
*Spiritual Architecture and Paradise Regained: Milton’s Literary Ecclesiology* supplies the revelation and promulgation of church identity as an integral complement to reading Milton’s final poem as the spiritual discovery and proclamation of the Son, best known through Barbara K. Lewalski’s *Milton’s Brief Epic*. Ken Simpson tracks the progress of ecclesiastical realization by considering *Paradise Regained* within two new contexts. First, he focuses on the contribution to reformed theology made by the humanist agenda’s concentration on rhetoric and literature. This textual culture helped found the reformed tenet of the sole authority of the Word of God and its interpretation for the establishment and maintenance of the church. Second, he proposes that the brief epic constitutes the culmination best understood as Milton’s ongoing construal of the true church, a preoccupation from the early antiprelatical tracts through the continuous editing of *De Doctrina Christiana* during the Restoration. These two contexts coalesce in the image of *Paradise Regained* as literary “spiritual architecture.”

Simpson’s first chapter, “Writing the Church,” sets the terms and goals of his study. At the same time it exhibits the materials examined and exemplifies the method of historical and biographical framing, careful argument, and analytical reading of epitomizing language and image he employs throughout. The chapter opens recounting the familiar story of Milton’s calling to priesthood and prophecy from the Nativity Ode through the polemical church pamphlets, the commonwealth prose, the exhortations on the eve of the Restoration, and *Paradise Lost* plus *Samson Agonistes*. Then he focuses closely on the concepts of the all-sufficient salvational authority of the Bible as God’s Word and the invitation to all Christians to interpret and contribute to building a textual communion through their words. For his initial formulation Simpson concentrates on the “word of God,” which *De Doctrina* explicates radically by extending Erasmus’ humanist translation of “in principio erat” “logos” by “sermo” instead of “verbum.” He draws the conclusion that Milton self-consciously did so since he repeatedly followed this philological point to a radical antitrinitarian
theology: the relationship of the Father to the Son is that of speaker to spoken, the superior author’s intent mediated through the subordinate text’s representation. Rhetoric is transformed into theology through the mediating Son and then spirit: Word becomes flesh and text; ultimately mediation takes the form of the revelatory text written in the hearts of believers. Progressive revelations issue in the text of the invisible spiritual church communicated to and by believers. This argument leads Simpson to the hortatory Areopagitica, humanist oratory as homily. The “sermo” is dominated by metaphors of the church as a building which must be constructed, edified, and as a body which must be gathered like the gathering of Osiris’ body and truth in Milton’s prominent mythical allusion. Thus is laid the foundation for a progressive revelation and edification of the church by the endeavors of Christians freely exercising their calling to textual construction. Such an effort is exemplified in the spiritual architecture of Paradise Regained that is as integral to the poem as the progressive revelation, exemplification, and proclamation of the Son. For Simpson the two motives make up inseparable facets of the poem.

“The Priesthood of Believers and the Vocation of Writing” follows out the office of prophecy, the mediating inter-communication of silence and speech. This second chapter brings to bear patristic and Interregnum/Restoration theological arguments, Milton’s own writings, and critical controversies over the passages in Paradise Regained so as to explain the conspicuously silent climactic tower scene when Satan falls and the Son stands. Simpson shows how silence and speech inseparably communicate the all-sufficiency of God’s word for salvation of an invisible church of believers interpreting that word by free exercise of the inner guidance of the spirit as silence and speech simultaneously communicate the mystery of the incarnation.

“The Priesthood of Believers and the Vocation of Writing” follows out the office of priest, Milton’s radical extension of the Reformed conversion of clerical ministration of sacraments to the faithful preaching of the word, eliminating the distinction between clerical and lay and severing the church from the state. Thus priesthood is converted to prophecy and extended to the creation of literature and the exemplification of behavior in imitation of Jesus in an ongoing edification (in at least two senses) of the invisible church.
Again, Simpson works from two heritages of divine inspiration, that of poetry in humanistic rhetoric and that of the spirit in Christian hermeneutics. Then he tracks the development of Milton’s thought from his earliest poetry through the prose tracts into the late poems so as to set up a reading of *Paradise Regained* that pits the true prophetic ministry of the Son against the perverse parody of ministry in Satan’s temptations.

Postponing kingship to the final chapter, “The Renovation of Worship” makes the transition to ecclesiology by way of Milton’s radically Reformed conversion of church rituals in sacraments, set services, and formal prayers into a freer-flowing worship founded on the interpretation of the biblical word by means of the spirit’s text written in the individual heart.

*Paradise Regained* thus performs a literary act of worship and subsumes church rituals within the inspiration of the Word of God in both senses. Simpson shows Milton following out the early Reformation’s reduction of sacraments to two, their shift from presence to representation in their services, and their foundation of services on the biblical text rather than on tradition. The prophetic ministry based on prayer and interpretation of the word was for Milton reinforced by his sense of inspired poetic vocation. *Paradise Regained* embeds a worship service in the Son’s awaiting and announcing the Spirit’s motions. He endures patiently, obediently, and zealously searching himself as well as scripture for *kairos*, that “fullness of time” invoked by ritual’s congruence of fallen time with sacred time. Thus the Son’s baptism, prayers, interpretations of scripture, refusal of satanic food for the word of God and heavenly banquet, celestial hymning, and repetitive recollection of the moments when *kairos* appears in meditations that recurrently recount his life—all constitute a reformed communal church service.

“Astrology, Apocalypse, and the Church Militant” addresses the office of kingship. Against the theological history of arguments over the relationship between the visible and invisible church, and then through Milton’s increasingly thwarted hopes for their coalescence during the swirling politics of his own time, Simpson describes Milton’s ever greater emphasis on the spiritual, inward church and invisible communion as the only church available until the apoca-
lypse. Then comes his reading of the Son’s rejection of the extended temptation of kingdoms for an inner one. Similarly Simpson tracks Milton’s receding horizon of expectations for the apocalypse amidst the many polemics and astrological prognostications of his time in order to display Paradise Regained’s imagistic projections of Christ’s ultimate kingdom only at the end of time. Meanwhile Paradise Regained presents the literary edification of the invisible church in the testament of the biblical word interpreted by the words written on the hearts of the faithful.

Granting, as I do, the premises that De Doctrina Christiana is Milton’s, that his prose and poetry form a coherent pattern of evolution as he examined traditional and current theological controversies and that he extended them to radical ends, Ken Simpson’s Spiritual Architecture and Paradise Regained: Milton’s Literary Ecclesiology provides a comprehensive and persuasive complement to the thematic reading of the progressive identification and proclamation of the mystery of the Son of God in that of an ongoing revelatory definition and declaration of the invisible church of believers. The next task for this alignment of readings would be to expand and systematize beyond our current intermittent and allusive political interpretations a comprehensive political definition that evolves through Paradise Regained.


This collection of eight essays explores, in both Milton’s poetry and prose, his attitude toward the Jews. I find this approach problematic, because it confounds Milton’s approach to Jews and Judaism in his controversial works with his aesthetic deployment of Jewish traditions in his poetry. In many instances, Milton cited the Hebrew Bible in order to promote his anti-monarchical position, even to justify the killing of a king. In contrast, his treatment of the Book of Genesis in Paradise Lost and the Book of Judges in Samson Agonistes demonstrates a distinctly more creative and respectful elucidation of Jewish traditions (save for the Pauline transfer of the “elect” designation from Jews to