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### The Holy Spirit in *Paradise Lost*

*Abstract: This essay attempts to show how the Holy Spirit is represented in Paradise Lost, and the way in which the Spirit works through Milton. I argue that the various spirits Milton invokes throughout the poem are all the Holy Spirit and that the Spirit works through Milton on the poem itself. I make the point that Milton's ability to create this poem comes from the gifts given to him by the Holy Spirit to serve God's purposes in spreading the truth.*

John Milton included many characters in *Paradise Lost* that come from ancient myths, the Holy Bible, and even his own imagination. Some characters appear frequently, and others are merely hinted at. One character, in particular, appears in multiple mysterious ways. This is the character of Urania, also called the "heavenly spirit." When she is specifically mentioned, it is more often by the narrator than as a character in the poem or by one of the characters in the poem. The character is referenced by multiple names that could lead some to believe that she is not the same character in each instance, or that she is not even meant to be "Urania" at all. With the many names and attributes that make this character, and by the way this character seems to act on the poem itself, it can be shown that this is a single character that may be known by a different name. Although the poem does not specifically name the "Holy Spirit," I will argue that the invoked spirits represent the Holy Spirit that dwells in the hearts of those who believe in Jesus Christ, and that the Holy Spirit is shown to work on the poem itself and gifts Milton with

the ability to write it. There are many instances where the heavenly spirit is detectable, but for our purposes, the following examples will suffice.

One example of the heavenly spirit is found in book twelve. Contrary to the later instances, here the spirit is not invoked by Milton, but is rather mentioned by Michael to Adam. Adam is concerned that the believers in the Son, in future times, will face persecutions. Milton writes, “Hee to his own a comforter will send, / The promise of the Father, who shall dwell / His Spirit within them” (*Paradise Lost* 12:486-488). This being that is sent is apparently God’s very own Spirit. This Spirit has been promised and sent to comfort God’s own people. Milton writes, “To guide them in all truth, and also arm / With spiritual Armor” (*Paradise Lost* 12:490-491). By calling the spirit “His Spirit” and because we are told he arms them with “spiritual Armor” we know that this spirit is the Holy Spirit. As opposed to the other mentions of the heavenly spirit, this is the only one where it is certainly the Holy Spirit. The way the Holy Spirit is brought up here makes it sound like it is a new character in the poem. This could be a reason to reject the other mentions of the spirit as the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, when Michael tells Adam of the Holy Spirit, it is to be expected that he is referred to in a new manner because Adam doesn’t know about him yet. The Holy Spirit is not being invoked by Milton here as later shown but is being talked about by the characters. So, it very well could be that all the heavenly spirit references are referring to the Holy Spirit and this isn’t the first time the Holy Spirit is mentioned. While Michael talks about what the Holy Spirit will do and why he was sent, Milton writes “To evangelize the Nations, then on all / Baptiz’d, shall them with wonderous gifts endue / To speak all Tongues...” (*Paradise Lost* 12:499-501). One thing it says the Holy Spirit will do for some believers is give them the ability to speak God’s word in different languages and in different ways. Milton is a blind man. So, for him to be able to write *Paradise Lost*, or anything,

he must have someone to help him physically write it, and thus Milton has to speak the poetic words that he wants written. Throughout the poem, Milton has invoked the heavenly spirit to help him write, and here we see that the Holy Spirit helps believers speak God's word in different ways. For Milton, this poem is not read or written, it is spoken. So, *Paradise Lost* is a story about God's word that Milton has been given the tongue to speak by the Holy Spirit that dwells within him. The gift from the Holy Spirit is to help with God's plan for believers to evangelize.

Another instance is found in the beginning of book seven. We have Milton invoking the heavenly spirit to help him while writing. Milton writes, "Descend from Heav'n *Urania*, by that name / If rightly thou art call'd, whose Voice divine / Following, above th' *Olympian* Hill I soar" (*Paradise Lost* 7:1-3). We are immediately faced with the possibility that this invoked spirit is not actually the *Urania* of the classical Muses. The inspiration that Milton needs cannot be found from Mount Olympus, but rather must come from somewhere much higher. Instead, this spirit comes from heaven and follows the voice of the divine. Milton writes, "The meaning, not the Name I call: for thou / Nor of the Muses nine, nor on the top / Of old *Olympus* dwell'st..." (*Paradise Lost* 7:5-7). We see that it is indeed not the name "Urania" he calls, but what the name means. With *Urania* being the muse of astronomy, we see that Milton means the spirit from above, in the heavens—or the heavenly spirit. Milton writes, "...but Heavenly born, / Before the Hills appear'd, or Fountain flow'd" (*Paradise Lost* 7:7-8). Not only does this spirit reside in heaven, but it was also born in heaven. The spirit born before the fountain flowed tells us that it was around long before creation, so this couldn't be any spiritual being, besides the Holy Spirit, since the others were all created, and the Holy Spirit is not like other spirits. Milton writes, "Thou with Eternal Wisdom didst converse, / Wisdom thy Sister, and with her didst play / In

presence of th' Almighty Father" (*Paradise Lost* 7:9-11). It is also closely connected to "Eternal Wisdom," who was with the heavenly spirit in God's presence. The Holy Spirit is assumed to have no sisters, so it could be understood that the use of "Sister" could simply mean the two are intimately related. Milton writes, "Up led by thee / Into the Heav'n of Heav'ns I have presum'd" (*Paradise Lost* 7:12-13). Milton knows the greatness of this spirit he invokes and his purpose in writing. It has taken him from his lowly station and brought him into the high places in which it dwells to help him with this work of literature. Milton writes, "Return me to my Native Element: / Lest from this flying Steed unrein'd ... I fall / Erroneous there to wander and forelorn" (*Paradise Lost* 7:16-20). He feels a bit afraid that he has been brought too high and that he may not be able to handle the task at hand; so, he asks to be brought down and helped from there. He knows that the Holy Spirit is there to help him to share God's word through the gifts the Spirit gives him in writing. Milton writes, "So fail not thou, who thee implores: / For thou art Heavn'ly, shee an empty dream" (*Paradise Lost* 7:38-39). Milton still needs help, and he knows that this Spirit has the power, for it is from heaven, and no lowly Muse can help him. Only the power of heaven can be of adequate assistance in his time of need, and the Holy Spirit is the only spirit with such power. From this perspective, it can be seen that the heavenly spirit that Milton invokes in book seven is indeed the Holy Spirit, and that he needs the gifts of the Holy Spirit in order to accomplish his writing on such a lofty subject.

We see another instance the heavenly spirit is invoked by Milton in book nine. Milton is aware of the magnitude of, and difficulty in, writing this particular book. He knows that the subject of Adam and Eve eating the fruit is too lofty for him to approach on his own, but his helper can give him what he needs. Milton writes, "If answerable style I can obtain / Of my Celestial Patroness, who deigns / Her nightly visitation unimplor'd" (*Paradise Lost* 9:20-22).

Knowing the requirements for the “style” of writing, Milton looks to his celestial patroness for the help needed. An answerable style that corresponds to the greatness of the subject. The name “Celestial Patroness” gives us even more detail about this spirit. A patron is normally thought to support a person in whatever it is they are doing. So, when Milton needs to be held up above his station, so he can attain the ability to write this book, his celestial patroness is there to support him. This is the same thing done by the Holy Spirit for believers, so this is more evidence of this heavenly spirit being the Holy Spirit. Milton Writes, “And dictates to me slumb’ring, or inspires / Easy my unpremeditated Verse” (*Paradise Lost* 9:23-24). His patroness apparently visits him during the night and either gives him the words to write or the words he will later write. His verse is unpremeditated because it is not thought of beforehand by Milton, but rather is inspired in the moment by his helper. This inspiration is similar to, but not necessarily the same as, the inspiration given to the writers of scripture by the Holy Spirit. The difference lies in that the writers of Scripture were not writing of their own accord, but they were literally transcribing the word of God. Milton is presumably not attempting to be producing scripture, but instead trying to provide a way for the scriptural truth to be further heard and enjoyed. However, this is a difficult task, so Milton still needs the Holy Spirit to gift him with the ability to write. Milton writes, “...or Years damp my intended wing / Deprest; and much they may, if all be mine, / Not Hers who brings it nightly to my Ear” (*Paradise Lost* 9:45-47). To write this book, Milton must fly higher than normal, and if solely his own words, they won’t be high enough to amount to the loftiness of the subject. Thus, the words have to be from his “Celestial Patroness” if he wants to provide any type of answerable style. With the similarity between how his patroness inspires him and how the Holy Spirit inspires the writers of scripture, and with the supreme loftiness of the

subject and the help he will need, it is understandable that Milton's "Celestial Patroness" represents the Holy Spirit.

We see another way in which the Holy Spirit seems to act throughout the poem itself. Since it is understood that the Spirit gifts Milton with the ability to write, and helps him throughout, we can see how the Holy Spirit would use the different elements of the poetry to glorify God. An example of this is pointed out by Hannah Brawley in her essay, *Power in the Poetry: The Poetic Differences Between God and Satan's Speech*. What she notes has to do with the ending punctuation in books two and three. We see that Milton writes, "Wherefore do I assume / These Royalties...Refusing to accept as great as share / Of hazard as of honor, due alike / To him who Reigns, and so much to him due / Of hazard more, as he above the rest / High honor'd sits" (*Paradise Lost* 2:450-456). We have here Satan addressing his fellow fallen angels about himself making the journey to Eden. He has asked this rhetorical question because it implies that he will be the one to reign in hell. He seems to be deceiving them into viewing him as their leader. Brawley notes that, "Satan's single question reflects his self-interest and further demonstrates his need to convince others of his power" (Brawley 4). This example shows Satan's little amount of power in that he has to deceive those that have already followed him into making him their supreme leader. The Holy Spirit is helping Milton spread the truth of God's word. Highlighting the inadequacy and deceptive nature of Satan is a good way to do it. Conversely, we see that Milton writes, "So will fall / Hee and his faithless Progeny: whose fault? / Whose but his own? Ingrate, he had of mee / All he could have; I made him just and right, / Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall" (*Paradise Lost* 3:95-99). The Father is speaking to the Son about how all of humanity's fall was their own fault. He gave them all they needed to stand, but they lost it all by their own foolish choices. Brawley notes that, "God's questions in

his speech hint to his grace, but Satan's question allows him to shamelessly promote himself" (Brawley 5). There may be a slight parallel between God and Satan in that they both ask rhetorical questions, but the difference is that God shows himself to be good, providential, and sovereign, while Satan shows his deception and weakness. When Milton asks the Holy Spirit to help him write this work, this is just the kind of thing that he needs: for the truth to be magnified of God's goodness and Satan's lack thereof. One of the main points made by Brawley was that "By altering the implications of the punctuation used between Satan and God, Milton elucidates God's established throne and Satan's lack of such power" (Brawley 3-4). We see here an excellent example of how the Holy Spirit works through Milton within the poem's punctuation to glorify God.

In Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the Holy Spirit is not a character that plays a major role on the pages. Instead, he works within Milton to create the pages. Throughout the poem we see Milton invoke "Urania," his "Celestial Patroness," to help him write. What we have found, though, is that this isn't Urania at all. It is the Holy Spirit of God that has been given to believers for guidance in the truth and who gives them gifts to help further God's Kingdom and glory. The Holy Spirit may not be visibly seen very often within the poem, but he is always there. In every line and in every word, the Holy Spirit works through Milton to evangelize as far as the poem will travel.

## Works Cited

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