MILTON'S CONCEPT OF GOD

APPROVED:

Ralph A. Eberly
Major Professor

[Signature]

Minor Professor

E. S. Clifton
Director of the Department of English

[Signature]

[Signature]
Dean of the Graduate School
MILTON'S CONCEPT OF GOD

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Stephen Justice, B. A.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the twentieth century, Milton's thought has been the object of intensive study by many scholars, more perhaps than at any other time since his death. As one would expect, those who have described his major concepts often disagree, and his religious views are the object of a variety of interpretations, especially his concept of God. Generally speaking, there are two approaches to Milton's concept of God. One is represented by Denis Saurat, a leading French critic of Milton's thought. Saurat takes Paradise Lost as his starting point and, attempting to comprehend Milton's whole system of thought in terms of nineteenth-century idealistic philosophy, labels Milton a pantheist. The other general approach, represented on the whole by English and American critics, starts by considering the evolution of Milton's theology as expressed in his various writings.

An important aspect of this last approach is the disputed dating of Milton's treatise on Christian Doctrine. Since most of the critics who take the latter approach recognize that the concept of God disclosed in the treatise differs from the one expressed in Milton's works which were written between the late 1620's and the early 1640's, they are concerned with the
relation between his concept of God in Christian Doctrine and the one expressed in other works. Up until about 1641, it seems that he accepted the traditional and orthodox concept of God, a concept which describes the Godhead as existing eternally in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Sometime between 1641 and 1650, however, he changed his idea of God: for the first draft of Christian Doctrine was then nearing completion, and critics agree that this work presents a concept of God different from the orthodox one and different from the one which Milton had held in his earlier years. Other questions remain, however. Does the Christian Doctrine disclose his final view, and whether it does or not, what is the precise relation of his concept to its historical antecedents in the Christian church? In answering the first question, the critics disagree; but in replying to the second one, almost every critic describes Milton's concept of God in Christian Doctrine as Arian.\(^1\)

Although many of the English and American critics of Milton's thought repudiate Denis Saurat's opinion that Milton was a pantheist, there is no uniform agreement among them concerning Milton's final concept of God or even concerning the work in which this final concept may be found. Maurice Kelly believes that Milton's final concept is stated in Christian

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\(^1\) The term Arian derives from Arius, a presbyter in the church of Alexandria at the beginning of the fourth century, who upheld the doctrine of the creaturehood of the Son.
Doctrine and that this treatise served as the theological basis for Paradise Lost; and he sees no conflict between the views in Christian Doctrine, where, according to him, the concept of the Trinity is essentially Arian, and those in Paradise Lost. On the other hand, Arthur Sewell holds that the concept of God in the first three books of Paradise Lost differs from the concept in Christian Doctrine, but he argues that in the latter books of Paradise Lost the concept of God seems to be similar to the view in Christian Doctrine; in other words, he maintains that Paradise Lost reflects the change that occurred in Milton’s thought in its movement from the Trinitarian view to the concept that is developed in Christian Doctrine. In fact, Sewell believes that Milton’s final attitude toward any concept of God was doubt and uncertainty, asserting that this is indicated in Milton’s last tract, Of True Religion, which was published the year before his death in 1673. Thus, the conflict between Kelly and Sewell is one of interpreting Paradise Lost and Christian Doctrine, of dating the latter in relation to the former, and of interpreting Of True Religion as well.

After one has decided what Milton’s final view was, the works in which this view is expressed, and the relation of his final concept to his earlier views, one needs further to discover the reason for the change in his concept of God. Certain critics, like Harris F. Fletcher, Denis Saurat, and Martin A. Larson, emphasize his indebtedness to ancient and medieval Jewish writers on theology or his indebtedness to some one of his contemporaries.
Others, like Sewell, Kelly, and Conklin point out Milton's originality, which, according to them, is to be seen in the light of his attitude toward and his interpretation of the Scriptures. George Conklin, indeed, endeavors to prove that Milton's concept of God was entirely derived from his method of interpreting the Scriptures. Most scholars may hesitate to go quite this far, but they generally recognize that, though many of Milton's ideas had parallels in the writings of both his contemporaries and earlier writers, he was capable of coming to his conclusions independently of direct external influence. They emphasize Milton's own affirmation that he did not consciously follow anyone in arriving at the views expressed in *Christian Doctrine*, but that his views were taken from the Scriptures and formulated according to the judgment of his own reason. According to these critics, then, Milton's final concept of God was on the whole determined by his own individual approach to the Scriptures.

To sum up, the problem concerning Milton's concept of God involves three points of controversy. First, recognizing that he did change his views about the nature of God in the 1640's, the critics are concerned with establishing the date of the treatise on *Christian Doctrine*, since the views which are systematically developed in it are inconsistent with expressions found in other works that were written as early as the 1620's and as late as the 1640's. Secondly, while almost all critics observe that *Christian Doctrine* discloses a view different from
the orthodox Trinitarian concept, they disagree over the relation of the views in the treatise to those expressed in works written after its composition. Finally, there is the problem of describing Milton's final concept of God and of pointing out his reason for holding the views that he did.

Before outlining the method of formulating and describing Milton's concept of God, it seems necessary to indicate the reason for rejecting the method represented by Denis Saurat. First, by attempting to equate Milton's ideas with nineteenth-century philosophical idealism, he takes them out of their historical setting. Furthermore, he ignores the fact that Milton was a thinker whose concept of God was molded by the Scriptures and not primarily by notions derived from abstract philosophy. Moreover, he takes so much space to show the interconnection among Milton's main ideas that his treatment of Milton's concept of God is often incomplete and sometimes inaccurate, as, for instance, when he describes Milton's view as pantheistic. Indeed, Saurat's interpretation of Milton's views leaves much to be desired.

Therefore, in attempting to discover and formulate Milton's concept, it seems best to employ the evolutionary approach, examining his prose and poetry which were evidently written before the 1650's, in order to disclose in them his concept of God at that time. Next, the concept in Christian Doctrine will be discussed in relation to the views expressed in the earlier works and to those written evidently after Christian Doctrine.
Finally, Milton's final concept of God will be considered in relation to its historical antecedents (if any), in relation to matter (which concerns the question of pantheism) and in relation to the Bible. In studying the primary sources, of course, full note will be taken of interpretations by others, especially critics of the last forty years.
CHAPTER II

YOUNG MILTON'S CONCEPT
OF GOD

It seems clear that when Milton was a university student he held the Trinitarian concept of God. Even to enroll at Cambridge, he had to sign the Anglican articles of faith.$^1$

The first article declares that

There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or passions; of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the maker, and preserver of all things both visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.$^2$

Since Cambridge University was dominated by the Church of England, Milton became well acquainted with systematic theology$^3$ taught from the Anglican point of view. Even before he came to Cambridge in 1625, he had possessed an extensive knowledge of the Scriptures; he $^"$was reading the text in English, in Latin,

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$^3$Generally speaking, systematic theology is the method of studying the Scriptures by gathering under one head in a logical and systematic manner the diffused teachings of the Bible on a given subject.
both Vulgate and Junius-Tremellius; both Septuagint and New Testament Greek, and had begun reading Tanach in Hebrew and perhaps also the Aramaic Targums. And at Cambridge he began to study the Bible through the medium of systematic theology. According to Harris F. Fletcher, who bases his information on the Mead's account of Milton's book purchases at Cambridge, "Milton had as much training in theology as those students who later became priests."

The theology that he studied was essentially the orthodox Protestant view which had been shaped by John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Calvin's work, which was developed in a logical and argumentative fashion, has influenced the form of systematic theologies to this day. Even Milton's *Christian Doctrine* follows closely the form established mainly by Calvin's *Institutes*. The specific textbook of theology used at Cambridge in Milton's time, that of Bartholomew Keckermann, was also patterned after Calvin's logical and systematic handling of doctrine; it was divided into three books: one discussing the nature of theology; another presenting the three parts of theology—the knowledge of God, the knowledge of God the redeemer, the knowledge of salvation—and the final

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book describing the doctrine of the Church. Besides being closely similar to Calvin's Institutes in form, the book on salvation was strongly Calvinistic. Not only did Milton study systematic theology from the Protestant view of Calvin, but he also studied under two Anglican professors, Samuel Ward and Samuel Collins.

The concept of God which he acquired under such study was the same concept that had been systematically developed by Luther and Calvin and incorporated into the various Protestant confessions of faith. In the words of Calvin it is stated thus:

> When we profess to believe in one God, by the name God is understood the one simple essence, comprehending three persons or hypostases; and, accordingly, whenever the name of God is used indefinitely, the Son and Spirit, not less than the Father, is meant.

Though seldom given in Calvin's concise and facile definition, this concept of God appeared in all the textbooks on theology used at Cambridge University while Milton was there; and this concept is apparent in all Milton's writings, both poetry and prose, written between 1625 and 1641.

During 1629, the year in which Milton received the B. A. from Cambridge University, he refers in two places to his

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6 Ibid., p. 199.  
7 Ibid., pp. 195-196.  
conception of God. In Elegy VI he speaks of Christ as "the God that quitted the skies." This expression seems to allude to the Christian concept of the Incarnation, in which the eternal Logos, the Word, "became flesh," as stated in John's Gospel (1:1,14). Yet this passage is not conclusive: if it alone indicated Milton's belief at this time, one might reason plausibly that it is consistent with the view of the Son in Christian Doctrine. As will be seen later on in this thesis, Milton does not hesitate to call Christ God, even after he has argued that the Son was not with the Father from all eternity; the Son received the name God, indeed, because the Father invested him with this dignity and majesty. Thus, to refer to Christ as "the God that quitted the skies" might mean no more than what Milton meant in Christian Doctrine.

"On the Morning of Christ's Nativity" (1629) gives more conclusive evidence; here he gives a very specific expression to his concept of God at this time:

II

That glorious Form, that light unsufferable,
And that far-beaming blaze of majesty,
Wherewith he went at Heav'n's high Council-Table,
To sit the midst of Trinal Unity,
He laid aside; and here with us to be,
... chose ... a darksome House of mortal Clay.

10The Works of John Milton, edited by Frank Patterson et al. (18 Vols., New York, Columbia University Press, 1931-1938), I, 209. All citations from this edition of Milton's works will be hereafter designated "CE."
III

Say Heav'nly Muse, shall not thy sacred vein
Afford a present to the Infant God?\textsuperscript{11}

It is apparent that Milton refers here to Christ as God in the Trinitarian sense. Before he became incarnate, Christ as the Second Person of the Trinity sat "the midst of Trinal Unity."

As stated in the prose of the orthodox formula, this means that a trinity of persons in the unity of one essence has existed from all eternity. The figure of a "Council-Table" around which the Godhead sits seems to allude to the coequality of the persons in the Godhead. In Christian Doctrine Milton rejected this notion of coequality in no uncertain terms. In 1629, however, Milton evidently accepted the concept of the Trinity. Not only are the persons of the Godhead coequal, but they are coeternal; in this same poem he says that Christ "Forsook the Courts of everlasting Day."\textsuperscript{12} There is here an observed difference between time and eternity. To assume "a darksome House of mortal Clay"—to become man so that he could redeem men and reconcile them to God—Christ had to leave the "Courts of everlasting Day." Christ, in short, laid aside his eternal mode of existence so that he might enter the temporal order as the man Christ Jesus.

Sometime after 1641 Milton rejected the concept of God which is expressed by such words as coequal, coeternal, coessential, co-substantial, and Triunity; but until 1641 he

\textsuperscript{11}CE, I, 1. \textsuperscript{12}CE, I, 1.
had used these terms to express his view of God. In his tract *Of Reformation Touching Church Discipline in England* (1641), he addresses God as the Tri-Personal Godhead:

> 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, illumining Spirit, the joy and solace of created things! one Tri-personal Godhead! look upon this thy poore and almost spent and expiring Church . . . .

This passage is an unmistakable prayer to the Trinity, including a definite reference to the Holy Spirit as "the third subsistence of Divine Infinitude." In theology the term "subsistence," as Milton well knew, is equivalent to "person" or "hypostasis." Thus the Spirit and Son are as much God as the Father; indeed, there are three subsistences in the one eternal essence of God.

In this same year, 1641, moreover, he makes three other references to God. One of these appears in the same tract with the above expression. In speaking of the Arians and Pelagians who were slain by the heathens for Christ's sake, Milton says

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13CE, III, 76.


15The Arians were a group of Christians who arose in the third century and professed that Christ was not God in the orthodox sense but was the first and highest creature of God; the Pelagians in the fourth century asserted that man had free will and could cooperate with the grace of God in salvation. In *Christian Doctrine*, ironically enough, Milton's views on the Son and free will have characteristics in common with both these groups.
that "we take both these to be no true friends of Christ."\textsuperscript{16} Again, in his Animadversions he speaks of Christ as the "ever-begotten light, and perfect Image of the Father."\textsuperscript{17} The expression "ever-begotten light" seems to allude to the notion of the eternal generation of the Son. And while arguing that there is no difference in authority and office between a Presbyter and Bishop, Milton disparages Tertullian's authority on the question because he

\textquoteblock{... had made an imparity where none was originally, and should hee move us, that goes about to prove an imparity between God the Father and God the Sonne, as these words import in his Book against Praxeas. 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 than me. Believe him now for a faithful relater of tradition, whom you see such an unfaithful expounder of Scripture ... .}\textsuperscript{18}

His charge that Tertullian was "an unfaithful expounder of Scripture" has an ironic side to it: in Christian Doctrine when he himself attempts to show that the Father is the "whole substance" from which the Son derives his substance by the fact that the Father begets him at a point in time, Milton relies upon the Scriptures to establish his proposition. He declares, in fact, that his concept of God in Christian Doctrine was derived entirely from a faithful adherence to the Scripture.\textsuperscript{19}

Between 1641 and the date of the composition of Christian Doctrine, which was substantially completed not later than 1660

\textsuperscript{16}CE, III, 10. \hspace{2cm} \textsuperscript{17}CE, III, 146.
\textsuperscript{18}CE, III, 97. \hspace{2cm} \textsuperscript{19}CE, XIV, 177.
in the manuscript form which we now have, he gives very few explicit references to God that provide any insight into his concept. At least one other reference to the Son was written in the 1640's, however. In his *Marginalia* (1647), Milton has some notes on a man by the name of Paul Best, from whose book, *Mysteries Discovered*, he wrote down four reasons why Christ is called the Son of God: first, Christ is called the Son of God because he was conceived by the Holy Spirit; second, he was sanctified and sent by the Father; third, God raised him from the dead, and thus "begat him as it were a second time to eternal life"; lastly, Christ is called the Son of God because God made him like unto himself, in power and authority.

This marginal note tells us only that at this time Milton was interested in the views of others on various points of doctrine, a fact supported by other testimony. Although the above explanation for why Christ is called the Son of God is similar to that given in *Christian Doctrine*, the comparison ought not be forced. At most it proves that in 1647 Milton was thinking about doctrines that he ultimately agreed with and incorporated in *Christian Doctrine*.

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21CE, XVIII, 341-344.


23CE, XIV, 217.
One other expression, which is found in *The Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth* (1659), deserves mention, since Arthur Sewell thinks that it seems inconsistent with the view given of the Son in *Christian Doctrine*. Milton has finished speaking of the precious liberty that is about to be lost, and in the midst of his earnest plea that it be preserved for all men, he speaks thus: "Nay, though what I have spoken should happen (which thou suffer not, who didst create mankind free! nor thou next who didst redeem us from being servants of men!) to be the last words of expiring liberty." Here Milton seems to put Christ ("thou next" could hardly refer to any other since Christ is always spoken of as the redeemer of men) on an equality with the Father, but it is not at all clear what kind of equality is meant. In his *Christian Doctrine* Milton asserts that the Son possesses equality by gift from the Father, who is the supreme God. Thus the above reference to Christ, implored as the one "who didst redeem us from being servants of men," gives no valid evidence of a view different from the one that is expressed in *Christian Doctrine*.

In conclusion, then, Milton expressly held the Trinitarian concept of God until 1641. This concept states that the Godhead exists eternally in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each sharing the same essence and possessing the same attributes;

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25 CE, VI, 148.

26 CE, XV, 263.
in no wise does he imply that one member of the Godhead derived from the other. Between 1641 and 1660, outside the Christian Doctrine itself, any reference to his view of God is so meager that no valid conclusion can be drawn respecting his concept at this time. His concept of God, however, did change between 1641 and 1660, because the concept in Christian Doctrine, the first draft of which was completed in the early 1650's, is anti-Trinitarian, and is, according to Milton, derived from a faithful interpretation of the Scriptures.
CHAPTER III

MILTON'S CONCEPT OF GOD IN CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE,
PARADISE LOST AND LATER WORKS

Although Milton held the orthodox Trinitarian concept
until the early 1640's, sometime in the 1640's or early 1650's
he changed his concept of God to the form that it assumes in
the Christian Doctrine, which he had essentially completed
in 1658.¹ This treatise differs widely from his earlier
writings: it is avowedly anti-Trinitarian, and it presents
its concept of God in a deliberate and systematic manner
foreign to his previous works. It differs also in the use of
the Bible: the abundant Scriptural passages adduced,² analyzed,
and appended to the various parts of his exposition seem to
validate the claim which Milton makes in the Preface of the
work—that his treatise is based upon an exegesis of the
Scriptures.

¹James Hanford, "The Date of Milton's De Doctrina
see also Maurice Kelly, This Great Argument (Princeton, 1941),
p. 22 ff; Harris Fletcher, The Intellectual Development of

²According to Harris Fletcher, Christian Doctrine "contains
over seven thousand chapter and verse citations of Scriptures,
more than three-fourths of which include quotations." The Use
of the Bible in Milton's Prose (Urbana, no date given), p. 50.
A comparison of the views in Christian Doctrine, especially the concept respecting the relation between the Father and the Son, with those in Paradise Lost will reveal that both works present the same concept in a different medium. It can be shown with a great deal of plausibility, in fact, that the concept in Christian Doctrine is the theological basis of what appears in Paradise Lost. References to God in other works written after 1665, when Paradise Lost was completed, also reflect the views described in the treatise. In short, it appears that Milton's concept of God after 1641 took the form presented in Christian Doctrine and that substantially the same concept is expressed in all works written after 1660.

Anti-Trinitarian View

The first six chapters of Book One of Christian Doctrine, the chapters in which Milton clearly departs from orthodox views, treat of the following subjects: Of Christian Doctrine (in general); Of God; Of the Divine Decrees; Of Predestination; Of the Son of God; and Of the Holy Spirit. The chapters on God, the Son, and the Holy Spirit provide the crucial evidence about Milton's anti-Trinitarian concept of God.

3The main ones to be compared here are Paradise Regained (1671) and Of True Religion, Heresy, Schism, and Toleration (1673).

According to Milton,

Christian doctrine is that Divine Revelation disclosed in various ages by Christ (though he was not known under that name in the beginning) concerning the nature and worship of the Deity, for the promotion of the glory of God and the salvation of mankind.5

And "this doctrine . . . is to be obtained, not from the schools of philosophers, nor from the laws of man, but from the Holy Scriptures alone, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit."6 Indeed, when in Christian Doctrine he denies the doctrine of the Trinity, he makes his appeal to the Scriptures, showing that the word "Trinity" never appears there.

In discussing the nature of God, in the second chapter of the treatise, Milton follows the traditional, systematic method of talking about God in terms of his attributes. There are those attributes that describe God as he is in himself: Spirit; Truth; Immensity and Infinity; Eternity; Immutability; Incorruptibility; Omnipresence; and Unity. On the other hand, there are those attributes which relate God to creation: Vitality; Intelligence (Omniscience); Will; Truth and Faithfulness; Wonderfulness and Uncomprehensibility.7

One also finds in this same chapter the nature and extent of man's knowledge of God: " . . . the Deity has imprinted upon the human mind so many unquestionable tokens of himself, and so many traces of him are apparent throughout the whole of nature,

5CE, XIV, 17.  
6CE, XIV, 17.  
7CE, XIV, 41-55, 55-61.
that no one in his senses can remain ignorant of the truth
[that God exists]."8 Besides the knowledge which is
manifested in nature and in the very conscience of each man—
which, in fact, according to Milton, does not provide a right
knowledge of God when taken alone—"God has therefore made as
full revelation of himself as our minds can conceive, or the
weakness of our nature can bear."9 Although one can never
know God as he really is in himself, yet,

Our safest way is to form in our minds such
a conception of God, as shall correspond with his
own delineation and representation of himself in
the sacred writings. For granting that both in
the literal and figurative descriptions of God, he
is exhibited not as he really is, but in such a
manner as may be within the scope of our compre-
hension, yet we ought to entertain such a conception
of him, as he in condescending to accommodate
himself to our capacities, has shewn that he desires
we should conceive. For it is on this very account
that he has lowered himself to our level, lest in
our flights above the reach of human understanding
and beyond the written word of Scripture, we should
be tempted to indulge in vague cogitations and
subtleties.10

Thus, according to Milton, a right conception of God must be
derived from the Scriptures, and not just deduced from reason
and the world of nature.

In the fifth chapter of his Christian Doctrine, the
chapter in which he expressly repudiates the Trinitarian concept
of God, Milton asserts that man's knowledge of the relation of the
Son to the Father must be entirely derived from the Scriptures:

8CE, XIV, 25.  
9CE, XIV, 31.  
10CE, XIV, 31-33.
If indeed I were a member of the Church of Rome, which requires implicit obedience to its creeds on all points of faith, I should have acquiesced from education or habit in its simple decree and authority, even though it denies that the doctrine of the Trinity, as now received, is capable of being proved from any passage of Scripture. But since I enroll myself among the number of those who acknowledge the word of God alone as the rule of faith, I freely advance what appears to me much more clearly deducible from the Holy Scriptures than the commonly received opinion . . . . For without intending to oppose the authority of Scriptures, which I consider inviolably sacred, I only take upon myself to refute human interpretations as often as the occasion requires . . . .

And one of those "occasions" presents itself in the doctrine of the Trinity. He calls the traditional orthodox concept of the Trinity an "absurd paradox that is sustained by sophisms and verbal distinctions, borrowed from the barbarous ignorance of the schools."12

These "sophisms and verbal distinctions" to which Milton refers has to do with the terms—coessential, hypostasis, and subsistence, for example—used to describe the nature of the Trinity. Milton rejects such terms when he turns to the Scriptures and attempts to disclose the relation between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit because:

... it is evident that the essence of God, being in itself most simple, can admit no compound quality; so that the term hypostasis Heb. 1:3 which is differently translated substance, or subsistence, or person, can be nothing else but that most perfect essence by which God subsists by himself, in himself, and through himself. For neither substance nor subsistence makes any addition to what is already a most perfect essence;

11CE, XIV, 177. 12CE, XIV, 209.
and the word person in its later acceptation signifies any individual thing gifted with intelligence, whereas hypostasis denotes not the ens in the abstract. Hypostasis, therefore, is clearly the same as essence, and thus many of the Latin commentators render it in the passage already quoted. Therefore, as God is a most simple essence, so is he also a most simple subsistence.\(^{13}\)

Hence, Milton dismisses the verbal distinctions which had been made by the schools, and turns to the Scriptures to find the true nature of the relation of the members of the Trinity to one another. There is, to be sure, some kind of Trinity mentioned in the Scriptures (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are mentioned frequently in the New Testament), but, according to Milton, it is a different Trinity than that "of the schools."

For Milton, the word "Father" equates with the "supreme God," from whom the Son is derived in both his nature and office.\(^{14}\) And he bases this proposition upon an interpretation of those Scripture passages which seem to refer exclusively to the Father as the true God. In Milton's own words, there is no use for a long metaphysical discussion on the personalities of the Godhead,

Since it is most evident, in the first place, from numberless passages of Scripture, that there is in reality but one true and independent and supreme God; and as he is called one, (inasmuch as human reason and the common language of mankind, and the Jews, the people of God, have always considered him as one person only, that is, one in a numerical sense) let us have

\(^{13}\)CE, XIV, 43.  \(^{14}\)CE, XIV, 221.
recourse to the sacred writings in order to know who this one true and supreme God is.\textsuperscript{15}

Christ himself, in accord with the law and the prophets of the Old Testament, as well as the scribes who interpreted them, teaches that the Father alone is God. To support this Milton quotes two of his axiomatic Scripture passages (John 17:3, "this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent"; John 20:17, "I ascend unto my Father and your Father; and to my God and your God"), and he comments thus:

If therefore the Father be the God of Christ, and the same be our God, and if there be none other God but one, there can be no God beside the Father.

Paul . . . teaches the same in so clear and perspicuous a manner, that . . . no teacher of the catechumens in the Church could have spoken more plainly and expressly of the one God, according to the sense in which the universal consent of mankind has agreed to understand unity of number.\textsuperscript{16}

Here he quotes Paul (1 Corin. 8:4-6),

We know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one: for though there be that are called gods . . . to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him
to show that the Father alone in the Scriptures is God. Thus, not only does Christ himself teach that the Father alone is to be considered God, but Paul so teaches also in all his writings.

\textsuperscript{15}\textsuperscript{CE, XIV, 197.} \textsuperscript{16}\textsuperscript{CE, XIV, 201.}
Since, therefore, the Father alone is the one eternal God, the Son must have derived both his nature and office from the Father. One learns from the Scripture, according to Milton, that "the Son was begotten of the Father in consequence of his decree, and therefore within the limits of time . . . ."\(^{17}\)

The Scriptures, to be sure, teach that the Father has begotten . . . the Son in a double sense, the one literal, with reference to the production of the Son, the other metaphorical, with reference to his exaltation, \(^{18}\) but many commentators have applied the passages which allude to the exaltation and mediatorial functions of Christ as a proof of his generation from all eternity.

According to Milton, the Scriptures actually teach clearly that the Son is not generated from all eternity:

> For when the Son is said to be "the first born of every creature" and "the beginning of the creation of God" nothing can be more evident than that God of his own will created, or generated, or produced the Son before all things, endued with the divine nature, as in due time he miraculously begat him in his human nature of the Virgin Mary.\(^{19}\)

It follows, thus, that the Father did not beget the Son "from any natural necessity, but of his own free will, a mode more perfect and more agreeable to the paternal dignity."\(^{20}\)

If the Son existed, or was generated from all eternity, indeed, how is it that the Scriptures refer to him throughout as the "only-begotten Son of God"? Something that exists from all eternity, says Milton, cannot be generated or begotten;

\(^{17}\) CE, XIV, 189.  \(^{18}\) CE, XIV, 181.

\(^{19}\) CE, XIV, 193.  \(^{20}\) CE, XIV, 187.
therefore, there must be another reason why Christ is called the only begotten Son of God: Christ is called the own Son of God merely because he had no other Father besides God, whence he himself said, that God was his Father, John V. 18. For to Adam God stood less in the relation of Father, than of Creator, having only formed him from the dust of the earth; whereas he was properly the Father of the Son made of his own substance. Yet it does not follow from hence that the Son is co-essential with the Father, for then the title of Son would be least of all applicable to him, since he who is properly the Son is not coeval with the Father, much less of the same numerical essence, otherwise the Father and the Son would be one person. 21

And again,

If he always existed separately from, and independent of, the Father, how is he from the Father, how begotten, how the Son, how separate in subsistence, unless he be also separate in essence? ... However this may be, it will be universally acknowledged that the Son now at least differs numerically from the Father; but that those who differ numerically must also differ in their proper essences, as the logicians express it, is too clear to be denied by anyone possessed of common reason. Hence it follows that the Father and Son differ in essence. 22

The Son, in other words, who was begotten of the Father "within the limits of time," received freely from the Father whatever

21 CE, XIV, 193.

22 CE, XIV, 311, 339. The above two passages reveal strikingly the relation of reason to Milton's method of interpreting the Scriptures; "On the grounds of pure reason, Milton concludes that a difference in essence establishes a difference in number ... " Theodore Huguelet, "Milton's Hermeneutics; A Study of Scriptural Interpretation in the Divorce Tracts and in De Doctrina Christiana," unpublished doctoral dissertation, English Department, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1959, p. 205; see also pp. 61, 118, 187, 203-204.
nature and dignity he possesses; and therefore, when the Scriptures ascribe to Christ the names, attributes, and functions of Deity, as they do, it is to be noted that he received them "in conformity with his the Father's decree and will after the manner stated before." 23

The Bible which teaches the precise nature of the relation of the Son to the Father also tells something about the Holy Spirit's relation to both the Father and the Son. Yet, although the Scriptures teach clearly the origin of the Son as well as his nature and office, they say practically nothing about the origin of the Holy Spirit. Thus, "we must be content to leave undetermined a point on which the sacred writers have preserved so uniform a silence." 24 According to Milton, one learns that the Holy Spirit, inasmuch as he is a minister of God, and therefore a creature, was created or produced of the substance of God, not by a natural necessity, but by the free will of the agent, probably before the foundation of the world was laid, but later than the Son, and far inferior to him. 25

Milton notes that the Scriptures often use the term "Spirit" when they do not refer to the Holy Spirit. The word "Spirit" may "designate God the Father or his virtue and power, Christ, an angel, or the mind of man; only in certain instances does it denote the Third Person." 26

23 CE, XIV, 217; XV, 263.  
24 CE, XIV, 359.  
25 CE, XIV, 403.  
Though the Scriptures teach, according to Milton, that the Holy Spirit is a person and that he has a diversified ministry from the Father in the plan of redemption, they nowhere teach that the Spirit is a person coessential with the Father. The Spirit, on the contrary, is spoken of as proceeding from the Father; therefore how could he be of the same essence with the Father, since the Father, according to Milton, cannot send and at the same time be sent? In brief, if whenever the Father and the Holy Spirit are mentioned together, the Father alone be called God, and the Father alone, omitting all notice of the Spirit, be acknowledged by Christ himself to be the true God, as has been proved in the former chapter... if that God be one God and that one God the Father... It follows that he who sent both the Spirit and the Son himself... is the one God and only Father.

The Concept of God in Christian Doctrine Compared with That in Paradise Lost

As has been noted, Milton's concept of God in Christian Doctrine is anti-Trinitarian. Since both the Son and the Spirit derive their nature and office from the Father, the Father alone must be the one eternal, true and supreme God, from whom all things come. A comparison of this concept with the view in Paradise Lost will reveal that the two works present substantially the same concept of God.

Milton's views in Paradise Lost are not, however, as clearly and systematically described as they are in Christian Doctrine. Indeed, the ambiguous language of the poem,

27Ibid., p. 222.  
28CE, XIV, 379.
especially the first three books, has occasioned conflicting interpretations of Milton's view of the Trinity in *Paradise Lost*. Four different writers have maintained that *Paradise Lost* has some form of Trinity for its concept of God: Barber (1860) declared that it was orthodox; Larson (1926) expressed his opinion that Milton's concept of God was similar to the Sabellian modal Trinity; Woodhouse (1935) and Sewell (1939), though differing in some respects from Larson, asserted that they also found in *Paradise Lost* a concept of the Trinity similar to the Sabellian concept, called by them a Trinity of manifestation.  

To support their propositions, these critics appeal for the most part to the same epic passages, such as the following:

Beyond compare the Son of God was seen
Most glorious, in him all his Father shone
Substantially express'd . . . (III, 139-40).

Thee next they sang of all creation first,
Begotten Son, Divine Similitude,
In whose conspicuous count'nance, without cloud
Made visible, th' Almighty Father shines,
Whom else no creature can behold (III, 383-87).

Because thou hast, though throned in highest bliss
Equal to God, and equally enjoying

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29Kelly, *This Great Argument*, p. 119; see also Sewell, *A Study in Christian Doctrine*, pp. 88, 96 and *passim*. In Chapter IV of this thesis, Milton's concept of the Trinity will be considered in relation to the Sabellian concept, which asserts that the one God acts in three modes: as the Father he is creator and governor of the universe; as the Son he is the redeemer; as the Holy Spirit he sanctifies and works in men.
God-like fruition, quitted all to save
A world from utter loss, and hast been found
By Merit more than Birthright Son of God . . .
(III, 305-09).

According to those who declare that in Paradise Lost Milton held some form of the Trinity for his concept of God, these passages teach that the Son is coessential and coequal with the Father. Arthur Sewell, who makes the latest claim (1939), believes that in the poem Milton held as a concept of God a Trinity of manifestation "where the Father is seen as creator, the Son as mediator, and the Holy Spirit works in men." Milton could speak of a Trinity in this way, however, and not mean that the Son and Spirit are of the same essence as the Father; this would be consistent with the concept in Christian Doctrine, since there the Father is the source of all things, the Son is the executive agent through which the Father does all things, and the Spirit is the minister of the Father. Thus, contrary to Sewell's argument, an analysis of those passages in Paradise Lost which seem to teach that the Son is coessential and coequal with the Father discloses nothing inconsistent with the views in Milton's treatise.

When Milton describes the Son in Paradise Lost as him in whom "all his Father shone / Substantially express'd," those who assert a Trinitarian concept here aver that this means that the Son is coessential with the Father, and that this is

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31 Ibid., p. 96.
inconsistent with the view in the treatise. Without discussing the chronology of the two works here, one can easily see from a comparison of the two works, however, that there is almost an identical expression found in the treatise; for we learn there that though the Father "impacted to the Son as much as he pleased . . . of the divine substance . . . care [must] be taken not to confound the substance with the whole essence . . . ."\(^{32}\) The Father is expressed substantially in the Son, indeed, "for in any other way he [the Father] is invisible."\(^{33}\)

The passage from *Paradise Lost* does not say in what sense the Father and Son are one, though it implies that in some sense they are one. In *Christian Doctrine*, Milton is explicitly clear on this point:

In the first place, they are one, inasmuch as they speak and act with unanimity; and so he explains himself in the same chapter, after the Jews had misunderstood his saying: John x. 30. believe the works; that ye may know and believe that the Father is in me, and I in him. John xiv. 10. believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you, I speak not of myself, but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Here he evidently distinguishes the Father from himself in his whole capacity, but asserts at the same time that the Father remains in

\(^{32}\)CE, XIV, 187, 193. \(^{33}\)CE, XIV, 265.
him; which does not denote unity of essence, 
but only intimacy of communion.  

Thus, it seems that the two works are consistent here.

Those passages in the epic, furthermore, which seem to 
indicate that the Son is coequal with the Father can be 
interpreted consistently with the views in the treatise. It 
is necessary, of course, to take account of opposing views. 
According to Sewell, the following passage seems to teach 
that the Son is coequal with God the Father: "... thron'd 
in highest bliss / Equal to God and equally enjoying / God-
like fruition ..." (III, 305-307). Larson, whose views 
differ in some respects from Sewell's, also finds in Paradise 
Lost indications that Milton held that the Son was in some 
sense coequal with the Father:

What think'st thou of me, and this my state? 
Seem I to thee sufficiently possess'd 
Of happiness, or not, who am alone 
From all eternity? for none I know 
Second to me or like, equal much less (VIII, 403-407).

According to Larson this is the Son who is speaking to Adam

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34CE, XIV, 213.

35Sewell, A Study in Christian Doctrine, p. 88. It 
ought to be observed here that Sewell believed that after 
the first three books of Paradise Lost Milton's views on 
the Trinity began to yield to other views, such as 
Arianism; see pp. 88, 96 and passim.

36Martin A. Larson, The Modernity of Milton: A 
Theological and Philosophical Interpretation (Chicago, 1927), 
pp. 125, 129; Larson differs from Sewell because he asserts 
that both the treatise and the epic present a modal Trinity; 
for Sewell the treatise is essentially Arian in its views.
in a heavenly vision, and, Larson argues, he is one with the God who exists from all eternity. Sewell cannot say this on the basis of the passage which he adduces to show that the Son is coequal with the Father, since it is apparent that this passage (III, 305-307) distinguishes the Son from the God with whom he is equal.

One must confess an apparent inconsistency here, both in the epic and between Sewell and Larson. The first passage ascribes to the Son an equality with God. The next passage, however, says that the Almighty (for this is the name used by Milton) is alone from all eternity and knows no one "Second to me or like, equal much less." Yet, both these

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37 Larson accepts the idea that whenever Deity in Paradise Lost speaks to man, it is the Son that does the speaking, a view consistent with the notion in the poem that God performs all his creative acts through (or, in the view of Larson, as) his Son and Spirit. For Larson, the Word is the eternal God in the active mode. This Word, properly speaking, is God the Son. From a close study of those passages in Paradise Lost, however, where the Son and Father are mentioned together (see my footnote 38, p. 32), one finds that Milton discloses the Father and Son as essentially distinct persons. Thus it is at least possible that Larson is wrong in attributing VIII, 403-407, to the Son rather than the Father.

38 See Paradise Lost, Book Eight, line 396. That the title "Almighty" refers to the Father alone seems clear from Book Three, lines 56-64, where the Father is called "Almighty Father," who has a Son, "The radiant image of his Glory [the Father's] . . . ." Cf. Book Three, lines 167-172, 271-273, 344, 373-378, 383-387. Though Milton alludes in several places to the Son by the name God, he never refers to him as "Almighty," a title he evidently reserves for the Father, equivalent, it appears, for the terms supreme and true used frequently in the treatise to refer to the Father, who alone is really the true God and from whom the Son receives his nature and office.
passages from the epic can be interpreted consistently with the view of the Trinity in Christian Doctrine. In the passage from the treatise (see above, pp. 24-25), Milton argues that the Father, who alone is the one eternal God, speaks and acts in the Son and has given to the Son to enjoy equality with God; for Milton declares to be "equal to God" and to be "co-equal with the Father" are two different things.\textsuperscript{39} No one is coequal with the Father, who is the Almighty, although the Father manifests himself in the Son. Moreover there is none like the Almighty, or even second to him, in the sense of being of the same essence with him; nor, indeed, is there anyone who is with him from all eternity. Interpreted thus, the second passage from Paradise Lost (VIII, 403-407) is anti-Trinitarian both in the orthodox sense and in the sense that Larson suggests, because it seems evident from a comparison of the treatise and epic that Milton thinks that the Son is essentially distinct from the Father, though the Father speaks and acts in the Son. Thus, it seems that much difficulty of interpretation is obviated when the treatise is used as the "illuminator" of apparent contradictions in the epic. In any event, the burden of proof rests on those who assert that the views in Paradise Lost are inconsistent with those in Christian Doctrine.

Maurice Kelly has argued for this position effectively, demonstrating in Paradise Lost ample evidence of an anti-Trinitarian

\textsuperscript{39}CE, XV, 263.
view consistent with the concept in the treatise. Kelly compares,

No need that thou
Should'st propagate, already infinite;
And through all numbers absolute,
Though one (VIII, 419-421).

with, "... however the generation of the Son may have taken place, it arose from no natural necessity, as is generally contended (CE, XIV, 185)." In addition to the passage which Kelly cites, another passage in the treatise is an almost identical counterpart to the above quotation from the poem: "... it was in God's power ... not to have begotten the Son, inasmuch as generation does not pertain to the nature of the Deity, who stands in no need of propagation." The passage from the poem implies that in the Almighty there is no necessity to generate or beget someone of like nature, as there is in mankind: God, being infinite and eternal, does not need to lengthen his existence by generating another of his kind. Moreover, since he is already perfect (this seems to be the sense of absolute in PL VIII, 421) in every attribute, God has no need to increase his perfection. Finally, since there is just one of him, it is evident that he has not generated another of his kind.

It follows, therefore, that the "Almighty who is alone from all eternity" begat the Son of his own free will "within

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40 Kelly, This Great Argument, pp. 113, 121.

41 Ibid., p. 121.

42 CE, XIV, 187.
the limits of time," and it is this Son,

Effulgence of my Glorie . . .
Son in whose face invisible is beheld
Visibly, what by Deitie I am (PL, VI, 680-82)

in whom the Father speaks and acts, who is conversing with
Adam about propagation. Though, indeed, he and the Father
"speak and act with unanimity," the Son is not one in essence
with the Father. In conclusion, then, far from there being
two different concepts of God in the two works, it seems
reasonably clear that they give the same views on the Father
and the Son.

Likewise, the views on the Spirit in the two works appear
consistent in spite of one crux in the poem. Asking for
assistance in the composition of his epic, Milton refers to
the Spirit thus:

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
Was present, and with mighty wings outspread
Dove-like satst brooding on the vast Abyss
And mad'st it pregnant (III, 17-22).

If this passage were the only one in Milton's works in which
he uses the term Spirit, one might easily conclude that he was
alluding to the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Godhead.

In the Christian Doctrine, however, he says,

For though it [the Holy Spirit] be a Spirit, in
the same sense in which the Father and the Son are
properly called Spirits . . . yet in treating of
the nature of the Holy Spirit, we are not authorized
to infer . . . that the Spirit was breathed from the
Father and the Son . . . .
The name of the Spirit is also frequently applied to God and angels, and to the human mind. When the phrase, the Spirit of God, or the Holy Spirit, occurs in the Old Testament, it is to be variously interpreted; sometimes it signifies God the Father himself,—as in Gen. vi. 3. my Spirit shall not always strive with man; sometimes the power and virtue of the Father, and particularly that divine breath or influence by which every thing is created and nourished. In this sense many both of the ancient and modern interpreters understand the passage in Gen. i. 2. the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. Here, however, it appears to be used with reference to the Son, through whom the Father is so often said to have created all things.\(^{43}\)

In light of the ambiguity which surrounds this term Spirit, how can one be certain that the Spirit whom Milton invokes is the Holy Spirit proper? If it is, it does not follow necessarily that he is one in essence with the Father, since all that is said is that he was present from the beginning (apparently the beginning of creation). The passage from the poem seems to be a poetic presentation of the first three verses of the first chapter of Genesis, in which the "power and virtue" of the Father is meant.\(^{44}\) In any event, it seems reasonably clear that what is said in the poem cannot be shown to be at variance with the description of the Spirit in the treatise.

In Book VII, moreover, where Milton describes the Father's commission to the Son to go create new worlds, the Father says,

And thou my Word, begotten Son, by thee
This I perform, speak thou, and be it done:
My overshadowing Spirit and might with thee
I send along ... (VII, 163-66).

\(^{43}\)CE, XIV, 359.

\(^{44}\)Kelly, This Great Argument, pp. 110, 117.
And as the Son and the Spirit leave, the throngs of angels are moved because,

Heav'n op'n'd wide
Her ever-during Gates, Harmonious sound
On golden Hinges moving, to let forth
The King of Glory in his powerful Word
And Spirit coming to create new Worlds (VII, 205-09).

And again, after the Son and the Spirit have gone far into Chaos, they found

Darkness profound
Cover'd th' Abyss: but on the wat'ry calm
His brooding wings the Spirit of God outspread
And vital virtue infus'd . . . (VII, 233-36).

If there were no other way of knowing what Milton meant in this passage, one would suppose that he meant what is commonly accepted by the terms Father, Son, and Spirit. Since, however, one knows from Christian Doctrine what the word Spirit denotes in its relation to the concepts of Father and Son (see above, pp. 35-36 and p. 27), it seems obvious that nothing is said in these poetic passages that is inconsistent with the views in the treatise.

Thus, a comparison of the treatise and the poem reveals that the concept of God is substantially the same in both works. It is not argued, however, that both works present this concept in the same explicit and systematic manner; on the contrary, there is a marked difference in the mode of expression. This difference between the two works is due, according to Rajan, not to

what is said, but in the things that Milton deliberately chooses to leave out. He says / in Paradise
Lost, for instance, that the Father is manifest in the Son. But he does not say that this manifestation makes the Son inferior. He refers to the Son as receiving his attributes from the Father. But whenever he does so it is subject to the saving construction that the Son is addressing the Father, not in his divine nature but in his mediatorial office.\textsuperscript{45}

Whether Milton "deliberately" chose to leave out important aspects of his views, or whether the language of Paradise Lost, which is permeated by Scriptural phraseology, is unintentionally ambiguous is an open question.\textsuperscript{46} What does seem clear is that Christian Doctrine was the theological basis of the poem—a conclusion consistent with the dates of composition and supported by a consensus of critical opinion.

Since the poem was not designed to teach systematic theology, to try to derive important doctrines from it seems precarious. In Paradise Lost "Milton seems to go out of his way to avoid harassing the reader with his personal beliefs . . . ."\textsuperscript{47} As one reads the poem, he is not so much aware of doctrine as he is of the action of the poem and the sublime style in which it is related. Milton's beliefs are here "set forth in the form which poetry requires, and which alone constitutes poetry, i.e.,


\textsuperscript{46} Kelly, \textit{This Great Argument}, p. 96; see also his footnote 28 on p. 196.

\textsuperscript{47} Rajan, \textit{Paradise Lost and the Seventeenth Century Reader}, p. 23.
in the form . . . of visual phantasy."48 Kelly declares, "Paradise Lost is concrete and strives for artistic verity by means of the speaking picture and the feigned image of poetry,"49 but Christian Doctrine "is abstract and aims at dogmatic truth through an interpretation of Scripture."50 Thus, "the Miltonic philosophy, presented to us in other writings only in dispersed poetic gleams . . . is here in Christian Doctrine exhibited coolly and connectedly . . . in its driest bones of abstract thesis and proposition."51

Thus Christian Doctrine

. . . is the work in which Milton makes his explicit, literal statement of what he believes. Paradise Lost is his imaginative representation of the fall of man and as such, though it incorporates much that he thinks literally true, is amplified with innumerable concrete particulars that we cannot say he would endorse as historical fact supporting his religious faith. The De Doctrina, therefore, not Paradise Lost, is the proper source for our knowledge of Milton's private, personal creed. As I see it . . . we are on shaky ground when we try to piece out what may seem vague in the De Doctrina with the possibly more detailed and concrete amplification of Paradise Lost.52

Since both the treatise and the poem belong to the same period of literary activity, it seems reasonable to conjecture "that

49 Kelly, This Great Argument, p. 196.
50 Ibid.
51 Masson, Life of Milton, VI, 822.
they] agree in their theological doctrines." This is also the conclusion of Rajan:

In investigating the relationship between *Paradise Lost* and *De Doctrina Christiana* we have seen that the intellectual territory they cover is the same and that, within that territory, the treatise and the epic are doctrinally identical. What varies considerably is the treatment of these doctrines. In the systematic theology they are clearly defined and outspokenly advocated. In *Paradise Lost* Milton's major unorthodoxies are presented discreetly and doubtfully, and his beliefs, when they are embodied in his fable, are mixed inextricably with invention and conjecture. Some of the evidence can be dealt with by assuming that Milton was afraid to state his convictions openly; but the most satisfactory way of dealing with it is to assume that these differences are eventually due to differences in the media and aims of expository prose and epic poetry.  

It would seem, therefore, that Christian Doctrine ought to be used to interpret whatever is vague and ambiguous in the poem—that the treatise is "the key to Milton's poetry."  

This conclusion is supported by a consideration of the date of Christian Doctrine in relation to that of Paradise Lost. The manuscript of Christian Doctrine which we now possess is for the most part in the hand of one scribe, Jermie Picard,

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53 Kelly, *This Great Argument*, p. 192.  
54 Rajan, *Paradise Lost and the Seventeenth Century Reader*, p. 35.  
56 For a fuller description of the history of the manuscript and the critical discussions pertaining to it, see the appendix.
who was Milton's amanuensis between 1658 and 1660. Very little is known about him. His name occurs on several other papers and places with entry dates between 1658 and 1660; it appears on a conveyance bond to Cyriack Skinner, May 7, 1660; he signed a deed in 1657-1658; he made the last entries in the Milton family Bible in 1658; and also in the same year he transcribed the sonnet "Methought I Saw My Late Espoused Saint," in the Cambridge MS. Between 1658 and 1660, in short, all Milton's dictation seems to have been in one hand, evidently the hand that copied and finished the manuscript of Christian Doctrine. Paradise Lost was finished sometime between 1663 and 1665 and was first published in 1667; indeed, Milton seems to have begun work on the epic about the time he was finishing the final draft of the treatise--between 1655 and 1658. Thus it is chronologically plausible that the systematic theology was the theological guide for the poem.

57 James H. Hanford, "The Rosenbach Milton Documents," PMLA, XXXVIII (June, 1923), 293.

58 Hanford, "The Date of De Doctrina Christiana," Studies in Philology, XVII (July, 1920), 312; see also Kelly, This Great Argument, p. 22.


60 Ibid.; see also Kelly, This Great Argument, p. 67.
The Concept of God in Christian Doctrine
Compared with That in Later Works

A comparison of his later works, principally Paradise Regained (1671) and Of True Religion (1673), with Christian Doctrine discloses nothing inconsistent with the views in the treatise. In Paradise Regained Milton selects details and events in the life of Christ to achieve his desired effect and purpose. The theme of his new poem, the temptation of Christ, was implied in the first lines of Paradise Lost:

Of Man's First Disobedience, and the Fruit Of that Forbidden Tree, whose mortal taste Brought Death into the World, and all our woe, With loss of Eden, till one greater Man Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat . . . (I, 1-5).

The "one greater Man" undoubtedly refers to Christ, who would come and "regain" what the first man lost through the temptation by Satan. In Paradise Lost Christ is disclosed as God, but in Paradise Regained he is presented to us as the man Christ Jesus.

This does not mean, however, that the Christ of Paradise Regained is a mere man. Though he became a man and moved through life as a man, yet he was the God-Man. Milton makes this very plain in Christian Doctrine:

Christ . . . by whom all things were made both in heaven and earth . . . he who in the beginning was the word, and God with God, and although not the supreme, yet the first born of every creature, must necessarily have existed previous to his incarnation . . . .

This incarnation of Christ, whereby he, being God, took upon him the human nature, and was made flesh, without thereby ceasing to be numerically the same as before, is generally considered by
theologians as, next to the Trinity in Unity, the
greatest mystery of our religion. Of the mystery
of the Trinity, however, no mention is made in
Scripture; whereas the incarnation is frequently
spoken of as a mystery. 61

Although in Paradise Regained he does not express his views
as systematically and unambiguously as he does here, never-
theless it appears that the above concept is consistently
reflected in the poem.

At the beginning of Paradise Regained, Milton says,

I who erewhile the happy Garden sung,
By one man's disobedience lost, now sing
Recovered Paradise to all mankind,
By one Man's firm obedience fully tried
Through all temptations, and the Tempter foil'd
In all his wiles, defeated and repuls'd,
And Eden rais'd in the waste Wilderness.

Thou Spirit who led'st this glorious Eremite
Into the Desert . . . and brought him thence
By proof th' undoubted Son of God . . . (I, 1-11).

Here, Christ, as another member of the human race, must be
subjected to the same kind of temptations as the first pair.
As a man he suffered the temptations; in the strength of God
he overcame them.

Although Milton chose the temptation event in the life of
Christ instead of his death to disclose the way Paradise was
regained, this, it seems, is consistent with the view in
Christian Doctrine. As Milton says above in the beginning of
the poem, the design of the temptations was to prove that Christ
is "th' undoubted Son of God." Milton knew that Christ in all

61 CE, XV, 263.
points was tempted like other human beings, but without sin. Christ was not only obedient when tempted by Satan in the wilderness, but he was also obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. The first parents of the race were not obedient even in the first temptation, but Christ, who overcame three temptations at the beginning of his ministry, is undoubtedly the Son of God.

Satan reported to the assembled multitude of fallen angels that at the baptism of Christ by John the Baptist a voice from heaven declared,

This is my Son belov'd, in him am pleas'd.

Disturbed, Satan had called together his followers precisely to discuss the meaning of this heavenly declaration. Quite astounded because this may be an actual Son of God like the one he had encountered before in Heaven, he says,

His Mother then is mortal, but his Sire, 
Nee who obtains the Monarchy of Heav'n,
And what will he not do to advance his Son?
His first-begot we know, and sore have felt,
When his fierce thunder drove us to the deep;
Who this man is we must learn, for man he seems
In all his lineaments, though in his face
The glimpses of his Father's glory shine (I, 86-93).

Satan will, indeed, learn shortly who this man is.

After he has essayed in the first two temptations to cause Christ to act independently of the Father's will, Satan says to Christ that he wants to know for sure in what sense thou art called

The Son of God, which bears no single sense;
The Son of God I also am, or was,
And if I was, I am; relation stands;
All men are Sons of God; yet thee I thought
In some respects far higher so declared (IV, 516-521).

Thus, Satan still doubts who this man really is, and
Therefore to know what more thou art than man,
Worth naming Son of God by voice from Heav'n,
Another method I must now begin (IV, 538-540).

And so he takes Christ up to the top pinnacle of the Temple and
urges him to cast himself down, because it is written concerning
the Christ that God will not allow his foot to be cast against
a stone but will give the angels charge over him. Christ
answers thus:

Also it is written,
Tempt not the Lord thy God; he said and stood.
But Satan smitten with amazement fell . . . (IV, 560-562).

And Satan, returning immediately to his followers

that sat consulting, brought
Joyless triumphs of his hop't success,
Ruin, and desperation, and dismay
Who durst tempt the Son of God (IV, 577-580).

Satan has, indeed, discovered in what sense Christ is the Son
of God. After the testing is over, Milton at the end of the
poem says concerning Christ that he is the

True Image of the Father, whether thron'd
In the bosom of bliss, and light of light
Conceiving, or remote from Heaven, enshrin'd
In fleshly Tabernacle, and human form . . . (IV, 596-599).

In short, he is the Son of God both by birthright and merit.

This is the view of Christian Doctrine. In the Scriptures,
according to Milton, we find that the Son was begotten "in a
double sense, the one literal, with reference to the production
of the Son, the other metaphorical, with reference to his
exaltation . . . 62 Besides all those texts in the Scriptures which refer to Christ before the world was made, there are those "other texts which . . . relate only to his metaphorical generation, that is, to his resuscitation from the dead, or to his unction to the mediatorial office . . . .' 63 And before Christ could assume the office of a mediator, he had to become a man. This is why he is called the only begotten Son of God. 64

Here is a close relation to what is said by Milton at the very end of Paradise Regained. As a mediator, Christ has to be able to sympathize with man's condition; thus, he became man and was tempted as man and overcame, fitted therefore to become man's great high priest. This seems to be implied in the passage where Milton has the heavenly host sing:

Hail Son of the most High, heir of both worlds,
Queller of Satan, on thy glorious work
Now enter, and begin to save mankind (IV, 633-635).

The Son of God can now, indeed, enter on his "glorious work" of paying the supreme price to become man's savior. It is only in his twofold nature as man and God that he can become the mediator. To answer Satan's question, therefore, "in what sense is Christ the Son of God?" Milton replies, "because God only is his Father, 65 and because he has received his office by dispensation from the Father." 66 It seems clear, therefore,

64CE, XIV, 185. 65CE, XIV, 187.
66CE, XIV, 189, 191.
that what is said in *Paradise Regained* respecting the Son may be consistently interpreted to agree with the concept in the treatise.

One draws a similar conclusion from a consideration of the short tract *Of True Religion* (1673). First, nothing in it varies from his concept of the Trinity in the treatise. His attitude toward the Scriptures, moreover, seems to be the same. Here, he appears to manifest the same attitude that is reflected in the treatise. Sewell, however, thinks that *Of True Religion* indicates "the words of a man, not wholly self-assured in argument, anxious to consider and understand the fruits of other minds, still open to new convictions." It is difficult to determine on what grounds Sewell bases this proposition. There is no evidence in *Of True Religion* to indicate that Milton had ceased to put as much faith in his arguments as he had done when he began to compose the treatise.

In this tract, which Milton wrote and published during the year before his death, one of the principal themes concerns toleration in matters of religion. Milton desires that the sects be given the same freedom of religious expression as the established churches. Since the Reformation has made it possible for each individual to interpret the Scriptures for himself, those who sincerely attempt to understand it aright

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should be tolerated and not considered as heretics.\textsuperscript{68} As long as an individual accepts only the Scriptures as the norm of faith, why should he not be tolerated? asks Milton. This is the same attitude disclosed in the treatise, where, in the Prefatory Remarks that precede the discussion on the Son in Chapter Five, Milton writes,

\begin{quote}
But inasmuch as they \textsuperscript{\textit{orthodox theologians}} can lay claim to nothing more than human powers, assisted by that spiritual illumination which is common to all, it is not unreasonable that they should on their part allow the privileges of diligent research and free discussion to another inquirer, who is seeking the truth through the same means and in the same way as themselves, and whose desire of benefiting mankind is equal to their own.\textsuperscript{69}
\end{quote}

Milton is here referring to the Scriptures as the source of knowledge of divine things. He could not trust his eternal salvation to those who were supposed to teach the truth of Scriptures; therefore,

\begin{quote}
I resolved not to repose on the faith or judgment of others in matters relating to God; but on the one hand, having taken the grounds of my faith from divine revelation alone, and on the other, having neglected nothing which depended on my own industry, I thought fit to scrutinize and ascertain for myself the several points of my religious belief, by the most careful perusal and mediation of the Holy Scriptures themselves.\textsuperscript{70}
\end{quote}

Thus, since no one ought to be jealous of the caution that he has taken to arrive at what he considers to be the truth taught in the Bible,

\textsuperscript{68} CE, VI, 168. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{69} CE, XIV, 179.

\textsuperscript{70} CE, XIV, 5.
I readily give as wide a circulation as possible to what I esteem my best and richest possession, and I hope to meet with a candid reception from all parties, and that none at least will take unjust offense, even though many things should be brought to light which will at once be seen to differ from certain received opinions. . . . Since so far from recommending or imposing anything on my own authority, it is my particular advice that every one should suspend his own opinion on whatever points he may not feel himself fully satisfied, till the evidence of Scripture prevail, and persuade his reason into assent and faith. 71

As Milton says in Of True Religion, "heresie is in the will and choice profestly against Scripture; error is against the will in misunderstanding the Scripture after all sincere endeavors to understand it rightly." 72 It seems reasonably clear from the above comparison that Milton's attitude toward the Scriptures and the subject of toleration is about the same in both the treatise and the tract.

It also appears that he has not changed his attitude toward the traditional doctrine of the Trinity. In the treatise he objected to the doctrine because it was not taught in the Bible. He says much the same thing in the tract Of True Religion. Although the doctrine of the Trinity is a mystery indeed when described by "Scholastic notions and sophistic Subtilities, like Triunity, coessentiality, Tri-personality, and the like," in the Scriptures the doctrine of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is "a plain Doctin." 73 This sounds almost like the words from Christian Doctrine, where Milton refers to the orthodox concept of the Trinity as an absurd paradox which is sustained by the treacherous aid of sophisms and verbal

71CE, XIV, 9, 11. 72CE, VI, 168. 73CE, VI, 169.
distinctions, borrowed from the barbarous ignorance of the
schools." 74 In another place in the treatise, he speaks of the
mystery of the incarnation, about which the Bible has much to
say, but he declares, "... of the mystery of the Trinity,
however, no mention is made in Scripture." 75 Thus, it seems
that Milton's belief in 1673 is the same as that reflected in
Christian Doctrine.

As has been noted in this chapter of the thesis, Christian
Doctrine evidently is the work in which Milton expressed his
final and systematic concept of God. It is an anti-Trinitarian
concept, and it is allegedly based upon a methodical exegesis
of the Scriptures. There seems to be nothing said respecting
his concept of God in Paradise Lost, as well as the works
written after it, 76 that cannot be interpreted consistently

74 CE, XIV, 209.  
75 CE, XV, 263.

76 Besides the works mentioned in this chapter, which were
completed and published between 1660 and 1673, Milton completed
and published two others: The History of Britain (1670); and
Samson Agonistes (1671). Neither of these works discloses any-
thing inconsistent with the views in the treatise. That which
is treated in The History of Britain is irrelevant to his concept
of God. Milton's faith in God's wisdom, though, seems to be as
steadfast as ever: "All is best, though we oft doubt, / What th'
unsearchable dispose / Of highest wisdom brings about, / And ever
best found in the close. / Oft he seems to hide his face, / But
unexpectedly returns / And to his faithful Champion hath in
place / Bore witness gloriously" (lines 1745-1752). In other
words, God's justice does not outstrip his wisdom. This appears
to be the view Milton had expressed in Christian Doctrine:
"Since a being infinitely wise and good would neither wish to
change an infinitely good state for another ... without con-
tradicting his own attributes [Milton is here describing God's
consistency with himself] he also [is] true and faithful in
respect of his will (CE, XIV, 59); and again, "... God must
be styled by us wonderful and incomprehensible, [for] Isa. xl.
28. [declares] there is no searching of his understanding"
(CE, XIV, 61).
with the views in the treatise. In fact, it seems reasonable to conclude that the treatise provided a theological basis for the views reflected in both the poems.
CHAPTER IV

MILTON'S CONCEPT OF GOD IN

A BROADER PERSPECTIVE

In this chapter Milton's concept of God will be considered in relation to Arianism and Sabellianism, in relation to his concept of matter, and in relation to the Scriptures.

Because of his views on the Son, Milton is almost universally labeled an Arian. Usually, though, the labelers do not say in what sense he agrees or disagrees with Arius, the fourth-century Alexandrian presbyter who upheld the doctrine of the creaturehood of the Son. It is notable, also, that Sewell and Larson have affirmed that Milton's view of the Trinity is similar to that of Sabellius, who in the third century asserted that the one personal God manifests himself in three modes: as the Father he is the creator and governor of the universe; as the Son he is the redeemer; as the Spirit he is the regenerator.

Moreover, since Milton held the view that all things are of God (ex Deo), in contradistinction to the orthodox concept that God created all things from nothing (ex Nihilo), some have ventured to designate Milton a pantheist, or at least a materialist. There is, to be sure, in Milton's notion of
creation some ambiguity respecting the precise nature of God's relation to matter.

Some critics, also, seem to ignore Milton's claim that his concept was derived from the Scriptures alone. An examination of the Preface to the Christian Doctrine, along with a description of his approach to the Scriptures, will disclose in what sense Milton's views are derived solely from the Bible.

The Trinity

The views of Arius have received various names, as have those of his predecessor Sabellius. Arianism admits of several modifications: Arius himself held that the Son was created by God out of nothing, and that he in no wise can reveal him that created or begot him; a middle-Arian was one who held that there is some "likeness" between the Father and the Son; the high-Arian, or semi-Arian, was one who held that the Son was like the Father in substance.¹ The differing view of Sabellius has also received various names: Modalism, Modalistic Monarchianism, and Patrhipassianism (Father Suffering);² all these names, however, affirm Sabellius' concept that God is one person who manifests himself in three modes.


A comparison of Milton's concept of the Son with Arius' reveals that they disagree on several points. Arius held that Christ was created out of nothing and that God is one both in substance and in person; indeed, for Arius, the Son "did not partake of the divine essence in any sense." Of course, Milton rejected the notion that anything at all was created out of nothing, let alone the Son. He sharply disagrees also on the origin of the Son, for Milton says that the Son was created from God's own substance, and that God endued the Son with as much of his essence as he saw fit. Moreover, whereas Arius said that the Son cannot reveal the unknown God, Milton declares that Christ is the only revealer of God.

It seems clear, on the other hand, that Milton's and Arius' concept have certain aspects in common. Writing to Eusebius of Nicomedia, Arius declares,

We acknowledge One God ... who begot an only-begotten Son before eternal times ... and begot Him, not in semblance, but in truth; and that He made him to subsist at His own will, unalterable and unchangeable; perfect creature of God, but not as one of the creatures; offspring but not as one of things begotten.\(^5\)

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\(^4\)Ibid.; see also McGiffert, *Christian Thought*, I, 246.

Milton's concept of the Son's relation to the Father agrees in certain points with Arius' statement here: there is only one God, who is the Father of the Son; the Son existed before the creation; Christ is the perfect creature of God. Arius' distinction between the creation of the Son and the creation of other things has also a striking similarity in Milton's concept of the generation of the Son. Milton thought it more proper to refer to the origin of the Son by the term generation, the act "whereby God, in pursuance of his decree, has begotten his only Son; whence he chiefly derives his appellation of Father." God creates in the proper sense of the word, according to Milton, through the Son and the Spirit, but creation in this sense is not the same as generation. Milton and Arius, in short, both agree that the Son was begot, not from eternity, but at some point of time.

6CE, XIV, 179-181.  
7CE, XV, 3-5.  
8When Arius says (see above, p. 54), "We acknowledge One God ... who begot an only-begotten Son before eternal times," the phrase "eternal times" evidently does not mean from all eternity, because Arius says in another place, "We believe in one God, the Father Almighty; and in the Lord Jesus Christ His Son, who was made by Him before all ages ... ." And again, "But we say and believe and have taught and do teach, that the Son is not unbegotten, nor in any way part of the Unbegotten ... and that before He was begotten or created or purposed or established He was not." Thus, Arius goes on to say, "We are persecuted because we say that the Son has a beginning, but that God is without beginning." Joseph C. Ayer, A Source Book for Ancient Church History (New York, 1941), p. 302 ff.
Though they agree that the Father does not eternally generate the Son, Milton and Arius disagree radically on the nature of the Son. As has been noted, Arius asserted that the Son can not truly reveal the one eternal God: this is implied when he says above that the Father begot the Son "not in semblance, but in truth." Indeed for Arius the created and begotten can disclose nothing concerning the one unknown, infinite God. But concerning the Scripture passage in 1 Timothy (3:16), which says that God was manifest in the flesh, Milton writes, "God was manifest in the flesh—namely in the Son, his own image; in any other way he is invisible: nor did Christ come to manifest himself, but his Father . . . ."9 And again,

. . . he who was in the Son from the beginning, after reconciliation had been made, returned with the Son into glory, or was received into that supreme glory which he had obtained in the Son.10

In like manner, Milton says in *Paradise Lost* through choirs of angels,

Thee next they sang of all creation first, Begotten Son, Divine Similitude, In whose conspicuous countenance, without cloud Made visible, th' Almighty Father shines, Whom else no creature can behold (III, 383-87).

It seems clear that for Milton the Son does reveal the infinite, supreme and true God, who is the source of all things. The Son,

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9CE, XIV, 265.  
10CE, XIV, 267.
in fact, received the title only-begotten "principally because he is the mediator between God and man."\textsuperscript{11}

The Son does reveal the Father, indeed, because his divine nature is derived from God the Father:

The generation of the divine nature is described by no one with more sublimity and copiousness than by the apostle to the Hebrews, i. 2, 3. whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, etc. It must be understood from this, that God imparted to the Son as much as he pleased of the divine nature, nay of the divine substance itself, care being taken not to confound the substance with the whole essence, which would imply, that the Father had given to the Son what he retained numerically the same himself; which would be a contradiction in terms instead of a mode of Generation.\textsuperscript{12}

Although we can never comprehend God as he is in himself (for Milton God is infinite and incomprehensible), nevertheless, the Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, has declared him, so that the eternal Father has revealed himself to man indeed. God can do this because he has communicated his nature, or substance, to the Son. In the latter part of the fourth century, certain followers of Arius' concept, "high-Arians" or "semi-Arians" as they are called, had adopted a similar view. Yet it should be noted that, although his concept of the Trinity has certain aspects, the origin and nature of the Son, for instance, in common with the high-Arians, Milton's views differ

\textsuperscript{11}CE, XIV, 191.

\textsuperscript{12}CE, XIV, 193.
from Arianism altogether "in spirit and aim." In asserting his views, Arius appears dogmatic and impatient. Unlike Milton, who is concerned to show that his views are derived from the Scriptures alone, Arius was primarily moved by philosophical considerations, as were most of his followers.

A comparison of Milton's concept of the Trinity with the Sabellian, or modal, concept indicates further that he held a view essentially his own. The Sabellian view of the Trinity differs sharply from the Arian concept, asserting that there is one God, in person as well as essence, who manifests himself in three modes. Sabellius seems to have been interested more than the others in preserving the unity of God and he insisted in the strongest possible way that God is one person as well as one substance. As one person he is indivisible but he has three energies or operations: creating and governing, redeeming, regenerating and sanctifying.

Although Sabellius' disciples emphasized different aspects of the modal concept, the description above of the nature of the Trinity covers in general the various modifications of the view.

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That Milton's concept of the Trinity has various aspects in common with the Sabellian view seems obvious. Milton holds emphatically that God is one simple essence as well as one person. According to Milton, God the Father was himself in Christ.\(^{16}\) God is manifest, to be sure, both in the Son and in the Spirit, in their work of creation and redemption.\(^ {17}\) There are, moreover, three offices and works which the one eternal God executes: creation, redemption, and providence.

But all these operations are fulfilled by God through his Son and Spirit, whom Milton considers real persons, distinct from God the Father; here Milton departs from the Sabellian concept of the Godhead. According to Milton, the Father is the true and supreme God, from whom the Son and Spirit derive their existence, nature, and office. The Sabellian concept, moreover, has no place for the notion of the generation of the Son. To say, according to Milton, that the Son is not a person distinct from the Father from whom he derives his nature is to question the real essence of the Christian faith:

\[\text{If . . . the Son, who has his own proper hypostasis, have not also his own proper essence, but the essence of the Father, he becomes . . . no \\enskip at all . . . which strikes at the very foundation of the Christian religion.}\] \(^{18}\)

And again, since Christ is not one in essence with the Father, he himself is a distinct person. If therefore he be a

\(^{16}\text{CE, XIV, 301.}\) \(^{17}\text{CE, XIV, 361, 367, 381, 393.}\) \(^{18}\text{CE, XIV, 221.}\)
distinct person, he is distinct from God, who is unity."19
Thus, the Son is a distinct person from God the Father because
he generated the Son within the limits of time.20
Likewise, the Spirit is a distinct person from both the
Father and the Son. Since the Scriptures do not assign to
the Holy Spirit the importance and functions which are
ascribed to the Son and the Father,
he must evidently be considered as inferior to both
the Father and Son, inasmuch as he is represented
and declared to be subservient and obedient in all
things; to have been promised, and sent, and given;
to speak nothing of himself; and even to have been
given as an earnest.21
Milton says also in another place that "the Spirit of God being
actually and numerically distinct from God himself, cannot
possibly be essentially one God with him whose Spirit he
is . . . ."22 In Christian Doctrine, moreover, Milton affirms
positively that the Father is a person distinct from the Son
and the Spirit:

. . . if—whenever the Father and the Holy Spirit
are mentioned together, the Father alone be called
God, be acknowledged by Christ himself to be the

19CE, XIV, 255.  20CE, XIV, 189.
21CE, XIV, 377.
22CE, XIV, 379. Though Milton holds that the Holy Spirit
is a creature of God, yet he asserts that the Scriptures speak
of the Spirit as though he belonged to both the Father and the
Son: "Having concluded what relates to the Father and the Son,
the next subject to be discussed is that of the Holy Spirit,
inasmuch as this latter is called the Spirit of the Father and
the Son." CE, XIV, 357; cf. the quotation on pp. 60-61 of this
thesis.
one true God. . . . if that God be one God, and
that one God the Father. . . . whence it follows
that he who sent both the Spirit of his Son and
the Son himself, he on whom we are taught to call,
and on whom the Spirit calls, is the one God and
only Father. 23

Thus, it seems that Milton's concept of the Trinity varies
conspicuously from the Sabellian concept which asserts that
God is one person who manifests himself in three modes. To
refer at all to Milton's concept of God in Trinitarian phrases
appears improper. It is evident that Milton's concept is
anti-Trinitarian. Although he has several points of view in
common with both Arianism and Sabellianism, Milton's concept
of God is manifestly different from theirs.

God and Matter

Although Milton's concept of God is relatively clear
compared with similar concepts in the early history of Christian
theology, his notion of God's relation to matter is not so
perspicuous. This ambiguity in Milton's concept of God's
relation to matter has occasioned the charge of pantheism. 24
Denis Saurat avers that the "idea of free will within a
pantheistic system was the central point of Milton's thought

23 CE, XIV, 379.

24 "The doctrine that reality comprises a single being of
which all things are modes, moments, members, appearances, or
projections. As a religious concept Pantheism is to be dis-
tinguished from Immanent Theism . . . by asserting the
essential immanence of God in the creatures." Wilbur Long,
both in *Paradise Lost* and *De Doctrina Christiana.*

Saurat's thesis is based primarily on Milton's notion of creation, where Milton rejects the orthodox doctrine of creation *ex Nihilo* (from nothing), and asserts that creation is *ex Deo* (of God). Since God is the fountain of all things, it follows, according to Saurat's interpretation of Milton's view, that matter must be a part of God.26 (It is not here intended to discuss Milton's concept of creation in full, but only that aspect of it that bears on the idea of pantheism.)

According to Milton, in *Christian Doctrine,* matter could not have existed from all eternity:

... that matter ... should have existed of itself from all eternity, is inconceivable. If on the contrary it did not exist from all eternity, it is difficult to understand from whence it derives its origin. There remains, therefore, but one solution of the difficulty, for which moreover we have the authority of Scriptures, namely, that all things are of God.27

Of this original matter from God, Milton says that "it was a substance ... though at first confused and formless, being afterwards adorned and digested into order by the hand of God."28 Thus, it seems that in the creative act of God there are two aspects: first, God produces an original, undifferentiated, chaotic matter from himself; second, he then individualizes

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27 CE, XV, 21.

28 CE, XV, 23.
this matter into various forms—creation in the proper sense, according to Milton. Unless God himself is material in some sense, however, it is difficult to understand just how he can produce from himself something that is material. Milton is also aware of this problem:

For Spirit being the more excellent substance, virtually and essentially contains within itself the inferior one; as the spiritual and rational faculty contains the corporeal, that is, the sentient and vegetative faculty. For not even divine virtue and efficiency could produce bodies out of nothing, according to the commonly received opinion, unless there had been some bodily power in the substance of God; since no one can give to another what he does not himself possess.  

Likewise, in **Paradise Lost**, this view of matter's origin is expressed in almost identical words:

0 Adam, one Almighty is, from whom
All things proceed, and up to him return,
If not deprav'd from good, created all
Such to perfection, one first matter all,
Indu'd with various forms, various degrees
Of substance, and in things that live of life (V, 469-74).

In short, matter has its ultimate source in God himself.

From the suggestion that God contains within himself "some bodily power" from which matter originated, does it follow that the substance of God and matter are the same? According to Milton, it is clear that Spirit contains the inferior substance of matter; however, Milton does not say explicitly that there is a material substance in God. He says, on the contrary, that God contains matter "virtually and essentially," whatever this

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29CE, XV, 25.
may mean. In any event, Milton does make a distinction between
the material substance which God produces and the substance of
God himself. It seems one thing to say that matter is in God
and another to say that God is in matter. 30 The substance
of matter is different from God, indeed, because it proceeds
from God: "Matter, like the form and nature of angels itself,
proceeded incorruptible from God; and even since the fall it
remains incorruptible as far as concerns its essence." 31 And
it has proceeded from him to the extent that it is "in the
power of another party." 32 Thus, it seems clear that Milton
thought of the essence of matter as being distinct from the
essence of God. Whether or not there is materiality in God
Milton never says, and this is an open question. 33

Saurat bases his interpretation of God's relation to
matter upon a passage in Paradise Lost, where, according to him,
Milton discloses his most important conception of the nature
of God. 34 In this passage God the Father is speaking to the

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30A. S. P. Woodhouse, "Some Notes on Milton's View of
Creation," Philological Quarterly, XXVIII (October, 1949), 228;
see also Maurice Kelly, This Great Argument: A Study of
Milton's "De Doctrina Christiana" As a Gloss Upon Paradise Lost
(Princeton, 1941), p. 94.

31CE, XV, 23-25.  
32CE, XV, 25.

33John Reesing, "The Materiality of God in Milton's De
Doctrina Christiana," Harvard Theological Review, L (July, 1957),
159; cf. Walter C. Curry, Milton's Ontology, Cosmogony, and
Physics (Lexington, 1957), pp. 14, 35; Hilaire Belloc, Milton

34Saurat, Milton: Man and Thinker, p. 126 and passim; see
also Kelly, This Great Argument, p. 211.
Son and saying,

And thou my Word, begotten Son, by thee
This the creation of a new universe for man
I perform, speak thou, and be it done;
My overshadowing Spirit and might with thee
I send along, ride forth, and bid the Deep
Within appointed bounds be Heav'n and Earth,
Boundless the Deep, because I am who fill
Infinitude, nor vacuous the space.
Though I uncircumscrib'd myself retire,
And put not forth my goodness, which is free
To act or not . . . (VII, 163-72).

In the cosmology of Paradise Lost, Heaven (God's abode—the place where the Divine Glory is eminently manifest) and Hell are already in existence before God created the visible universe in which man lives. Thus one finds in the above passage that the Almighty is commissioning the Son to go and bring forth out of the original matter (called Chaos in Paradise Lost) a new universe. Saurat, however, sees here the method by which the original matter came into being. Beginning with the phrase "Boundless the Deep" to the end of the passage, Saurat avers that the original stuff came into existence when God "retracted" (his definition of "retired") himself from part of his own being (in the sense of withdrawing from and thus isolating a part of his being). 35 He concludes, therefore, that Milton was a pantheist and a materialist. 36

It is distinctly possible, however, that Saurat has mis-interpreted this passage in Paradise Lost. According to Maurice Kelly, this passage means just the opposite of what

35Saurat, Milton, p. 102 ff.  
36Ibid., p. 140.
Saurat makes it say. 37 Kelly declares that the boundless deep refers evidently to the formless matter left over from the creation of Heaven and Hell. It is formless because God has retired from giving form to the original material. Since there is no natural necessity in God to create, creation therefore is an act of goodness on the part of God, who is free to act or not. Instead of retracting himself, in Saurat's interpretation, in order that matter may exist, God puts forth his goodness and gives form and individuality to the original stuff that already exists. This interpretation of the passage by Kelly seems more reasonable than Saurat's, because it is consistent with the context in which it occurs 38 and also because it is consistent with the views in Christian Doctrine. In short, since matter is a substance distinct from the substance of God, it appears that matter, in a pantheistic sense, is not a part of God.

Furthermore, it seems unwise to call Milton a pantheist, because he declares that human nature does not participate in the divine nature, and that the Son and the Holy Spirit are not of the same numerical essence with the Father. On the first point Milton writes,

We may understand from other passages of the Scripture, that when God infused the breath of life into man,

37 Kelly, This Great Argument, p. 211.

38 See Book VII, lines 166-169, 209-223.
what man thereby received was not a portion of God's essence, or a participation of the divine nature, but that measure of the divine virtue or influence, which was commensurate to the capabilities of the recipient.\textsuperscript{39}

It is obvious that this is not pantheism. On the question of the relation of the Son to the essence of the Father, Milton writes,

But that those who differ numerically must differ also in their proper essences, as the logicians express it, is too clear to be denied by any one possessed of common reason. Hence it follows that the Father and the Son differ in essence.\textsuperscript{40}

And again Milton asserts that "the Spirit being actually and numerically distinct from God himself, cannot possibly be essentially one" with God.\textsuperscript{41} With so clear a statement by Milton himself regarding the relation of intelligent substances to God, whatever else we may call his metaphysical world-view, it seems evident that it ought not to be called pantheism.\textsuperscript{42}

One may, however, describe it as a monistic concept of God's relation to his creatures.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{39}CE, XV, 39. \hfill \textsuperscript{40}CE, XIV, 309-311.

\textsuperscript{41}CE, XIV, 379.


The Bible

According to Milton, his concept of God was derived from the Scriptures alone. Some, Harris F. Fletcher, for instance, doubt that this is the case.\textsuperscript{44} It is clear, however, that his exhaustive use of the Scriptures in the treatise is evidence of prolonged investigation that reflects his high estimation of the authority of the Scriptures.\textsuperscript{45} In his approach to the interpretation of the Bible, moreover, Milton seems to have used definite hermeneutical principles.\textsuperscript{46} That these principles were the basis of his concept of God is the conclusion of both George Conklin\textsuperscript{47} and Theodore Huguelet.\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{44}Fletcher, \textit{The Intellectual Development of John Milton}, 2 Vols. (Urbana, 1956), II, 200.

\textsuperscript{45}Harris F. Fletcher himself avers, "Milton's great interest in and use of the various Semitic languages was prompted by his desire to understand the Scriptures which he regarded as an absolute authority, but an authority for the scholar to understand." \textit{Milton's Rabbinical Readings} (Urbana, 1930), p. 302; cf. Herbert Agar, \textit{Milton and Plato} (Princeton, 1928), p. 34; see also Herman Scherpbier, \textit{Milton in Holland} (Amsterdam, 1938), pp. 65-70.

\textsuperscript{46}Hermeneutics: "The science of interpretation and explanation. . . . especially that branch of theology which defines the laws applied by exegesis"; \textit{Exegesis}: " . . . a critical explanation of a portion of Scripture" (\textit{Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary}, Second Edition, 1953).

\textsuperscript{47}George N. Conklin, \textit{Biblical Criticism and Heresy in Milton} (New York, 1949), p. 111 and \textit{passim}.

\textsuperscript{48}Theodore Huguelet, \textit{"Milton's Hermeneutics,"} unpublished doctoral dissertation, Department of English, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1959, p. 9 and \textit{passim}.
who have systematically investigated Milton's method of interpreting the Bible.

In the Preface to *Christian Doctrine* Milton declares emphatically and at length that his theology was derived from the Scriptures alone. He seems to have had a definite conviction that each individual ought to be independently persuaded in his own mind concerning the things God has revealed:

> But since it is only to the individual faith of each that the Deity has opened the way of eternal salvation, and as he requires that he who would be saved should have a personal belief of his own, I resolved not to repose on the faith or judgment of others in matters relating to God; but on the other hand, having neglected nothing which depended on my own industry, I thought fit to scrutinize and ascertain for myself the several points of my religious belief, by the most careful perusal and mediation of the Holy Scriptures themselves. 49

From what is said about reposing on the "faith or judgment of others," one may reasonably assume that he had studied the theology of others, that he was familiar with controversial doctrines, and that he was familiar with the order and arrangement of existing systematic theologies; these conclusions are, moreover, supported by other testimonies. 50 When he says,

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49 CE, XIV, 5.

therefore, that his doctrines were derived from "the Holy Scriptures themselves," he evidently means that his treatise is the fruit of an original, first-hand examination of the Bible itself.\(^{51}\)

This is the main apologetic theme in the Preface of Christian Doctrine.\(^{52}\) Apparently he began to study the Bible and theology during his youth:

I entered upon an assiduous course of study in my youth, beginning with the books of the Old and New Testament in their original languages and going diligently through a few of the shorter systems of divines, in imitation of whom I was in the habit of classing under certain heads whatever passages of Scripture occurred for extraction, to be made use of hereafter as the occasion might require.\(^{53}\)

After pursuing this kind of study for some time, he seems to have become interested in the more complicated points of theology:

At length I resorted with increased confidence to some of the more copious theological treatises, and to the examination of the arguments advanced by the conflicting parties respecting certain disputed points of faith.\(^{54}\)

What these "disputed points of faith" were Milton never says.

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\(^{51}\)Huguelet, "Milton's Hermeneutics," p. 9 f.

\(^{52}\)Besides the Preface, in the first six or seven chapters of Book One of Christian Doctrine, the chapters in which Milton palpably departs from commonly received beliefs, he explicitly refers to the Scriptures as his authority; see the following, for instance: CE, XIV, 19, 21, 31, 33, 65, 177, 197, 357, 379-381; CE, XV, 19, 27.

\(^{53}\)CE, XIV, 5.

\(^{54}\)CE, XIV, 5.
in the Preface of Christian Doctrine. From the contents of Milton's own treatise, however, it appears that the most important ones were the doctrine of the Trinity, predestination, creation, immortality of the soul, and church government. Milton became dissatisfied with the "copious theological treatises" because of the devious arguments he found in them:

... I was concerned to discover in many instances adverse reasonings either evaded by wretched shifts, or attempted to be refuted, rather speciously than with solidity, by an affected display of formal sophisms, or by a constant recourse to the quibbles of the grammarians; while what was most pertinaciously espoused as the true doctrine, seemed often defended... by misconstructions of Scripture... Owing to these causes, the truth was sometimes as strenuously opposed as if it had been an error or a heresy—while errors and heresies were substituted for the truth, and valued rather from deference to custom and the spirit of party than from the authority of Scripture.

Thus Milton protested three aspects of traditional theologies: rejection of certain truths in Scripture, interpolation of errors, and substitution of other values for the authority of Scripture.

Because he found the systematic theologies of others unsatisfactory for his own edification, he began work on a system derived from his first-hand interpretation of the Bible:

According to my judgment, therefore, neither my creed nor my hope of salvation could be safely trusted to such guides; and yet it appeared highly requisite to possess some methodical tractate of Christian doctrine, or at least to attempt such a disquisition as might be useful in establishing my faith or assisting my memory. I deemed it

55 CE, XIV, 5-7.
therefore safest and most advisable to compile for myself, by my own labor and study, some original treatise which should be always at hand, derived solely from the word of God itself, and executed with all possible fidelity, seeing that I could not wish to practise any imposition on myself in such a matter. 56

This phrase, "methodical tractate of Christian doctrine," seems to describe Milton's treatise as it now exists. According to Milton, it took several years to compile his "original treatise":

After a diligent perseverance in this plan for several years, I perceived that the strong holds of the reformed religion were sufficiently fortified. . . . It was also evident to me, that, in religion as in other things, the offers of God were all directed, not to an indolent credulity, but to a constant diligence, and to an unwearyed search after truth. 57

While he was in the midst of his work on the treatise, he discovered, apparently, various points of doctrines that the reformed religion had not reformed enough. Following the above remarks, he says,

. . . more than I was aware of still remained, which required to be more rigidly examined by the rule of Scripture, and reformed after a more accurate model . . . . It was also a great solace to me to have compiled, by God's assistance, a precious aid for my faith . . . . 58

And Milton seems to indicate that his treatise is an attempt in the direction of this reformation. Toward the end of the Preface, concerning this "precious aid" and his "best and richest possession," Milton declares in an artless and unaffected

56 CE, XIV, 7.  
57 CE, XIV, 7-9.  
58 CE, XIV, 9.
protest that the conclusions in it were not influenced by others:

For my own part, I adhere to the Holy Scriptures alone—I follow no other heresy or sect. I had not even read any of the works of heretics, so called, when the mistakes of those who are reckoned for orthodox, and their incautious handling of Scripture, first taught me to agree with their opponents whenever those opponents agreed with Scripture. 59

Thus, both Milton's own testimony and the evidence of prolonged investigation which is reflected in the content of the treatise indicate that "his declaration of adherence to Scripture alone is essentially true." 60

Although his declaration of adherence to the Scriptures alone indicates the approximate source of his views, nevertheless, it does not disclose his precise approach to the Bible. That he took the Scriptures as the only authority in matters of Christian doctrine seems clear. He also asserted that every believer possesses the right to study the Bible independently: "Every believer has a right to interpret the Scriptures for himself, inasmuch as he has the Spirit for his guide and the mind of Christ is in him." 61 It is the Holy Spirit, moreover, who makes the Scriptures plain to the believer; for "under the gospel we possess, as it were, a twofold Scripture; one external,

59 CE, XIV, 15.
61 CE, XVI, 265.
which is the written word, and the other internal, which is the Holy Spirit . . . ." 62 Whenever there is doubt as to the authenticity of a portion of the written word, the Spirit is to be relied on to communicate the truth. 63 The written word, however, is the common ground of truth, and is to be accepted in almost all instances. 64 There is no conflict between the testimony of Scripture and the Spirit, to be sure, but it is the Spirit that reveals the meaning of the text: "The Scriptures, therefore, partly by reason of their own simplicity, and partly through the divine illumination, are plain and perspicuous in all things necessary to salvation . . . ." 65

In interpreting the Scriptures, this principle of perspicuity is a fundamental point among others in Milton's hermeneutics: "All of Milton's exegetical labors proceed under the assumption that the written word is essentially clear, un perplexed, and unerring." 66 In ascertaining the exact meaning of a difficult text, however, he seems also to have been governed by other principles of exegesis: he felt that an acquaintance with the original languages was necessary; he accepted as valid the historical (as opposed to allegorical) sense of a passage; he also believed in the harmony of nature, reason, and Scripture; and finally, he held that the Bible teaches by the laws of

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62 CE, XVI, 273.  
63 CE, XVI, 275.  
65 CE, XVI, 259.  
logical method. In general, "his approach to the Scripture is grammatico-historical, and his principle of interpretation may be called rational in general outlook as well as in the specific use of reason as an instrument of interpretation."  

In his chapter on the Son, for instance, Milton makes use of reason in two ways: first, he shows in a critical way the errors in the reasoning which tries to demonstrate that the Son is one in essence with the Father; second, he uses reason constructively, comparing texts to show that the Scriptures refer to the Father as the true God. Yet, although reason is to be used as an instrument for examining the Scriptures, it remains true that reason in no wise challenges the authority of Scripture, for Milton held that there is mutual harmony between the Scriptures and "the eternal laws of nature and reason."

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67 *Ibid.*, p. 255. Milton believed that the Bible meant what it said. For example, the temptation of Eve in the third chapter of Genesis by Satan, who used a serpent to accomplish his end, is to be taken literally as a historical event. If the Bible says that Jonah was swallowed by a whale—or a fish created for the purpose—then this was a literal event that happened many years ago. Moreover, since the Bible is God's revelation of truth to man, and since God never does anything that is not according to order, he so arranged the truths in the Scriptures that the reason of man may grasp them in their systematic and logical relation—provided that one diligently applies himself to the study of the sacred oracles.


Thus, believing that the Scriptures incorporated the natural laws of reason, Milton seems to have used reason to discover the revealed truths in the Bible. His chief tool of exegesis here was the comparison of texts.\textsuperscript{71} For example, after noticing that the word Bara, the Hebrew word for create, always means to create out of something, he reconsidered the use of the word in Genesis 1:1 and concluded that in the beginning God evidently created the universe out of something and not nothing. Further, Milton compared obscure texts—for instance, the various texts on marriage and divorce—with less obscure ones in order to achieve clarity of meaning.\textsuperscript{72} Milton firmly believed, moreover, "that the Bible teaches by the natural laws of method, whereby general axioms are interspersed among the text of Scripture as guides."\textsuperscript{73} The job of the exegete is to find these axiomatic texts and arrange them "in the order of clarity so that clearer axioms lead and obscurer ones follow."\textsuperscript{74} In short, this "assumption that the Scriptures are reducible to method convinced Milton of the validity of comparing obscure texts with clearer ones and with texts containing axioms of doctrine."\textsuperscript{75}

\textsuperscript{71}Huguelet, "Milton's Hermeneutics," p. 225 ff.
\textsuperscript{72}CE, XV, 157 ff.
\textsuperscript{73}Huguelet, "Milton's Hermeneutics," pp. 262-263.
\textsuperscript{74}Ibid., pp. 217-219 and passim.
\textsuperscript{75}Ibid., p. 13.
This is the method he employed in arriving at his concept of God. Although he recognized that in the Scriptures Christ is referred to as God, Milton concludes from a comparison of texts that this does not mean the true and supreme God. Milton begins his exegesis of the New Testament Scriptures on the nature of God by first considering the words in John's Gospel where Christ refers to the Father as the true God:

Christ himself therefore, the Son of God, teaches us nothing in the gospel respecting the one God but what the law had before taught, and clearly asserts him to be his Father. John xvii. 3, this is eternal life, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.

This verse seems to become an axiom with Milton; though he never explicitly calls it an axiom, yet he uses the phrase "true God" again and again while discussing other passages. Since Milton relied on the Bible alone and since there is not another passage in the Scriptures which designates the Father "the true God," Milton evidently has John 17:3 in mind when he refers to the Father as the true and supreme God. In fact, John 17:3 is the first verse that Milton lists in a long series of passages from the New Testament which are exegetically examined and compared to show that the Son is not essentially one with the Father.

After he has studied all those passages that seem obviously to teach, like John 17:3, that the Son is not one in essence

76 Ibid., p. 231. 77 CE, XIV, 193-195 f.
78 CE, XIV, 201. 79 CE, XIV, 201.
with the Father, Milton then takes up those passages which appear to ascribe Deity to Christ and interprets them in the light of what had been taught in the other texts—that the Father alone is the true God.\(^{80}\) 1 Timothy 3:16, for example, says that "God was manifest in the flesh," but according to Milton Paul means "God the Father in conjunction with the Son. For it is not Christ who is the great mystery of godliness, but God the Father in Christ, as appears from Col. ii. 2.

the mystery of God and of the Father, and of Christ.\(^{81}\) Again, in interpreting John 1:1, Milton cannot accept Trinitarian exegesis, because when the writer says "in the beginning was the Word," he does not necessarily mean that the Word existed from all eternity, nor does the phrase "with God" mean that he is of the same essence as the Father; and he concludes that "reason rejects the doctrine."\(^{82}\)

It seems, therefore, that Milton's method of exegesis is based upon the principle of moving from Bible passages that seemed grammatically and logically clear and simple to those that seemed obscure, interpreting the latter in the light of the former.\(^{83}\) This "whole rationalistic approach to hermeneutics is a direct corollary of the supposition that reason, nature, and Scripture are mutually concordant and measurable."\(^{84}\)

\(^{80}\) CE, XIV, 209. \(^{81}\) CE, XIV, 265. \\
\(^{82}\) CE, XIV, 253. \(^{83}\) CE, XIV, 119. \\
\(^{84}\) Huguelet, "Milton's Hermeneutics," p. 190.
Milton believed, in short, "that human understanding may grasp the impeccable logic underlying Scripture teaching."  

Concluding Remarks

As has been noted, Milton insisted on interpreting the Scriptures anew for himself. His views on the nature of the Trinity seem to have been derived from his method of exegesis, which was an application of reason in comparing the texts of Scripture to discover there the divinely revealed truth.

This is the same method of exegesis which underlies his divorce arguments and his arguments against the Episcopal system of church government in his several tracts on those subjects. Between 1641 and 1645 Milton was intensely engaged in the study of the Scriptures to find answers to the questions of divorce and church government. Convinced that the Scriptures teach that divorce is valid on the grounds of moral and spiritual incompatibility, Milton wrote several tracts to establish his view: *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (1642); *The Judgment of Martin Ducer* (1644); *Tetrachordea* (1645). In all his tracts dealing with church government, moreover, Milton was concerned to show what the Bible teaches on the subject. Against the Episcopal system of church government, Milton favors the Presbyterian form. In 1641 and 1642 he wrote three  

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pamphlets propagating his views: *Of Reformation Touching Church Discipline in England* (1641); *Of Prelatical Episcopacy* (1641); *The Reason of Church Government Urged Against Prelaty* (1642). In all these tracts, Milton appeals to the Scriptures as his authority, and interprets them according to the principles of common reason. It seems, therefore, plausible to conclude that his method of interpreting the Scriptures during this period of controversial writings may have led him to change his views on several doctrines.

Although his concept of God has certain aspects in common with the views of others, such as Arianism and Sabellianism, it seems that there is no exact parallel to be found for his view. George N. Conklin feels that "Milton's doctrinal heterodoxies may have derived largely from his method of Biblical criticism rather than from patristic, Renaissance, or rabbinical sources." It is true that Milton did study the early Christian writers closely; he was probably at least somewhat conversant with the rabbinical literature on the Old Testament; and he had evidently read much Renaissance material

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87 *CE*, III, 81, 184.


on the Bible. Instead of finding in any of these the source for his views, though, one finds that Milton departed in one way or another from each of them in his interpretation of Scripture. In short,

although he has something in common with the Fathers, with the Greek philosophers, with the Renaissance metaphysicians, with the Protestant reformers, and with the chief heretical sects of the reformation, nevertheless, among them all we can nowhere find a parallel for his system.

As Theodore Huguelet has pointed out, because Milton believed that there is agreement between nature, reason, and the Bible, he held that the human understanding was capable of grasping every essential truth there revealed. For Milton, there are very few mysteries in the Scriptures that man cannot understand. God has given man both reason and the Bible, and according to Milton, man is responsible to search the Scriptures for himself to learn of eternal salvation. If one commits an error—a thing all humans are liable to—while he is attempting to discover the truth from the Scriptures, then he ought not to be called a heretic by his less zealous fellow Christians:

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91 Harris F. Fletcher, *The Use of the Bible in Milton's Prose* (Urbana, no date given), p. 90.


It is a human frailty to err, and no man is infallible here on earth. But so long as all . . . profess to set the Word of God only before them as the Rule of faith and obedience; and use all diligence and sincerity of heart, by reading, by learning, by study, by prayer for illumination of the holy Spirit, to understand the Rule and obey it, they have done what man can do: God will assuredly pardon them . . . though much mistaken in some points of Doctrin.95

95 CE, VI, 168.
APPENDIX

The Manuscript of Christian Doctrine

The manuscript of the De Doctrina Christiana was discovered among the public records in the Old State Paper Office at Whitehall by Robert Lemon, Deputy Keeper of the State Papers, in 1823. The Royal Librarian, Charles R. Summer, later Bishop of Winchester, was commissioned by George IV to publish and translate it. His edition was issued from the Cambridge University Press in two quarto volumes, one containing the Latin text, the other the translation, in 1825.¹

It seems that after Milton's death the manuscript of Christian Doctrine was in the hand of an Oxford graduate, Daniel Skinner, "who had served as the last of the poet's literary and scholarly assistants."² Ever since he had completed the treatise—about 1660—Milton had intended to publish it, but "perhaps due to the hostile temper of those in power," he delayed publication.³

In 1775 and 1776, a year or so after Milton's death, Daniel Skinner, evidently to fulfill Milton's request,

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¹CE, XVII, 425.
attempted to publish the manuscript of Christian Doctrine, along with some State Letters, in Holland.\textsuperscript{4}

The publisher, noting its heretical character, delayed the printing of it, and Skinner, warned by Issac Barrow that his responsibility for publishing such material would entail loss of his minor fellowship at Trinity College, on a later visit to Amsterdam recalled the manuscript both of De Doctrina and of the Letters.\textsuperscript{5}

Thus, when the manuscript and Letters were returned to England by Daniel Elzevir, the printer in Holland who had previously contracted with Skinner to publish them, the treatise of Christian Doctrine with the State Letters "somehow found their way among the State Papers, where they remained together in a packet inscribed 'To Mr. Skinner, Merchant,' until their discovery by Lemon" in 1823.\textsuperscript{6}

The manuscript itself of Christian Doctrine is in two books: Book I, which has thirty-three chapters, is entitled "Of the Knowledge of God"; Book II, which has seventeen chapters, is entitled "Of the Worship of God." The form and arrangement of Book II owes much to the theological works of Wolleb (1586-1629) and Ames (1576-1633), whose works, Compendium Theologiae Christianae and Medulla Theologiae, Milton


\textsuperscript{5}CE, XVII, 427.  

\textsuperscript{6}CE, XVII, 427.
had studied intimately. Book I of the manuscript is more original; it reflects a greater amount of labor, both in composition and revision.

Although the evidence indicates that the manuscript of Christian Doctrine stood complete by about 1660, Milton seems to have continued to make revisions in it down to his death in 1674. It appears that the changes he made in polishing the treatise were not of such importance as to have altered the meaning of the principal doctrines: the revisers

... did not alter any of the doctrines, and in virtually all of them the revisions Milton's purpose seems fairly apparent. In none of them did he seek to alter the doctrine of his treatise, for the definitions—the essential dogmatic framework of any systematic theology—remain almost unchanged.


8CE, XVII, 431; see also Maurice Kelly, This Great Argument: A Study of Milton's De Doctrina Christiana As a Gloss Upon Paradise Lost (Princeton, 1941), p. 67.


10CE, XVII, 426, 431.

11Kelly, This Great Argument, p. 45. Daniel Skinner, who apparently revised and rewrote most of the first two hundred pages, was evidently preparing the manuscript for printing before Milton's death. It seems that because of Milton's death and the condition of the rest of the manuscript he stopped at chapter fifteen and attempted to have the manuscript printed in the form that is now extant.
Only five changes in definitions of doctrine occur in the treatise, and none of these changes affect his concept of God. Thus, it seems that Milton did not alter any of his major concepts in any marked way after the Picard draft (see above, Chapter 3, pp. 34-35) of Christian Doctrine.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid., p. 57, including footnotes.

\textsuperscript{13}Hanford, "The Date of De Doctrina Christiana," p. 313; see also Kelly, This Great Argument, p. 39 and passim; cf. Sewell, A Study in Christian Doctrine, pp. 1-34. According to Merritt Y. Hughes, Sewell's study of Milton's treatise "is superseded by Kelly's treatment of the problems of the dating of the revisions of the manuscript and of the relevancy of the work to interpretation of PL [Paradise Lost]." John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose (New York, 1957), p. 900.
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