

Irreconcilable (Dis)Continuity: *De Doctrina Christiana* and Milton^{1*}

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A definite reality presents itself to the Milton student as she/he turns to *De Doctrina Christiana*, a Latin treatise of divinity that has been largely attributed to Milton: the treatise includes distinctive heterodox elements in the areas of soteriology and theology proper which are not found in Milton's undisputed *corpus*, and the latter shows orthodox elements in those same areas that are not found in the Latin treatise. The vision of limited discontinuity—i.e. Milton's changing his mind about certain aspects of his theology—may account for some discrepancies, but its speculative nature is underscored both by the conspicuity of the discrepancies and by the fact that the discontinuity reaches backwards as well as forward. Alternatively, it can be argued that the Latin treatise is the work of more than one author (including Milton), or that it is the work of someone close to Milton's theological *milieu* and yet so far from it as to retain independent views in areas where Milton's undisputed works align themselves with mainstream views.

These pages address the question of authorship by bringing elements of continuity and discontinuity to light which call to task the ultimate bearing of *De Doctrina* on Milton's major poetry.

The Law²

De Doctrina goes to great lengths to make inward liberty dependent upon the termination of the law. To this end, it first intertwines the

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concept of the abrogation of the law with the emphasis on law as a unity. It was Calvin who had notably divided the law into moral, ceremonial and judicial, only to regard Christ as the end of its last two portions. The moral portion of the law, by contrast, subsisted as the expression of God's eternal character (*Institutes* 2: 4.663). Luther, for his part, argued that the law had been abrogated in its entirety by Christ and was only useful for self-examination (12: 233). The Latin treatise insists on regarding the law as a unity in its attempt to stress that the end of the law does not entail the termination of just one portion of it. It rather results in the cessation of the law as a whole to the effect that Christians are free from any external demands.

By putting forth this argument, the treatise fails to fully understand the position which finds its fountain-head in Calvin. So Polanus³: "the fact that one is not under the law does not mean that one does not owe obedience to the law, but that one is free from the curse and constraint of the law and from its provocation to sin" (*Syntagma* 6.10.351; Milton, *CPW* 6: 27.535). Here, the law metonymically stands for that which we may call the domain of the law, from which the gospel frees the believer. *De Doctrina's* reply to this argument is revealing:

But if this is so, what do believers gain from the gospel? For believers, even under the law, were exempt from its curse and its provocation to sin. Moreover what, I ask you, can it mean to be free from the constraint of the law, if not to be entirely exempt from the law, as I maintain we are? For so long as the law exists, it constrains, because it is a law of slavery. (*CPW* 6: 27.535)

From these words, one may infer that believers do not gain *from the gospel* exemption from the law's curse and provocation to sin, namely the very capacities the author has been arguing to be sources of slavery. What they do gain from it is the extinction of the law as a whole. Thus the treatise gets caught in a circular inconsistency as it maintains that freedom from the constraints of the law only comes by getting rid of the law altogether, while arguing that even under the law the believer was free from those constraints. Also, if that same law is what

produced curse and provocation to sin in the first place, how could believers under the law be exempt from them? Much to the contrary, Milton appears to argue in his undisputed works that the constraining power of the law, curse, and provocation to sin all vanish when the believer is clothed in Christ's righteousness.⁴

To be sure, after insisting on the abrogation of the law in its entirety, the treatise nevertheless specifies that "in reality the law, that is the substance of the law, is not broken by this abolition. On the contrary its purpose is attained in that love of God and of our neighbour which is born of faith, through the spirit" (CPW 6: 27.531). In his endnote, Maurice Kelley refers to A. S. P. Woodhouse, who points out that of this "substance of the Law" (CPW 6: 27.531) "indeed the Moral Law [which *De Doctrina* regards as abrogated] was itself a formulation" (Woodhouse 65). Granted the identity between that which *De Doctrina* refers to as the "substance of the Law" and the moral law, the lack of resort to the defining phrase "the moral law" in *De Doctrina* constitutes in and of itself a surprising omission. The phrase had a broad theological bearing for any divine, Milton included, and even so much so that Milton would resort to it frequently in both the antiprelatical and the divorce tracts and would not shy away from it even in his major poem, *Paradise Lost*. It goes without saying that to find such a phrase in a poem—but not in a system of divinity by the same author—simply makes no sense.

To be sure, *Paradise Lost* proves largely unconcerned with the emphasis on the law as a unity, while aligning itself with Calvin's tri-fold division of the Mosaic law as judicial/civil, ceremonial, and moral (see *PL* XII.230-35, 297-99). The first division is referred to in Book XII.230-31:

Ordain them laws; part such as appertain
To civil justice [...]

The second part of the law is hinted at in the words that immediately follow (XII.231-32):

[...] part religious rites
Of sacrifice [...]

The ceremonial part of the law is then further acknowledged in the words,

[...] conscience, which the law by ceremonies
Cannot appease [...] (*PL XII.297-98*)

The third portion of the law is, in turn, set apart in Book XII, lines 298-99:

[...] nor man can the moral part
Perform [...]

While the ceremonial law is to be regarded as “types” and “shadows” (*PL XII.232-33*) pointing to the final reality, that is, Christ and his sacrifice, Michael’s progressive account of salvation history seems to define the civil/judicial portion of the Mosaic law in dispensational terms. In other words, this part of the law seems to properly pertain to Israel as the civil extension of the moral law. As to the latter, for the poem to bring up this distinctive category is to set itself lexically and theologically in the company of the magisterial systems of divinity, e.g. by William Ames (see 111, 139, 269, 287, 291, 318). As in the mainstream theologies, in the poem, too, the substance of the moral law never appears to subside. Yet, the problem is not found in the subsistence of the moral law but in the human impossibility to perform it. While the moral law points man to the way of life whereby they may live and have peace of conscience, it cannot give them the power to meet its requirements. Neither a new law nor the termination of the existing one is needed but a new covenant that may give man life and peace, despite their inability to perform the law and thus provides inward freedom as the foundation to fulfill it:

Some blood more precious must be paid for man,
Just for the unjust, that in such righteousness

To them by faith imputed, they may find
 Justification towards God, and peace
 Of conscience, which the law by ceremonies
 Cannot appease, nor the moral part
 Perform, and not performing cannot live.
 So law appears imperfect, and but giv'n
 With purpose to resign them in full time
 Up to a better cov'nant, disciplined
 From shadowy types to truth, from flesh to spirit,
 From imposition of strict laws to free
 Acceptance of large grace [...] (PL XII.293-305)

It is plain from these lines that liberation from the rule of the law does not come by doing away with the law, as *De Doctrina* extensively argues, but through redemption from the slavery of sin. Redemption, in turn, is provided at the cross by Christ as a substitutionary sacrifice. David V. Urban persuasively argues that Milton follows in the orthodox Reformed strain in envisaging Christ's whole life as active righteousness—which even positively recapitulates Adam's fall—as an integral element of atonement's substitutionary consummation at the cross. This emphasis is especially evident in *Paradise Regained*.⁵ The result of Christ's atonement is grace. Where grace rules, the law loses its constraining capacity because it is deprived of the principle upon which it operates. Much to this effect, emancipation from the slavery of sin does not result in freedom from the moral demands of the law but from the *rule* of the law. Likewise, in *Paradise Lost* the passage from the covenant of works to the covenant of grace is not a passage from law to antinomianism but from the "*imposition* of strict laws to free / Acceptance of large grace" (XII.304-05; my emphasis).

The continuity between *Paradise Lost* and Milton's undisputed prose is revealing when it comes to considering the law both in its divisions and in its theological bearing. In particular, the relationship between the civil law and the moral law is underscored in the divorce tracts as well as in the antiprelatical tracts. For Milton, the moral law is to maintain the prerogative to direct the civil and political course of a community and a nation under the new covenant, since the judicial branch of the law is "but the arme of the moral law" (CPW 2: 16.322).

Even so, as the expression of the inward microcosm of Christian liberty, it is bound to differentiate itself from the strictures of Israel's theonomic prescriptions:

The whole Judaick law is [other than moral] politicall, and to take pattern by that, no Christian nation ever thought it selfe oblig'd in conscience [...] (CPW 1: 764)

The civil and political precepts of the law of Moses, that is the second half of the Decalogue, are here said to be discarded by Christian nations. Milton is already pointing to a redefinition of the civil and political law based on the moral law as it is taught at the school of the gospel. This outlook will progressively lead to the rejection of the coalescence of church and state in ruling against the individual conscience, and to a more and more clean-cut separation of religious and civil matters in his writings, culminating in *A Treatise of Civil Power* (1659).⁶

Faith and Works

Fulfilled by Christ in man's place and its wages paid, the law loses its prerogative to condemn, constrain and stir man's enslaving affections. It no longer serves, as it did the child, as an external set of rules and prescriptions, but its moral essence can be discerned and observed by the free and adult individual through works of faith. The latter supplant works of law as deeds which are built upon man's reliance on (faith in) his pre-established inward liberty by the new light of the indwelling Spirit. Indeed, all factors which held reason captive appear to dissipate as man is pronounced free at the beginning of his walk and given over to "the Spirit of truth":

The promise of his Father, who shall dwell
His Spirit within them and the Law of Faith,
Working through love, upon their hearts shall write
To guide them in all truth [...] (PL XII.487-90)

After Jesus' departure from earth, his disciples are promised not to be left orphans. A comforter, the Paraclete, will come from heaven to dwell within man. God's perpetual law of truth will no longer be encompassed in external formulaic prescriptions but will become part of man's inward essence. By engraving the law on the heart of man, the Spirit will provide the inward counterpart and synthesis of that truth which is only found in the "written records pure" (PL XII.513), in fact, those same records which are "but by [that] same Spirit understood" (PL XII.514). The new law will no longer be a law of works but a law of faith, as it is that which the Spirit fulfills in man on the basis of trust in the Son's imputed righteousness. This faith does not do away with works but expresses itself through works of love:

[...] the benefit [of his death for man] embrace
By faith not void of works [...] (PL XII.426-27)⁷

The reader will immediately recall the words of Paul in Romans 3:28, "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." *De Doctrina* finds in the specification "of the law" the key to overcoming the alleged discrepancy between Paul and James in the New Testament: if for James "by works a man is justified, and not by faith only" (Jas 2:24), it is because he is referring to "works of faith" (CPW 6: 22.490). "Paul does not say that man is justified simply through faith, without works, but *without the works of the law*" (CPW 6: 22.490). As a result, *De Doctrina* goes so far as to argue, in Thomistic terms, that "if to believe is to act," as the examples show which the treatise draws from the Old Testament, "then faith is an action, or rather a habit acquired by frequent actions [...]. Actions, however, are usually said to be effects rather than instruments; or perhaps they might better be called causes, though of less moment than principal causes" (CPW 6: 22.489).⁸

Yet, the Latin treatise here fails to account for something *Paradise Lost* seemingly indicates: faith has a very definite object under the full manifestation of the covenant of grace and its revelation to Adam. If the object is Jesus and his work on the cross, and if faith is "trust" (PL

XII.418), it follows that works of faith cannot be causes, even if secondary. The benefit of Christ is, on the contrary, embraced by that quality of faith in the Son which makes works good. While the likes of Ames get lost in defining internal-external dynamics (see Ames 234-36), Calvin puts it best in his commentary on James: "No faith, or only a dead faith, is without works" (22:314). That Milton is referring to true faith as opposed to dead faith without yielding ground to works of faith as a cause of justification is conclusively indicated by the assurance given to Adam that "This godlike act / Annuls thy doom" (PL XII.427-28), a *single* internal act of living faith delivering him from "the death" he "should have died / In sin for ever lost from life" (PL XII.428-29).⁹

Prevenient Grace

Whether prevenient grace is seen in Calvinistic terms as that grace which *comes prior to* human faith, irrespective of anything that comes from man, or, in accordance with Arminian theology, as grace that enables the human faculties to choose to come to Christ, either concept is foreign to *De Doctrina Christiana*.

Just as the "moral law," the expression "prevenient grace" (Latin *gratia praeveniens*) is not found in *De Doctrina*; another most peculiar omission in light of both the lexical and the theological distinctiveness and implications of the phrase. Once again, Milton is so confident in both the lexical and the theological importance of the technical expression as to seek no poetic way around it in his poem. After the fall and after the slavery of sin, in all its divisive power, has sunk in, Adam and Eve become reminiscent of God's gracious act of covering both their outward and inward nudity with his robe of righteousness (PL X.219-23), and they now manifest the reality of God's grace prevenient through their repentance and turning to God:

Thus they in lowliest plight repentant stood
Praying, for from the mercy-seat above

Prevenient grace descending had removed
 The stony from their hearts, and made new flesh
 Regenerate grow instead [...] (*PL* XI.1-5)

For all the lexical divergence, “prevenient grace” appears to some as the same as *De Doctrina*’s “sufficient grace” (*satis gratia*, *CPW* 6: 4.192-94). Benjamin Myers assimilates the two by pointing out how in the treatise grace “restores man’s natural faculties of faultless understanding and free will” (*CPW* 6: 18.461) and adding, “This is precisely the meaning of prevenient grace in *Paradise Lost*” (*Milton’s Theology* 151-52). Myers, nevertheless, fails to ascribe to Milton’s use of the highly distinctive terminology (“grace which comes prior to”—*prae-veniens*—as opposed to “grace sufficient”—*satis*) its proper significance. *De Doctrina* speaks of grace as universal in its extent and as a unit. Bestowed to all in different measure according to God’s will, grace is sufficient for all to discern and choose and thus synergically cooperate with God in attaining to salvation.¹⁰ By contrast, *Paradise Lost* points to a grace that induces capitulation only to direct man to God. To this effect, the poem is particular in distinguishing between God preemptively molding the heart of Adam and Eve so they can seek his face, and the Son pointing to his merit and to the price he will pay (i.e. his death) to obtain reconciliation. In the same way, in Book III, Milton understands God’s prevenient grace as shedding light on man’s frail condition so that he may fully place his trust in the deliverance provided at the cross:

[...] once more I will renew
 His lapsed powers, though forfeit and enthralled
 By sin to foul exorbitant desires;
 Upheld by me [...]
 [...]
 By me upheld, that he may know how frail
 His fall’n condition is, and to me owe
 All his deliv’rance, and to none but me. (*PL* III.175-82)

In lines 175-76, Milton’s understanding apparently matches *De Doctrina* in that he refers to grace prevenient as that act which restores

man's fallen faculties. Even so, in the following lines, the renewal of man's fallen faculties is defined by the recurrence of the object pronoun "me." The circular motion of the chiasmus "Upheld by me [...] / By me upheld" contrasts the person on whom the delivering initiative rests with man's enthralled and impotent self. The function of grace here is not to yield strength (in terms of judgment and free will) but weakness. It is to yield a heart that acknowledges the frailty of man's fallen condition and the impossibility for man to do anything other than reclining on the one who alone is their true source of deliverance.

De Doctrina's view on grace comes very close to the Quaker concept of the inner light and leads those who accept the treatise as Milton's to conclude that he "made little distinction between them [i.e. grace actual and habitual]" (Boswell 83). Whether Milton's understanding of prevenient grace is Calvinistic or Arminian, *Paradise Lost's* concept of grace prevenient makes clear, to the contrary, that salvation is all of God and all of grace.

Agents of Creation and Regeneration¹¹

Early Quakers notably identified the Son and the gospel of grace as the essence of inner light. Even so, both the Son and the Spirit were interchangeably referred to as its agents. Accordingly, in pointing to the Son as he who is and conveys the light of heaven, Milton intertwines his functions with those of the Spirit in the creation of the world, the spiritual re-creation of the poet and the resulting creation of the poem:

Hail holy light, offspring of Heav'n first-born,
 Or of th'Eternal coeternal beam
 May I express thee unblamed? Since God is light,
 And never but in unapproachèd light
 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? Before the sun,

Before the heavens thou wert, and at the voice
 Of God, as with a mantle didst invest
 The rising world of waters dark and deep,
 Won from the void and formless infinite.
 [...]

[...] on his right

The radiant image of his glory sat,
 His only Son [...] (III.1-12, 62-64)

While those reading the antitrinitarianism of *De Doctrina* into *Paradise Lost* are ready to dismiss the invocation to light as variously pointing to the personification of an attribute of God or to physical light,¹² the incipit of the *Book of the Son* (Book III) yields a clean-cut portrait of the latter's nature to those who acknowledge Genesis 1:1-3 and the prologue of the Gospel of John as its primary pre-text. In it, the same creating *Logos* (PL III.708, VII.163) who by the word of his mouth (VII.164, cf. III.9-10) "did[...] invest / The rising world of waters dark and deep"—even that which the Spirit "won from the void and formless infinite" or "vast abyss" (I.21-22, VII.234-37)—is the true light that is coming into the world to make a new *spiritual* creation (John 1:9, 1:13). The theological synthesis of the two Scriptural passages is ultimately afforded by Paul in what amounts to an all-encompassing backdrop for the Son's poetic role as *Logos*, wisdom and light in the two threshold moments of history:

For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Cor 4:6)

Just as light flowed from the command, in fact, from the Word of God at creation, so did the light the poet invokes at the beginning of Book III stream forth "at the voice / Of God." In the same way as the God who is light has shone "in our hearts," the poet calls on the light of heaven to shine inward. With light comes the knowledge of the glory of God, just as the inner light is to enable the poet to "see [...] things invisible to mortal sight" (PL III.54-55). And if for Paul the knowledge of the glory of God shines in the face of Christ, in Milton the Son is

“the radiant image of his [God’s] glory” (*PL* III.63) in whose countenance alone the poet is to see God “without cloud” (*PL* III.385).

To be sure, the overlapping of the Spirit and the Word at creation and in the work of illumination may sensibly lead to the conclusion that the light Milton revisits is identical with the Spirit of God in the initial invocation in Book I:

And chiefly thou, O Spirit, that dost prefer
Before all temples th’ upright heart and pure,
Instruct me, for thou know’st; thou from the first
Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread
Dove-like sat’st brooding on the vast abyss
And mad’st it pregnant [...] (I.17-22)

Mindful of *De Doctrina*’s warning not to call upon the Spirit (see *CPW* 6: 6.295), Maurice Kelley, and a plethora of critics after him, regards the Spirit here as “a personification of the various attributes of God the Father” (see Kelley 106-18). Even so, in commenting on the presence of the Spirit at creation, *De Doctrina* refers to it as “the *spirit* of God [...] a reference to the Son, through whom, as we are constantly told, the Father created all things” (*CPW* 6: 6.282; my emphasis). W. B. Hunter comes to this same conclusion by way of theological reasoning (Hunter et al. 149-56), so that in his reading the Spirit and the holy light of heaven end up being assimilated into the Son. While the solution offered by *De Doctrina* (and Hunter), if unsatisfying from a dramatic point of view, may seem to settle the discussion from a theoretical one, the problem of identification materializes again when, in turning to Book VII, the reader is faced with the simultaneous presence and involvement of both Son and Spirit in creation:

My overshadowing Spirit and might with thee [the Son]
I [the Father] send along [...] (*PL* VII.165-66)

The reference to the gospel narrative of the Annunciation would have proven inescapable to the seventeenth-century Scripture-saturated mind in light of its definition of the Spirit as “overshadowing” and

“might”: “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee” (Luke 1:35). Milton was thus associating the Spirit active in the first creation with the Spirit active in the new creation inaugurated by the coming of Jesus in the flesh. This same Spirit plainly matches the Spirit of the invocation in Book I. The identification occurs as Raphael’s language in Book VII echoes I.20-21 as well as the pre-text of Genesis 1:2:

[...] on the wat’ry calm
His brooding wings the Spirit of God outspread
And vital virtue infused [...]. (VII.234-36)

Granted the identity of the Spirit in Books I and VII, in the latter the Spirit appears to be conversant with one “*eternal Wisdom*” (VII.9-10; my emphasis). Book III, in turn, identifies God’s wisdom as the “Son of my [the Father’s] bosom,” who “alone” is his “Word, [his] wisdom” (169-70), namely the light that streams forth “at the voice / Of God” (III.9-10).

The conclusion is inescapable: the Spirit involved in creation in *Paradise Lost* is *not* and *cannot* possibly be the Son, as *De Doctrina* would have it. The invocation to the Spirit at the outset of *Paradise Lost* does not therefore address the Son, contrary to the teachings of the Latin treatise. Also, the Spirit is defined in personal terms by the poem—see “His” with reference to the Spirit (VII.235)—whereas *De Doctrina* consistently refers to the Spirit as an impersonal force. The question remains: What are then the separate functions of Spirit and Son in creation and regeneration?

Albeit the Spirit is himself called to “Illumine” what in the poet is “dark” (*PL* I.23, 22) he is only able to inspire the poetical creation, just as he infused his virtue in the creation of the world, insofar as he exposes the poet’s darkness and directs him to the source of creation and light. In the words of John, the Spirit will guide you in all truth for he “shall receive of mine [the Son’s], and shall shew *it* unto you” (John 16:14). No less is signified by the Spirit being called “the Spirit of Grace” (XII.525). In fact, if the light of the knowledge of the glory of

God is in the gospel of the Son alone, it is for the Spirit to reveal one's spiritual darkness and convey the Son alongside his transforming life and vision on the grounds of grace. If right reason is twinned with liberty, it is given to the "Spirit of Grace" to be joined in indissoluble marriage with it, its "consort" (XII.526).

Theology Proper¹³

Kelley's *This Great Argument* (1941), Hunter et al.'s *Bright Essence* (1971), Bauman's *Milton's Arianism* (1987), and Campbell et al.'s *Milton and the Manuscript of De Doctrina Christiana* (2007) have shaped mainstream attitudes toward *De Doctrina* and *Paradise Lost* over the past decades. Kelley's reading of the Latin treatise as a theological gloss upon the poem, along with his masterful notes to Book 6 of the Yale edition of Milton's prose works, laid the foundations of critical orthodoxy. A stern reaction to Kelley's work would have to wait until the 1960s, when Patrides made his case for the alignment of Milton's theology with traditional Christian orthodoxy in *Milton and the Christian Tradition* (1966). A new critical standard was only provided a few years later by Hunter et al.'s revisiting of the theology of both treatise and poem. If throughout the 1970s and 1980s *Bright Essence's* often recondite subordinationist attempt at disjoining or variously reconciling *Paradise Lost* and *De Doctrina* under the banner of orthodoxy was received by many Miltonists, it would not be long before the treatise's heterodoxy took over the scene again, notably through Bauman. He fundamentally moves from Kelley's premises to conclude that "if what was condemned at the Council of Nicea was Arianism, then John Milton was an Arian" (2). All attempts at defining the bearing of *De Doctrina* on *Paradise Lost* were to come to terms with a new challenge after 1992, when William Hunter first questioned Milton's authorship of *De Doctrina* ("The Provenance of the *Christian Doctrine*," published in *Studies in English Literature* and followed by a forum in the same issue of the journal testifying to the significance of the objec-

tions raised). The ensuing vibrant debate included, among staunch supporters of Milton's authorship, Barbara Lewalski (see esp. "Milton and *De Doctrina Christiana*: Evidences of Authorship," 1998), Christopher Hill (see esp. "Milton's Christian Doctrine: Professor William B. Hunter, Bishop Burgess and John Milton," 1994), and John P. Rumrich (see "Milton's Arianism: Why it Matters," 1998, and "Stylometry and the Provenance of *De Doctrina Christiana*," 2002), and, among those entirely or partially rejecting the attribution of the treatise to Milton, Hunter himself (see esp. *Visitation Unimplor'd*, 1998), Paul R. Sellin (see esp. "John Milton's *Paradise Lost* and *De Doctrina Christiana* on Predestination," 1996, and "Further Responses," 1999), and Michael Lieb (see esp. "*De Doctrina Christiana* and the Question of Authorship," 2002, where he argues that we cannot ultimately know which parts of the Latin treatise are Milton's and which are not). Arguments of provenance notwithstanding, those holding on to Milton's authorship of the treatise are at their best when pointing to the alleged continuity between *De Doctrina* and the Miltonic corpus in such areas as divorce, monism, and *creatio ex Deo*. To a reasonable degree, one may claim that the various arguments on either side have been addressed effectively, but the discussion has been, as it were, put to rest by Campbell et al.'s more recent effort. Though the latter is hailed by many as conclusive today, yet unaddressed or overlooked arguments of continuity and discontinuity and close theological comparison prove to be a stumbling block for it.¹⁴ Arguments of continuity trace a most natural backdrop for the poem's theology proper to the words of *Of Reformation's* invocation:

Thou therefore that sit'st in light & glory unapproachable, *Parent of Angels and Men!* Next thee I implore omnipotent King, Redeemer of that lost remnant whose nature thou didst assume, ineffable and everlasting *Love!* And thou the third subsistence of Divine infinitude, *illuminating Spirit*, the joy and solace of created *Things!* One *Tri-personall* GODHEAD!" (CPW 1: 613-14)¹⁵

Far from holding on to a tri-personal Godhead, it has been noted that *De Doctrina* maintains a strongly antitrinitarian stance (CPW 6: 5.218).

The Son is therein depicted as the recipient of the substance of God, yet as not sharing his very essence (CPW 6: 5.211), and as perpetual, yet not eternal (CPW 6: 5.211). On the contrary, the light of heaven in the poem is said to be “of th’Eternal coeternal beam” (PL III.2), the dwelling of God “from eternity” (III.5), and “Bright effluence of bright essence increate” (III.6). To view the light so portrayed as anything other than God himself is tantamount to creating an irreconcilable dualism between God and light: both are said to exist from eternity, and light is pronounced uncreated—as is assumed God alone is—as well as streaming from God’s own essence. In other words, light is everything *De Doctrina* states only God can be. Even so, the light of heaven is significantly identified as “offspring of Heav’n first-born” (PL III.1), thus marking its otherness from God. Notice *De Doctrina* specifically mentions the Son’s being the firstborn in Scripture as irrefutable evidence that he cannot be the coessential light (see CPW 6: 5.211).

In its hymn on the Son, Colossians 1:15-17 reads (my emphasis):

[He] is the image of the invisible God, the *firstborn* of every creature: for by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist.

The Son is, in fact, heaven’s firstborn throughout the New Testament. If the celestial light is the same as the “of all creation first / Begotten Son” (PL III.383-84), generation—contrary to *De Doctrina*—must be so interpreted as to signify the Son’s position as pre-eminent life-giving ἀρχή as well as his relationship of divine love with the Father (cf. CPW 6: 5.205-06, 6: 7.302-03). The image of the “invisible” God (cf. PL III.374) and “light” (cf. III.3), the Son is only rightfully identified with the holy light of heaven as the “radiant image of his [the Father’s] glory” (III.63) in whom “th’Almighty Father” is “made visible” and “shines” (III.386; the possibility of the Father being “made visible” in the Son sharply contrasts with CPW 6: 5.237, 6: 6.297).

In the final analysis, no better description for the Son is found in *Paradise Lost* than that provided by the Nicene Creed: "light of light, very God of very God" (*Book of Common Prayer* 22). All in all, the Son in the poem is nothing short of the "ineffable and everlasting *Love*" (CPW 1: 614) of the prose. The effluence of God's very essence, whose piercing ray descends to man in his darkness and saturates him with the gospel, the Son is the light of the knowledge of the unknowable God communicated by the prevenient, concomitant and subservient agency of the "third subsistence of Divine Infinitude, [the] *illuminating Spirit*" (CPW 1: 614). Like Augustine, Milton must resort to the term *person* (cf. "*Tri-personall GODHEAD*", CPW 1: 614) to not remain silent.

Discontinuity between Milton's *corpus* and *De Doctrina* is also evident when we assess what Milton made of Arianism in the early prose.¹⁶ Milton's references in the antiprelatical tracts to Arians as "no true friends of *Christ*" (CPW 1: 534), to the "unsoundness in Religion" of Constantine, "favoring the *Arians*" (CPW 1: 555), and the ill effects of the emperor's policy with "his Son *Constantius*" proving "a flat *Arian*" (CPW 1: 557) do not merely testify to his own rejection of a particular strand of antitrinitarianism,¹⁷ but they amount to an expression of his staunch trinitarianism. Hence his endorsement of the Nicene council as a source to "hearken" amongst the many flawed voices of tradition (CPW 1: 545, 555, 562) along with his positive as well as negative references to individuals respectively believing in the Trinity and denying it: among the former is "the faithfull and invincible Athanasius," one of the fiercest opponents of Arianism (CPW 1: 555, 563); among the latter are Origen and Tertullian. "The erroneous Origen," on the one hand, held the Father to have a place of prominence within the Trinity (CPW 1: 567). Tertullian, on the other hand, is thus quoted in *Of Prelaticall Episcopacy*: "The Father is the whole substance, but the Son a derivation, and portion of the whole as he himself professes because the Father is greater then me." "Beleeve him now," Milton goes on, "for a faithfull relater of tradition, whom you see such an unfaithfull expounder of Scripture" (CPW 1: 645). It is

highly significant that what Milton here labels an unfaithful expounding of Scripture closely parallels the standpoint of *De Doctrina Christiana*.

The argument is inevitable which questions the likelihood of the same person being the author of both the antiprelatical tracts of the early 1640s and the theological treatise possibly *in fieri* throughout the following decade. A reply comes from Campbell and Corns (273):

Theology was a living discipline for Milton, and his opinions on many theological issues changed in the course of his life. *De Doctrina* affords a view of his theological thinking in the 1650s. His thinking is for the most part unexceptionable, but on some issues he adopts minority opinions which he defends vigorously.

Although it is fair to assume a change may have occurred in Milton's thinking, three aspects should be considered. First and foremost, the distinction Milton draws in the antiprelatical tracts between the "purity of Doctrine" in which "we agree with our Brethren [Protestants abroad]" and "Discipline," namely church government. "In this," adds Milton, "we are not better than a *Schisme*, from all the *Reformation*" (CPW 1: 526). While England already shares pure doctrine with her Brethren, reformation is still wanting as far as church government is concerned. One would expect future development to inform reflection upon church government, not theology proper.¹⁸

Secondly, if the envisioned change of mind did occur, evident signs of it should be detectable somewhere other than in the *De Doctrina*. But apart from *De Doctrina*, the Miltonic canon seems to show no clear indications of major shifts towards heterodoxy. Those who detect signs of heterodoxy in *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* resort to circular arguments, that is they read the poems through the spectacles of the treatise or therein find a theological framework for their perception of God in the poem.¹⁹

Nonetheless, what is most puzzling is that *De Doctrina* never refers to such a shift. Not even in passing does it mention previous works in which a totally opposite position in theology proper was vigorously

held. On the contrary, its author lashes out against people holding to trinitarianism and disparages their arguments as one who has never been affected by them:

If my opponents had paid attention to God's own words [...] I say, if my opponents had paid attention to these words, they would not have found it necessary to fly in the face of reason or, indeed, of so much scriptural evidence. (CPW 6: 5.213)

[...] they have availed themselves of the specious assistance of certain strange terms and sophistries borrowed from the stupidity of the schools. (CPW 6: 5.218)

The question of whether Milton had any religious affiliations in the years prior to and concomitant with the composition of the major poems and late prose has been largely debated. Evidence points to more than the simplistic yet frequent answer, "He had none!"

The close parallel between Roger Williams's and Milton's own spiritual course strictly resembles a pattern.²⁰ Williams's ecclesiological stances significantly unfold in four stages: from his taking holy orders in the established church to separatism, from separatism to the Baptist persuasion, and from the latter to the seeker's apprehension of all forms of Christian churches as apostate. Williams's progressive shift testifies to a linear estrangement from the rule of men. Milton's course is described along the same lines by John Toland in his *Life of John Milton* (151-52):

In his early days he was a Favourer of those *Protestants* then opprobriously cal'd by the name of *Puritans*: In his middle years he was best pleas'd with the *Independents* and *Anabaptists*, as allowing of more Liberty than others, and coming nearest in his opinion to the primitive practice: but in the latter part of his Life, he was not a profest Member of any particular Sect among Christians, he frequented none of their Assemblies, nor made use of their particular Rites in his Family. Whether this proceeded from a dislike of their uncharitable and endless Disputes, and that Love of Dominion, or Inclination to Persecution, which, he said, was a piece of Popery inseparable from all Churches; or whether he thought one might be a good Man, without subscribing to any Party; and that they had all in som things corrupted the Institutions of Jesus Christ, I will by no means adventure to determin: for Conjec-

tures on such occasions are very uncertain, and I never met with any of his Acquaintance who could be positive in assigning the true Reasons of his Conduct.

Toland clearly makes Milton's ideological turn to Independency and Anabaptism a matter of liberty. The notion itself finds further confirmation in the personal involvement which transpires from a letter Milton addressed to a minister on behalf of a French Protestant church of Independent leanings in 1659.²¹ Toland's further unconfirmed suggestions about the latter part of Milton's life as free from any formal religious affiliation in turn present us with scenarios which seemingly match Williams's late persuasion. That which Samuel Johnson would portray as Milton's personal intolerance for any form of authority, whether civil or ecclesiastical,²² is depicted by the deist Toland as the genuine result of a libertarian sentiment.

Milton's leaning towards the Baptist and Independent persuasion certainly speaks of his departure from mainstream orthodoxy, but only in terms of liberty from the rule of men, that is, with respect to freedom of conscience and ecclesiology. As for theology proper, both Independent and Baptist groups were trinitarian.

This understanding is further corroborated by Milton's association with Saumur and with Moyse Amyraut,²³ to whom the academy of Saumur inextricably binds its name. Amyraut's progressive reaction against post-Reformed Protestant Scholasticism constitutes a significant *trait d'union* between Calvinism and Independent, General Baptist and Quaker theology.²⁴

One of Amyraut's notable pupils, the Quaker William Penn, entertained views on religious freedom and toleration variously reflective of Amyraut's own. Notable is also Amyraut's advocacy of fellowship among all Christian churches holding to the main tenets of the Reformation. This position closely aligns with Milton's understanding of freedom of conscience and toleration.

When it comes to divinity itself, although his distinctive trait of hypothetical universalism attracted widespread controversy,²⁵ Amyraut's theology was largely regarded as in line with the Re-

formed tradition. In expressing his disagreement with the Saumur divines, Francis Turretin consistently identified them as “our ministers” (4.17.4, 12.6.3, 14.14.6) on the ground of shared fundamentals. John Owen himself praised both Cameron and Amyraut’s understanding of divine justice and the Trinity.²⁶

Given *De Doctrina*’s emphasis on matters of theology proper and its vehemence in disparaging trinitarianism, a radical gap exists between *De Doctrina* and Milton’s endorsement of trinitarian Saumur. Consideration of *Of True Religion* works to the effect of amplifying the gap. The 1673 pamphlet shares with Amyraut, Baptists and early Quakers a significant emphasis on toleration and freedom of conscience while taking on a largely mainstream standpoint in matters of theology. Striking though the parallelism is which aligns *Of True Religion* with both *De Doctrina*’s contempt for Scholasticism and with its referential hermeneutic of Scripture, the similarities between the two passages should not blind us to the essential discrepancy in the respective conclusions, which we portray here not with the intention of building a straw-man but as an exemplification of both a general parallelism and divergence:

It is amazing what nauseating subtlety, not to say trickery, some people [in endorsing trinitarianism] have employed in their attempts to evade in the plain meaning of the scriptural texts. (CPW 6: 5.218)

The Arian and Socinian are charg’d to dispute against the Trinity: they affirm to believe the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, according to Scripture, and the Apostolic Creed; as for the terms of Trinity, Triunity, Coessentiality, Tripersonality, and the like, they reject them as Scholastic notions, not to be found in Scripture, which by a general Protestant Maxim is plain and perspicuous abundantly to explain its own meaning in the properest words, belonging to so high a Matter and so necessary to be known; a mystery indeed in their Sophistic Subtilties, but in Scripture a plain Doctrin. Their other Opinions are of less Moment. (CPW 8: 424-25)

In interpreting the second passage, both Rumrich (“Milton’s Arianism” 78) and Hunter (“The Provenance” 195) focus on the phrase “a mystery indeed in their Sophistic Subtilties” (425). If Rumrich were

right in asserting that “their” does not refer to Arians and Socinians, as Hunter on the contrary suggests, but to “Scholastic notions,” the possessive adjective “Their” introducing the following sentence would be left completely wanting identification. However, both Hunter and Rumrich seem to neglect the closing phrase “but in Scripture a plain Doctrin,” which is bound to shed light on the entire passage: whether the accusation of turning the doctrine of the Trinity into something obscure in the passage address one or the other party, the Bible is plain in its teaching thereof. In other words, the “high matter” of the Trinity, one of such necessary import, whether or not Scholastic terms do it justice, is plainly taught in the Scriptures. This interpretation finds a confirmation in the general thrust of the following argument. Milton makes a case for God not deserting “to damnable Errors & a Reprobate sense [...] the Authors or late Revivers of all these Sects and Opinions” (CPW 8: 426) who have misconstrued the Scriptures despite making them their ultimate authority and approaching them in all sincerity. On the contrary, he envisions God’s *pardon* for “their errors” (426). God’s pardon, nevertheless, is needed where there is sin and error. Milton cannot possibly endorse either. He therefore did *not* subscribe to the faulty doctrinal positions of Arians and Socinians, but to the plain teaching of Scripture. Even so, toleration is to inform the attitude of those who retain the truth. Notice Milton does not refer to Calvin and Luther in the same terms as he appraises their doctrine and differentiates his position from theirs in certain respects. The difference can be appreciated between an attitude of toleration and one that considers the counterpart on equal terms (CPW 8: 424). *De Doctrina* itself decries Socinianism, though not Arianism, in the words, “he [the Son] must have existed before his incarnation, whatever subtleties have been invented to provide an escape from this conclusion, by those who argue that Christ was a mere man” (CPW 6: 14.419). However, *De Doctrina* proves here anti-Socinian with sole respect to Christ’s pre-incarnate nature. In fact, parallels between *Of True Religion* and *De Doctrina* cannot be carried any further, as for the latter “there is [...] not a single word in the Bible about the mystery of

the Trinity" (CPW 6: 14.420), while for the former that of the Trinity is "in Scripture a plain Doctrin" (CPW 8: 425). Ultimately, one may argue that "plain Doctrin" does not refer to the particular concept of the Trinity but implicitly, if loosely grammatically speaking, to the nature of God in general. Once again, the burden of proof rests solely on the proponent, as Milton's entire argument revolves around toleration for people known for their denial of the Trinity. On the other hand, it may be said that Milton's understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity as it is plainly taught in Scripture may vary from orthodoxy. Nevertheless, *De Doctrina's* theology does not merely attempt a redefinition of the Trinity but proves strongly antitrinitarian in the immediate context of the words separately quoted above, "It is quite clear that the Father alone is a self-existent God: clear, too, that a being that is not self-existent cannot be God" (CPW 6: 5.218).

In the final analysis, if for Milton theology proper is "so high a Matter and so *necessary* to be known" (CPW 8: 424; my italics), his endorsement of Saumur in 1657 and his involvement, to whatever degree, in an Independent group in 1659 could not reasonably occur independently of shared stances in theology proper. For *De Doctrina*, that which Saumur believes in matters of theology proper and which Milton has always believed and been outspoken about, is plain sophistry. Whereas the tone of the Latin treatise towards believers in the Trinity and trinitarianism is highly intolerant, in *Of True Religion* Milton argues for toleration towards antitrinitarians.

Discontinuity between the Latin treatise and Milton's undisputed works in the areas of soteriology and theology proper as well as continuity between Milton's early prose and Milton's major poems and late prose in those same areas apparently refute Milton's authorship of the Latin treatise, in its entirety or in significant parts thereof—or, rather, make it an island in Milton's production. While the work of divinity remains an invaluable background source in Milton studies, the arguments are inconclusive which hold to *De Doctrina's* heterodox stances as a backdrop for Milton's theological thought.

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NOTES

¹This article variously rearranges, reformulates and expands on parts of the following published material by the author (cf. bibliography): *Milton's Inward Liberty* and "More Challenges to Milton's Authorship of *De Doctrina Christiana*."

²The ensuing discussion of law, faith and works, and grace prevenient variously reflects this author's germane arguments in *Milton's Inward Liberty*. Herein, I deal with law (see 13-21), with faith and works (68-70), and with prevenient grace (73-74, 153-54). While the book addresses these topics from the point of view of liberty, the present article revisits the respective arguments with respect to authorship.

³Amandus Polanus (1561-1610) was a German Reformed theologian, professor of Old Testament in Basel and rector of the University in the final part of his life. He authored *Partitiones theologicae* and *Syntagma theologiae christianae*. In 1603, he moved from Luther's translation to produce the first Calvinistic translation of the Bible into German.

⁴See numerous references and the respective analysis in Falcone, *Milton's Inward Liberty* 13-21. Esp. see PL X.220-23: "Nor he their outward only with the skins / Of beasts, but inward nakedness, much more / Opprobrious, with his robe of righteousness, / Arraying covered from his Father's sight." Also see XII.293-305.

⁵See Urban, esp. 820-26. Urban nevertheless envisions the orthodoxy of Milton's view of atonement as portrayed against the backdrop of *De Doctrina's* heterodox view of the Son.

⁶See Campbell and Corns 282-83: "The central proposition, to be substantiated from scripture, is 'That for beleef or practise in religion according to this conscientious perswasion no man ought to be punishd or molested by any outward force on earth whatsoever.' [...] The distinction between civil disorder, to be punished by the magistrate, and theological error, to be tolerated, is crucial."

⁷Also see PL XI.64: "faithful works."

⁸In arguing for *De Doctrina's sola fide* justification, Campbell et. al. do not acknowledge the reference to works as secondary causes of justification (111).

⁹While the arrangement of the lines directly associates "this Godlike act" with the act of embracing the benefit of the cross by faith not void of works, the entire motion of the passage maintains a connection between "this Godlike act" and "His death for man" (425) which points to the other side of one and the same coin.

¹⁰See Myers, *Milton's Theology* 152 and 154-55n64. See also Myers' thesis, *The Theology of Freedom in Paradise Lost* 94.

¹¹The ensuing discussion of the agents of creation and regeneration and of theology proper variously reflects this author's germane arguments in "More Challenges" (see 242-43).

¹²See Kelley 92; also see Bauman 220-22. Not so Hunter et al., who view the light in the passage as a reference to the Son (149-56).

¹³The following pages discussing Milton's affiliation rearrange, rephrase and expand on material that can be found in *Milton's Inward Liberty* (see 45-46, 71-72). Discussion of discontinuity with the early prose and of *Of True Religion* rearranges, rephrases and expands on "More Challenges" (243-47).

¹⁴Among dissenting voices, see Ernest W. Sullivan's review of *Milton and the Manuscript of De Doctrina Christiana*.

¹⁵Also cf. "trinal unity" ("On the Morning of Christ's Nativity," line 11).

¹⁶The ensuing discussion of Milton's religious affiliations and of discontinuity between *De Doctrina* and Milton's early and late prose in the area of theology proper variously reflects the author's germane arguments in "More Challenges to Milton's Authorship of *De Doctrina Christiana*."

¹⁷The author of *De Doctrina* is not a plain Arian, as Campbell and Corns point out: "[Milton's position] does not make Milton an Arian, because he believed that the Son, in the words of the Christmas carol, was 'begotten not created'" (273).

¹⁸This argument is Hunter's first objection in "The Provenance of *Christian Doctrine*."

¹⁹Kelley's *This Great Argument* and Bauman's *Milton's Arianism* set the stage for reading the treatise as a gloss upon the major poems. The vast majority of works on or references to *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* quite uncritically assume Milton's authorship of *De Doctrina* and thus inevitably read God, the Son, and the Spirit in the poems against the backdrop of the treatise's heterodoxy.

²⁰Other notable examples of a similar pattern are John Saltmarsh (s.d.-1647), William Dell (1607-1669), and John Goodwin (1603-1674). Parish priests at the outset of their ministry, Saltmarsh and Dell ultimately appeared to embrace Seeker positions (Dell would be buried outside the church) while Goodwin turned to Independency.

²¹See Nuttall 227-31. In accounting for the document, Nuttall argues for the Independent leanings of the congregation and for Milton's involvement in it.

²²E.g., "I know not any of the Articles [the 39 articles] which seem to thwart his opinions: but the thoughts of obedience, whether canonical or civil, raised his indignation" (Johnson 245).

²³Moyse Amyraut (1596-1664) was a French Reformed theologian, who studied under James Cameron in Saumur, where he ended up teaching. He is best known for his redefinition of Calvinist theology. See notes 25-26.

²⁴See also Falcone, *Milton's Inward Liberty* 72-73, for Milton's emphatical approval of the Saumur Academy.

²⁵Amyraut held to a one-way predestinarian view of *universalismus hypoteticus*. Calvin's limited extent of atonement was replaced by the view of atonement as universal yet hypothetical. The sufficiency of Christ's satisfaction for all sinners was in fact juxtaposed to its limited efficacy. Whereas grace could be offered to

everyone, only individual faith could appropriate its salvific efficacy. To be sure, “Amyraut maintained the Calvinistic premises of an eternal foreordination and foreknowledge of God, whereby he caused all things inevitably to pass—the good efficiently, the bad permissively. [...] But in addition to this he taught that God foreordained a *universal salvation* through the universal sacrifice of Christ offered to all alike (*également pour tous*), on condition of faith, so that on the part of God’s will and desire (*voluntas, velleitas, affectus*) grace is universal, but as regards the condition it is particular, or only for those who do not reject it and thereby make it ineffective” (Schaff 1: 481). He reasoned from the standpoint of God’s love towards his creatures; Calvinism reasoned “from the result, and made actual facts interpret the decrees” (Schaff 1: 481). “Amyraut also made a distinction between natural ability and moral ability, or the power to believe and the willingness to believe: due to intrinsic depravity man possessed the former, but not the latter” (Schaff 1: 483). A charge of heresy would not fail to rise which was addressed at the consecutive synods of Alençon (1637), Charenton (1644), and Loudun (1659). In all three instances Amyraut was acquitted of all charges.

²⁶See Muller 1: 79-80; on Amyraut’s view of the Trinity, see *De mysterio trinitatis*, part 1, 3-5. The main promoter of Amyraldian hypothetical universalism in England, and himself a pupil of John Cameron, was William Davenant. Davenant held to a general atonement in terms of intention and sufficiency. God’s universal desire for the salvation of all men formed the basis for conditional salvation: “In the floor debate on redemption at the Westminster Assembly, Edmund Calamy of the Davenant School attempted to insert Amyraldism into the Catechism” (Blunt 5-10).

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