The Authorship of *De Doctrina Christiana*:
A Response to David V. Urban[1]

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Abstract

Urban proposes that the doubts about Milton's authorship of *De Doctrina Christiana* make it acceptable to ignore the work when one writes about the theology in Milton's late biblical poems. I reply that: (1) The doubts are being exaggerated. Copious and many-sided evidence supports the attribution to Milton. Stylometry is inconclusive. (2) The work's style and argumentation show clear continuity from *DDC* into his other prose works, both Latin and English, and also some poems. (3) Continuities extend, though in more complex ways, even to the late poems. These ways show Milton's theological thought changing and developing: the relationship depends on topic and interest, as recent research is demonstrating. (4) Thus to forswear the knowledge and use of *De Doctrina* would not be enabling to Milton studies but impoverishing.

In his thoughtful and thorough contribution David Urban suggests that "the debate's conclusion in favor of Miltonic provenance was declared prematurely" (156). He narrates the history of the debate, along with his "own scholarly journey with *DDC* [*De Doctrina Christiana*] and its attendant controversies," to close on "reflections regarding how […] scholars might choose to use or not use *DDC* in their future work" (157).[2] He proposes that "one consequence of the larger debate should be the liberty for scholars to analyze Milton's theological presentations in his poetry *apart* from the specter of *DDC*" (156; italics mine).

I see the provenance of *De Doctrina* differently, because Urban's focus on conclusions—on which scholar concluded what—overshadows the key things, which are the premises and method, evidence and reasoning. I see the liberty of analysis differently too, for although something depends on genre and medium, to ignore *DDC* for Milton's *prose* would be myopic, licence not liberty. And even for his verse, *DDC* helps us understand his developing and changing mind, in new ways, by this evidence. I feel no "specter" about *DDC*. It is not a hindrance but a help, and a challenging resource.

The History of the Debate since 1991

I have few misgivings about Urban's narrative itself, which is thorough and uniquely full. However, its coverage leads to a certain impact of disproportioning. Scholars who uphold the ascription to Milton are differentiated, according to their own purposes, be they to argue for a more radical Milton, or for one who changed his views in the late great poems, or for something else. By contrast, scholars who doubt or deny the ascription, though fewer in number, seem unified by their doubts, which makes doubt more formidable than the evidence warrants. A narration of my own would have allowed difference of purpose or emphasis as simply usual within Milton studies. It would have included difference, and indeed changes of mind and emphasis, among the sceptics; changes and variation in the grounds of doubt. For if Milton did not author *DDC*, who did? Who meets the criteria better? Successive suggestions have not caught on.

My own piece of the debate is seen in *Milton and the Manuscript of DDC* (henceforward *MMsDDC*), summarized and supplemented in *Milton's Scriptural Theology* (ix-xii, 1-3; henceforward *MST*). As the Latinist of the multidisciplinary enquiry launched by Gordon Campbell and Thomas Corns, I first looked for words or names which Milton in other works, like the *Letters of State*, would have abominated as "bad" (unclassical) Latin. This method had helped distinguish Milton's draft presence among the many letters. I found no such thing in *DDC* to disauthenticate it, wholly or partly. What I did notice was a liking for

the word *duntaxat*, that full-blooded version of "only," along with synonyms and parallel stipulative idioms like *non nisi*. Quantity and quality made these a distinctive, personal group. They likewise appear in Milton's known Latin prose. For *DDC*, they show the spirit of the individual mind when aroused. For me, *duntaxat* encapsulates its governing spirit, from the epistle and title-page onwards.[3] I became further convinced when reading the whole manuscript in its original handwritten Latin, transcribing it as part of editing *DDC* for the Oxford Milton. No evidence or reasoning that has since been offered countervails. Only stylometrics could do it—if, I mean, it could show that the Latin is plainly *not* compatible with Miltonic authorship (which I discuss in a moment), but furthermore if only I could understand and use it for myself! This admission epitomizes and complicates the debate. Where many Milton scholars have competence neither in Latin nor in stylometrics, they may prefer to put decision at a layman's distance. The debate drags on because of this distance. We need that rare bird, a Miltonist who knows the ways of Latin and of statistics, impartially. Perhaps the debate in *Connotations* will find out this bird. I persist, nonetheless, in gratitude to Campbell and Corns for the initiative of a multidisciplinary, collective enquiry; and to the concatenation of its findings.

Indeed, the gathered findings have not been controverted; for sceptics have not met them all fully, but harp on the gaps and silences. Since the main findings stand, I turn to them, to restate them and amplify; which, moreover, is a continuing process, particularly within the editorial tradition.

Criteria of Provenance

Successive reports of the enquiry strengthened the case for a Miltonic provenance. Here is a recent summation of the Campbell-Corns findings:

> Our case is based on multiple strands of evidence:

1. The history of the manuscript ties it firmly to a Miltonic provenance.
2. Milton demonstrably has connections with the two principal scribes: Picard's hand appears elsewhere on Miltonic manuscripts; Skinner had access to his *Nachlass* [estate] and extracted other documents from it.
3. The format of the manuscript is consonant with the working practices of a blind author (in fascicules) and a civil servant (wide left margins, still used in the UK civil service).
4. Stylometric analysis is unlikely to provide a definitive verdict in a genre in which authors so heavily appropriate the work of their predecessors; however, our stylometric analysis found no evidence to *exclude* a Miltonic authorship.
5. The Latinity is expert to a level uncommon among Milton's contemporaries but wholly consonant with Milton's accomplishment elsewhere.
6. While there are some minor discrepancies between the theology of *DDC* and *PL* [*Paradise Lost*], they are explicable in terms of genre (Milton not wanting to alienate readers of an epic poem directed to a broad Protestant consensus) and date (work on *DDC* probably being suspended at the Restoration). The editorial tradition has identified numerous points of close similarity where the treatise illuminates the poem. (Campbell and Corns, "Re: Confirming *MMsDDC*")

The summary is stated calmly, almost understated. The opening metaphor of "strands" merits attention. Strands, in weaving, strengthen one another.

Individual strands, too, deserve expansion for present purposes. Thus "firmly" (1) and "demonstrably" (2) deserve more of a fanfare, and "consonant with" (5) might be put more strongly; and so with the final sentence of (6). Points one to three, especially when taken together, might well clinch the matter—given also that analysis of the Latinity (5) and work within the editorial tradition (end of item 6) are regularly adding linguistic similarities which accompany the connectedness of the ideas. To repeat, the six points *together* validate the whole.

I illustrate this before turning to David Urban's second point, about the fit application of *DDC* to Milton's other work (especially but not only the poems).

1. History of the MS: "[Daniel] Skinner had access to [Milton's] Nachlass and extracted other documents from it" (2). Why would Skinner, seeking to publish Milton's dangerous State Letters of undisputed authorship take the additional risk of passing off somebody else's heterodox theology along with those Letters? And prior to that, what other English-based author had published on divorce, in a work relying plentifully on John Selden?

2. Scribes: "Milton demonstrably has connections with the two principal scribes" (2), Jeremie Picard and Skinner. This strand interweaves with the first. Although (or because) the blind Milton's own hand will not be found on the MS, Skinner, whether transcribing or ending it off, adds the name, and does it in one of the hands he uses more generally.

3. Format of the MS: fascicules, and the wide left hand margins especially, are not as widespread as might be thought: these points tighten the weave from points (1) and (2).

4. Stylometrics is a harder matter. Scholars who are as baffled by it as I am must speak with caution, though more so if they do not read *DDC* in its original Latin either. From the two obstacles together may derive the intermittently cautious wording and apparent hesitancy in the language of the debate as Urban has recorded it, and also the occasional outbursts of exasperation. To speak for myself, the imitative, classicizing Latin of humanists, their purist obsession with using words and idioms that Roman practice authorizes, poses special problems of identification. It makes authentication harder. A stately but impersonal impression may result from the prevailing periodicity and hypotaxis, and so too with the flexibility of word-order which inflectedness allows. Thus the reader feels a distinctive mind without seeing how to test it statistically. What with the need for the computer to parse every inflection, and with the persistent hyperbaton which inflected word-forms encourage, these aspects drive me to look elsewhere, to details which do carry personality and so enable identification, albeit corroboratively.

May the current forum, based in Europe, encourage new contributions on these technical matters![4] Meanwhile, I have been convinced of Milton's authorship by attention to the *ipsissima verba,* points (5) and (6), below. (As for the matter of my reliance on *duntaxat* and its kindred of stipulative idioms, I was persuaded by the statistics which came out of stylometric comparison with the Latin of two English congeners, by Ames and Wolleb, the two which *DDC* uses most, alongside Latin prose works on other topics by Milton and Tom May, as reported in Chapter 4 of *MMsDDC*. It may be that *duntaxat* etc. figure significantly in theologies not examined by our consortium. Certainly I hope that subsequent lexicographical work or new dictionaries will enable such examining.)

5. Accomplished Latinity: Whatever the prose of *DDC* may share with other theologians writing in Latin, it shows the continuity with Milton's other Latin prose when at its most impassioned in advocacy (my own preferred criterion). I have probed this in *Milton's Scriptural Theology*, throughout, and most fully in the chapter on its opening *Epistle* (7-17). Furthermore, I have recorded the Epistle aloud, to test its impassioned and partisan individuality.[5] Kinship with Milton's other appeals to fair-minded readers (the trope of *Candido Lectori*) emerges. I return to this in a moment, when adducing the work of John Creaser to show continuity with Milton's prose of controversy as well as accomplishment.

6. Philology: Allusions, Words, Phrases, Mannerisms; parallel passages in *Artis Logicae*. Consider some instances from each category:
(a) *Allusions to favourite pagan authors. DDC* adduces Homer, Euripides, and Ovid, all lifelong favourites of Milton's. The allusions are not slight but substantial in length and weight, expertly argued, with a flair similar to that in Milton's other prose.[6]
(b) *Words.* The water of baptism in *DDC* must be *profluentem*, "flowing forth," not static nor in symbolic droplets (Oxford 732, MS 340). Similarly in the epic at *PL* XII.442, baptism is stressed as originarily in the

"profluent stream." The choice of word is insistent in its context, and *OED* cites other contemporary uses as mainly medical.

(c) *Phrases.* Donald Cullington noted that in the Epistle the verbal doublet *excutere…ventilare*, probing and winnowing, turns up again in the *Second Defence* (*MST* 2). Doublets being a habit in the Epistle, might we seek them out generally through Milton's Latin prose? To move, more tellingly, from word and phrase to a whole sentence and proposition: "to God all times are not present," "*tempora omnia praesentia non sunt*," reverses the orthodox idea that "all times are present to God." This appears in *DDC* and in *Artis Logicae* (*MST* 2 item (iv)).

(d) *Mannerisms.* The calm pedagogy of Milton's *Art of Logic*, from which he promised to exclude theological examples, is interrupted whenever he does exemplify from theology. The most startling comes when he explains that things which differ in number differ in essence also, and adds *Evigilent hic theologi*, "here let the theologians awake!" (*MMsDDC* 103). Trinitarians, beware. In thought (the disjunctive arithmetical axiom) this accords with *De Filio*, chapter 6 of *DDC*. Compare the similar injunction to *Politici* in *DDC*.[7] Note, too, how often Milton, prizing his own independence of thought, likes to lump the so-called professionals into a dismissive plural, at points throughout *De Doctrina* and his prose in general. It is a mannerism or habit of thought; arrogant but individualizing; an Abdiel standing out against the conformist herd. Mental acts or turns of phrase alike show us the same *personality* in prose action. He quips on the name of a theological opponent, Placaeus, saying "*ut placet Placaeo*." "As Placaeus pleases": being too easily pleased he lays himself open to anti-Trinitarian squelching (Oxford 196, MS 84; see *MST* 50, 53-54. In *Pro Se Defensio*, where the primary target of obloquy is (erroneously and wilfully!) named as Morus, the name triggers repeated punning on *morus*, "mulberry." In *Prima Defensio* the name "Salmasius" triggers punning on *salmo*, "salmon." Not, alas, an unusual form of so-called wit, but in Milton it seems willed, habitual in controversies; no surprise, then, that it pops in during *DDC* also.

For the present discussion, these scattered quiddities combine to suggest a single mind and its tastes, deploying a Latinity shared across prose genres. No such evidence has been offered for other candidates in the debate on provenance. And when gathered together, do not the quiddities persuade more than separately as to provenance? And further, when added to the main Campbell-Corns evidence, tie those threads still more tightly?

Prose of Controversy, English and Latin Alike

We can move now to Urban's second contention about the suitability of applying *DDC* to Milton's other work (especially but not only the poems). I see no misfit at least between *DDC* and his prose of controversy. I see continuities in its obloquy, 6 (c) above, in argumentation, and in the whole characteristic of "'irritable' writing for victory" (Creaser 175) that John Creaser deplores because it clouds Milton's fundamental insights. Using Creaser's approach, I have charted this trait further in *Milton's Scriptural Theology*, and not only for *De Doctrina* but for *Paradise Lost* (*MST* ch. 10).

Creaser is not mentioned by Urban. That is because Creaser is exploring all of the prose together, English and Latin alike. That wider coverage and its premising implicitly question Urban's. To me, it suggests that when separation is premised one may miss similarity and connection—even, as I shall suggest, in the late biblical poems. Not that continuity or connection entail sameness or exact repetition.

Just before considering those late poems, however, compare the Abdiel tone in *DDC*, the lone voice against the muddled herd, with the tone in some sonnets: "I did but prompt the age to quit their clogs [...]" The herd are likened in their voicing to noisy beasts, "a barbarous noise [...] / Of owls and cuckoos, asses, apes, and dogs" (Milton, *Complete Poems* 82). Milton himself (honest Joe) speaks only for truth's sake, on a vital issue. Is this this not exactly how the *DDC* Epistle appeals at its

close, for a fair hearing after heaping obloquy on rivals and their tedious long and self-contradictory volumes? If so, Milton in polemical sonnets of the Interregnum sounds like the indignant voice within *DDC*, dated by Campbell and Corns to the same period. Does the continuity of *DDC* with Milton's bilingual prose and these sonnets extend further, to the late biblical poems?

The Late Biblical Poems

Now one might see the continuity in eristic from *DDC* to Milton's prose of controversy to certain of the sonnets, without following it into the late poems, whose theology is of greatest concern. I have myself upheld the valuable distinction made by C. A. Patrides between the "closed" theology of *DDC* and the "open" theology of *Paradise Lost* (*MST* 113, 115). Patrides contrasts theology which closes down or limits interpretation with theology which opens it up to alternatives. If this distinction were simply a difference of author, or at any rate an all-important difference of genre, such that readers could safely ignore the unwelcome rigidities, perhaps as aberrations, Urban's desired "liberty for scholars to analyze Milton's theological presentations in his poetry *apart* from the specter of *DDC*" (156; italics mine) would come as a relief.

To the contrary, although in *MST* I have recently endorsed and exploited Patrides's distinction, to separate for practical scholarship the treatise from the epic strikes me as extremism. An inclusive position holds truer to the evidence, and to the complexities of Milton's mind in action, indeed in development; and also (as regards Urban's practical emphasis) gives us *more* to work with, and in the end clarity more than confusion. Working life becomes more, not less, interesting.

Here are some ways in which *DDC* actively benefits understanding and appreciation of the epic:

- At times, *PL* evinces the *same* mind in action as *DDC* and the prose. The spirit of *duntaxat* prevails in them all when Milton reviles an opposite opinion or rigidly subordinates Father to Son at the expense of the spirit if not also the letter of scripture (See *MST* ch. 9). This is how from Pope to Empson readers have responded, not to *DDC* but to *PL* itself; to the same embedded intransigence.
- The epic is more open than the treatise *without* being always open. Contrariwise, neither is the treatise always closed (the "openness of [Milton's] fundamental insights"; Creaser 175): see Book One, Chapters 4 on predestination and 17–18 on renewal and regeneration.
- Complexities and asymmetries *belong* in Milton's "egotistical sublime," the one-sidedness of his self-belief. In general, too, middle or moderate or mixed positions suit real life, even when extremes sound clearer and do challenge opinion when it seems too settled. But extreme views do also distract and do damage. Vide Aristotle in the *Ethics*. Virtue is both extreme and a *meson*. Urban's position is extreme rather than moderate!
- Current research into the asymmetries should be applauded and heeded, not shelved or ignored…
- … for that is to simplify the complexities of a master spirit, impoverishing debate.

Accepting the findings of the Campbell-Corns enquiry stimulates fresh enquiries, not vitiated as some of Kelley's were by the over-enthusiastic or one-for-one glossing of *PL* from *DDC*. *DDC* helps us share Milton's developing view. One result of Hunter's disauthenticating zeal and the enquiry's considered rebuttal of it is that a new generation can examine the priceless evidence of treatise in its manuscript, without expecting a simple straight-line development. The cancellations and redefinitions show us how Milton thinks and went on thinking. Jeffrey Miller and Jason Kerr have been doing this. By the same impetus, does I.10 develop or only summarize the thinking of the English pamphlets about divorce (for this is one time when *DDC* follows, not precedes,

echt-Milton)? Taken together, these instances prompt me to reflect on further forms of relation between treatise and epic, using for this not changes of thought manifested within the MS but the stark distance between MS and poem in that central personage, Satan. Whereas comparison of the Son in the two works produces complex debate, whether and how far the poem is anti-Trinitarian, comparison of the two Satans shows the treatise simple and expository, almost perfunctory. I find it equally worth asking Why, and How. It tallies with what we know of the poem's gestation.

At all events, the relationship of treatise to poem varies according to topic. This varying needs charting and assembling. It deserves full attention from the community of scholarship, undeflected by lingering doubts of authorship or imputations of motive.

In Conclusion

All in all, one does not absolutely need to know *De Doctrina* to probe the theology of Milton's poems. Its thinking can be invoked unseasonably. Yet despite such provisos, the treatise and its manuscript give us a rich resource. To ignore it is false economy, impoverishing debate. It reveals, uniquely, his mind in action: how it argues, develops, even changes. Let it encourage new research! Warts and all, it belongs in the DNA of *Paradise Lost*.

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<div align="center">NOTES</div>

[1]I must record thanks to David V. Urban himself for the accuracy and fullness of his Response, reviving my sense of indebtedness since 1990 to many of the scholars he names, such as William Hunter and Michael Lieb; to Thomas Corns, Donald Cullington, and Jason A. Kerr for discussing the questions raised; and to Megan Kitching for her help in preparing the MS.

[2]*De Doctrina Christiana* is cited henceforward in the notes as "*DDC*." Reference is by page number with "Oxford" and the manuscript numeration, thus "Oxford 684, MS 311."

[3]/ex sacris duntaxat libris petita/ (Oxford 16, MS 7). One extreme instance comes at Oxford 862, MS 429, in a threefold insistence. Another comes at Oxford 678, MS 308, where /Israelitis potissimum/ can be seen in the MS hardening into /Israelitis duntaxat/. Anecdotally, I heard some sounds of recognition and change of mind from my audience at IMS Grenoble in 2005 when I suggested *duntaxat* as a key to the modality of *DDC*, its tone of voice. It struck a chord. The whole matter is discussed in *MMsDDC*, "The Latin Style," ch. 6, 137-42.

[4]For example, was it mistaken for *MMsDDC* to suggest that the liking for doublets in the Latin of DDC was distinctive (145-47)? Several more suggestions made in that chapter have not received a rebuttal.

[5]To listen to our reading, go to https://arc-humanities.org/blog/2019/10/23/recording-milton/.

[6]See further John K. Hale, "A Study of Milton's Greek."

[7]*Politicis etiam atque etiam legendum* ("to be read again and again by Statesmen"), Oxford 1242, MS 728; see also *MMsDDC* 128 with 103.

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