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The Devil on One Shoulder: Satan, Humanity, and the Holy Spirit

Abstract: This paper seeks to explain the oppositional relationship that exists between Satan and the Holy Spirit as beings who influence the actions and values of their subjects. The methods of exerting influence and motivations of these two beings throughout Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained are compared and contrasted in order to better understand their respective roles in relation to both God and one another. Ultimately, it is argued that Satan, through his reliance on reason as a means of opposing God's will, plays the part of a hypothetical "Unholy Spirit" when viewed in relation to the faith reliant Holy Spirit working in accordance with God's will.

A devil on one shoulder and an angel on the other is a plot device that has become prominent in modern media. The iconic image serves as a representation of a character's internal conflict while faced with a moral dilemma. In these circumstances, the involved character is often tempted by the devil to commit immoral acts for their own individual benefit, while the angel acts as the devil's antithesis, attempting to keep the character on a path of moral justice, with the interest of the common-good at heart. While the symbols of the shoulder angel and devil are often used with humorous intent in modern media, the relationship of conflicting moral influences seen between these symbols actually provides an illuminating lens from which we can view the relationships between some of English literature's most tragic, conflicted, and enigmatic figures. In John Milton's poems, *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, Milton,

without directly alluding to its visual iconography, provides an excellent example of the shoulder angel and devil relationship through his depictions of Satan and the Holy Spirit. This creation of this antithetical dynamic between Satan and the Holy Spirit is demonstrated throughout *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* through the methods by which Satan and the Holy Spirit influence their subjects, Adam, Eve and Jesus, as well as their conflicting intentions in exerting this influence, acting either in accordance with or against God's will.

In order to understand how Satan functions as the Holy Spirit's foil, it is first essential that one understands how Milton depicts the Holy Spirit throughout his oeuvre. Despite the vast amount of ambiguity that surrounds the personhood of the Holy Spirit in Milton's works, its intentional qualities remain evident throughout *Paradise Lost*, Milton's commentary on the Holy Spirit in *The Christian Doctrine*, and his poetry in "At a Solemn Music". Though the acts of the Holy Spirit are largely alluded to rather than outright stated in *Paradise Lost*, when asked by Adam who shall guide the faithful after the fall of man, the angel Michael states, "The promise of the Father, who shall dwell / His Spirit within them, and the Law of Faith / Working through love, upon thir hearts shall write, / To guide them in all truth, and also arm / With spiritual Armor, able to resist / *Satan's* assaults" (*Paradise Lost* 12: 487-491). This passage suggests that the Holy Spirit is intended to act as a spiritual and moral guide for those who remain faithful and believe in its messages. This passage is also notable as it suggests that the Holy Spirit had not been an active influence in Milton's chronology up to that point, only becoming involved with humanity after Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit. Additionally, in his poem "At a Solemn Music", Milton writes of the Holy Spirit's goals, stating "In first obedience and their state of good. / O may we soon again renew that Song, / And keep in tune with Heav'n..." (*At a Solemn Music* 24-26). This suggests that the Holy Spirit's role as a moral guide, also serves as a guide to

the faithful to be in union with God and heaven. As for the motives that underly the Holy Spirit's goals, as outlined in the previous passages, one can look to *The Christian Doctrine*. In this work, Milton states, "[The Holy Spirit] must evidently be considered as inferior to both Father and Son, inasmuch as he is represented and declared to be subservient and obedient in all things" (*The Christian Doctrine* 968). In conjunction with Milton's anti-trinitarian view of the Holy Trinity, a perspective that suggests a hierarchy within the Trinity, it can be deduced that Milton believes the Holy Spirit's intention to be the carrying out the will of God to which it is subordinate. By and large, what is suggested in these passages is that the Holy Spirit, motivated by the will of God, provides the its subjects with the strength of faith and guidance necessary to remain just and moral. While the intentional qualities of the Holy Spirit are largely evident in these passages, the means by which the Holy Spirit achieves his goals are still rather vague. In order to understand the Holy Spirit's methods, we must consider the work in which the Holy Spirit's influence is most conspicuous, *Paradise Regained*.

In Tazi Buchholz's *Fighting for Dependence*, Buchholz argues that Jesus, the Son's struggle in staving off Satan's temptations throughout *Paradise Regained* is notable because Jesus must rely entirely on his own strength of faith in God to guide him through Satan's temptations, sharply contrasting with the Son's direct connection to God in *Paradise Lost*. According to Buchholz, it is the successfully thwarting of Satan's temptations by Jesus through his faith that allows Jesus to regain paradise. While Buchholz's assertion that as a human, Jesus lacks the direct connection to God that he had previously is correct, Buchholz fails to identify that Jesus is connected to God, albeit indirectly, through the Holy Spirit's influence. While the Holy Spirit's influence on Jesus is implied throughout *Paradise Regained*, its influence is most apparent in Book IV when Milton writes:

O patient Son of God, yet only stood'st
 Unshaken; nor yet stay'd the terror there.
 Infernal Ghosts, and Hellish Furies, round
 Environ'd thee, some howl'd , some yell'd, some shriek'd,
 Some bent at thee thir fiery darts, while thou
 Satt'st unappall'd in calm and sinless peace (*Paradise Regained* 4: 420-425).

At this point in the poem, despite the terrible and turbulent environment that surround Jesus, Milton intentionally depicts Jesus as continuing to maintain inner peace. While continuing to maintain a level of obscurity, the inner peace that Milton describes here is largely indicative of the Holy Spirit's influence based on how the Holy Spirit has been described in previously discussed passages. As Michael suggested in *Paradise Lost*, the Holy Spirit is acting as spiritual armor against Satan's assaults and attempts at tempting Jesus. Furthermore, Jesus's state of inner peace alludes to the "paradise within" (*Paradise Lost* 12: 587), an inward state also associated with the influence of the Holy Spirit by Michael in *Paradise Lost*. In conjunction, these passages demonstrate Holy Spirit's means of influencing its subjects, and as a result explain why its presence is so obscure. Instead of influencing its subjects by asking questions or suggesting answers, the Holy Spirit exerts its influence more passively, suggesting that faith in God's will should be prioritized when faced with adversity and uncertainty. If this is the case, in what way does Satan function as a kind of "Unholy Spirit"?

Unlike his interpretation of the Holy Spirit, Milton is rather unambiguous in how he portrays Satan throughout *Paradise Lost*. In his depiction of Satan, Milton presents a comparatively less enigmatic character with rather explicit motivations who uses uncomplicated methods in order to achieve his end goals. Motivated by his desire to oppose God's will as an act

of vengeance against God, Satan is shown to manipulate his subjects by playing on their uncertainty by posing questions and rational arguments that eventually lead his subjects away from their faith. These motives and methods, which demonstrate how Satan serves as the Holy Spirit's foil, are largely shown in how Satan's relationship and interactions with *Paradise Lost's* tragic characters, Adam and Eve.

Satan's relationship with Adam and Eve is what eventually brings about the fall of man. While the Holy Spirit functions to guide humanity along the path of faith, morality and eventual unity with God, Satan functions as a guide to lead the faithful into temptation, away from the moral path, away from God, and into communion with Hell. This is demonstrated in Book IV, when, upon his first encounter with Adam and Eve, Satan states, "Like this fair Paradise, your sense, yet such / Accept your Maker's work; he gave it me, / Which I as freely give; Hell shall unfold, / To entertain you two... (*Paradise Lost* 4: 379-382). This passage demonstrates Satan's awareness of Adam and Eve's blissful state and his intentions to lead them away from God and into a communion with the turmoil of Hell. Satan's methods are further revealed in Book IV, when he states, "O fair foundation laid whereon to build / Thir ruin! Hence I will excite thir minds / With more desire to know, and to reject / Envious commands, invented with design / To keep them low whom Knowledge might exalt / Equal with Gods..." (*Paradise Lost* 4: 521-526). Evidently, Satan's relationship with Adam and Eve is built upon his intention to lead them away from faith and into disunion with God by having them break the single rule that God set for them upon their creation. This passage also demonstrates that Satan intends bringing about this betrayal of God through temptation and, more specifically, the promise of knowledge and power. Satan's use of knowledge to bait Adam and Eve into temptation is particularly important as it further demonstrates his antithetical role to the Holy Spirit who, conversely, seeks to emphasize

the value of faith over knowledge in its subjects. By this token, Satan's attempt to bring about the desire for knowledge is not only a step in his plan to make Adam and Eve break the one rule set out by God, but it also bringing about a balance of values that is diametrically opposed to those instilled by the Holy Spirit. That being said it is also important that we understand how Satan intends to bring about this new balance of values in Adam and Eve?

Unlike the Holy Spirit, whose role and influence are largely obscured by the being's lack of physical presence within Milton's poetry, Satan's reliance on rational thought as a means of influencing his subjects is immediately evident during his interactions with Adam and Eve. In Book IX, when guiding Eve away from God and into temptation, Satan states "If they all things, who enclos'd / Knowledge of Good and Evil in this Tree, / That who so eats thereof, forthwith attains / Wisdom without their leave? and wherein lies / Th' offense, that Man should thus attain to know? / What can your knowledge hurt him, or this Tree / Impart against his will if all be his?" (*Paradise Lost* 9: 722-7728). This passage demonstrates the divergence between Satan's methods and those of the Holy Spirit. Here, Satan relies heavily on direct questions of reason in order to manipulate Eve into eating the forbidden fruit. This contrasts greatly with the Holy Spirit's approach to guidance, relying on the strengthening of faith over reason. The foils between Satan and the Holy Spirit do not end at their differing methods, however.

Satan's antithetical role to the Holy Spirit is further made evident by their differing motivations for acting upon their subjects. This first becomes evident in Book II, when Beelzebub states "To waste his whole Creation, or possess / All as our own, and drive as we were driven, / The puny habitants, or if not drive, / Seduce them to our Party, that thir God / May prove thir foe, and with repenting hand / Abolish his own works. This would surpass / Common revenge, and interrupt his joy..." (*Paradise Lost* 2: 365-372). This passage reveals that Satan's

desire to bring about Adam and Eve's fall is almost entirely motivated by his desire to oppose God's will as revenge for driving him and the other fallen angels into Hell. This motive is wholly opposite to the Holy Spirit's motivation to carry out God's will, as was previously established in *The Christian Doctrine*. These contrary motivations further cement Satan's role as the Holy Spirit's antithesis.

As was previously stated, the shoulder angel and devil dynamic provides an illuminating lens from which we may view some of literatures most dramatic and tragic characters. Just as the shoulder devil plays the role of the shoulder angel's counter in guiding an individual's approach to a given moral conundrum, so too does Satan play the role of the Holy Spirit's counter in guiding their subjects through moral struggles. As the evidence presented has shown, Satan's use of reason to manipulate Adam and Eve, his desire to break their union with God, and his underlying motivation to oppose God's will at every turn in the name of revenge, all demonstrate his role as the antithesis of the Holy Spirit, a being who influences its subject through the strengthening of faith to bring them into union with God in accordance with God's will. The contrarian role that Satan plays in relation to the Holy Spirit in both his methods and motivations for exerting influence over their subjects shows that Satan effectively functions as a hypothetical "Unholy Spirit".

Work Cited

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