



A SPECIFIC STUDY OF ANGELOLOGY IN MILTON'S PARADISE LOST

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ABSTRACT:

"Paradise Lost," written by John Milton and first published in 1667, stands as one of the most significant and enduring epic poems in English literature. The theme of Paradise Lost is the fall of Man. Milton has studied the sin which has brought about the downfall of man. The examination of the corruption of man's heart is a necessity for Milton. He wants to explain why human nature has come short of his expectations and why all his hopes have been frustrated. The prime fact of the fall is disobedience to God.

The explosive growth of Milton studies in recent times have resulted in what has been referred to as the 'flourishing Milton industry'. But this, far from helping the resolution of the controversies about Milton, has only made them all the more complex and complicated. Hence the scope for further research in Milton seems unlimited.

One of the most serious and sustained controversies about Milton has been that over his theodicy which is his stated purpose of writing Paradise Lost. Both the defenders and detractors of his theodicy have generally assumed that Milton is a thorough going biblicist. It is true that, studies have been made to show that Milton deviates very seriously from orthodox Christian dogma. But the biblical basis of his beliefs seems to be taken for granted by Milton scholars in general. So they have assumed that both Paradise Lost and the Bible stand or fall together. This assumption seems to have seriously vitiated the controversies over Milton producing more heat than light.

One of the sources of serious problems for Milton's theodicy is his angelology, especially the presentation of the fallen angels in the poem. Since the triumph of rationalism in the 19th century, these problems have generated serious controversies. Both the defenders and detractors of the God of the poem, however, have generally identified his angelology with Biblical angelology. This study attempts the angelology of Milton's Paradise Lost.

KEYWORDS:

ANGELOLOGY, THEODICY, ANGELS, TRIUMPH.

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INTRODUCTION

Paradise Lost has been recognised as a text representative of Western Culture - a combination of Pagan, Christian, Greek, Roman and Renaissance Europe. Through the ages it has been praised for conforming to the classical tradition and harshly criticised for its deviations from that tradition. Despite the opposition of Thomas Rhymer - an influential critic of the 17th Century - Paradise Lost was accepted as a classical epic. Milton had achieved for England what Virgil achieved for Rome and Homer for Greece. The first literary critic to notice the greatness of Paradise Lost was Addison. His comment on the poem emanates from his consideration of the poem as an epic. He does not bother to examine Milton's fidelity to the Bible or his theodicy. Like other 18th century critics, he analysed the poem and quoted from it to prove that Milton was an orthodox Christian. Evidently, he did not notice the unbiblical elements in the epic.

Addison evidently thought of the angels in Paradise Lost as the equivalents of the warriors in the Greek and Roman epics. But he could not see any difference between them and the angels of the Bible. He goes on to add that "Milton with like art, in his poem on the Fall of Man has related the fall of those angels who are his professed enemies." Addison is of opinion that the story of the angels adds to the beauty of the epic. About the time of the battle of the angels too Addison seems to have thought that Milton followed the Biblical order: he says that "the battle of the angels" and the creation of the world preceded "the principal action of the poem" (the fall of man) "in point of time", though in narrative order Milton "cast them into the fifth, sixth and seventh books" because otherwise it would have destroyed the unity of his principal action. In Addison's opinion, Milton was only following the epic tradition when in his poem on the fall of Man, he related

the fall of those angels who are his professed enemies. The principal actors in Milton's epic are man in his greatest perfection and woman in her highest beauty. Their enemies are the fallen angels.

Milton has been accused of the Arian heresy in *Paradise Lost* as well as *De Doctrina Christiana*. In *Paradise Lost* it is this issue that makes Milton incorporate the exaltation of the Son in Book V 600-15. Thereby making the reader as well as the angels feel that the Son was not co-equal with the Father. It is this very act which sets in motion a series of actions- envy of the Son of God, Satan with his angels moving away from God for he cannot worship the Son, the war in heaven, a part of heaven vacated, creation of man, temptation in Eden and the fall of man. If the whole action in *Paradise Lost* can be traced to a single cause it is perhaps the exaltation of the Son. Wadlock is of the view that the exaltation needlessly provoked Satan. In heaven, in hell and on earth the angels and their activities take up considerable space and attention of the readers. Satan seems to have captured the attention of the readers though Milton willed it otherwise. The authorial voice though strong has been inadequate to bring the reader to Milton's avowed aim. The reader participates emotionally in the action. Empson argues that Milton insists that God intended the Fortunate Fall and that Satan was only a tool.

Milton's purpose for the doctrine in *De Doctrina Christiana* is to justify his use of the Bible to present his monist view of God, and in *Paradise Lost* it is to justify his presentation of his monist view of the angels.

THE ORIGIN OF THE ANGELS IN PARADISE LOST

Though *Paradise Lost* does not contain any passage that deals directly with the origin of the Angels yet some scattered references to their creation are there. According to *Paradise Lost* In *De Doctrina Christiana* Milton defines creation as "act by which GOD THE FATHER PRODUCED EVERYTHING THAT EXISTS BY HIS WORD AND SPIRIT, that is, BY HIS WILL, IN ORDER TO SHOW GLORY OF HIS POWER AND GOODNESS" (Kelley 300). And he goes on to exclude the Son (Word) and the spirit from the word "God". The Son, according to Milton, is only "instrumental or less important cause of creation." The principal cause is "God the Father." This view of the role of the father in the creation of all things including the angels finds expression in Raphael's speech in the fifth book of *Paradise Lost*: "Oh Adam, one Almighty is, from whom all things proceed [...] created all such to perfection".

In *Paradise Lost* he makes a deliberate, though guarded, effort to present his Arian view of Christ. Such an effort can be seen in his representation of the creation of the angels too. Milton's Arian view of Christ's role in the creation of the angels finds expression in Abdiel's words and in Satan's response to Abdiel's statement.

Milton explains "begotten Son" literally, as referring to the Son's origin. In *De Doctrina Christiana* he says; "In scripture there are two senses in which the Father is said to have begotten the Son: one literal, with reference to the production, the other metaphysical, with reference to

exaltation" (Kelley 205). If the Son was a "Product" of the Father, he has no power in himself to create anything. The power belongs to "the mighty Father" who "made All things." So the real creator is the Father not the Son.

In *Paradise Lost* Milton represents the Father who played the major role in the creation of the angels and the Son who played the minor role as existing in two bodies in the empyrean. In the third book "the Almighty Father" is introduced as sitting "high throned above all high" and bending "down his eye" to view "His own works and their works" The angels, the sanctities of heaven stood thick as "stars" about him "and from his sight received I beatitude past utterance". The Son, "The radiant image of his glory", sat on his right. Milton's purpose is evidently to enable the reader to visualize the Father as physically bigger than the Son. Kerrigan says that Milton's "Portrait of God is so defiantly anthropomorphic that Milton seems at times to be rebuking other Christian poets for their recourse to "purer" symbols, as if they found scandal or embarrassment in the central accommodations of scripture" (145). Other Christian poets had to use "purer" symbols because they knew that God is spirit and does not exist in a body. Milton has to rebuke them because his God exists in a body. To use more precise terminology than Kerrigan's Milton's portrait of God must be called anthropomorphic rather than anthropomorphitic. Anthropomorphitism is a heresy which holds that God exists eternally in a body. Anthropomorphism is a figure of speech which attributes human bodily parts to refer to the various attributes of God.

According to *Paradise Lost* Milton does not state directly or indirectly anywhere in *Paradise Lost* the time of the creation of the angels. The only time the question is raised is when Satan is seen countering Abdiel's defence of God as the creator of the angels.

When this creation was? Rememberest thou

Thy making, while thy maker gave thee being?

We know no time when we were not as now;

Know none before us, self-begot, self-raised

By our own quickening power, when fatal course

Had circled his full orb (V 857-862).

Milton does not make Abdiel answer Satan's question. So the question of the time of the creation of the angels is left unanswered in the poem. In *De Doctrina Christiana*, however, he begins his discussion of creation with the general statement. "As to the actions of God before the foundation of the world, it would be the height of folly to inquire into them, and almost equally, so to attempt a solution of the question". This statement in its context implies not only that there were actions of God before the foundation of the world, but also that the actions included creation too. The statement also contains a hint that the angels were created before the foundation of the world or the creation dealt with in Genesis. In *Paradise Lost*, however, Milton does not follow his own dictum that "it would be the height of folly to inquire into" God's actions

"before the foundation of the world." In fact much of the action of the poem deals with what Milton imagines to be God's actions before He formed the world. The starting point of the action of the poem is the exaltation of the Son over the angels (Book V) which was clearly before this world was created (V 577). The exaltation of the Son results in the revolt of a section of the angels, which leads to the war in heaven, which lasts for three days. The war ends with the defeat and expulsion of the rebel angels from the Empyrean. Nine days the rebels fall through chaos and plunge into hell. It is when they are in hell that the Son creates the world or "the foundation of the world" is laid. So the exaltation of the Son over the angels takes place at least twelve days earlier than the foundation of the world. The creation of the angels must have obviously taken place before the Son was exalted over them. So according to the time scheme of the poem the angels were created long before the Biblical creation week.

Thus the writer who wisely tells us of the birth of the universes does not fail to put these words at the head of the narrative. "In the beginning God created;" that is to say, in the beginning of time. Therefore if he makes the world appear in the beginning, it is not a proof that its birth preceded that of all other things that were made. He only wishes to tell us that, after the invisible and intellectual world, the visible world, the world of the senses, began to exist.

THE FALL OF THE ANGELS IN PARADISE LOST

The time of the fall of the angels seems to be one of the main preoccupations of Milton in Paradise Lost. As the epic progresses several characters are made to refer to this very serious question as to when the fall of the angels occurred. In this question Milton refers to the casting out of Satan and his hosts from heaven as a thing of the past. In his subsequent treatment of the angels too, their fall into the lake of fire as well as their fall from God's favour are represented as having taken place before the creation of the stellar universe.

If God is presumed to be omniscient it should mark Satan's fall from God's favour too. As soon as Satan makes this resolution he awakens "his next subordinate" and induces him to rebel. Together they awaken all the angels under them and tell them to assemble at "the quarters of the north". Immediately they all flew to the north where Satan incited them to rebellion. Of all the assembled hosts Abdiel alone stood up to oppose Satan. His speech rebuking Satan was met with "hostile scorn" from the entire audience.

The fall of Satan and his angels from God's favour took place in the night that followed the exaltation of the Son. The time of the fall of the angels into the lake of fire according to Paradise Lost can be determined from Raphael's narration of the events following their fall from God's favour.

Milton makes it clear that they fell into the lake of fire before the six days creation dealt with in the Bible. From Book VI we learn that even the declaration of "God's pleasure" to create man and his habitation was made only

after expelling "Satan and his angels out of heaven" (The Argument). In the first two books Milton tells the story of the rebel angels as already fallen into the lake of fire. In Book I we are told that nine times the space that measures day and night to mortal man.

The angels had fallen and were in hell before man and the earth were created. Satan had only heard of such a prophecy when he was in heaven. Even when he was talking to his comrades he was not sure whether man had been already created. The fall of the angels is referred to again in Book II 689-92. Here Death (the Son of Satan, born out of an incestuous relationship between Satan and his daughter Sin) tries to prevent Satan's journey to the earth. Death is angry with Satan for the misery in hell. Milton's view of the cause of the moral fall of the angels finds expression in Paradise Lost Book V.

The angles are summoned forth. They stand in circles before the Father. the angels had known only God the Father when they were summoned forth. The Father introduces the Son and declares that he begot the Son that very day. The angels probably believed that the Son was called forth like one of them. God had anointed him and exalted him on that day. Milton does not tell us in Paradise Lost what the Son's position was before the exaltation. And now God the Father makes him the head of the angels. He ordered the angels to bow before the Son and worship him. Some among them were displeased. With this new command of the king of heaven. So according to Paradise Lost it was envy of the Son whom the Father exalted above the angels that made Satan and his angels rise in rebellion. And it was for this rebellion that they were put into the lake of fire.

THE NATURE OF THE ANGELS IN PARADISE LOST

Milton's angels in Paradise Lost have all the attributes of personality. Soon after the invocation in Book I two fallen angels, Beelzebub and Satan, are introduced as speaking characters. According to Satan will and emotions like revenge, hate and courage are unmistakable marks of personality. Throughout his speech Satan sees himself as an epic hero and considers himself divine. Though Satan puts up a brave front he is forced to accept that he is in hell. But Satan once again twists language to suit his occasion. The view that heaven and hell are states of mind was held by Amaury de Bene, a medieval heretic often cited in 17th century accounts of atheism. Satan's specious denial of the effects of the fall of the angels is belied by his shock at the change he notices in Beelzebub: and almost verbally contradicted in Book IV 75.

The other fallen angels too are presented as personal beings. They lie in a stupor in the lake of fire, but Beelzebub is hopeful that they will revive from the shock. Satan asks these fallen angels who are bewildered whether such astonishment can seize "Eternal spirits". The angels though fallen and are in hell are still "eternal". They have not become mortal through sinning. These fallen angels came to earth and "By falsities and lies the greatest part of mankind they corrupted to forsake God their creator". God

had created the angels to love and serve God. The fallen angels were unwilling to serve God.

The Good Angels too evince all the characteristics of personality. Uriel the first good angel to appear in the poem is also the first in the chariot of God. The good angel whose personality is most clearly delineated in *Paradise Lost* is Raphael. The name Raphael, 'Health of God', appears in the Apocryphal book, Tobit. Raphael was one of the four archangels who formed God's cosmic chariot in the cabalistic fusion of planetary with angelic deities he was sometimes jovial, sometimes solar.

The angels of *Paradise Lost* too are superhuman beings. Satan in Book I addresses Beelzebub thus. "Fallen cherub to be weak is miserable". Cherubs were angels who excelled in knowledge. Milton's description of the fallen angels evoke impression of great power. The angels are fallen they have lost much of their goodness but they remain immortal and powerful. In the case of human beings sin brought death too but not so with the angels: They cannot escape their predicament. The devils are reminded "Both of lost happiness and lasting pain". Happiness is eternally lost and pain acquired. The fallen angels became vulnerable to pain when their natures were impaired by sin. Angels are supposed to possess superhuman intelligence but here the good angel is unable to see through the disguise of the bad angel. Milton too calls his angels "incorporeal spirits". But Milton misses no opportunity to emphasize his monistic view that his "incorporeal" angels exist in bodies having shape or form.

CONCLUSION

Milton too adopts the Free Will Defense for his justification of God. He discusses it in detail in his *Areopagitica*, and in *Paradise Lost*. Milton's God's self-defense may seem quite satisfactory. Milton blows up the role of the tempter to such an extent that man's fall becomes not only reasonable, but almost inevitable. Raleigh says that Milton "lavished all his power, all his skill, and, in spite of himself, the greater part of his sympathy, on the splendid figure of Satan". Raleigh goes on to say that if Milton had called his poem heroic Satan would undoubtedly be the hero. "And the epic value of *Paradise Lost* is centred in the character and achievements of Satan". Milton's materialistic angelology makes his God's power also depend on his "dire arms." "Dire arms" is ambiguous. It can refer to the literal arms of Milton's anthropomorphic God or to weapons made of materials like "adamant". In either case they have to be localized and hence cannot be simultaneously active

everywhere. Any power that depends on such "arms" cannot be omnipotent in the absolute sense of the word. Milton's God is so helpless that he has to allow Satan to escape from the loyal angels and to go on to ruin the newly created man and his progeny in order to save the world from destruction. Milton's representation of God's treatment of the angels would seem to justify Raleigh's observation that "some kind of internal blindness must have visited him" when he wrote *Paradise Lost*. It has shown that much of the action of the epic, which involves only God and his angels, has no Biblical basis. Milton deviates from the Bible in his view of the time of the origin of the angels, the part each Divine Person had in their creation, the substance with which they were created, the cause of their rebellion, the time of their fall, and God's treatment of them. The problems of theodicy arising from these deviations are so serious that they justify most of the judgements critics have pronounced against Milton's God.

Finally, Milton's angels are capable of love making which argues for their materiality. Angels are unmarriageable beings. The fallen angels were known under several names in and out of Israel. Milton's materialistic delineation of the angels in *Paradise Lost* is a serious deviation from Biblical angelology.

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