

## MORE CHALLENGES TO MILTON'S AUTHORSHIP OF «DE DOCTRINA CHRISTIANA»

The work in systematic theology known as *De Doctrina Christiana* has drawn the attention of scholars ever since it was first discovered in 1823. Debate over the past decades has centred primarily on the relationship between *De Doctrina* and *Paradise Lost*. In setting out to do away with Saurat's analysis<sup>1</sup> of Milton's thought by questioning the bearing of *De Doctrina* on *Paradise Lost*, C.S. Lewis in his *A preface to Paradise Lost*<sup>2</sup> was also reacting against Maurice Kelley's *This great argument: A study of Milton's De Doctrina Christiana as a gloss upon Paradise Lost*<sup>3</sup>. The latter was bound to set the critical standard for years to follow by extensively reading the Latin treatise as a sort of theological commentary on *Paradise Lost*. Most notable along Kelley's line, Michael Bauman's *Milton's Arianism*<sup>4</sup> strongly advocates Arianism in *Paradise Lost*. Reactions to Kelley's work followed in Lewis' footsteps in an attempt to disjoin the work of Milton's right hand from that of the left or redefine Milton's theological thought. Such is the case with C.A. Patrides, W.B. Hunter, J.H. Adamson<sup>5</sup> and J.T. Shawcross<sup>6</sup>, who variously attempted a reappraisal of *Paradise Lost* and/or *De Doctrina*'s heterodoxy. Different though they were, the results of all inquiries into Milton's thought in *Paradise Lost* were determined by the same general attitude which finds no mean description in Brown's words: «scholars have spent much effort reading [or trying not to read] the particular doctrines [of *De Doctrina*] into the poetry of

<sup>1</sup>) Saurat 1925.

<sup>2</sup>) Lewis 1942.

<sup>3</sup>) Kelley 1941.

<sup>4</sup>) Bauman 1987.

<sup>5</sup>) Patrides - Hunter - Adamson 1971.

<sup>6</sup>) Shawcross 1992, pp. 155-162.

the last years»<sup>7</sup>. Such an attitude necessarily stemmed from the assumption that the authorship of *De Doctrina* should not be disputed: alleged discrepancies between the epic poem and the Latin treatise should be explained away or accepted as such. A cogent blow to the system came when Hunter opened the door to the questioning of the treatise's authorship, thus raising a vibrant debate which has involved some of the finest Milton authorities. In his *The provenance of the Christian Doctrine*<sup>8</sup>, Hunter argues against Milton's authorship of *De Doctrina* from both the point of view of textual and comparative analysis and by questioning the reliability of the line of transmission of the text. The ramifications of Hunter's conclusions would be so deep and so widespread as to call for immediate response in the form of a forum on the same issue of «Studies in English Literature» 32 (1992) which published Hunter's essay. Rebuttals by Barbara K. Lewalski and John T. Shawcross were followed by a final reply by Hunter himself<sup>9</sup>, ultimately calling for a competent study of the Latin text. The following year Hunter endeavoured to press his case further by issuing *The provenance of Christian Doctrine: Addenda from the bishop of Salisbury*<sup>10</sup>, to be followed by a second forum on «Studies in English Literature» with Kelley's reply to Hunter<sup>11</sup> being echoed by Christopher Hill's *Professor William B. Hunter, bishop Burgess and John Milton*<sup>12</sup>, both followed by Hunter's response<sup>13</sup>. Only in 1995-97, however, did a committee of scholars<sup>14</sup> set out to meet Hunter's expectation for a study on the Latin text of *De Doctrina*, yielding ambiguous results. In 1998 Lewalski picked up the subject again<sup>15</sup>, as did Dobransky and Rumrich (*et al.*) in *Milton and heresy* and Hunter in his *Visitation unimplor'd*<sup>16</sup>. Four years later, Rumrich reiterated his commitment in *Stylometry and the provenance of De Doctrina Christiana* while Lieb became involved in the controversy through *De Doctrina Christiana and the question of authorship*<sup>17</sup>. The former committee now formed by Campbell, Corns, Hale and Tweedie was finally persuaded to tackle the various challenges posed to its early conclusions. The result was *Milton and the*

<sup>7</sup>) Brown 1995, p. 140.

<sup>8</sup>) Hunter 1992, pp. 129-142.

<sup>9</sup>) Lewalski - Shawcross - Hunter, pp. 143-166.

<sup>10</sup>) Hunter 1993, pp. 191-207.

<sup>11</sup>) Kelley 1994, pp. 153-163.

<sup>12</sup>) Hill 1994, pp. 165-188.

<sup>13</sup>) Hunter 1994, pp. 195-203.

<sup>14</sup>) Campbell, Corns, Hale, Holmes and Tweedie.

<sup>15</sup>) Lewalski 1998, pp. 203-228.

<sup>16</sup>) In 2005 Shawcross will attempt a refutation of Hunter's arguments as expounded in this work.

<sup>17</sup>) Lieb 2002, pp. 172-230.

*manuscript of De Doctrina Christiana*<sup>18</sup>. For all its relevance, however, the evidence expounded in this recent scientific effort does not prove final, or else, in Ernest W. Sullivan's words, «the debate remains open»<sup>19</sup>. Such a conclusion will prove far from gratuitous when seen against the backdrop of Milton's larger medium. In fact, Milton's theology proves peculiarly informed by and overwhelmingly indebted to Scripture against a wide theological substratum largely sharing a structural, epistemological and lexical framework. Calvin, Luther, Arminius, Episcopius, Amyraldus, Perkins, Tremellius, Zanchius, Cameron, Polanus, Amesius, Wollebius and the author of *De Doctrina Christiana* are only a few of them who variously share in and draw from this Protestant organic community. While the degree of dependence of one upon the other, if any, is to be individually established, all respective works testify to a common frame of thought. When seen in the light of such broader context, the inconsistency of the position will become apparent which views any single one of these as utterly binding on Milton.

To be sure, most of the arguments on either end of the debate appear inconclusive, as they largely depend on the proponent's limiting presuppositions. The same information can be construed in such a way as to confirm one's thesis or to disprove it.

Though incomplete, the list of some of the most relevant contributions to the dispute aims to show what bearing the attribution of *De Doctrina*'s authorship has been deemed to have on a proper understanding of Milton's thought. After reams have been written, and by such robust pens, it might seem little room is left to anything other than speculation, but light can still be shed on a hidden corner if but a tiny window is opened.

The present essay purposes to contribute to the discussion by introducing some apparently disparate elements that seem so far to have been overlooked or confronted from a different visual angle. These elements derive either from the inextricable connection in *Paradise Lost*<sup>20</sup> between the nature of the Son and theodicy or from the continuity reflected by the relations between *Paradise Lost* itself, the antiprelatical tracts, *Sonnets* 18 and 19 and *Of True Religion* as opposed to the discontinuity called for by welcoming *De Doctrina* into the picture. No reference will be made to the issue of the Latin treatise's provenance, stylometry or to most of the many texts that have been the main ground of confrontation.

In Milton's attempt at elevating himself to the height of his great argument and justify the ways of God to men, the fall turns into the

<sup>18</sup>) Campbell - Corns - Hale - Tweedie 2007.

<sup>19</sup>) Sullivan 2008.

<sup>20</sup>) This material is organised "topically" rather than "chronologically", as we feel the relations between the works can be better traced this way.

poet's battleground. *Man* is responsible for evil in the world. The freedom God accorded him to receive willing obedience from him was misused. Still the justice and love of an omnipotent God had to prevail, lest he be proved impotent. Justice calls for punishment and condemnation of man and his evil. Love calls for forgiveness and restoration. The dialectic between the two finds its synthesis in the Son<sup>21</sup>. He is the justification of God's ways to men, for «mercy and justice in [God's] face discerned»<sup>22</sup> finally meet at the cross. If for Saurat the crucifixion plays «no noticeable part» in the poem's theology and «vicarious atonement is no Miltonic conception»<sup>23</sup>, it is nowhere but at the Golgotha<sup>24</sup> that the Son absorbs God's wrath in his person as he takes the sinner's place<sup>25</sup>: «Behold me then, me for him, life for life, I offer, on me let thine anger fall»<sup>26</sup>, to «pay the rigid satisfaction, death for death»<sup>27</sup>, «to redeem man's mortal crime, and just, the unjust to save»<sup>28</sup>.

O unexampled love,  
Love nowhere to be found less than divine!

(3.410-411)

I have elsewhere<sup>29</sup> noted how relevant the nature of the Son is to the substantiation of Milton's theodicy in that the sole sacrificial offering of full Deity can propitiate God eternally while man alone can die and be burdened with man's sin<sup>30</sup>. The Son then becomes the key to disclose God's

<sup>21</sup>) The entire argument as it chiefly appears in Book 3 is aptly portrayed in Danielson 1999. See also Falcone 2009, pp. 309-318.

<sup>22</sup>) *PL* 3.407.

<sup>23</sup>) Saurat 1925, pp. 177-178.

<sup>24</sup>) See *PL* 3.477; 12.395-420.

<sup>25</sup>) While language of "imputation" in *PL* (e.g. 3.290-291; 12.409) contrasts Grotius' concept of rectoral or governmental vicarious atonement, it reflects the reformed theology of substitutionary atonement. Cfr. 2 *Cor.* 5.21.

<sup>26</sup>) *PL* 3.236-237. See also *PL* 12.394-419. Milton the iconoclast will not represent the cross in his poem, but the theme and doctrine of the cross underlies it from beginning to end.

<sup>27</sup>) *PL* 3.211-212. See also *PL* 12.290-314.

<sup>28</sup>) *Ivi* 3.214-215.

<sup>29</sup>) Falcone 2009, pp. 309-318.

<sup>30</sup>) Notice the Son's divine nature in *De Doctrina* entails his possession of the divine substance yet not of God's very essence. Because of this, the author of *De Doctrina* has to affirm that «the Bible never states that only God can approach God, or take away sin, or fulfil the law, or endure and overcome the anger of God, the power of Satan and temporal and eternal wrath, or recover the blessings lost by us. What it does state is that he whom God has empowered to do all this can do it» (*Yale Prose* 6.425). On the contrary, theodicy in *PL* demands the unfolding of God's perfections in a way that only finds in such words as Ames' an adequate expression: «it appears how necessary it was that Christ the mediator should be both God and man. For if he had not been man, he would not have been a fitting sacrifice; and if he had not been God, the sacrifice would not have been sufficient» (Ames

ways to men as the one who is «both God and man, Son both of God and man»<sup>31</sup>, or else he who «joins Manhood to Godhead»<sup>32</sup>. Milton's *protevangelium* underlying the entire poem is itself the announcement of the advent in human form of «the Son / of God Most High», by whose proceeding from the woman's womb «God with man unites»<sup>33</sup>. The association between the latter «God» and «God Most High» graphically implies *unity* between Father and Son. It is the Son's Deity Milton is emphasising when he declares him «equal to God», while it is his humanity the poet is referring to when he proclaims him «By merit more than birthright Son of God», for in his *kenosis* he has «quitted all», «[...] in thee / Love hath abounded more than glory abounds; / Therefore thy humiliation shall exalt / With thee thy manhood also to this throne»<sup>34</sup>. To be sure, the author of *De Doctrina* points himself to the hypostasis of divine nature and humanity in Christ, but while he depicts him as being «in fact both God and man»<sup>35</sup>, he prefers to read «fulness [as in «the whole fullness of the godhead dwelling in him bodily», *Col. 2.9*] as fulfilment, and take it to mean that the entire fulfilment of the Father's promises resides in, but is not hypostatically united with Christ as a man»<sup>36</sup>. Strictly speaking, God does not unite with man in *De Doctrina*. A derived being does, a separate essence who has been imparted divine substance<sup>37</sup>.

Against the background of theodicy and the underlying Reformed doctrine of substitution now stands another ineluctable objection to *De Doctrina*'s anti-Trinitarianism. In the words of theologian Charles C. Ryrie, «the idea of substitutionary atonement makes God unjust since He condemned His Son to bear the sins of mankind». «This might be a valid objection», Ryrie further argues, «except for the fact that the Triune God was involved in planning redemption, and the Son voluntarily took upon Himself the work of substitution. In other words, although this might be

1623, transl. Eusden 1968, p. 133). Cfr. *PL* 3.294-297, 303-306; 10.76-79 with *PL* 3.246, «All that of me *can* die». For Lewalski the latter phrase yields «the only one real discrepancy between the treatise and the late poems ...» as it «contradicts the argument in *De Doctrina* that both the human and the divine natures of Christ die in the crucifixion», Lewalski 1992, pp. 151-152.

<sup>31</sup>) *PL* 3.316.

<sup>32</sup>) *Ivi* 12.389.

<sup>33</sup>) *Ivi* 12.381-382.

<sup>34</sup>) *Ivi* 3.306-314.

<sup>35</sup>) *Yale Prose* 6.424.

<sup>36</sup>) *Ivi* 6.419. Cfr. *ivi* 6.424-425.

<sup>37</sup>) I discuss this point in *From strict laws to large grace: Gleanings from Milton's theology of history in book XII of Paradise Lost*, presented at the *Newton: Milton Two Cultures?* Conference (University of Sussex, July 2009).

a valid objection on a finite level, it cannot be on the infinite level, since at that level there are not three parties involved»<sup>38</sup>.

Let us now turn to the heavenly scene of Book 3.209-240<sup>39</sup>: the hosts of heaven are before God. Man's doom is declared: «He with his own posterity must die» (209), lest justice die, «unless for him some other [...] pay» (210-211). Nevertheless, a substitute must prove «able», «willing» (211), «just» (215) and displaying love beyond measure. «Say heavenly powers, where shall we find such love? Which of ye will be mortal [...] Dwells in all heaven charity so dear?» (213-216). Silence in this scene is the most eloquent device. «[...] all the heavenly choir stood mute, / And silence was in heaven» (217-218). The redundancy of «stood mute» and «silence» points to the celestial crowd's impotence as well as unwillingness. No one is suitable for the task, no one will or can take man's place. No one has such love and no one can have it but «the Son of God, / in whom the fullness dwells of love divine» (224-225). Powerful and spotless though the heavenly creatures may be, the love and righteousness that are called for do not and cannot dwell in them, but in God alone. If the *fullness* of love divine informs the Son, it is *God's* own love he embodies<sup>40</sup>, as opposed to the love of a heavenly "creature"<sup>41</sup> who is separate from God himself.

To this effect, we see how in the sacrifice of a derived being, whatever its status, for another God's love and justice are mutually exclusive, that is they would never meet the standard of Milton's theodicy on the grounds first envisaged by Ryrie. For God to sacrifice a third party, an innocent being for an unrighteous one, would be utterly unjust and unloving. Willing though the Son be to take man's place, God would favour man's life over the life of his Son and thus fail to be just and loving toward the latter. On the other hand, were God to condemn man and spare his Son, he would be just, yet wanting love toward man. God alone can take that place on the cross «that he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus»<sup>42</sup>. J.T. Shawcross would object to the divergence between treatise and poem in this respect. For him in *De Doctrina* «the *substantia* of God makes God indivisible», and «the separate personages of God create separate essences (or personalities) which each has

<sup>38</sup>) Ryrie 1999, p. 330.

<sup>39</sup>) The biblical background behind the entire scene is that of *Heb.* 10.5-10.

<sup>40</sup>) *PL* 3.410-411.

<sup>41</sup>) The word creature serves our purpose here only in so far as it indicates derivation. It does not however aim at establishing an etymologic connection with the verb "create", since *De Doctrina* is sure to distinguish between creation and the begetting of the Son. None the less, we read that «it is as plain as it could possibly be that God voluntarily created or generated or produced the Son before all things» (*Yale Prose* 6.211).

<sup>42</sup>) *Rom.* 3:26.

an external efficiency unto itself. Generation out of the *substantia* of the indivisible God has created these *essentiae*»<sup>43</sup>. Nevertheless Shawcross' "scholastic notions" would hardly be shared by the author of *De Doctrina* and taint both treatise and poem with Sabellian overtones. In the Latin treatise we read that «by GENERATION God begot his only Son, in accordance with his decree. That is the chief reason why he is called Father»<sup>44</sup>. Strictly speaking, the Son only exists in *De Doctrina* as a product of God the Father. He only exists, to use Shawcross' terminology, as a "personality" of God, the supreme expression of his external efficiency, not as GOD. In making the divine "personality" of the generated Son something *other* than the Father, *De Doctrina* is making it something *other* than God, «Generation must be an example of external efficiency, since the Son is a different person from the Father»<sup>45</sup>. Such is not only the case as the Father is a separate personality sharing the same divine essence with the Son, but because «nothing can be said of the one God that is inconsistent with his unity, and which makes him both one and not one [...] this one God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ»<sup>46</sup>. Or else, «If the Father is Christ's God and our God, and if there is only one God, who can be God except the Father?»<sup>47</sup> It follows the substance of God in the Son is nothing but «what God imparted to the Son. But do not take substance to mean total essence»<sup>48</sup>. And again, in regard to the Son being called *God* many «hit upon the bizarre and senseless idea that the Son, although personally and numerically distinct, was nevertheless essentially one with the Father, and so there was still only one God»<sup>49</sup>. If the Father alone possesses God's essence and is therefore distinct from the Son, neither man nor God is on the cross, but a third party.

Hence the poet is ever so careful at drawing a conspicuous portrayal of the nature of the Son<sup>50</sup>. Lines and lines on end are devoted to its definition from the very beginning of Book 3:

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 unapproachèd light  
Dwelt from eternity – dwelt then in thee,  
Bright effluence of bright essence increate.

<sup>43</sup>) Shawcross 1992, p. 158.

<sup>44</sup>) *Yale Prose* 6.205.

<sup>45</sup>) *Ibidem*.

<sup>46</sup>) *Ivi* 6.148.

<sup>47</sup>) *Ivi* 6.218.

<sup>48</sup>) *Ivi* 6.211.

<sup>49</sup>) *Ivi* 6.212.

<sup>50</sup>) See Patrides 1964, pp. 423-429.

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 [...]

(3.1-12, 61-63)

While those taking pains reading the anti-Trinitarianism of *De Doctrina* into *Paradise Lost* are ready to dismiss the invocation to light in the passage as variously the personification of an attribute of God or a reference to physical light<sup>51</sup>, the *incipit* of the *Book of the Son* (Book 3) yields a clean-cut portrait of the latter's nature to those who will acknowledge in *Genesis* 1 and the prologue of the Gospel of John its primary backgrounds. For the creating Logos<sup>52</sup> who by the word of his own mouth<sup>53</sup>, the voice / Of God<sup>54</sup>, «didst invest the rising world of waters dark and deep» which the Spirit «won from the void and formless infinite» or «vast abyss»<sup>55</sup> is the true light that was coming into the world to make a new *spiritual* creation<sup>56</sup>, the first-born who is coeternal and increate, the Son in whom the Father has dwelt from all eternity and whose *bright essence* he shares<sup>57</sup>.

Not only so, but the opening of Book 3 projects the reader further into Milton's view of God as the echo is perceived of the author's Trinitarian supplication of God in *Of Reformation*<sup>58</sup>.

Thou therefore that sits't 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!

<sup>51</sup> E.g. Kelley 1941, p. 92, as opposed to Hunter *et al.* 1971, pp. 149-156, the latter viewing light here as a reference to the Son. Distinguishing between the *essence* and the *effluence* of such a light to make it coincide with the created light of *Gen.* 1.3 is to miss the Gospel reference to light.

<sup>52</sup> *PL* 3.708; 7.163.

<sup>53</sup> *Ivi* 7.164.

<sup>54</sup> *Ivi* 3.9-10.

<sup>55</sup> *Ivi* 1.21-22; 7.234-237.

<sup>56</sup> See John 1.13.

<sup>57</sup> These notions plainly clash with *De Doctrina's* Christology, which is best summarised by Campbell and Corns' words: «With respect to God the Son, however, Milton argued that he is consubstantial with the Father but not co-essential, and that he is perpetual but not eternal (i.e. that there was a time before he was generated when he did not exist, but that he will exist forever)».

<sup>58</sup> *Yale Prose* 1.613-614.



The lines above (3.1-12, 61-3) call for a distinction between Light and light while at once assimilating the two, just as the prose above distinguishes between Father, Son and Holy Spirit, while at once stating their unity. Like Augustine, Milton must resort to the term "Person" to "not remain silent".

In the prose imploration, as in *Paradise Lost*, the Father dwells in unapproachable light, even he who is light. While man cannot draw near God's light, light itself can reach down and make God known. Hence Milton calls upon the «celestial Light»<sup>59</sup> to «Shine inward»<sup>60</sup> and regenerate him so he «may see and tell / Of things invisible to mortal sight!»<sup>61</sup> The result will be a third creation, namely the poetical one. Such a light irradiating, *planting* eyes in the three times blind poet<sup>62</sup>, is further identified as «the radiant image of» God's «glory»:

No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared *him*.<sup>63</sup>

The proximity between the prose tract and *Paradise Lost* then becomes all the more evident as the threefold supplication of the former turns into poetry in the latter:

Thee, Father, first they sung, omnipotent,  
 Immutable, immortal, infinite,  
 Eternal king; thee, author of all being,  
 Fountain of light, thyself invisible  
 Amidst the glorious brightness where thou sitt'st  
 Throned inaccessible, but when thou shad'st  
 The full blaze of thy beams, and through a cloud  
 Drawn round about thee like a radiant shrine  
 Dark with excessive bright thy skirts appear,  
 Yet dazzle heaven, that brightest seraphim  
 Approach not, but with both wings veil their eyes.  
 Thee next they sang, of all creation first,  
 Begotten Son, divine similitude,  
 In whose conspicuous countenance, without cloud  
 Made visible, the almighty Father shines,  
 Whom else no creature can behold: on thee  
 Impressed the effulgence of his glory abides.

(3.372-388)

<sup>59)</sup> *PL* 3.51.

<sup>60)</sup> *Ivi* 3.52.

<sup>61)</sup> *Ivi* 3.55.

<sup>62)</sup> *I.e.* affected by physical, spiritual and inspirational blindness. Cfr. *Sonnet* 19: «When I consider how my light is spent [...]».

<sup>63)</sup> John 1.18. Cfr. 3.279.

The reverberation of *Of Reformation's* Trinitarian invocation in «Thee, Father» and «Thee next» is inescapable. Criticism has made a storm in a teacup of such controversial wording as «of all creation first, / Begotten Son»<sup>64</sup>, while neglecting the eloquent reference and the general meaning of the text. The latter in its turn recalls both the words of the Gospel of John, «Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father»<sup>65</sup>, and those of Paul, «[...] his dear Son ... the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him all things were created [...] the firstborn from the dead; that in all *things* he might have the pre-eminence»<sup>66</sup>. With relation to creation and resurrection Christ is said to be first, not because he was the first to be created and resurrected, but because he is the preeminent life-giving *arché*. An ultimate synthesis of both poetical passages extensively reproduced above and the keystone to an informed understanding of the Son's nature in *Paradise Lost* is conclusively found in the words of 2 *Cor.* 4.6:

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.

A powerful poetical synthesis and fulfilment of the invocations of Books 1 and 3 to the Spirit and the Son, Book 7 itself contributes to the portrayal of the nature of the «ineffable and everlasting love»: here the Son shares «the seat / of Deity *supreme*»<sup>67</sup>, as indicated by the contextual phrase, «us dispossessed»<sup>68</sup>, and is himself «Girt with *omnipotence*»<sup>69</sup> or «*omnific*»<sup>70</sup>. Omnipresence also appears to be ascribed to both Father and Son when, after stressing the former's ubiquity<sup>71</sup>, Milton confers such divine perfection on the Son as he takes his place on the throne after accomplishing the work of creation<sup>72</sup>.

<sup>64</sup>) For a reading of this and other analogous passages as Arian, see Bauman 1987.

<sup>65</sup>) John 14.8-9.

<sup>66</sup>) *Col.* 1.13-19.

<sup>67</sup>) *PL* 7.141-142.

<sup>68</sup>) *Ivi* 7.142.

<sup>69</sup>) *Ivi* 7.194.

<sup>70</sup>) *Ivi* 7.217.

<sup>71</sup>) *Ivi* 7.516-518.

<sup>72</sup>) *Ivi* 7.587-591: the causal «for» of line 588 relates the following sentence to the entire preceding motion. «He» must therefore refer to the Son and not to the Father, as it would in the case of a deictic. The *enjambement* of line 587 in turn stresses the significance of the object pronoun «Him», thus drawing a visual and structural association between the latter and the «He» of the ensuing line.

For all its focus on the Son, however, Book 7 is sure to point to the latter as the Spirit's sister, the «*eternal Wisdom*» with whom Urania is conversant<sup>73</sup>. In his search for inspiration that would enable him to put his talent to use, the poet was finally persuaded it was no longer time to «stand and wait», but to call on the Spirit to support his high task:

And chiefly thou, O Spirit, that dost prefer  
 Before all temples the 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: what in me is dark  
 Illumine, what is low raise and support.

(1.17-23)

Provided the invocation address the Holy Spirit, the discrepancy with *De Doctrina* is at once apparent in that the theological treatise strongly warns against invoking the Spirit<sup>74</sup>.

Nevertheless, in commenting on the presence of the Spirit at creation, the author of *De Doctrina Christiana* sees it as «the *spirit* of God», «a reference to the Son, through whom, as we are constantly told, the Father created all things»<sup>75</sup>. While ignoring the identification in *De Doctrina* itself of the Spirit as the Son, Hunter significantly comes to this same conclusion by way of theological reasoning<sup>76</sup>. Such an achievement is yet not so surprising if we consider the Son to be the last remaining option after Kelley, himself unaware of the passage above, had identified the Spirit as «a personification of the various attributes of God the Father»<sup>77</sup>. Both attempts derive from the necessity to do away with the despicable incongruence between treatise and poem as to the legitimacy of calling on the Spirit. While the solution offered above by *De Doctrina*, if unsatisfying from a dramatic point of view, may seem to settle the discussion from a theoretical one, the problem materialises again when, in turning to Book 7, the reader is faced with the simultaneous presence and involvement of both the Son and the Spirit at creation:

My overshadowing Spirit and might with Thee [the Son]  
 I [the Father] send along [...]

(7.165-166)

<sup>73</sup>) *Ivi* 7.9-10.

<sup>74</sup>) *Yale Prose* 6.295.

<sup>75</sup>) *Ivi* 6.282.

<sup>76</sup>) Hunter 1971, pp. 149-156.

<sup>77</sup>) Kelley 1941, pp. 106-118.

That the Spirit of Book 7, and not the Son, coincide with the Spirit of the invocation in Book 1 is guaranteed by the assimilation of both Spirits to the heavenly Muse, Urania, and by Raphael's revealing language:

[...] on the wat'ry calm  
His brooding wings the Spirit of God outspread<sup>78</sup>  
(7.234-235)

The conclusion is therefore compelling which views the opening invocation of *Paradise Lost* as "redoubling" the uttering of *Of Reformation's* supplication to the «third subsistence of Divine infinitude», the «*illuminating Spirit*», as opposed to the redeeming Light of Book 3.

Even so, the Spirit is only able to inspire the poetical creation, just as he infused his virtue in the creation of the world, inasmuch as he, in the words of John,

[...] shall receive of mine [the Son's], and shall shew *it* unto you.<sup>79</sup>

If the Son alone gives knowledge of the Father, it is the Spirit who gives knowledge of the Son. Such saving knowledge in turn is the twofold ground for the service of poetry<sup>80</sup>.

In the final analysis, both Son and Spirit are at work in the creation of the world, in the spiritual regeneration of the poet as well as in the poetical birth of *Paradise Lost*. This ultimate creation cannot unfold without the saving Light of the Gospel opening the poet's eyes to all that is ineffable by the illumination and indwelling of the Spirit<sup>81</sup>.

If the poetical inferences above are correct, we have reason to believe that the prose invocation yields the true physiognomy of the tri-personal Godhead in *Paradise Lost*, with poetical, narratological and dramatic motives intertwining theological ones in calling for the diversification of the functions within the Trinity<sup>82</sup>. In this respect, it is of some moment to notice a pattern all through *Paradise Lost* of *general* and *particular* identification of the Deity. When God has a paradigmatic function, the Deity is referred to as "God" or "Godhead", when a distinctive action, speech or tribute is being portrayed, God is singled out as "Father", "Son" or "Spirit"<sup>83</sup>.

<sup>78</sup>) Cfr. 1.20-21.

<sup>79</sup>) John 16.14.

<sup>80</sup>) I discuss this point in *The dialectic of poetical aspiration and the service of God in John Milton*, presented at the *Young Milton Conference*, Oxford (Worcester College, March 2009).

<sup>81</sup>) Cfr. *PL* 3.195-196.

<sup>82</sup>) See e.g. *ivi* 10.63-79.

<sup>83</sup>) Exemplary of this point is *ivi* 3.341-343.

Milton's references in the antiprelatical tracts to Arians as «no true friends of Christ»<sup>84</sup>, to the «unsoundness in Religion» of Constantine, «favoring the Arians»<sup>85</sup> and the ill effects of the emperor's policy with «his Son *Constantius*» proving «a flat Arian» do not merely testify to his own rejection of a particular strand of anti-Trinitarianism<sup>86</sup>, but they amount to an expression of his stark Trinitarianism. Hence his endorsement of the Nicen council as a source to «hearken» amongst the many flawed voices of tradition<sup>87</sup> along with his positive as well as negative references to individuals respectively believing in the Trinity and denying it: among the former features «the faithfull and invincible Athanasius», one of the strongest opponents of Arianism<sup>88</sup>. Among the latter Origen and Tertullian. «The erroneous Origen», on the one hand, held the Father to have a place of prominence within the Trinity<sup>89</sup>. 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», goes on Milton, «for a faithfull relater of tradition, whom you see such an unfaithfull expounder of Scripture»<sup>90</sup>. It is highly significant that what Milton here labels an unfaithful expounding of Scripture closely parallels the standpoint of the author of *De Doctrina Christiana*.

The question inevitably rises as to the likelihood of the same author writing both the antiprelatical tracts of the early '40s and the theological treatise possibly *in fieri* throughout the following decade.

A reply comes from Campbell and Corns in the words:

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 1650's. His thinking is for the most part unexceptionable, but on some issues he adopts minority opinions which he defends vigorously.<sup>91</sup>

Although it is fair to assume a change of Milton's thought might have occurred, three aspects should still be considered. First and foremost, the distinction Milton draws in the antiprelatical tracts between the «purity

<sup>84</sup>) *Yale Prose* 1.534.

<sup>85</sup>) *Ivi* 1.555.

<sup>86</sup>) The author of *De Doctrina* is himself 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'» (Campbell - Corns 2008, p. 273).

<sup>87</sup>) *Yale Prose* 1.545, 555, 562.

<sup>88</sup>) *Ivi* 1.555,563.

<sup>89</sup>) *Ivi* 1.567.

<sup>90</sup>) *Ivi* 1.645.

<sup>91</sup>) Campbell - Corns 2008, p. 273.

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*»<sup>92</sup>. 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 and not theology proper.

Secondly, if the envisaged change of mind did occur, signs of it, though concealed, should be detectable somewhere other than in *De Doctrina*. On the contrary, the Miltonic canon without *De Doctrina* seems extremely compact and coherent. Those who have seen such signs in *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* mostly seem to resort to circular arguments.

Nonetheless, what is even more puzzling is that the author of *De Doctrina* himself never refers to such a shift. He never even generically mentions previous works in which a totally opposite position in theology proper was vigorously held. On the contrary, he lashes out against people holding to Trinitarianism and their arguments as one who has never been affected by them. He never uses expressions like: “I used to believe that ... but now ...”, “I myself used to rank amongst Trinitarians, but now ...”. Think of the apostle Paul. He persecuted the Christian church. Then, all of a sudden, he started preaching Christ and siding with the people he persecuted. An evolution had occurred, but he never stops reminding us in his writings of what he used to be and believe until he fell off his horse on the road to Damascus. When did Milton fall off his horse? Where does he account for the radical transformation of his thought? In other words, could the man who would, when crossing the sea, change his sky but not his mind later change his mind without crossing any sea<sup>93</sup>?

Now, if an evolution of Milton's thought, as unlikely as it seems, may account for his authorship of *De Doctrina*, it certainly cannot when it comes to considering a seemingly contemporary composition as *Sonnet 18*. As Bignami reminds us, this composition is the expression of those inmost feelings that the Secretary for Foreign Tongues had to repress in his formal correspondence<sup>94</sup>. In his invocation to God to avenge the massacre of the Waldensians living in the valleys of the Pellice and Angrogna, God's «slaughtered saints» are «even them who kept

<sup>92</sup>) *Yale Prose* 1.526.

<sup>93</sup>) The reference is here to Milton's inscription in the *album amicorum* of Camillo Cardoini, a Protestant Neapolitan exile to Calvin's (and, from Milton's point of view, Giovanni Diodati's) Geneva. Far from constituting the landmark of a change in the shape of Milton's thought, his licensing of the Racovian Catechism merely witnesses to his consistency with the views on liberty and toleration expounded in *Areopagitica*. Cfr. Miller 1990, pp. 279-288.

<sup>94</sup>) See Bignami 1989, p. 237.

thy truth so pure of old» as opposed to «all our fathers who worship't sticks and stones». It goes without saying the Waldensians were (and are) a Trinitarian crew, even they who are said to have kept God's truth so pure. One can do little not to recall the «purity of *Doctrine*» Milton envisages in *Of Reformation*, where Trinitarianism was an inalienable trait of such purity. Could the one who in *Of True Religion*<sup>95</sup> deems theology proper «so high a Matter and so necessary to be known» not consider it a relevant part of pure doctrine in 1655 and deal with it in a contemporary writing – *De Doctrina* – so differently from those whose closeness to the Gospel he praises? The author of *De Doctrina* surely did not think so little of theology proper, vehement and detailed as his anti-Trinitarian arguments are.

Consideration of *Of True Religion* is now in order. Milton's 1673 pamphlet shares both *De Doctrina*'s contempt for scholasticism and its adherence to a referential hermeneutic of Scripture. The parallelism in the following lines is indeed striking:

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.<sup>96</sup>

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 terms of Trinity, Triunity, Coessentiality, Tri-personality, 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.<sup>97</sup>

The similarities between the two passages should but not blind us to the substantial discrepancy in the respective conclusions, which we portray here not with the intention to build a straw-man, but as an exemplification of both a general parallelism and divergence: in interpreting the second passage, both Rumrich<sup>98</sup> and Hunter<sup>99</sup> focus on the phrase «a mystery indeed in their Sophistic Subtilties». 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 com-

<sup>95</sup>) See *infra*, nt. 97.

<sup>96</sup>) *Yale Prose* 6.218.

<sup>97</sup>) *Ivi* 8.424-425.

<sup>98</sup>) Dobransky - Rumrich (eds.) 1998, p. 78.

<sup>99</sup>) Hunter 1993, p. 195.

pletely wanting identification. However, both Hunter and Rumrich seem to neglect the closing phrase «but in Scripture a plain Doctrin», which is bound to cast 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 – certainly the author of *De Doctrina* would himself qualify – the Bible is plain in its teaching thereof. In other words, the «high matter» of the Trinity, Triunity, Coessentiality, Tri-personality, one of such necessary import, 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»<sup>100</sup> «the Authors or late Revivers of all these Sects and Opinions» who have gone astray despite approaching the Bible in all sincerity. On the contrary, he envisages God's *pardon* for «their errors». God's pardon 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. Notice Milton does not refer to Calvin and Luther in these 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<sup>101</sup>. The author of *De Doctrina* in his turn implicitly decries Socinianism, though not Arianism, in the words, «he [the Son] must have existed before his incarnation, whatever subtleties may have been invented to provide an escape from this conclusion, by those who argue that Christ was a mere man»<sup>102</sup>. However, the author proves here anti-Socinian only with reference 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»<sup>103</sup>, while for the former that of the Trinity is «in Scripture a plain Doctrin». 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 noted 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 *anti*-Trinitarian in the immediate context of the very words separately quoted above, «It

<sup>100</sup>) *Yale Prose* 8.426.

<sup>101</sup>) *Ivi* 8.424.

<sup>102</sup>) *Ivi* 6.419.

<sup>103</sup>) *Ivi* 6.420.



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»<sup>104</sup>.

The lexical and conceptual vicinity in some of the wording in *De Doctrina* and Milton apparently witnesses to the vivid daily confrontation of this champion of liberty with issues of toleration and faith that found a common lexical and epistemological ground or code amongst the thinkers of the day. Peculiar patterns of thought and language were largely shared by the entire 17th century Protestant community, orthodox and heterodox alike. In the light of this, the absence from the Latin treatise of such theologically distinctive phrases as «prevenient grace»<sup>105</sup> and «the moral part [of the law]»<sup>106</sup>, which on the contrary find room in the poem, is revealing<sup>107</sup>.

A plain question finally arises in the mind of the reader of *De Doctrina*. We shall raise it here in passing, Who are the author's «opponents» the treatise is constantly referring to with relation to matters of theology proper? Milton did not have any religious opponents other than in the fields of divorce and ecclesiology. Is it just a general reference to any divine who would disagree with the views expounded? The involvement of the author of *De Doctrina* seems far more personal.

In the final analysis, if Patrides is right when he charges *De Doctrina* with being «a gross statement of theology, unworthy» of Milton<sup>108</sup>, it might prove rewarding to free *Paradise Lost*, with all the major poems, from the constraint of such a tight theological suit only to restore them to their broader biblical and theological wardrobe.

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<sup>104</sup>) *Ivi* 6.218.

<sup>105</sup>) *PL* 11.3.

<sup>106</sup>) *Ivi* 12.298.

<sup>107</sup>) See *infra*, nt. 37.

<sup>108</sup>) Patrides 1976, pp. 245-252.

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