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'Reason' as a Theological-Apologetic Motif in Milton's *Paradise Lost*

I INTRODUCTION

Nathaniel Hawthorne, the great novelist of nineteenth-century America, has given us what is perhaps the most accurate picture of the moral and intellectual dilemma of the Puritan mind of the seventeenth century in his description of the Reverend Mr Dimmesdale, the protagonist of *The Scarlet Letter*. After narrating the discussion between Dimmesdale and the evil physician, Roger Chillingworth, Hawthorne writes:

> Mr. Dimmesdale was a true priest, a true religionist, with the reverential sentiment largely developed, and an order of mind that impelled itself powerfully along the track of a creed and wore its passage continually deeper with the lapse of time. In no state would he have been what is called a man of liberal views; it would always be essential to his peace to feel the pressure of a faith upon him, supporting, while it confined him within its iron framework. Not the less, however, though with a tremulous enjoyment, did he feel the occasional relief of looking at the universe through the medium of another kind of intellect than those with which he habitually held converse. It was as if a window were thrown open, admitting a freer atmosphere into the close and stifled study where his life was wasting itself away, amid lamplight, or obstructed daybeams, and the musty fragrance, be it sensual or moral, that exhales from books. But the air was too fresh and chill to be long breathed with comfort. So the minister, and the physician with him, withdrew again within the limits of what their church defined as orthodox.[1]

It is true that Hawthorne finished his classic in 1850, two hundred years after Milton, but since the action of his novel begins '... not less than two centuries ago,'[2] it may be taken to reflect what was the dominant tension within the Puritan mind of Milton's day. Milton himself, schooled in the classical humanism of the Renaissance and also in the Greek and Hebrew of the scriptures, was a man whose intellectual pursuits led him into the milieu of contemporary enlightened thinking; and his effort to make relevant the body of divine truth he inherited from Calvin and his other Reformed ancestors issued in blindness and general ill-health, much as did Dimmesdale's scholarship in America. (It must, of course, be kept in mind that Milton was much more the man of contemporary political affairs than Dimmesdale, even though the parson was the central figure of the village in colonial America, and also that

1. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (New York: New American Library, 1959), p. 122.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

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much of Dimmesdale's ill-health was caused by his intense spiritual problem of unconfessed guilt.) Milton was also surrounded by the Cambridge Platonists, who, borrowing from Plato and the humanistic reverence for 'right reason,' were undertaking new and somewhat radical excursions into modern thought, which constituted an equally powerful challenge to that Puritan dogmatic thinking which had been built up during more than a century since the Reformation.

The Protestant theological enterprise had flatly renounced, in its Lutheran wing, the medieval reverence for Aristotelian scholasticism (even though Melanchthon ultimately formulated a compromise which has been the basis of 'Lutheranism' as we know it today); while in its Calvinistic counterpart, a more modified renunciation of reason constituted no less a denial of the ability of man to understand himself and God (which Thomistic theology had steadily affirmed and developed). Calvin states: 'Original sin, then, may be defined a hereditary corruption and depravity of our nature, extending to all the parts of the soul, which first makes us obnoxious to the wrath of God, and then produces in us works which in scripture are termed works of the flesh.'[3] Milton's lifelong purpose was to vindicate the body of truth as found in scripture, but at the same time to give full reverence to the natural dignity of man and to the whole humanistic cultural enterprise with which his classical schooling had acquainted him. He writes, in his *Tractate on Education*, that the purpose of education is 'to repair the ruins of our first parents by regaining to know God aright.'[4] In his *Areopagitica*, he insists:

> And perhaps this is that doom which Adam fell into of knowing good and evil, that is to say of knowing good by evil. As therefore the state of man now is; what wisdom can there be to choose, what continence to forbear without the knowledge of evil? ... Assuredly we bring not innocence into the world, we bring impurity much rather; that which purifies us is trial, and trial is by what is contrary.[5]

Thus we see tensions and polarity in Milton's thinking. While he admits that we bring impurity into the world, he implies in his *Tractate on Education* that, merely by the ongoing process of instruction, man may repair the harm done by Adam. Milton never defected from his subjection to external scriptural authority, yet he forcefully paid full attention to the usefulness of judgment and reason. Although 'the external ground which we possess for our belief at

3. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II, i, 8.

4. Quoted by Basil Willey, *The Seventeenth Century Background* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1953), p. 240. It is important to define the term 'education' quite sharply here. Cf. 'The Educating Power of the Bible,' *Christianity Today*, 22 November 1963, p. 24: 'The word "education" comes not, as commonly supposed from the Latin *educere* (to "lead" or "draw forth") but from *educare* (to "bear" or "bring up"). The distinction is not minor for the Christian. If education means nothing more than drawing out what is already within the person, then regeneration is unnecessary and the atoning work of Christ may be bypassed.'

5. John Milton, *Complete Prose Works*, vol. II (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), p. 515.

the present day is important ... that which is internal, and the peculiar possession of each believer, is far superior to all, namely, the Spirit itself ... the Spirit which is given to us is a more certain guide than scripture whom therefore it is our duty to follow.'[6]

It will be the aim of this paper to analyze the role of reason in Milton's Paradise Lost, and by doing so, to show that Milton is perhaps one of the greatest of the early cultural theologians of the modern era, and that in his *Paradise Lost* one can find one of the first grand Protestant attempts at constructive theology. On the one hand, we can see in Milton the rejection of strict, orthodox Calvinism, which has only periodically and momentarily been revived by such men as Jonathan Edwards, B.B. Warfield, and G.C. Berkouwer, while on the other hand, we also see the flowering of the modern 'enlightened' Christian who ever seeks new ways and means to relate the Christian faith to the whole human enterprise. In this way, we will be able to note the beginning of what can be called 'the persistent liberal witness'[7] as well as the conservative tendency in Milton – a polarity which seems to exist, almost inevitably, in every mature and astute Christian thinker.

After sketching Milton's over-all scheme, I propose to examine *Paradise Lost* in three areas. First, I shall try to show how Milton deals with the role of reason in the creation of the entire universe. Secondly, I shall examine the nature and activity of Adam and Eve – specifically their action when tempted – with a view to pointing out how the Miltonic anthropology, even of fallen man, reflects a humanistic, as well as a Christian theological, understanding of God, man, and the world.[8] Thirdly, Milton's understanding of the *imago dei* (including reason) in the sons of Adam will be examined, with some reference

6. John Milton, *De Doctrina Christiana*, quoted by Willey, *Seventeenth Century Background*, p. 77.

7. Cf. Bernard E. Meland, 'The Persistent Liberal Witness,' *Christian Century*, 26 September 1962, pp. 1157–9.

8. It is beyond the compass of this paper to examine the full implications of this tension in Milton's thinking. Denis Saurat, *Milton, Man and Thinker* (New York: Dial Press, 1925), outlines what he regards as a conflict between orthodoxy and heterodoxy. C. S. Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 82, has effectively refuted any such charges: 'Heretical elements exist in it [*Paradise Lost*], but are only discoverable by search; any criticism which forces them into the foreground is mistaken, and ignores the fact that this poem was accepted as orthodox by many generations of acute readers well grounded in their theology.' Cf. *ibid.*, p. 29: 'In *Paradise Lost* we are to study what the poet, with his singing robes about him, has given us. And when we study that we find that he has laid aside most of his private theological whimsies during his working hours as an epic poet.' Lewis discusses Saurat's ascription of the following heretical ideas to Milton: (a) evil as latent in God; (b) God as total being; (c) Arian Christology; (d) matter as a part of God. Lewis concludes that many of Milton's heresies can be found only in his prose writings, and that those which can actually be traced in the epic are either only implicit or of minor significance for the sense of the poem. In sum, Lewis warns against the kind of 'heresy hunting' which fails to see 'the forest for the trees.'

One particular aspect of Milton's anthropological thought which cannot be developed here is his implicit antipathy to women, as reflected in his description of Eve after the fall as 'This novelty on earth, this fair defect/Of nature' (*Paradise Lost*, x, 11. 891f.),

to the views of Calvin, Locke, and Edwards, and conclusions will be drawn concerning the freedom of the will.[9]

II MILTON'S OVERALL SCHEME

The scope of Milton's cultural theology may be seen almost at a stroke, from his own statement of his primary intention. At the beginning of his epic, he invokes the heavenly muse to 'Instruct me ... /That to the height of this great argument,/I may assert Eternal Providence/And justify the ways of God to men.'[10] Milton's reference to justification is apparently the exact opposite of what one would normally expect from a Puritan theologian. Milton knew that God was sovereign, righteous, and all-powerful, and that he did not need to be 'justified' – indeed, that he could not be justified, or be brought before the bar of man's judgment at all. On the face of it, Milton's purpose seems the height of human audacity, and his statement of it has been too handily accepted by some critics as an indication that his poem is a rejection, more or less implicit, of the Puritan world-view. Viewed in this perspective, the supposed heresies discussed previously (in note eight above) would necessarily loom large. However, Milton's poem is filled with humble acknowledgments of God's sovereignty. Even Beelzebub, in his speech during the Satanic council of war in book II, acknowledges God as the author and sustainer of all that is:

> ... For he, be sure,
> In height, or depth, still first and last will reign
> Sole king, and of his kingdom lose no part
> By our revolt ...[11]

At the opening of book III, Milton attempts to express poetically the unified existence of the Father with the Son and implies – putting the case in interrogative form – that since God is who he is, no one can tell (i.e., explain) the Son's origin, but that man can only adore his majesty and perfection:

> Hail, holy Light, offspring of Heaven first-born!
> Or of the Eternal coeternal beam
> May I express thee unblamed? since God is light,
> And never but in unapproached light

and also in his reference to the act of the feminine shape who opens the door to allow Satan to leave hell for his mission of confounding man on earth as 'the fatal key,/Sad instrument of all our woe' (II, 11. 870f.). Cf. his description of this shape: 'The one seemed woman to the waist, and fair,/But ended foul in many a scaly fold,/Voluminous and vast – a serpent armed/With mortal sting' (II, 11. 650–3). Here Milton seems implicitly to blame Eve, who was created fair, but who yielded to the tempter.

9. Some readers may wonder why I do not deal with Christ as the Reason or *Logos* of God. For dramatic rather than theological reasons, Christ, as the Wisdom of God, does not in fact figure prominently in *Paradise Lost*. The story is Adam's or (some would say) Satan's. Since he is not the protagonist – or even the antagonist or a foil – Christ is a minor figure. He figures more prominently in the sequel, *Paradise Regained*.

10. *Paradise Lost*, I, 11. 19–26. 11. *Ibid.*, II, 11. 323–6.

Dwelt from eternity – dwelt then in thee,
Bright effluence of bright essence increate!
Or hear'st thou rather pure Ethereal Stream,
Whose fountain who shall tell?[12]

Furthermore (again in book III), Milton puts into the mouth of God his belief that God cannot be called to account for the consequences of creation or Adam's fall, even though he is sovereign:

... They, therefore, as to right belonged
So were created, nor can justly accuse
Their Maker, or their making, or their fate,
As if Predestination overruled
Their will, disposed by absolute decree
Or high foreknowledge. They themselves decreed
Their own revolt, not I.[13]

Finally (for the sake of brevity of argument), we may note that Adam, following his fall, acknowledges that it is man who must be justified and not God:

... Ah, why should all Mankind,
For one man's fault, thus guiltless be condemned,
If guiltless? But from me what can proceed
But all corrupt – both mind and will depraved
Not to do only, but to will the same
With me? How can they, then, acquitted stand
In sight of God? Him, after all disputes,
Forced I absolve.[14]

If Milton, then, acknowledges within the body of his poem that God does not need to be justified, why does he imply that the whole poem will be such an undertaking? My position in this paper is that Milton used such an unexpected phraseology precisely because he wished, not to vindicate God, who needs no such vindication, but to demonstrate the role of *reason* in the whole creation-redemption story. Milton saw clearly that, given the emerging enlightenment of seventeenth-century man, the gospel story must be shown to be consonant with the innate ability of reasonable man. Read in this sense, Milton's epic becomes an apology, a defence of the faith within its cultural situation. Milton, then, can be seen as one of the precursors of modern apologetic theology, which later found expression in such men as Friedrich Schleiermacher and Paul Tillich. He saw the irrelevance of the strict Calvinistic theology of total depravity to the men of his day, and left us this poetic understanding and dramatic rendering of the faith, through which he made his magnificent appeal for the gospel in the later years of his life. Viewed in this light, he takes his place with other 'reasonable' Christians of his day, such as

12. *Ibid.*, III, 11. 1–8.
13. *Ibid.*, III, 11. 111–17.
14. *Ibid.*, X, 11. 822–9.

Samuel Clarke, John Locke, John Tillotson, and many others. Milton's distinction, apart from theological differences, is that his effort was a poetic one, while most of theirs were cast in sermonic or essay form, with science, epistemology, or comparative study of religions as the main motifs. Milton, then, is not heretical, but a Christian believer who is consciously relating the tradition he has received to the situation confronting him.

This interpretation is supported by the fact that Milton ends his poem on a note of optimism and confidence. Having spent twelve books showing that men, 'since they/God's image did not reverence in themselves,'[15] have been subject to all the sin, error, woe, and death of history, Milton, writing in the mid-seventeenth century, sees before Adam and Eve (or mankind) a life of immeasurable possibilities, if they will conscientiously pay heed to God's gift of reason within them. As Adam and Eve left Paradise:

> Some natural tears they dropped, but wiped them soon;
> The world was all before them, where to choose
> Their place of rest, and Providence their guide.[16]

With providence as the great teleological guide, Milton sees that, despite the fall, mankind can take a certain satisfaction in *this* life because of God's prevenient grace. After hearing Michael's story of the dismal future of mankind and the ensuing glorification of Christ in the act of redemption and resurrection, Adam exclaims:

> O Goodness Infinite, Goodness immense,
> That all this good of evil shall produce
> And evil turn to good – more wonderful
> Than that which by creation first brought forth
> Light out of darkness! Full of doubt I stand,
> Whether I should repent me now of sin
> By me done and occasioned, or rejoice
> Much more that much more good thereof shall spring –[17]

This view, carried to its extreme, leads to the heretical *felix culpa* notion, according to which the church finds a certain legitimate anchorage in the sinful state of man, because through it God works his glorious redemption. Milton was too much of a Puritan, of course, to tolerate the slightest levity or serenity concerning sin, but he stresses God's providential purpose for man the sinner. Michael counsels Adam after the fall:

> Nor love thy life, nor hate; but what thou liv'st
> Live well, how long or short permit to Heaven.[18]

In this 'living well' man must utilize reason; reason, if hearkened to, becomes an accurate guide throughout the earthly life. Indeed, depravity comes from neglect of reason, not only or primarily from genetic transmission. In describ-

15. *Ibid.*, XI, 11. 524f.
16. *Ibid.*, XII, 11. 645–7.
17. *Ibid.*, XII, 11. 469–75.
18. *Ibid.*, XI, 11. 553f.

ing the depravity of Noah's contemporaries, Milton marks well that neglect of reason and truth causes sin:

> So all shall turn degenerate, all depraved,
> Justice and temperance, truth and faith, forgot;[19]

Thus, from beginning to end, *Paradise Lost*, although it deals primarily with the sin of Adam, is an interpretation of sin by which Milton seeks to justify the gospel to his contemporaries. Sin is unreasonableness. God has given us reason, to which we must appeal in order to do right; reason, when it yields to the passions or fraud, produces sin. In this way, the fall of Adam can 'reasonably' be seen by man as a fall from his better self; thus the gospel is made more palatable to seventeenth-century man. The role of reason, then, is essential in Milton's epic. God can be justified, for the fall can be rationally explicated; the gospel can be believed because, with providence as our guide as we appeal to reason, the Christian faith will commend itself, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to the mind of man.

III THE ROLE OF REASON IN CREATION

An understanding of reason in its relation to the universe is basic to Milton's scheme. He knew only too well that to establish the order and intelligence of the entire created universe was essential to his purpose.

Milton effects this rational undergirding of his argument in two ways: (1) by assigning to Chaos an existence outside the world of man; (2) by describing God's creation as a work of intelligence.

1 Satan, after volunteering to travel to the world to upset the moral order there, hovers outside 'the firm opacous globe of this round world':

> Meanwhile upon the firm opacous globe
> Of this round world, whose first convex divides
> The luminous inferior orbs, enclosed
> From Chaos and the inroad of Darkness old,
> Satan alighted walks. A globe far off
> It seemed; now seems a boundless continent,
> Dark, waste, and wild, under the frown of night
> Starless exposed, and ever-threatening storms
> Of Chaos blustering round, inclement sky,
> Save on that side which from the wall of heaven,
> Though distant far, some small reflection gains
> Of glimmering air less vexed with tempest loud.
> Here walked the fiend at large in spacious field.[20]

Satan is a vulture, waiting 'To gorge the flesh of lambs or yearling kids.' Here

19. *Ibid.*, XI, 11. 806f.

20. *Ibid.*, III, 11. 418–30.

we have the orderliness of *this* world emphasized by contrast with the chaotic nature of the nether world.

As Milton presents it, this Chaos is irrational in the extreme. The abyss where the rejected angels dwell is 'where eldest Night/And Chaos, ancestors of nature, hold/Eternal anarchy ... Chaos umpire sits ... next him, high arbiter,/Chance governs all.'[21] Here Milton vividly contrasts the confused nature of the abyss of Satan, with the rational creative intent of God wherever he creates, by saying:

> ... Into this wild abyss,
> The womb of Nature, and perhaps her grave,
> Of neither Sea, nor Shore, nor Air, nor Fire,
> But all these in their pregnant causes mixed
> Confusedly, and which thus must ever fight,
> Unless the Almighty Maker them ordain
> His dark materials to create more worlds –[22]

Thus, apart from God's creative act, irrationality exists. But where God creates, he ordains 'dark materials' into an ordered arrangement, into which Satan cannot go, except by deceit and fraud (itself a manifestation of the failure of reason).

However, Milton is so intent on undergirding his 'justification' of God that he states that even in hell there is some reason. Thus all of created reality owes its existence to the gracious action of God through reason. Even devils are rational, as they counsel for war:

> ... Devil with devil damned
> Firm concord holds; men only disagree
> Of creatures rational,[23]

Satan himself admits that God is wise, even in his damning of all the Satanic horde:

> Who justly hath driven out his rebel foes
> To deepest Hell, and, to repair that loss,
> Created this new happy race of men
> To serve him better. Wise are all his ways![24]

Here Satan is dissembling, of course, to Uriel, who guards the entrance to the world of man into which Satan is trying to enter, but still the doleful note of awareness sounds in his hypocrisy.

2 Milton goes on to describe just what the nature of God's creative act is. Since he is 'The great Work-master,'[25] his work must be orderly:

21. *Ibid.*, II, 11. 894–910.
22. *Ibid.*, II, 11. 910–16.
23. *Ibid.*, II, 11. 496–8.
24. *Ibid.*, III, 11. 677–80.
25. *Ibid.*, III, 1. 696.

For wonderful indeed are all his works,
Pleasant to know ...
But what created mind can comprehend
Their number or the wisdom infinite
That brought them forth, but hid their causes deep?
I saw when, at his word, the formless mass,
This world's material mould, came to a heap:
Confusion heard his voice, and wild Uproar
Stood ruled, stood vast Infinitude confined;
Till, at his second bidding, Darkness fled,
Light shone, and order from disorder sprung.[26]

Similarly, in book VII, the Creator returns to heaven,

Thence to behold this new created world,
The addition of his empire, how it shewed
In prospect from his throne, how good, how fair,
Answering his great Idea.[27]

Here Platonic affinities can be seen in Milton's thinking. The world is a material reflection of the eternal form or idea in the mind of the eternal God.[28] Thus, the creation of this world produced an ordered, rational, intelligent work, a work without discord, a work of harmony.

It might be objected that, having established such an ordered world, Milton is perilously close to destroying any possibility of real freedom. Freedom implies a certain flexibility, a certain openness, which Milton's world would not seem to admit. In brief, it appears that Milton, having created such a world in his epic, must now resort to the ancient Greek tragic scheme to produce his drama. Both the fall of Satan and the fall of Adam become, in this context, Promethean in nature. Endowed with will, both Satan and Adam defy the ordered arrangement of their lives and seek self-expression and individuality. On this reading, the only theology that can interpret such a Promethean act must be the Greek theology of the classical tragedies, where, following the act of defiance by the finite creature, all is restored through the absorption of the individual's defiance into the cyclical recurrent pattern of ordered history. (E.g., Prometheus is chained to the rock.) Milton no doubt knew his Aeschylus and Sophocles, but he knew also that the Christian story was not just another way of expressing their tragic vision. If we are to understand his position, we must try to explicate the role of reason in the fall of Adam.

26. *Ibid.*, III, 11. 702–13. Note the oblique ridiculing of the astronomy of Milton's day.
27. *Ibid.*, VII, 11. 556f.
28. Cf. also the form-matter motif in: '... Though what if earth/Be but the shadow of heaven, and things therein/Each to other like, more than on earth is thought?' (*ibid.*, V, 11. 574–6).

IV THE ROLE OF REASON IN THE FALL OF MAN

To maintain the reasonableness of the created universe, as well as to preserve the freedom, not only of Adam, but of all his sons, Milton defines freedom as 'true filial freedom.'[29] After Adam and Eve were created,

> ... In their looks divine
> The image of their glorious Maker shone,
> Truth, wisdom, sanctitude severe and pure –
> Severe, but in true filial freedom placed,
> Whence true authority in men:[30]

That is to say, in effect, freedom is freedom only when it serves reason. Man is free to be reasonable, and by being reasonable he obeys God. As soon as he chooses not to be reasonable, he is misusing his freedom; and then he is not only something less than a man, but is actually disobedient to God, who gave him free will.[31]

Satan, musing as he plans his deception of Eve, asks:

> Knowledge forbidden?
> Suspicious, reasonless! Why should their Lord
> Envy them that? Can it be sin to know?
> Can it be death? And do they only stand
> By ignorance? Is that their happy state,
> The proof of their obedience and their faith?[32]

Satan, then, confuses Adam and Eve as to the nature of their sin. He entices Eve by piously asking whether attainment of knowledge itself is evil; and she, observing that the serpent (into which Satan has entered while it slept), having eaten, is now able to speak, reasons further that she, being human, may become a goddess if she eats of the fruit of knowledge.

It is here that the fraud perpetrated by Satan becomes most palpable. Such a misinterpretation of the nature of the fall has repeatedly embarrassed intelligent Christians, who have been interested in the ongoing task of apologetic theology. Milton knew that, whereas from Paul to Luther the Christian faith had been accepted on the church's authority, it now needed to commend itself to reason.[33]

29. *Ibid.*, IV, 1. 294. 30. *Ibid.*, IV, 11. 291–5.

31. Cf. Preston Roberts, 'A Christian Theory of Dramatic Tragedy,' *The Journal of Religion*, 31 (1951), 3, who remarks that, in making reason so prominent in his concept of freedom, Milton escapes the Promethean danger, but gravitates towards the other Greek concept, which interprets *hamartia* as 'an error in judgment, an intellectual mistake, or a failure to take thought and be prudent rather than a moral weakness or religious sin.' Luther and Kierkegaard never tire of reminding us that sin is more than this concept allows for.

32. *Paradise Lost*, IV, 11. 515–20.

33. Cf. Willey's discussion of Milton and external authority in *Seventeenth Century Background*, pp. 75–80.

Milton, therefore, describes the sin as *pure disobedience*. The point is not that the obtaining of knowledge is evil. To admit that would have lost for Milton a hearing in his day. Milton's own life is testimony to his conviction that the attainment of knowledge is one of Christian man's chiefest ends; indeed, he lost his eyesight in his dedication to the pursuit of truth, which he followed even after his medical attendants warned him of the probable result.[34] He wished only that all attainment of knowledge should be subjected to its author, Almighty God. The angel, Michael, in describing the defects of Cain's descendants, warns:

> ... studious they appear
> Of arts that polish life, inventors rare;
> Unmindful of their Maker, though his Spirit
> Taught them; but they his gifts acknowledged none.[35]

Thus the attainment of knowledge is not diabolical *per se*; it is the forgetting of man's maker that makes it so. Milton makes belittling remarks about the scientific endeavour of his contemporaries to discover the causes of motion in nature in the universe, and rates such an effort lower than the knowledge of the Redeemer. Adam states that he will:

> 'Acknowledge my Redeemer ever blest.'
> To whom thus also the angel last replied: –
> 'This having learned, thou hast attained the sum
> Of wisdom; hope no higher, though all the stars
> Thou knews't by name, and all the ethereal powers,
> All secrets of the deep, all nature's works,
> Or works of God in heaven, air, earth, or sea,
> And all the riches of this world enjoy'dst,
> And all the rule, one empire. Only add
> Deeds to thy knowledge answerable; add faith;
> Add virtue, patience, temperance ...'[36]

Similarly, Raphael counsels Adam earlier that knowledge of the universe (whether embodied in Ptolemaic or Copernican theories) is really irrelevant to the question of disobedience. Here Milton seems to be deprecating that tremendous thirst for knowledge of the universe which such men as Galileo, Kepler, and Newton had sought, or were seeking, to assuage:

> What if the Sun
> Be centre to the world, and other stars,
> By his attractive virtue and their own

34. Cf. Bernard D. Grebanier, *English Literature and its Backgrounds* (New York: Dryden Press, 1952), p. 353.
35. *Paradise Lost*, XI, 11. 609–12.
36. *Ibid.*, XII, 11. 573–83.

Incited, dance about him various rounds? ...
... and what, if seventh to these
The planet earth, so steadfast though she seem,
Insensibly three different motions move? ...
But whether thus these things, or whether not,
Whether the Sun, predominant in Heaven,
Rise on the earth, or earth rise on the Sun ...
Solicit not thy thought with matters hid:
Leave them to God above; him serve and fear.
... Be lowly wise;
Think only what concerns thee and thy being;
Dream not of other worlds, what creatures there
Live, in what state, condition, or degree ...[37]

For Milton, real reason is moral virtue – a conviction which he probably derived from the Cambridge Platonists, as well as from his own exegesis of the scriptures. Since moral virtue is paramount for Milton, education is that which 'fits a man to perform justly, skilfully, and magnanimously all the offices, both private and public, of peace and war.'[38] Speaking of the low condition of certain nations, Milton states plainly that 'virtue, which is reason,'[39] is the only source of happiness.

Thus it is not the Promethean search for fire from heaven that produces the tragic fall of Adam, but the radical disobedience involved in the fall. Beginning his ninth book, Milton explicitly states:

... I now must change
These notes to tragic – foul distrust, and breach
Disloyal on the part of man, revolt
And disobedience;[40]

In book XII, Milton further embellishes this concept of disobedience as the evil, rather than the attainment of knowledge as such, when he makes Michael laud Abraham because 'He straight obeys;/Not knowing to what land, yet firm believes.'[41] Had Adam and Eve obeyed, they would have remained free. Eve was deceived by Satan's lie that God considered knowledge to be evil *per se*. She saw that the serpent now spoke to her – perhaps she, too, would gain a higher state of being. Adam would not have fallen had he been like Abraham, who obeyed although he knew not the land. The radical character of his disobedience is also expressed in God's rebuke when Adam blames Eve for the fall: 'Was she thy god, that her thou didst obey/Before his voice?'[42]

37. *Ibid.*, VIII, 11. 122–76.
38. Milton, *Tractate on Education*, quoted by Willey, *Seventeenth Century Background*, p. 258.
39. *Paradise Lost*, XII, 1. 98.
40. *Ibid.*, IX, 11. 5–8.
41. *Ibid.*, XII, 11. 126f.
42. *Ibid.*, X, 11. 145f.

It seems, then, that Adam fell because he was free to fall or not to fall:

They trespass, authors to themselves in all,
Both what they judge and what they choose; for so
I formed them free, and free they must remain
Till they enthrall themselves: I else must change
Their nature, and revoke the high decree
Unchangeable, eternal, which ordained
Their freedom;[43]

Here Milton expresses the Renaissance concept of man – a dignified, free human being, able to listen to the voice of reason within him and, if he does, to make a world of truth and beauty out of the options which lie before him. Adam, then, had he acted as a good Renaissance man (i.e., hearkened to reason), would have remained free (i.e., able to work in the service of reason). But Adam and Eve both failed this test of obedience;[44] now that man has disobeyed, he is told:

... yet know withal,
Since thy original lapse, true liberty
Is lost, which always with right reason dwells
Twinned, and from her hath no dividual being.
Reason in man obscured, or not obeyed,
Immediately inordinate desires
And upstart passions catch the government
From Reason, and to servitude reduce
Man, till then free.[45]

If this, then, is the consequence of Adam's fall, how did Milton understand seventeenth-century man's ability to understand himself and moral good and evil?

V THE ROLE OF REASON IN THE SONS OF ADAM

Here Milton touched on the sore spot of Calvinistic theology. How was he to explain the depravity of man, and yet maintain a dialogue with his enlightened contemporaries? Calvin had said:

43. *Ibid.*, III, 11. 122–8.

44. The fact that Adam passed his *first* test of reason and obedience in book VIII is frequently overlooked (cf. 11. 381–448). Following his creation, Adam humbly asks God: 'Hast thou not made me here thy substitute,/And these inferior far beneath me set?' He further seeks '... to participate/All rational delight, wherein the brute/Cannot be human consort.' God is pleased that Adam knows himself to be rational and that he has expressed 'the spirit within thee free,/My image, not imparted to the brute.' God further states that only trial would have produced such reverence for the image of God within him, '... for trial only brought,/To see how thou couldst judge of fit and meet. God rewards Adam's obedience with the gift of a wife (Eve). Milton also states in *Areopagitica* that trial is that which purifies (cf. n. 5, above), and we see this truth borne out in Adam.

45. *Paradise Lost*, XII, 11. 82–90.

For our nature is not only utterly devoid of goodness, but so prolific in all kinds of evil, that it can never be idle ... Everything which is in man, from the intellect to the will, from the soul even to the flesh, is defiled and pervaded with this concupiscence.[46]

However, Calvin was not a supralapsarian, and agreed with Milton that Adam was really free:

... in his primitive condition ... in this upright state, man possessed freedom of will, by which, if he chose, he was able to obtain eternal life ... Adam, therefore, might have stood if he chose, since it was only by his own will that he fell; but it was because his will was pliable in either direction, and he had not received constancy to persevere, that he so easily fell.[47]

Calvin and Milton thus agree on Adam's freedom. The point in question, however, is whether and how the corruption into which Adam fell is transferred to all his sons.

For Calvin, as quoted above,[48] man is totally depraved, and that because he is inclined to evil from the womb. Milton accepts this view, but does not examine any more closely than Calvin how such depravity is transmitted. Michael, as he gives Adam a panoramic view of the future subsequent to the fall, states:

Adam, now ope thine eyes, and first behold
The effects which thy original crime hath wrought
In some to spring from thee, who never touched
The excepted tree, nor with the Snake conspired,
Nor sinned thy sin, yet from that sin derive
Corruption to bring forth more violent deeds.[49]

Yet Milton does not include the loss of power of reason among the losses which Adam experienced, when he records the curse God pronounces on Adam because he sinned:

Because thou hast hearkened to the voice of thy wife,
And eaten of the Tree concerning which
I charged thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat thereof,
Curs'd is the ground for thy sake; thou in sorrow
Shalt eat thereof all the days of thy life;
Thorns also and thistles it shall bring thee forth
Unbid; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field;
In the sweat of thy face thou shalt eat bread,
Till thou return unto the ground; for thou
Out of the ground was taken; know thy birth,
For dust thou art, and shalt to dust return.[50]

46. Calvin, *Institutes*, II, i, 8.
47. *Ibid.*, I, XV, 8.
48. Cf. n. 3, above.
49. *Paradise Lost*, XI, 11. 423–8.
50. *Ibid.*, X, 11. 198–208.

Similarly, when Milton muses on the consequences of Eve's fall (yet to come), he carefully states that Satan is hiding

> To intercept thy way, or send thee back
> Despoiled of innocence, of faith, of bliss.[51]

Here again it is important to note that Eve is to be stripped of innocence, faith, and bliss, but not of reason.

It needs to be said, before we conclude this study, that there are other affinities between Calvin and Milton which clarify Milton's struggle to relate Christian doctrine to the humanistic anthropology which he faced in his day. Despite Calvin's insistence on the total noetic, volitional, and emotional depravity of man, like Milton he was not unconscious of the rationality of all men.

> Therefore [he wrote], in reading profane authors, the admirable light of truth displayed in them should remind us, that the human mind, however much fallen and perverted from its original integrity, is still adorned and invested with admirable gifts from its Creator. If we reflect that the Spirit of God is the only fountain of truth, we will be careful, as we would avoid offering insult to Him, not to reject or condemn truth wherever it appears.[52]

Again, Calvin's psychology is so similar to Milton's that it seems that Milton may have borrowed it straight from Calvin, instead of from Plato or Aristotle. When Milton says:

> Yet evil whence? In thee can harbour none,
> Created pure. But know that in the soul
> Are many lesser faculties, that serve
> Reason as chief. Among these Fancy next
> Her office holds; of all external things,
> Which the five watchful senses represent,
> She forms imaginations, aerie shapes,
> Which Reason, joining or disjoining, frames
> All what we affirm or what deny, and call
> Our knowledge or opinion; then retires
> Into her private cell where Nature rests,[53]

this seems like a poetic expression of Calvin's teaching:

> First, I admit that there are five senses, which Plato (in Theaeteto) prefers calling organs, by which all objects are brought into a common sensorium, as into a kind of receptacle: Next comes the imagination (phantasia), which distinguishes between the objects brought into the sensorium: Next, reason, to which the general power of judgment belongs: And, lastly, intellect, which contemplates with fixed and quiet look whatever reason discursively revolves ... the soul consists of two

51. *Ibid.*, IX, 11. 410f.
52. Calvin, *Institutes*, II, ii, 15.
53. *Paradise Lost*, V, 11. 99–109.

parts, the intellect and the will ... the office of the intellect being to distinguish between objects ... and the office of the will, to choose and follow what the intellect declares to be good, to reject and shun what it declares to be bad ... the intellect governs the will.[54]

Thus, for both Calvin and Milton the will must wait until reason pronounces her judgment before she (the will) can act. This faculty-psychology has since been rejected, even by such a reformed theologian as Jonathan Edwards, who saw clearly that the will is the whole man acting, and not a separate entity which waits for reason to judge.[55] Edwards was thus able to insist against Arminians that there can be no suspension of judgment, and also that no man can choose to have a will. While Calvin would probably have agreed with Edwards here,[56] his faculty-psychology will not support the position; and Milton's reverence for reason in man can be seen as not inconsistent with Calvin's basic psychological presuppositions, despite the fact that Calvin believed all men to be totally depraved.

What status, then, did Milton give to man in the area of moral choice? It has been shown above that Milton believed reason able to judge with veracity; that reason was employed by God in creation of the world; that even devils are rational; that Adam and Eve, had they chosen to follow reason or conscience, would not have fallen;[57] and that, despite the immensity of the curse on Adam and his posterity, the loss of reason was not included in this curse. To clarify this last point, we must investigate Milton's understanding of the *imago dei.*

It seems that Milton adopted the patristic conception of the twofold *imago dei,* which stems from Justin Martyr and Irenaeus.[58] For example, he quotes almost verbatim the Genesis account:

> Let us make now Man in our image, Man
> In our similitude, and let them rule

54. Calvin, *Institutes,* I, xv, 6f.

55. Cf. Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of the Will* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), p. 163: 'That which has the power of volition or choice is the man or the soul, not the power of volition itself.' Here Edwards is merely following John Locke, *Essay concerning Human Understanding,* II, xxi, 21: 'I think the question is not proper whether the will be free, but whether the man be free. It is the man that does the action.'

56. Calvin, *Institutes,* I, xv, 6f., criticizes the philosophers for dividing appetite into will and concupiscence, 'calling it *boulēsis* whenever the appetite, which they call *hormē,* obeys the reason. But when appetite, casting off the yoke of reason, runs to intemperance, they call it *pathos.* Thus they always presuppose in man a reason by which he is able to guide himself aright. From this method of teaching we are forced somewhat to dissent.' However, Calvin never did extricate himself from the implications of his faculty-psychology; Milton, although he stems from the Puritan tradition, leans more to the left.

57. Cf. *Paradise Lost,* III, 11. 195–7, where God says: 'My Umpire Conscience; whom if they will hear,/Light after light well used they shall attain,/And to the end persisting safe arrive.'

58. Cf. N.W. Porteous, 'Image of God,' in *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible,* II, 683.

Over the fish and fowl of sea and air,
Beast of the field and over all the earth,
And every creeping thing that creeps the ground![59]

Again, after Michael shows Adam the murder of Abel, Adam cries in despair:

Can thus
The image of God in man, created once
So goodly and erect, though faulty since,
To such unsightly sufferings be debased
Under inhuman pains? Why should not Man,
Retaining still divine similitude
In part, from such deformities be free,
And for his Maker's image' sake exempt?[60]

Michael responds that if man obeys the 'rule of *not too much*' – i.e., if he will use his reason to order his life in moderation and temperance – he will be spared much sorrow. Apparently, then, in order to do full justice to the human cultural enterprise of the seventeenth century, Milton adopts the dual *imago dei* as basic to his anthropology. (He is not the last Reformed theologian to have done so; Emil Brunner, in his dialogue with Barth and in his attempt at a real cultural theology, distinguishes between the formal and material *imago dei*, and insists on man's capacity to respond, and therefore on his responsibility, because of the reality of the *analogia entis*, as found in the biblical creation account.[61])

The distinction is usually made between the *tzelem* (image) and *demuth* (likeness) of Genesis 1:26–8. Catholic theologians have contended that in the fall man lost only *demuth* or *justitia originalis*; and that *tzelem*, which is his innate ability to reason, or to think as God thinks, has been retained. It is ironic that this interpretation, which seems to be basic to the poet Milton's anthropology, can be disposed of on *poetic* grounds. It is common knowledge that Hebrew writing employed parallelism – i.e., that not infrequently the writer would emphasize or reaffirm his one basic contention by expressing it a second time in another way. Therefore, when the writer of Genesis 1:26–8 uses both *tzelem* and *demuth*, he is probably not talking of two aspects of man's nature, or of nature together with some *donum superadditum naturae*, but of one nature only. On this supposition, Reformed theology endeavoured to sweep away the entire scholastic (notably the Thomistic) anthropology.[62]

Tension has marked the discussion of this problem throughout the theo-

59. *Paradise Lost*, VII, 11. 519–23.

60. *Ibid.*, XI, 11. 507–14.

61. Cf. E. Brunner, *Dogmatics*, vol. II: *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1952), pp. 44ff., 57ff., 65ff., 75ff.

62. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I a–II ae, 85, 2: 'Sin cannot take away entirely from man the fact that he is a rational being, for then he would no longer be capable of sin. Wherefore it is not possible for this good of nature to be destroyed entirely.'

logical history of the church. Suffice it to say here that any kind of cultural theology and any substantial apologetic theology must take stock of the empirical fact that unbelievers are not less rational than believers, and that many times they are just as moral as believers, if not more so. This seems to have been Milton's methodology – to build on what he had to admit was true: that man, through the use of his innate reason, was making tremendous discoveries and opening up enormous vistas of scientific and moral (political) truth.[63]

VI CONCLUSION

Our investigation suggests that Milton can be seen as the first of a long line of great Protestant apologetic theologians. His estimate of the role of reason in God and creature has been examined. We have seen that, in Milton's view, God created according to reason and wisdom; that Adam was endowed with reason and with the freedom to serve it; that he fell by being tempted and deceived; that the ensuing curse by God did not include forfeiture of reason. As Milton closes his poem, we find him basically optimistic: 'The world was all before them ... and Providence their guide.' Writing near the end of his life, blinded by his studies, disappointed that the Puritan interlude had failed, he is still confident that God, despite the fall, has not left himself without a witness, but graciously continues to sustain his universe in moral wisdom.

63. This broadened vision of moral truth is not always recognized by students of the Enlightenment. In fact, geographical explorations had disclosed to men the existence of a variety of cultures, with strangely different moralities but equally dignified and noble religious foundations. The honest Christian theologian was thus obliged not only to incorporate the fall into his theology, but also to discover whether and to what extent there could be a natural theology.