of the difficulty he thinks lies in Milton himself in that "it does not come very naturally to Milton to suggest a loving God."²⁷ He suggests that this difficulty may be due to Milton's puritan background. William Grace also sees Dante as more successful in his method than Milton with his abstract, rational certainty and anthropomorphic God.²⁸ However, it must be emphasized that Milton's God is not Dante's God and

Dante's God is not Milton's God and whether one is more successful than the other is not the question in Paradise Lost. The basic question is, does Milton's God succeed in Paradise Lost; is He justifiable as the "divine overseer?"

C. S. Lewis, who generally defends Milton's God theologically, joins the chorus of those who find Milton's poetic presentations of God inadequate: "A God, theologically speaking much worse than Milton's, would escape criticism if only He had been made sufficiently awful, mysterious, and vague."²⁹ He feels that the theological scruples of critics are cast aside when Milton is content to suggest the wonder and glory of God, as in III, 60-62, when we are told that

About him all the Sanctities of Heaven
Stood thick as Starrs, and from his sight receiv'd
Beatitude past utterance

or in III, 380, when he says that God is "Dark with excessive bright." But "when the Son bows over his sceptre or the Father entertains the angels with 'rubied Nectar' served 'in Pearl, in Diamond, and massie Gold'" then Lewis insists that "we are displeased It is these anthropomorphic details that make the Divine Laughter sound merely spiteful and the Divine rebukes querelous; that they need not sound like this, Dante and the Hebrew prophets show."³⁰ Lewis, however, recognizes that Dante (and the Hebrew prophets) were not doing what Milton did, for he admits that the "comparison with Dante may be misleading."

No doubt Dante is in most respects simply a better poet than Milton. But he is doing a different kind of thing. He is telling the story of a spiritual pilgrimage---how one soul fared in its passage through the universe and how all may fear and hope to fare. Milton is giving us the story of the universe itself. Hence quite apart from any superiority in Dante's art or Dante's spirituality (and I freely admit that he is often superior in both) the Comedy is a religious poem, a poetical expression of religious experience, as Paradise Lost is not. 31

Exactly! Milton's poem is not Dante's poem, anymore than Dante's purpose is Milton's purpose. Dante wished to lead men up to God while Milton brings God down to man, but this does not necessarily make Milton's God any less spiritual and it certainly does not make the poem less religious.

Bush lends his support to Milton's presentation of God in citing Coleridge's comparison of Milton to Dante: "Milton 'was very wise in adopting the strong anthropomorphism of the Hebrew Scriptures at once,' and his judgement 'in the conduct of the celestial part of his story is very exquisite'." In Coleridge's opinion, "Dante has not succeeded . . . nearly as well as Milton"³² in the combination of poetry with doctrines. Bush goes on to add that "No long poem in the world is maintained at concert pitch and certainly not the Divine Comedy which is often used as a stick to beat Milton with."³³

Despite the argument between the critics over the superiority of Milton to Dante or Dante to Milton, it is evident that Milton encountered a problem in attempting to present an incomprehensible God to finite readers, a problem which Dante skirted by leaving God to the higher echelons of

his Medieval cosmology. But it was a problem of which Milton was not unaware. Marianna Woodhull notes that "Milton was aware that the characterization of God was an impossible undertaking; for in the treatise on Christian Doctrine, he has stated his belief that to a finite mind God was incomprehensible."³⁴ Yet despite this problem Milton undertook to present the ways of God to man, but he does so with a sense of the loftiness of God. His heightened sense of God is conveyed throughout the poem, though necessarily within the limits of an anthropomorphic framework. It is intimated in the four invocations (Book I, 1-26; Book III, 1-55; Book VII, 1-39; Book IX, 1-14), and is explicit where God is addressed as light:

. . . since God is light,
And never but in unapproached light
Dwelt from eternitie, dwelt then in thee,
Bright effluence of bright essence increate. (III, 3-6)

But it is also evident in the narratives. Saurat in commenting on this issue draws attention to one of the notable passages indicating Milton's awareness of the Unknowable Being.³⁵ It is the heavenly scene in which the angels are singing the praises of the Father:

Thee Father first they sung Omnipotent,
Immutable, Immortal, Infinite,
Eternal King; thee Author of all being,
Fountain of Light, thy self invisible
Amidst the glorious brightness where thou sit'st
Thron'd inaccessible, but when thou shad'st
The full blaze of thy beams, and through a cloud
Drawn round about thee like a radiant Shrine,
Dark with excessive bright thy skirts appeer,
Yet dazle Heav'n, that brightest Seraphim
Approach not, but with both wings veil thir eyes.
(III, 373-382)

One might also note the lucid and exquisite description of the Son moving out to do battle in His thundering victory over Satan at the close of Book VI, 746-772, of which Mr. Lewis only notes the "Sceptre."

So said, he o're his Scepter bowing, rose
 From the right hand of Glorie where he sate,
 And the third sacred Morn began to shine
 Dawning through Heav'n: forth rush'd with whirlwind sound
 The Chariot of Paternal Deitie,
 Flashing thick flames, Wheele within Wheele undrawn,
 It self instinct with Spirit, but convoyd
 By four Cherubic shapes, four Faces each
 Had wondrous, as with Starrs thir bodies all
 And Wings were set with Eyes, with Eyes the Wheels
 Of Beril, and careering Fires between;
 Over thir heads a chrystal Firmament,
 Whereon a Saphir Throne, inlaid with pure
 Amber, and colours, of the showrie Arch.
 Hee in Celestial Panoplie all armd
 Of radiant Urim, work divinely wrought,
 Ascended, at his right hand Victorie
 Sate Eagle-wing'd beside him hung his Bow
 And Quiver with three-bolted Thunder Stor'd,
 And from about him fierce Effusion rowld
 Of smoak and bickering flame, and sparkles dire;
 Attended with ten thousand thousand Saints,
 He onward came, farr off his coming shon,
 And twentie thousand (I thir number heard)
 Chariots of God, half on each hand were seen:
 Hee on the wings of Cherub rode sublime
 On the Crystallin Skie, in Saphir Thron'd.

True, this presentation of the Son, as of the Father, is a bit anthropomorphic, but how else is man to grasp the nature of His Being except through a heightened analogy or metaphor of things on earth? If Dante preferred to know God through trances and dreams and be led by his transformed lover up a celestial mountain, Milton preferred to present God in situations familiar to His creatures on earth and communicate something of His ways through descriptions in anthropomorphic

language. Milton's procedure is illustrated in the conversation of Raphael with Adam.

High matter thou injoinst me, O prime of men,
 Sad task and hard, for how shall I relate
 To human sense th' invisible exploits
 Of warring Spirits; how without remorse
 The ruin of so many glorious once
 And perfet while they stood; how last unfould
 The secrets of another world, perhaps
 Not lawful to reveal? yet for thy good
 This is dispenc't, and what surmounts the reach
 Of human sense, I shall delineate so,
 By lik'ning spiritual to corporal forms,
 As may express them best, though what if Earth
 Be but the shaddow of Heav'n, and things therein
 Each to other like, more than on earth is thought?
 (V, 563-576)

True, this is an accommodated knowledge, the accommodation of God and His truth to man's capacities for understanding, through a utilization of metaphors, images and illustrations, but this is what the Bible provides and what Paradise Lost aims to provide, and Milton understood this as all critics of the poem, as well as all men of faith, must understand. But the "True or genuine. . . is not opposed to the figurative."³⁶ Of course, accommodation has its problems. Not only can and will exception be taken to particular interpretative presentations of abstract truth and spiritual realities which may differ from our preferences or violate our prejudices, but accommodated views are inevitably imperfect. This imperfection is not only true of our knowledge of heavenly beings and their activities and speech, but it is also true of the time concepts portrayed throughout the epic.³⁷ Raphael emphasizes this fact in his comments to Adam about God's creation of the

world:

Immediate are the Acts of God, more swift
Then time or motion, but to human ears
Cannot without process of speech be told,
So told as earthly notion can receive. (VII, 174-177)

The time problem is further apparent as one seeks to follow the course of the epic narrative as Milton presents it. The poet, in writing of events that preceded history (of the time before time), must use flashbacks such as Raphael incorporates while speaking to Adam, and visions or foreknowledge to preview things to come, when writing in the context of pre-history.

It should be obvious by now that Milton recognized the problem of presenting heavenly matters to the human mind. But he also knew that the incomprehensible majesty of God does not prevent man from knowing something of His existence, presence and ways. Indeed, if God is to be relevant to man, man must have some knowledge of his Maker and eternal Provider. In fact, the theme of Paradise Lost depends upon the assumption that man does indeed have some knowledge of his Creator and Redeemer. Yet Milton never ceased to realize the difficulties of his task, and it was for this reason that he prayed for inspiration from the God above. Hanford says that the theory of accommodation "fitted with Milton's Platonism and lent support to his confidence in the authenticity of his inspiration. . . . When Milton undertook to write the epic of the Fall and became thereby a successor . . . , of Moses, he must have taken satisfaction in the thought that the original Word

itself was but accommodated truth."³⁸

One other matter regarding Milton's presentation of God requires consideration. Some objection has been raised against the laughter of God. The God of Paradise Lost has been criticized not only for His cold and calculating pronouncements, but also for the derisive laughter that He is made to express towards both the fallen angels and man. At least three occasions of divine laughter have been noted in the poem: when the Son and Father comment on the futility of the rebellion in heaven (V, 718-742), when Raphael cautions Adam against futile speculations about the heavens (VII, 75-84) and when Michael is showing Adam men's confusion at the tower of Babel (XII, 48-62). Saurat³⁹ is displeased because Milton did not develop these instances of "feeling" in God more fully while other critics prefer that they had not appeared at all. However, when rightly understood, these moments of derision seem quite appropriate to the Overseer of the universe as He perceives the futility of Satan's arrogant rebellion and man's futile speculations and proud attempts in vain exploits. Milton demonstrates this futility in his extensive development of Satan's rebellion in heaven, which he makes basic to the drama of the whole epic: from Book I, where Satan revives from his heavenly fall and initiates his vengeance, to Book IX where he begins to spoil God's new world. Joseph Summers, in citing the central place of this war in heaven to the structure and plot of the epic, points out that it is not included merely because classical epics contain heroic battles,

as some critics have maintained, but because Milton wished to show the futility of rebelling against God.⁴⁰

Arnold Stein suggests that the whole style and effect of the war in heaven are meant to be mock-heroic rather than heroic. Satan is representative of the traditional epic hero, seeking glory by force of arms, but this heroic type is forcefully repudiated not by arms but by the stalwart loyalty of angels such as Abdiel and Michael and above all by the stern devotion of God's own son (VI, 824 ff.). But Stein sees the mockery carried beyond the mere rejection of the heroic type, to the repudiation of "warfare in general. It is all an extravagant satire on the belief in war as pre-eminently heroic:"⁴¹

To trouble Holy Rest; Heav'n casts thee out
From all her Confines. Heav'n the seat of bliss
Brooks not the works of violence and Warr. (VI, 272-274)

This repudiation of war is illustrated by the fantastic weaponry that is employed and the endless futility of the campaign. Neither side is able to gain a victory until God arranges for His Son to intervene:

Whence in perpetual fight they needs must last
Endless, and no solution will be found:
Warr wearied hath perform'd what Warr can do,
And to disorder'd rage let loose the reines,
With Mountains as with Weapons arm'd, which makes
Wild work in Heav'n, and dangerous to the maine.
Two dayes are therefore past, the third is thine;
For thee I have ordain'd it, and thus farr
Have sufferd, that the Glorie may be thine
Of ending this great Warr, since none but Thou
Can end it. (VI, 693-703)

The ironic mood for this whole episode is set at the beginning of the war scene:

And smiling to his onely Son thus said.

Son, thou in whom my glory I behold
In full resplendence, Heir of all my might,
Neerly it now concernes us to be sure
Of our Omnipotence, and with what Arms
We mean to hold what anciently we claim
Of Deitie or Empire, such a foe
Is rising, who intends to erect his Throne
Equal to ours, throughout the spacious North;
Nor so content, hath in his thought to trie
In battel, what our Power is, or our right.
Let us advise, and to this hazard draw
With speed what force is left, and all imploy
In our defence, lest unawares we lose
This our high place, our Sanctuarie, our Hill.

To whom the Son with calm aspect and cleer
Light'ning Divine, ineffable, serene,
Made answer. Mightie Father, thou thy foes
Justly hast in derision, and secure
Laugh'st at thir vain designes and tumults vain,
Matter to mee of Glory, whom thir hate
Illustrates, when they see all Regal Power
Giv'n me to quell thir pride, and in event
Know whether I be dextrous to subdue
Thy Rebels, or be found the worst in Heav'n.

(V, 718-742)

Milton's views about war, the nature of his description of the heavenly warfare and the attitude of God toward the war all have Biblical foundations. The Psalmist speaks of the laughter of God: "He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord has them in derision" (Psalm 2:4). Several references to a heavenly war between God and the rebellious forces of Satan appear throughout the Scriptures (Isaiah 14:12 f.; II Peter 2:4; Jude 6; Revelations 12:4, 7-9) and, of course, the cessation of war is achieved by the Son of God (Micah 4:3 f.; Isaiah 9:6-7). Milton's poetic presentation of God in his speeches and laughter may come "down to earth" but it is a Biblical accommodation.

CHAPTER III

THE WAY OF A BIBLICAL GOD

The second major criticism against Milton's God is that He is theologically unacceptable. It is appropriate to note, however, that it was not until 1825, following the translation, from Latin, and publication of De Doctrina Christiana (Milton's theological treatise on his Christian doctrine), that critics began to suspect Milton of unorthodoxy. When the theology of Paradise Lost began to be read in the light of the theology of the treatise, it became "apparent" to some that the God of Paradise Lost, was Arian, pantheistic and mortalistic.

Kelley and Sewell have produced extensive studies on the comparative theology of De Doctrina Christiana and Paradise Lost and generally conclude that Milton was unorthodox in views of the Son as subordinate to the Father (Arianism), in his belief that God created the world out of His own substance rather than out of nothing (pantheism), and in his conviction that the soul died with the body (mortalism). They differ on their dating of the treatise, with Kelley contending that it preceded the poem and that it forms a gloss for understanding the poem's theology;⁴² while Sewell believes the treatise succeeded the writing of the poem and grew out of the theological struggles which developed during the writing of the poem.⁴³ However, some contend that no one can be sure, because any heresies that may exist are either subordinate to

the purpose of the poem or they are so well clothed in blank verse and imagery that they go unnoticed. Rajan writes, "Collate Paradise Lost with the De Doctrina and it is Arian But read it as it was meant to be read, by itself, as an epic poem, not a systematic theology, and the heresy fades in a background of incantation In Paradise Lost Milton's major unorthodoxies are presented discreetly and doubtfully, his opinions on things indifferent are never answered, and his beliefs, when they are embodied in his fable, are mixed inextricably with invention and conjecture."⁴⁴

Sewell, concluding that Milton is Arian at the end of his poem, just as he is in his treatise says: "As Creator, the Father inevitably stands superior in measure to the Son: not because the Son is a creature, but because the work of the Son as Mediator follows as a consequence of the decrees and designs of the Father. But for those decrees, there would have been no need for any mediatorial manifestation of the God-head."⁴⁵ But regardless of the reason for the Arianism of Milton's God Sewell finds it inherent in the poem. "In a poem in which the differences between the divine persons are dramatically stressed, Milton could not avoid implying the inferiority of the Son."⁴⁶ Irene Samuel also construes the very presentation of a heavenly council, with the Son distinct from the Father and subordinate to Him, as a condescension to Arianism.⁴⁷ And James Hanford, like Sewell and Samuel, points to the Arian heresy in Milton's theological concepts.

He finds the poet departing from orthodoxy not only in playing down the sacrifice of Christ as an atonement for sin, but also in presenting Christ himself as a being, though divine, distinctly inferior to God, and in assigning to the Holy Ghost a position of even less importance.⁴⁸ The Arian accusation may be substantiated by several passages in the poem, when one goes looking for the subordination of the Son or the scanty presence of the Holy Spirit. One of the passages in which Sewell notes Arian tendencies is in Book VIII, 399-421, where Adam relates to Raphael his conversation with God prior to the creation of Eve:

A nice and subtle happiness I see
 Thou to thy self proposest, in the choice
 Of thy Associates, Adam, and wilt taste
 No pleasure, though in pleasure, solitarie.
 What thinkst thou then of mee, and this my State,
 Seem I to thee sufficiently possess
 Of happiness, or not? who am alone
 From all Eternitie, for none I know
 Second to mee or like, equal much less.
 How have I then with whom to hold converse
 Save with the Creatures which I made, and those
 Beneath what other Creatures are to thee?
 He ceas'd, I lowly answer'd. To attaine
 The highth and depth of thy Eternal wayes
 All human thoughts come short, Supream of things;
 Thou in thy self art perfect, and in thee
 Is no deficiencie found; not so is Man,
 But in degree, the cause of his desire
 By conversation with his like to help,
 Or solace his defects. No need that thou
 Shouldst propagat, already infinite;
 And through all numbers absolute, though One.

Arthur Sewell seems to be the only one noting the relevancy of this passage to the question of Arianism, and that may be because he has been most noteworthy in his awareness of the anti-trinitarianism of Paradise Lost. Of course, since God

concedes that He was only "trying" Adam (VIII, 437), one may dismiss this passage as a "divine farce" rather than a theological heresy. But this possibility, of course, by no means eliminates the Arian tendency in the poem.

A more prominent passage of controversy on the relationship of the Son to the Father is in Book V, 603-606, where the Father announces the begetting of the Son as the Head of all heaven's hosts:

This day I have begot whom I declare
My onely Son, and on this holy Hill
Him have anointed, whom ye now behold
At my right hand; your Head I him appoint.

This is the announcement which precipitated Satan's rebellion against the Almighty, and though two thirds of the angels found no concern or alarm over the "annointing" of the Son as the Lord over all, Satan makes quite a point over this "new doctrine" (V, 855-856) in his argument with Abdiel. Some scholars have found this begetting the principal evidence of heresy in Milton's Godhead. Saurat notes the distinction between the Father and Son, particularly in this verse and contends that the Son is not infinite but limited: "he is not eternal, he has had a beginning."⁴⁹ Saurat's position, and indeed much of the accusation of Arianism against Milton in Paradise Lost, hinges on the meaning of the word "begot" in relation to the Son. C. S. Lewis points out what Milton emphasizes in his own statement of doctrine, De Doctrina, that "begot" has a double meaning. It not only means "to create" but it also means "to exalt." Lewis develops his case against

the charge of Arianism by explaining that if "begot" means "to create," then taken literally at this point in the epic, the Son would have been created after the angels, "But that is impossible We learn in III, 390, that God created the angels by the agency of the Son And it is obvious that 'this day I have begot' must mean, 'this day I have exalted,' for otherwise it is inconsistent with the rest of the poem."⁵⁰ Lewis does not hereby explain the origin of the Son, but he does substantially support the case for orthodoxy in Milton's view of the Godhead, contending that Milton's Arianism is not asserted in Paradise Lost. And there is further evidence in the poem, as Lewis contends, that "begot" is not to be taken to mean creation but rather as an exaltation of the Son. When Satan's envious reaction is first described by the poet, it is not because the Son was just now created that Satan rebelled, but because the Son was "that day/ Honoured by his great Father, and proclaimed/ Messiah King annointed" (V, 662-664). The nature of the Son's begetting as exaltation is further emphasized by Abdiel in his refutation of Satan's rebellious plan:

Words which no eare ever to hear in Heav'n
Expected, least of all from thee, ingrate
In place thy self so high above thy Peeres.
Canst thou with impious obloquie condemne
The just Decree of God, pronounc't and sworn,
That to his only Son by right endu'd
With Regal Scepter, every Soule in Heav'n
Shall bend the knee, and in that honour due
Confess him rightful King? (V, 810-818)

This may leave such matters as the origin of the Son unexplained,

but if it does that is how Milton would have it in his epic, for he gives no (other) explanation.

But in addition to the problems of the Son's relationship to the Father we have the problem of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead, and His relationship to the Father and Son. Some have preferred not to notice Him, contending that a spirit has no place in an epic, and that He really hardly appears, since He is a post-gospel manifestation. Lewis takes note of Him only in the opening invocation (Book I) and in His operations in the Church (Book XII, 484-530).⁵¹ But others find the presence of the Spirit, throughout the narrative, though they contend, that like the Son, He is subordinate to the Father and often identical with the Son. This is especially evident in the accounts of creation, when God sends the Son to mark out the bounds of the deep (VII, 162 f., 216 f.). Saurat says, "The Holy Spirit is somewhat of a supernumerary in Milton's system Milton shows little interest in this hypothetical being. In his thought, the Son is essentially the Spirit of Creation."⁵² One's view of the Spirit depends largely on how He is defined, whether as merely a post-gospel phenomenon, who makes His appearance only in history and after the incarnation of Christ, or as a part of the Godhead from the very beginning of time, as would be necessary if He shared in the creation of the world. This question is not the major matter of contention that the question of the Son's relationship to the Father is.

However, one other facet of the Spirit should be noted. Saurat cites the De Doctrina to show that the Holy Spirit may sometimes mean an angel, as well as a "voice of God by which the prophets were inspired."⁵³ And if this be the case in Paradise Lost then the Spirit is very much in evidence throughout the narrative, for angels, with messages from God, may be found flying all over the world---of Eden. These human-like Angels may be found engaging in eating, discoursing, playing, and loving, but faithful ones are also found carrying out heavenly missions for God: Raphael and Michael offer guidance and instructions to Adam and Eve; Gabriel, Uriel, Uzziel, Ithuriel, and Zephon are found standing guard over Paradise and searching out the evil intruder; Abdiel is remembered for his dispute against Satan in Heaven; while Moloch, Belial, Mammon and Beelzebub are all found engaged in the great debate in Hell; and all are involved in the great war in Heaven begun by Satan and won eventually by the Son of God. West in evaluating Milton's use of angels says: "The positive characteristics of this Puritan angelology are plain in Paradise Lost: its clinging to the Bible, and its emphasis on moral beings, as creatures obedient or rebellious to God, tempters of man or ministers for his salvation."⁵⁴ West has noted more than thirty angels' names in Paradise Lost, apparently coined sonorously or drawn by Milton from a variety of sources, though the "principal angelic actors"⁵⁵ are taken from the Bible. Milton, while following the angelology of his day, seems to

have felt free to develop his angels as suited his story. Not a great deal of notice seems to be given to Milton's angels because, as West indicates, they are generally orthodox and belong to the story Milton is relating.⁵⁶

The second main charge of unorthodoxy against Milton's view of God pertains to the question of creation. The orthodox teaching is "that God made the material universe 'out of nothing,' i.e. not out of any pre-existing raw material."⁵⁷ The problem facing the church, as C. S. Lewis explains it, was to avoid the idea that God was not the sole origin of things, but found himself from the beginning faced with something other than himself."⁵⁸ But it is clearly evident in Paradise Lost that Milton understands matter to be already present, though in chaotic form, when the Son goes forth to create the world:

On heav'nly ground they stood, and from the shore
They view'd the vast immeasurable Abyss
Outrageous as a Sea, dark, wasteful, wilde,
Up from the bottom turn'd by furious windes
And surging waves, as Mountains to assault
Heav'ns highth, and with the Center mix the Pole.
Silence, ye troubl'd waves, and thou Deep, peace,
Said then th' Omnific Word, your discord end.
(VII, 210-217)

So the question comes: if our world has not existed from the beginning and does not come out of nothing, from where does it come? Milton's concept of creation in De Doctrina as in Paradise Lost emphasizes that the world was framed out of matter of some kind or other and goes on to conclude that all things are of God.⁵⁹ This is precisely what Milton says in Paradise Lost where Raphael discusses the nature of heavenly

beings with Adam:

. . . one Almighty is, from whom
All things proceed. (V, 469-470)

Lewis, who concurs in this view of Milton's concept of creation, that all things come from God, contends that this is not heresy since heresy in the doctrine of creation consisted mainly in believing in an eternal dualism, which pitted matter against God.

However, Milton is exposed to another charge of unorthodoxy in this concept of creation: the charge of pantheism, which equates God with matter---matter is God and God is matter. Larson accepts this charge against Milton as a case of "monistic pantheism" and is satisfied that all problems of heresy are solved or become incidental because Milton is beyond them in his enlightenment.⁶⁰ Walter Clyde Curry is not happy at all to allow Milton's God to be pantheistic: he prefers "it" to be "a metaphysical theopantism,"⁶¹ a concept which he admits may be incomprehensible. Actually Curry seems to have devised a philosophic explanation for the creation built upon the Neo-platonic idea of emanations, though with a difference, "for Proclus the emanation of materiality from essentiality of the one is a necessary and eternal process; for Milton the efflux of matter from God occurs at a point in time (XV, 19) and involves the exercise of the divine will."⁶²

If, therefore, Milton avoids dualism by contending that all matter (things) comes from God, and if he avoids pantheism, in which all matter is God or God is everything,

through a Platonic process of emanations, the question is how? And in answer to this question Saurat has posited a view of "retraction" based on the passage VII, 165-173, where the Father describes to the Son (and Spirit) the emergence of matter or being.

My overshadowing Spirit and might with thee
I send along, ride forth, and bid the Deep
Within appointed bounds be Heav'n and Earth,
Boundless the Deep, because I am who fill
Infinitude, nor vacuous the space.
Though I uncircumscrib'd my self retire,
And put not forth my goodness, which is free
To act or not, Necessitie and Chance
Approach not mee, and what I will is Fate.

Saurat identifies this passage with the teaching of the Zohar, a non-orthodox Jewish writing from Spain, which is interpreted to mean that God withdrew or retired His goodness from the area which became the world. "God has created all things, not out of nothing, but out of himself."⁶³ Saurat holds this view to be essential to Milton's concept of free will and the justification of God. "Through this 'retraction', matter is created; through this 'retraction', individual beings are created; the parts of God thus freed from his will become persons. . . . Had therefore God not withdrawn from beings, there would have been in the universe nothing but God. This is the central point of Milton's doctrine, the instrument of his justification of God, for man's responsibility is derived from it."⁶⁴ Several critics, however, have taken exception to Saurat's view of "retraction," and like Sewell, contend that God, rather than withdrawing, puts forth His goodness to effect

creation by bringing order where before in the absence of God's goodness there is only chaos and chance. Sewell distinguishes between the being of God and the design of God's order in nature, so as to avoid the charge of pantheism, but he does not make clear how free will operates in God's ordered world. He only confesses that the creation is a mysterious paradox.⁶⁵

However, Lewis is inclined to concur with Saurat, though he feels that Saurat may have misinterpreted the Zohar. He feels that Saurat has interpreted the Zohar to mean that God is corporeal rather than spiritual or why else would God have to withdraw Himself. If this is the case, it is heretical, for God is never to be viewed as corporeal. But Lewis does not believe that the Zohar teaches that God is corporeal, "for having said that God 'contracts His essence' it goes on to assert that He does not thereby diminish Himself," and "spatial contraction of a body would involve diminution in extent. Therefore, the retraction of the Zohar is not really an affair of space, as we understand it, at all; and not even the Zohar, much less Milton, can with certainty be accused of such crude picture-thinking as we at first suspect."⁶⁶ This incorporeal "coming and going" of God is explained by Milton as the nature of an "omnipresent" God:

The Filial Power arriv'd, and sate him down
With his great Father, for he also went
Invisible, yet staid (such priviledge
Hath Omnipresence) and the work ordain'd,
Author and end of all things, and from work

Now resting, bless'd and hallowd the Seav'nth day,
As resting on that day from all his work. (VII, 587-593)

Lewis goes on to contend that Milton, "believing that God made the world 'out of Himself'," does so "in the sense that the world was modelled on an idea existing in God's mind. . . . He 'thought of' matter as Dickens 'thought of' Mr. Pickwick"67

George Taylor, in his extensive survey on Milton's Use of Du Bartas, deals specifically with the question of Milton's view of creation (as described in VII, 165 f.) and comes out with a view directly in contrast to Saurat's, though not too far from Lewis' conclusion. Taylor contends not only that Milton is indebted to Du Bartas, the French pietist, for his view of creation but also that creation is not by "retraction". Taylor cites references from Du Bartas which are similar to the thought of Milton, but which he feels explains Milton's concept of creation better because Du Bartas gives emphasis to the context in which the question of the "origin of matter" arises in Paradise Lost. The passage in question comes as a response to the question of Adam to Raphael, "What cause/ moved the Creator in his holy rest/ through all eternity, so late to build/ in Chaos?" (VII, 90 ff.) It is in response to this question that we must understand Raphael's explanation of creation (VII, 165-173). Du Bartas explains that God in a state of rest meditated the idea of the world before time in contrast to His active creation in time. "God, however, exercises his creative faculties in only a limited portion of

chaos on other portion of chaos, he does not 'put forth his goodness'." According to the commentators, "put forth his goodness" means to create. "As to these other parts of chaos, he 'retires'---not in the sense of contracts, but in the sense of remaining 'at rest'. The creative process among the Hexaemeral writers is clearly an expanding not a contracting process. It is an encroachment on chaos not a retiring from it."⁶⁸ Taylor has paraphrased the passage (VII, 165 f.) as follows:

Go forth and create the world out of a portion of chaos. Put an outer shell around it to protect it against the inroads of this chaos. So bound the world. Chaos itself is boundless because I am infinite, am everywhere extending to all points of it and fill it. Think not that the uncreated part of a chaos is a vacuum. I fill it, 'uncircumscribed'. I am everywhere, although I do not everywhere exercise the active principle of being on all chaos, not putting forth my goodness as to all chaos, but, as to the greater part of chaos, remaining, as I have been from all eternity, at rest, 'retired'. ⁶⁹

Therefore, we can conclude that whether God "retracted" from a portion of chaos or "put forth his goodness," on a circumscribed area of it, whether He "meditated" or "created", He brought forth out of Himself an ordered universe from what was without form. And as Bush emphasizes, this idea is not particularly heretical. He says, "In the Christian Doctrine Milton opposed the orthodox view that God created the world out of nothing and argued that he created it out of his own substance (a view which, in Christian tradition, seems to have begun with Gregory of Nyssa and pseudo-Dionysius); but the reinterpretative language of the poem does not directly

challenge orthodoxy."⁷⁰ The poem simply emphasizes the important point, not whether He created out of Himself or out of nothing, but that God did the creating.

It is possible, as Lewis elsewhere suggests, along with others, that Milton was not concerned to declare his theological position and therefore framed this passage so that the mystery of the process could be felt as well as perceived through the ambiguity of his poetical construction. Commenting on a passage in VIII, 291, Lewis says, "The very crumbling of consciousness is before us and the fringe of syntactical mystery helps rather than hinders the effect."⁷¹ So with the passage in Book VII, it is not at all clear what "infinitude" is retiring from and where He is not putting forth His goodness, but we are made aware that God is mysteriously responsible for the emerging creation.

Mortalism is the third and final charge of heresy generally laid to the God of John Milton in Paradise Lost. Mortalism, simply stated, means that the soul dies with the body. There is no free-soaring spirit rising to an immortal abode in heaven following the death of the body. This view, of course, is consistent with the pantheistic tendency to conceive matter and spirit as one and inseparable, which some find in Milton. But, more than that, it is based on Milton's interpretation of the Scriptures as spelled out in De Doctrina. Conklin explains that the literal meaning of "soul" as Milton understood it from the Old Testament, precluded any pre-existence and, referring to the whole man, allowed for no

separation of soul from the body. Death is "the dissolution of the whole man, body and soul."⁷² Svendsen finds this view expressed in Paradise Lost by Adam in his lament over sin and its consequence (X, 792 f.), but it is considered "only one of the evasions that Adam abjures near the end of the soliloquy . . . , and soon abandons because, he realizes that none of him will ever die."⁷³

As with the other two questions of heresy, so with this charge of mortalism: it is by no means certain. But it is certain that Milton believed that the enemy, Death, would be eliminated by the work of God through His Son. God Himself declares that eventually, with "one sling" of the "victorious Arm" of His "well-pleasing Son," both "Sin and Death" and the "yawning Grave" will be at last

Through Chaos hurl'd, obstruct the mouth of Hell
For ever, and seal up his ravenous Jawes. (X, 630-637)

Rajan,⁷⁴ like Saurat,⁷⁵ adds that any really significant effects of the mortalist's view are cancelled out in Paradise Lost by affirmation of belief in the resurrection of both soul and body.

. . . so he dies
But soon revives, Death over him no power
Shall long usurp; ere the third dawning light
Returne, the Starres of Morn shall see him rise
Out of his grave, fresh as the dawning light,
Thy ransom paid, which Man from death redeems,
His death for Man, as many as offerd Life
Neglect not, and benefit imbrace
By Faith not void of workes: this God-like act
Annuls thy doom, the death thou shouldst have dy'd,
In sin for ever lost from life; this act
Shall bruise the head of Satan, crush his strength
Defeating Sin and Death, his two maine armes,

And fix farr deeper in his head thir stings
 Then temporal death shall bruise the Victors heel,
 Of theirs whom he redeems, a death like sleep,
 A gentle wafting to immortal Life. (XII, 419-435)

What then may be concluded about the ways of Milton's God in Paradise Lost from a theological point of view? Obviously, He is, as always, the object of much endless controversy. Secondly, he may not be the God of the Nicene creed, though this is not entirely certain from the poetic presentation. Finally, one need not be surprised if He is not orthodox since Milton nowhere avows to be, but on the contrary the poet was quite notable for his exceptional views in politics and religion and particularly in his opposition to Romanism (III, 440 ff.) and the established church (VI, 143 ff.; XII, 507 ff.). But on the other hand, to be unorthodox was not to Milton the equivalent of being a heretic. In Of True Religion, he states, "Heresy is in the will and choice professedly against scripture; error is against the will, in misunderstanding the Scripture after all sincere desires to understand it rightly; hence it was said well by one of the ancients, 'Err I may, but a heretic I will not be.' It is a human frailty to err, and no man is infallible here on earth."⁷⁶

But though Milton was not concerned to be orthodox he was concerned about being Biblical, as he states in his treatise: "For my own part, I adhere to the Holy Scriptures alone; I follow no other heresy or sect. I had not even read any of the works of heretics, so called, when the mistakes of those who are reckoned for orthodox, and their incautious

handling of Scripture, first taught me to agree with their opponents whenever those opponents agreed with Scripture."⁷⁷

Though Milton's views were Biblical, they were Milton's views of the Bible as he understood them in the light of his training and of the Spirit. "Milton's perusal of Scripture meant simply the discovery of the literal meaning of the Word of God, which resulted from diligent study of the text (for which grammatical authority could be sought) and, then, for the significance of the resultant rendition, dependence on the Holy Spirit."⁷⁸ And what Milton demanded of himself he preferred for others. "Every believer has a right to interpret the Scriptures of himself, in as much, as he has the Spirit for his guide, and the mind of Christ is in him; nay, the exposition of the public interpreter can be of no use to him, except so far as they are confirmed by his own conscience."⁷⁹ This view is fully expressed in the epic when Milton refers to the fact that religious truth will mentally be tainted by tradition and superstition because it can be found

. . . onely in those written Records pure,
Though not but by the Spirit understood. (XII, 513-514)

Milton's theological views of God were always substantiated by Scripture as a study of De Doctrina will reveal or as a general perusal of the Bible will indicate. The Gospel of John gives particular emphasis to the three persons of the Godhead, though not indicating their equality or inequality---only their unity and interrelatedness. The accounts of the creation appear in Genesis 1 and 2 with verse two of

chapter one describing the movement of God upon the "void"; Genesis 2 and 3 describe the habitat and activities of Adam and Eve, including the Fall. Conklin cites references substantiating the mortalist viewpoint from Genesis 1:26 and I Corinthians 15:42-50.⁸⁰ The Biblical basis for Paradise Lost is apparent from beginning to end. The whole panorama of Books XI and XII is but a condensation of major events from the Scriptures. In fact the Bible itself is a revelation given for the justification of the ways of God to men: "For these are written in order that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (John 20:31)

However, the main Biblical concept upon which Milton draws and builds is the redemptive action of the Son, especially in contrast to and in combat with Satan. Grierson, like Hanford and Saurat, points to the apparent absence of the atonement, in Paradise Lost. "If Paradise Lost . . . seems to many people today imperfectly Christian in Spirit, it is not because of any explicitly heretical doctrines the poem gives expression to, such as Arianism, but because Milton's scale of values is not that of the orthodox and sincere Christian Take two of the doctrines, the Atonement and the doctrine of Divine Grace."⁸¹ Lewis, in responding to a similar charge from Saurat, replies: "Professor Saurat says (p. 177) that the Crucifixion plays 'no noticeable part' in the poet's theology and that 'vicarious atonement' is no Miltonic conception (p. 178). But it is precisely the scheme

of vicarious atonement in its strictest Anselmic form which the Father propounds . . . and which Satan accepts."⁸² References to the Son's redemptive (atoning) action appear in I, 4-5; III, 56-415; X, 58-62; XII, 386-395.

But the scope of the Son's action includes not only His atoning death but His very incarnation. Frye points to the declaration of Michael that it is by the incarnation that "the Son will crush Satan's strength over man, 'defeating Sin and Death, his two main arms, and fix far deeper in his head their stings' (XII, 431-32). The Son's action will give 'Death his death's wound' (III, 252), that is render him powerless over men who accept the accommodation of God to man's condition, the offer of divine acceptance Even before the fall of man, the Father and the Son had determined the utter destruction of all evil, the total erasure of sin, when the Son would ruin all the foes and with Death's 'carcass glut the grave' (III, 259) The total shattering of all evil must come before man can enter on the life everlasting."⁸³

The function of the Son as Redeemer, following the Biblical motif, is emphasized by contrast to the futile and perverse activities of the self-depraved angel---revealing further the significance of the responsible exercise of free will. The contrasting activities and endeavors of Satan and the Son are emphasized by "The description of the Son issuing from the gates of Heaven and riding into chaos on his mission

of creation. . . set in deliberate contrast to that of Satan issuing from the gates of Hell on his mission of destruction."⁸⁴ But the evidences of this contrast are everywhere apparent throughout the epic from the moment the Father announces His Son's annointment (V, 603), against which Satan rebels, to the final judgement pronounced by the Son upon Satan and effected in the domains of Hell where the arch-fiend squirms like a worm (X, 504 ff.). The superiority of the Son and His ways over the devil and his schemes was indicated in the Son's victorious battle (V, 733-41), but it is not fully realized until the reconciliation of man with God and the establishment of Paradise in the heart of man (XII, 587). It is in the triumph of Christ, the Son of God, that the ways of God to man are finally vindicated and fully justified. The ways of Satan are overcome and eventually dissolved

. . . so shall the world goe on,
 To good malignant, to bad men benigne,
 Under her own waight groaning, till the day
 Appeer of respiration to the just,
 And vengeance to the wicked, at return
 Of him so lately promis'd to thy aid,
 The Womans seed, obscurely then foretold,
 Now amplier known thy Saviour and thy Lord,
 Last in the Clouds from Heav'n to be reveal'd
 In glory of the Father, to dissolve
 Satan with his perverted World, then raise
 From the conflagrانت mass, purg'd and refin'd,
 New Heav'ns, new Earth, Ages of endless date
 Founded in righteousness and peace and love,
 To bring forth fruits Joy and eternal Bliss.
 (XII, 537-551)

The full effect of the Son's redemptive action involves far more than merely the elimination of Satan and the effecting of a Paradise in the heart of man. God, the Father, responding

to Satan's rebellion envisions the uplifting of all creation
to heaven's abode:

But least his heart exalt him in the harme
Already done, to have dispeopl'd Heav'n,
My damage fondly deem'd, I can repaire
That detriment, if such it be to lose
Self-lost, and in a moment will create
Another World, out of one man a Race
Of men innumerable, there to dwell,
Not here, till by degrees of merit rais'd
They open to themselves at length the way
Up hither, under long obedience tri'd,
And Earth be chang'd to Heavn, & Heav'n to Earth,
One Kingdom, Joy and Union without end. (VII, 150-161)

The triumph of Christ culminates finally in a mystical union
of God and all creation:

Scepter and Power, thy giving, I assume,
And gladlier shall resign, when in the end
Thou shalt be All in All, and I in thee
For ever, and in mee all whom thou lov'st. (VI, 730-733;
cf. III, 330-341)

What this, of course, means is beyond human ken but not be-
yond the Scriptural tenets upon which John Milton drew
(Colossians 1:15-20; Ephesians 2:15-23).

CHAPTER IV

THE WAY OF A JUST GOD

What now remains to justify the ways of God in Paradise Lost? Just as Milton's poetic presentation has offended some and his "unorthodox" theological concepts have not pleased others, so his ideas of God's justice have not suited all. In other words, it is questionable whether the God of Paradise Lost is justifiable morally. Shelley is one of the first to take issue with the morals of Milton's God. Preferring Milton's devil to his God, Shelley writes, "Milton's Devil as a moral being is as far superior to his God, as one who perseveres in purpose which he has conceived to be excellent, in spite of adversity and torture, is to one who in the cold security of undoubted triumph inflicts the most horrible revenge upon his enemy, not from any mistaken notion of inducing him to repent of a perseverance in enmity, but with the alleged design of exasperating him to new torments. Milton has so far violated the popular creed."⁸⁵ Shelley cites the teaching of Jesus, "Love your enemy, bless them that curse you," as "the practice of God," which Milton's God fails to imitate.

Despite accusations to the contrary, the mercy and grace of God are reiterated throughout the epic. In speech, description and action, the poet emphasizes the loving concern of God, the Father and the Son. This love is clearly

enunciated (throughout Book III) even as the Father imparts foreknowledge to the Son and angels of the doom that is to befall man through the deceits of Satan. First the Father announces it:

By the other first: Man therefore shall find grace,
The other none: in Mercy and Justice both,
Through Heav'n and Earth, so shall my glorie excel,
But Mercy first and last shall brightest shine.
(III, 131-134)

Then the Son reaffirms it:

O Father, gracious was that word which clos'd
Thy sovran sentence, that Man should find grace.
(III, 144-145)

Finally, the angels praise it:

Not so on Man; him through their malice fall'n,
Father of Mercie and Grace, thou didst not doome
So strictly, but much more to pitie encline:
No sooner did thy dear and onely Son
Perceive thee purpos'd not to doom frail Man
So strictly, but much more to pitie enclin'd,
He to appease thy wrauth, and end the strife
Of Mercy and Justice in thy face discern'd,
Regardless of the Bliss wherein hee sat
Second to thee, offerd himself to die
For mans offence. (III, 400-410)

And that which was announced from the beginning is carried out in the end---through the judgement enacted by the Son (X, 55 ff.) and by the intercession (XI, 1 ff.) as well as the incarnation and atonement foreseen by Adam through the revelations of Michael (XII, 359 ff.).

But the accusation of Shelley persists. If God is as merciful as He declares, then why all the misery and sorrow and woes that ensued from the "eating of the apple?" And what good is all this mercy, if this be mercy?

Of course, the answer is that the misery and sin and woe of man and his world are not the consequence of God's mercy. It is more than a matter of mercy. They are the result of man's misuse of his freedom of will. God's justice demands punishment of sin but His mercy provides a way to triumph over suffering, sin and death. From man, as from angels and all beings, God demands the responsible use of free will---the responsibility attendant on being a rational creature of God. This idea is reiterated throughout the epic---not only in heaven's high abode, but in Hell and on earth as well. Man was repeatedly reminded of this peculiar responsibility. From the time of his creation (VIII, 434 ff.) man was awakened to his free will, of which he was later reminded by Raphael (V, 520 ff.; VIII, 633 ff.), and which even Satan observed (IV, 294). Satan boasts of his freedom and his unconquerable will (I, 84 ff., 211 ff., 622 ff.; II, 19; V, 743; VI, 281 ff.). Moreover, God had clearly enunciated the principle of freedom (III, 93 ff.).

But, of course, there arise further complaints. If the woes of man are not the result of God and His lack of grace, but rather of the freedom given to man and angels, then what good is freedom under God? This was the lament of Adam amid his sorrows and woes:

. . . . O fleeting joyes
Of Paradise, deare bought with lasting woes!
Did I request thee, Maker, from my Clay
To mould me Man, did I sollicite thee
From darkness to promote me, or here place
In this delicious Garden? as my Will

Concurd not to my being, it were but right
 And equal to reduce me to my dust,
 Desirous to resigne, and render back
 All I receav'd, unable to performe
 Thy terms too hard, by which I was to hold
 The good I sought not. To the loss of that,
 Sufficient penaltie, why has thou added
 The sense of endless woes? inexplicable
 Thy Justice seems; yet to say truth, too late,
 I thus contest; then should have been refusd
 Those terms whatever, when they were propos'd:
 Thou didst accept them; wilt thou enjoy the good,
 Then cavil the conditions? and though God
 Made thee without thy leave, what if thy Son
 Prove disobedient, and reprov'd, retort,
 Wherefore didst thou beget me? I sought it not:
 Wouldst thou admit for his contempt of thee
 That proud excuse? yet him not thy election,
 But Natural necessity begot.
 God made thee of choice his own, and of his own
 To serve him, thy reward was of his grace,
 Thy punishment then justly is at his Will. (X, 741-768)

But long before that Satan himself had protested against
 God's idea of freedom. He had no desire to be free under God,
 for to him this was not freedom. "Better to reign in Hell,
 than serve in Heaven!" (I, 263). And, of course, this re-
 sentment toward the authority of God was the theme of his re-
 bellion (V, 773 ff.).

But what if better counsels might erect
 Our minds and teach us to cast off this Yoke?
 Will ye submit your necks, and chuse to bend
 The supple knee? ye will not, if I trust
 To know ye right, or if ye know your selves
 Natives and Sons of Heav'n possest before
 By none, and if not equal all, yet free,
 Equally free; for Orders and Degrees
 Jarr not with liberty, but well consist.
 Who can in reason then or right assume
 Monarchie over such as live by right
 His equals, if in power and splendor less,
 In freedome equal? or can introduce
 Law and Edict on us, who without law
 Erre not, much less for this to be our Lord,
 And look for adoration to th' abuse

Of those Imperial Titles which assert
Our being ordain'd to govern, not to serve?

Satan is saying two things about his estimate of freedom. First, that to be subservient to God is not freedom; it is servitude; it is enslavement. Further, Satan says that he will have none of this "freedom." In other words, he will have no gods over Him. He will be his own god: "The captain of his soul, the master of his fate."

Of course, John Milton had much to say about the meaning of freedom, even in Paradise Lost. Abdiel proves an able spokesman, repudiating the erroneous views of Satan. Abdiel in his argument with Satan, amid the revolution in heaven, enumerates several facets of freedom. First, freedom does not mean that one is to be left to one's self and its vain pride. Self-centeredness is anarchy, the perversion of freedom (cf. Satan's soliloquy, IV, 31 ff.; his laments IX, 49 ff.; and finally, his unexpected reversal, X, 504 ff.). Man left to himself degenerates into futility and meaninglessness; as Abdiel implies in his refutation of Satan's charge:

. . . for soon expect to feel
His Thunder on thy head, devouring fire.
Then who created thee lamenting learne,
When who can uncreate thee thou shalt know. (V, 892-895)

Futhermore, Abdiel reminds us that it is not forfeiture of freedom to choose to serve one worthy of our honor and devotion, one who is perfectly wise and good. Abdiel exemplifies the merit of loyalty and service to God. He justifies the way of God by choosing to stand against Satan; and he

demonstrates the way of freedom under God.

So spake the Seraph Abdiel faithful found,
 Among the faithless, faithful only hee;
 Among innumerable false, unmov'd,
 Unshak'n, uneduc'd, untterrifi'd
 His Loyaltie he kept, his Love, His Zeale;
 Nor number, nor example with him wrought
 To swerve from truth, or change his constant mind
 Though single. For amidst them forth he passd,
 Long way through hostile scorn, which he sustaind
 Superior, nor of violence fear'd aught;
 And with retorted scorn his back he turn'd
 On those proud Towrs to swift destruction doom'd.
 (V, 897-908)

Serving God is not servitude. Servitude consists of enslavement to evil and falsehood. Obedience is servitude only when man submits himself to the fraud of passions uncontrolled by reason or something less than God. Milton stresses this idea repeatedly. The loss of inner freedom, obtained by obedience to right reason in the will of God, leads inevitably to the loss of external freedom:

Reason in man obscur'd, or not obeyd,
 Immediately inordinate desires
 And upstart Passions catch the Government
 From Reason, and to servitude reduce
 Man till then free. Therefore since hee permits
 Within himself unworthie Powers to reign
 Over free Reason, God in Judgement just
 Subjects him from without to violent Lords;
 Who oft as undeservedly enthrall
 His outward freedom: Tyrannie must be,
 Though to the Tyrant thereby no excuse.
 Yet sometimes Nations will decline so low
 From vertue, which is reason, that no wrong,
 But Justice, and some fatal curse annex
 Deprives them of thir outward libertie,
 Thir inward lost. . . . (XII, 86-101)

Finally, Abdiel emphasizes that we can not ignore the laws and decrees of "God or Nature," we can only decide which way we shall go. Everyone will serve someone or some thing;

it is the inevitable consequence of our being (free). There is a determinism in life, a determinism consequent to choice.

O alienate from God, O spirit accurst,
 Forsak'n of all good; I see thy fall
 Determind, and thy hapless crew involv'd
 In this perfidious fraud, contagion spread
 Both of thy crime and punishment: henceforth
 No more be troubl'd how to quit the yoke
 Of Gods Messiah; those indulgent Laws
 Will not be now voutsaf't, other Decrees
 Against thee are gon forth without recall;
 That Golden Scepter which thou didst reject
 Is now an Iron Rod to bruise and breake
 Thy disobedience. (V, 877-888)

Summers explains this determinism of choice in an analysis of the decision made by Adam and Eve. He says, "When both Eve and Adam eat of the Fruit, we feel that the actions are determined; and, at these moments, they are. They have been determined by Adam and Eve themselves from the moments that each makes his choice, each decides that he will eat, commits himself inevitably to the action."⁸⁶ Somewhere in between the time of the choice and the accomplishment of the external action the determinism is effected, so that the decision and the action are one, indivisible experience. Unable to delineate the precise moment of decision, "we can only recognize the emotion which may accompany such a moment when, listening to Eve's account of her sin, Adam 'amaz'd/ astonied stood and Blank, while horror chill/ Ran through his veins' (IX, 889-891). When Eve speaks of the taste of the fruit as 'too long forborne' (IX, 747), when Adam says, 'some cursed fraud/ Of Enemy hath beguil'd thee, yet unknown,/ And me with thee hath ruin'd' (IX, 904-906), we can only recognize with them that

those moments are past. For both Eve and Adam the reasoning which follows those lines is only the rationalization of fallen humanity. Each has come to his decision as if it were not a decision, each has conceived of it as not only past but as determined, of himself as the object rather than the agent of choice. And as each has denied his freedom, he has lost it."⁸⁷ Therefore, one must give careful attention to what he inquires after, learns, and serves.

Knowledge is not hereby forbidden to us but we must choose the higher, more worthy wisdom of obedience first, in order that we can handle ourselves as well as all we learn and possess. The nature and priority of this wisdom are repeatedly stressed to Adam (VI, 892 ff.; VII, 111 ff.; XII, 552 ff., 575 ff.) by the emissaries of God:

To whom thus also th' Angel last repli'd;
 This having learnt, thou hast attained the summe
 Of wisdom; hope no higher, though all the Starrs
 Thou knewst by name, and all th' ethereal Powers,
 All secrets of the deep, all Natures works,
 Or works of God in Heav'n, Air, Earth, or Sea,
 And all the riches of this World enjoydst,
 And all the rule, one Empire; onely add
 Deeds to thy knowledge answerable, add Faith,
 Add Vertue, Patience, Temperance, add Love,
 By name to come call'd Charitie, the soul
 Of all the rest: then wilt thou not be loath
 To leave this Paradise, but shalt posses
 A Paradise within thee, happier farr. (XII, 575-587)

Milton's repeated allusions to the scientific views of his day and the scope of his learning make it clearly apparent that to him there is no dichotomy between knowledge and faith, or learning and freedom. But knowledge and learning do invoke tremendous burdens of responsible choice upon the learners

and incur extensive consequences upon all either for good or bad, for death or life, depending on what is done with that which we learn from our experience and inquiries. This, no doubt, is a part of the truth and message locked in that ancient Biblical "myth" of the forbidden fruit, upon which Milton drew in retelling the story of the Fall. It is what the Greeks sought to convey by the legend of Pandora's box, and it is what mankind is critically facing in the discovery of atomic energy.

Milton's understanding of freedom as expressed by Abdiel and emphasized throughout the epic is posited on a hierarchical scale of being or values in which "God means not only infinite power and infinite love, but rational and natural order in the universe, in society, and above all in the soul of man. Those three realms are all united in the doctrine of the great chain of being which had through many centuries been the framework of man's theocentric view of the world. The hierarchical principle of order and degree linked together all animate beings and inanimate things, God, angels, man, animals, plants, and stones."⁸⁸ Bush goes on to state, "In giving man his place in that descending or ascending order, cosmic and social, it also gave hierarchical order to man's own faculties and values. Thus while the doctrine provided a metaphysical philosophy, it was far more religious and ethical than scientific."⁸⁹ In other words, though (modern) man may not subscribe to the concept of a hierarchy literally in every aspect

of life, for instance, cosmologically, he had better not forget who he is ethically and metaphysically, a creature of his Creator, for he will bear the consequences of his choices and allegiances. Wise and fortunate is the man or angel who discovers it and abides by this discovery.

Be strong, live happie, and love, but first of all
Him whom to love is to obey, and keep
His great command; take heed least Passion sway
Thy Judgement to do aught, which else free will
Would not admit; thine and of all thy Sons
The weal or woe in thee is plac't; beware.
I in thy persevering shall rejoyce,
And all the Blest: stand fast; to stand or fall
Free in thine own Arbitrement it lies.
Perfet within, no outward aid require;
And all temptation to transgress repel. (VIII, 633-643)

Foolish and unfortunate is the man that misses it. And, of course, this is precisely what happened. He missed it. Adam and Eve missed it for a time, because they disregarded the nature of their being and the responsibility of their positions in the structure of life. Eve disregarded Adam's advice and Adam disregarded God's admonitions.

Some question may well be raised about the validity and relevance of such a concept of life as posited by Milton in his "chain of being" philosophy and in his belief in a "hierarchical scale of values." Today, we are led by scientific knowledge and understanding to disregard and write-off such a cosmology as is implied by a "God in heaven above," and consequently to ignore such a creature as "God above" and all subsequent scales of value and chains of obligations. In other words, for many without a heaven above there is no God

to serve. But the elimination of an out-dated cosmology does not require the elimination of God, who is "above" and "behind" and "before" and "within" His cosmos. Furthermore, a scale of values is still apparent in human relationships, where persons form special ties and partnerships, and in human concepts, where one hypothesis or idea is more valid than another. It is, therefore, appropriate that the metaphor of heaven's "divine overseer" (a heavenly Father) be retained along with the inherent sense of values. For without the belief that man has a Creator to whom he is responsible, human life becomes ultimately meaningless. And man must then be conceived as nothing more than a mass of predetermined or erratic chemical compounds doomed to dissipation or extinction.

But what if man does disregard his Creator? Is there any hope or mercy for him? Milton's presentation of God emphasizes that the mercy of God continues and is still available to us, if only in the judgements which God uses as a means of calling man back to Himself (cf. X, 54 ff., where the Son goes to pronounce the judgements to Adam and Eve). Adam and Eve discovered this continuing mercy (X, 140 f.; XII, 557 f., 610 f.) in what has been described as the culpa felix ("fortunate fall"); Abdiel realized this (V, 845 f., 88 f.); Satan sensed this (IV, 79 f.); and even Milton enjoyed the presence of God, despite his blindness and sufferings:

There is, as the apostle has remarked, a way to strength through weakness. Let me then be the most feeble creature alive, as long as that feebleness serves to invigorate the energies of my rational and immortal

spirit; as long as in that obscurity, in which I am enveloped, the light of the divine presence more clearly shines, then, in proportion as I am weak, I shall be invincibly strong; and in proportion as I am blind, I shall more clearly see. O! that I may thus be perfected by feebleness, and irradiated by obscurity! And, indeed, in my blindness, I enjoy in no inconsiderable degree the favor of the Deity, who regards me with more tenderness and compassion in proportion as I am able to behold nothing but himself. Alas! for him who insults me who maligns and merits public execration! For the divine law not only shields me from injury, but almost renders me too sacred to attack; not indeed so much from the privation of my sight, as from the overshadowing of those heavenly wings which seem to have occasioned this obscurity; and which, when occasioned, he is wont to illuminate with an interior light, more precious and more pure. 90

This is the way of God and His grace as portrayed in Paradise Lost and it is this way which justifies Him; but it is a way which is realized only as each man exercises his freedom responsibly in relationship to his Creator. However, it is a way open to every man as well as to the angels. It is in fact the way personified revealed and effected by the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

But the question arises, how long is this way open to man? The answer to this question is known only by the "divine overseer" and can only be known as each person discovers the answer for himself. Milton suggests that Satan may have had an opportunity to repent and return to God and His joyous fellowship even after his fall, while he was on his way to earth

The Stairs were then let down, whether to dare
The Fiend by easie ascent, or aggravate
His sad exclusion from the dores of Bliss.
(III, 522-524)

But Satan never realized it; he could not believe or did not wish to. Lewis also states the personal nature of this moral understanding of God. In commenting on those who do not like Milton's God, he says that the trouble with them is that "they do not like God."⁹¹ He further illustrates the personal nature of one's relationship to God in his evaluation of the critics' reaction to Milton's epic.

It demands that our merely natural passions should have already been organized into such 'sentiments' as ordered and magnanimous commonwealths prefer. It is not rustic, naif, or unbuttoned. It will therefore be unintelligible to those who lack the right qualifications, and hateful to the baser spirits among them. It has been compared to the great wall of China, and the comparison is good: both are among the wonders of the world and both divide the tilled fields and cities of an ancient culture from the barbarians. We have only to add that the wall is necessarily hated by those who see it from the wrong side, and the parallel is complete. ⁹²

CHAPTER V

A POSTSCRIPT OF PRAISE FOR MILTON'S WAY

Walter Raleigh, a literary critic, is reported to have described Milton's epic as a "monument to dead ideas,"⁹³ but anyone who is alert to the issues of freedom and theology that are engaging this age would recognize afresh in Paradise Lost the pertinence of Milton's concern to justify the ways of God. Men may not conceive of God as perched on a heavenly throne amidst the clouds and they may not even acknowledge an Almighty Sovereignty, but they still wrestle with the problems of freedom and the consequences of their choices. And if they read John Milton aright, they may even come to acknowledge his God.

Bush in saying that "Paradise Lost . . . is to be regarded as no mausoleum of decayed classicism" but rather "a metaphor of spiritual evaluation,"⁹⁴ has perceived something of the everlasting significance of Paradise Lost. But even though men may not be able to praise the God of the epic, they can not ignore the "enduring argument" of John Milton, one of the greatest of English poets.

FOOTNOTES

¹C. S. Lewis, A Preface to Paradise Lost (London, 1949), p. 128.

²John Milton, The Student's Milton, ed. Frank Allen Patterson (New York, 1961), pp. 101 f.

³Milton, pp. 14-15.

⁴Milton, p. 108.

⁵Milton, p. 105.

⁶Milton, p. 525.

⁷Allan H. Gilbert, On the Composition of Paradise Lost (Chapel Hill, 1957), pp. 12 ff.

⁸James Holly Hanford, A Milton Handbook (New York, 1946), pp. 190-191.

⁹from notes in English course 541 at University of North Carolina, Greensboro, N. C.

¹⁰George B. Woods, Homer A. Watt, George K. Anderson, The Literature of England. Third Edition. Vol. I (New York, 1947), p. 650.

¹¹B. A. Wright, Milton's 'Paradise Lost' (New York, 1962), pp. 45-46.

¹²Hanford, pp. 201-202.

¹³J. B. Broadbent, Some Graver Subject: An Essay on Paradise Lost (New York, 1960), pp. 144-145.

¹⁴B. Rajan, Paradise Lost and the Seventeenth Century Reader (New York, 1948), p. 24.

¹⁵Irene Samuel, "The Dialogue In Heaven: A Reconsideration of Paradise Lost, III, 1-417," PMLA, CXXII (1957), 601.

¹⁶Samuel, pp. 601, 603.

¹⁷Samuel, pp. 602-603.

- ¹⁸Samuel, p. 604.
- ¹⁹Samuel, p. 605.
- ²⁰Samuel, p. 608.
- ²¹E. M. W. Tillyard, Studies in Milton (New York, 1960), p. 52.
- ²²Tillyard, p. 47.
- ²³Tillyard, p. 48.
- ²⁴Tillyard, pp. 160-162.
- ²⁵Sir Herbert J. C. Grierson, Milton and Wordsworth (New York, 1937), p. 109.
- ²⁶A. J. A. Waldock, Paradise Lost and Its Critics (Cambridge, 1947), p. 97.
- ²⁷Waldock, pp. 103-104.
- ²⁸William J. Grace, "Orthodoxy and Aesthetic Method In Paradise Lost and the Divine Comedy," Comparative Literature, I (1949), 173-187.
- ²⁹Lewis, p. 126.
- ³⁰Lewis, p. 127.
- ³¹Lewis, p. 128.
- ³²Douglas Bush, John Milton (New York, 1964), p. 153.
- ³³Bush, p. 181.
- ³⁴Marianna Woodhull, The Epic of Paradise Lost (New York, 1907), p. 256.
- ³⁵Denis Saurat, Milton Man and Thinker (New York, 1925), pp. 122-123.
- ³⁶Roland Mushat Frye, God, Man and Satan (Princeton, 1960), p. 15.
- ³⁷F. E. Hutchinson, Milton and the English Mind (New York, 1948), pp. 167 f.
- ³⁸Hanford, p. 227.

- ³⁹Saurat, pp. 229-230.
- ⁴⁰Joseph H. Summers, The Muse's Method (Cambridge, 1962), p. 112.
- ⁴¹Wright, p. 46.
- ⁴²Maurice Kelley, This Great Argument (Princeton, 1941), p. ix.
- ⁴³Arthur Sewell, A Study in Milton's Christian Doctrine (London, 1939), pp. 78 ff., 111-112.
- ⁴⁴Rajan, p. 25.
- ⁴⁵Sewell, p. 97.
- ⁴⁶Sewell, p. 97.
- ⁴⁷Samuel, p. 610.
- ⁴⁸Hanford, p. 231.
- ⁴⁹Saurat, p. 134.
- ⁵⁰Lewis, pp. 84-85.
- ⁵¹Lewis, p. 85.
- ⁵²Saurat, pp. 134-135.
- ⁵³Saurat, p. 135.
- ⁵⁴Robert M. West, Milton and the Angels (Athens, 1955), p. 179.
- ⁵⁵West, p. 151.
- ⁵⁶West, pp. 112 f.
- ⁵⁷Lewis, p. 87.
- ⁵⁸Lewis, p. 88.
- ⁵⁹George Newton Conklin, Biblical Criticism and Heresy (Columbia University, 1949), pp. 70-73.
- ⁶⁰Martin A. Larson, The Modernity of Milton (Chicago, 1927), pp. 120-135.
- ⁶¹Walter Clyde Curry, Milton's Ontology, Cosmogony and Physics (University of Kentucky, 1957), p. 43.

- ⁶²Curry, p. 33.
- ⁶³Saurat, p. 136.
- ⁶⁴Saurat, pp. 124-125.
- ⁶⁵Sewell, pp. 125 ff.
- ⁶⁶Lewis, pp. 86-87.
- ⁶⁷Lewis, p. 88.
- ⁶⁸George Coffin Taylor, Milton's Use of Du Bartas (Cambridge, 1934), pp. 40-41.
- ⁶⁹Taylor, p. 42.
- ⁷⁰Bush, pp. 155-156.
- ⁷¹Lewis, pp. 45-46.
- ⁷²Conklin, p. 80.
- ⁷³Milton: Modern Essays In Criticism, ed. Arthur E. Barker (New York, 1965), p. 165.
- ⁷⁴Rajan, pp. 27 f.
- ⁷⁵Saurat, pp. 143-147.
- ⁷⁶Harry F. Robins, If This Be Heresy (Urbana, 1963), p. 30.
- ⁷⁷Conklin, p. 32.
- ⁷⁸Conklin, p. 52.
- ⁷⁹Conklin, p. 74.
- ⁸⁰Conklin, pp. 75 f., 80 f.
- ⁸¹Grierson, pp. 100-101.
- ⁸²Lewis, p. 88.
- ⁸³Frye, pp. 13-14.
- ⁸⁴Wright, p. 147.
- ⁸⁵William Empson, Milton's God (Norfolk, 1961), p. 21.
- ⁸⁶Summers, pp. 149 f.

⁸⁷Summers, pp. 149 f.

⁸⁸Barker, p. 165.

⁸⁹Barker, p. 165.

⁹⁰Milton, p. 1141.

⁹¹Lewis, p. 126.

⁹²Lewis, pp. 130-131.

⁹³Tillyard, p. 8.

⁹⁴Barker, p. 155.

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