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The Angel, The Spirit, and The Formation of Community in *Paradise Lost*

*Abstract: This paper deals with the community-building power of the Holy Spirit and how the Spirit acts in relation to the children of Israel in Book 12 of Paradise Lost. Drawing from Milton's poem as well as Lauren Alexander's paper, "The Actions of Good and Evil," the necessity of the Spirit will be discussed regarding humanity's inability to live in communion with God in a fallen world. The figure of the Angel that travels alongside the Israelites during their exodus will be analyzed as being the personification of the Holy Spirit accomplishing the function of guiding and maintaining the community.*

This paper argues that the Holy Spirit is present with the nation of Israel in Book 12 of *Paradise Lost* as they are freed from Egypt and as they travel to the Promised Land. A few sections involving Israel and their exodus will be analyzed, and the main concern of the argument in this regard will focus on how the Israelites were guided by an Angel of the Lord on the journey. It is proposed that the Angel that guides the Israelites is, in fact, the Holy Spirit. The nature of the Holy Spirit as it applies to miracles will be discussed in conjunction with the Angel, and the function of the Holy Spirit for building a community will be analyzed by looking at how the Israelites are unified with one another, even before their exodus, because they are God's chosen people. The belief in God – and by extension, the presence of the Holy Spirit – is what creates this community. The union of the Israelites exemplifies that which exists between Creation and God because they are united with one another in belief in God and His promise to

protect them; therefore, the Holy Spirit is doing the work of unifying this community, as well as protecting it in the form of the Angel in Book 12 of *Paradise Lost*.

The significance of the Holy Spirit in creating communion must first be established, beginning with the reason for the Spirit's presence. Why is the Spirit needed if God is active in watching over His creation? The necessity of the Holy Spirit is that God is limited when it comes to interacting with creation after the Fall. The sin in the Garden of Eden created a division between God and creation because God cannot be in communion with sin. Death was the penalty for Adam and Eve's sins, as it says in Book 12, "suffering death, / The penalty to thy transgression due, / And due to theirs which out of thine will grow: / So only can high Just rest appaid" (*Paradise Lost* 12: 398-401). Something had to be done for the unity between God and creation to be restored, so the Son volunteered to be a sacrifice and propitiation for the sins of Adam and Eve and the rest of humankind. Through this act of sacrifice, Christ became the mediator and cornerstone of Christian faith, laying the groundwork for the reunion between God and His creation.

Though Christ becomes the mediator for a sinful world, humanity is still fallen and unable to get back to God and Christ without a guide, which is where the Holy Spirit steps in to help. The Holy Spirit dwells with believers in place of the Father and the Son to "guide them in all truth, and also arm / With spiritual Armor" (*Paradise Lost* 12: 490-491). It is the Spirit that gives humans the ability to resist sin. In the paper "The Actions of Good and Evil," Lauren Alexander compares the actions and motivations of Adam and Satan, establishing an important difference between the two. For Alexander, the deciding factor in the fate of the two rests in Adam's desire to be with God as opposed to Satan's hatred of God. Alexander states, "Adam's continuous communion with God draws him back from continuing to commit sin" (Alexander 4).

This statement is referring to Adam's faith as a motivating factor for his decision to repent, and for the sake of this argument, the point can also be extended to the work of the Holy Spirit in believers, as they are able to have communion with God because of faith and the presence of the Spirit. In the case of Israel, the Holy Spirit is present with them perpetually, forming the community and functioning within it to keep them safe and to allow them to honor God.

Before, during, and after leaving captivity in Egypt, the Holy Spirit forms a unity among the children of Israel and also creates a community between them and God. The very establishment and existence of the nation of Israel displays the unification of the Spirit – they are together as a group of believers and as a chosen people because of their belief and trust in God. This belief is what holds them together, and God blesses them for it. God specifically chose the nation of Israel instead of other groups of humanity because other nations chose to reject Him and His commandments, causing Him to “withdraw / His presence from among them” (*Paradise Lost* 12: 107-108). The exclusive nature of God's choice to dwell with the Israelites suggests more about the community, implying that there is a “boundary” that is decided based on who believes (thereby having the Holy Spirit) and who does not. The people of Israel, both as individuals and as a group, worship God, and this worship creates, at the very least, a common interest; therefore, a community is formed through this interest. However, it is more than just a common interest that makes this community function as a whole. The work of the Holy Spirit can be observed through the unification that results from it, and this unification is more than just sharing a hobby or something similar – it is a God-given purpose and drive to do what is pleasing to the Lord, which cannot be done except through the direction of the Holy Spirit.

A key part to arguing that the Spirit is present with the Israelites is to acknowledge what actions must be done for believers to accept the Spirit and for the Spirit to fulfill the functions

God has ordained. God gives His creation free will; although He is omnipotent and almighty, He still allows room for His children to make their own decisions. For creation to become one with God, temptation and sin must be overcome. No human can overcome sin except for Jesus, so the role of the Holy Spirit is to allow help in withstanding temptation. The Spirit does the work of sanctification when humans humble themselves and choose to follow God. Actions, then, play a role in the restorative function of community building. In the previously mentioned paper, Alexander points to the importance of the different actions and decisions of the characters of Adam, Eve, and Satan in response to their sins. Alexander says that Adam and Eve's repentance allows them to "recover and paint their own character with shades of goodness by following the commands of God," whereas Satan's refusal to repent is motivated by the fact that "his faith and obedience to God is shattered" (Alexander 6). This is a relevant point because it can be used to emphasize the significance of choice; while free will is maintained, and humans can still choose to sin even with the Spirit dwelling within them, it is the work of the Spirit that urges them to choose to honor God and to obey His commands. For the Israelites, the Spirit remains with them because of their decision to follow God, and the Spirit allows them to continue to act in this decision to strengthen this relationship. Additionally, Moses, as leader of the Israelites, is given powers by God to fulfill His purpose, but only after Moses has made the decision to allow God to work through him. The significance of Moses will be discussed in more detail later in this paper. For all the Israelites, the Spirit is continually forming a restored community between them and God through the actions of the believers themselves.

Within the established community of Israel, the Holy Spirit is seen to be physically present as they make their way out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, and into the wilderness. A significant part of this presence is the Angel through whom God watches over the Israelites and

guides them to safety. Who or what is this Angel, and why does God entrust so much power to them? One explanation could be that this Angel is another messenger of God, fulfilling essentially the same role as Raphael and Michael do for Adam and Eve throughout *Paradise Lost*. However, it seems unlikely that this is the case, chiefly because of the fact that this Angel does not have a proper name as do the other angels Milton discusses (Raphael, Michael, Abdiel, etc.). In fact, in footnotes on the bottom of this page in the Hughes edition, it says that Milton, as he also does in *Christian Doctrine*, points out that God “lent His name to an angel” (459). Milton was aware of occasions in the Bible where God or Jesus appears to people in the form of an angel. Additionally, it says, “Such wondrous power God to his Saint will lend, / Though present in his Angel, who shall go / Before them in a Cloud, and Pillar of Fire” (*Paradise Lost* 12: 200-202). This Angel must be unique from other angels, and this could mean one of three things: that the Holy Spirit is within the Angel, that the Angel is actually God, or that the Angel is the Holy Spirit. These three conclusions would each have important differences and implications, and in subsequent paragraphs, this paper will aim to discuss both the significance of and the reasoning for choosing to argue that the Angel is the Holy Spirit.

One important fact in arguing that the Angel is the Holy Spirit is that the Angel is connected to the miracles of the pillar of fire and the cloud. The Angel goes before the Israelites “in a Cloud, and Pillar of Fire ... To guide them in thir journey, and remove / Behind them” (*Paradise Lost* 12: 202, 204-205). Furthermore, it appears that God’s presence is within this fire and cloud, or at least able to act through it, as it says, “Then through the Fiery Pillar and the Cloud / God looking forth will trouble all his Host / And craze thir Chariot wheels” (*Paradise Lost* 12: 208-210). Of course, angels are powerful, as it is obvious that they are given certain roles and abilities by God to fulfill His purposes. However, the fact that this Angel can do

miracles directly involving or invoking God's presence suggests that the Angel could be the Holy Spirit. Milton points to the ability of the Spirit to give believers "wondrous gifts ... / To speak all Tongues, and do all Miracles, / As did thir Lord before them" (*Paradise Lost* 12: 500-502). The pillar of fire and cloud are miracles, and if it is the Holy Spirit and/or God that creates miracles, then there can be a line drawn between the Angel and the Spirit. The ability of the Angel to do all this suggests that the character is more than just an angel or a servant to God.

Counterarguments may suggest that the Angel just had the Spirit within or was blessed by God and endowed with the power to do miracles. One could also propose that the Angel is God Himself instead of His Spirit. We do know that God was there in some capacity with the Israelites because it says that God was "looking forth" through the fire and the cloud, as mentioned previously. His omnipresence notwithstanding, it would appear that God was literally there in some way. Milton believed that God and the Holy Spirit were separate, however. Since God is watching over the Israelites from the cloud and the fire, it can be inferred that He is there, but what about His Spirit? Although Milton clearly says that the presence of the Lord was with the Angel, he does not clarify that the Angel *is* God, and this seems to be a deliberate choice on Milton's part. This is where the Angel being the Holy Spirit would become more significant – the reason for God sending an Angel instead of just His being present with the Israelites seems to suggest that the physicality, or at least the presence, of the Angel is an important part of the equation. The Angel is acting as a guide and is performing miracles to bring God's presence to the Israelites. The Holy Spirit also acts as a guide and unifies believers with the presence of God. Therefore, by sending an Angel to fulfill His purpose, God is protecting His children in the same manner as He does by sending the Holy Spirit to them. Without the Angel, there would not have been the same access and interaction between God and the Israelites, which means that the Holy

Spirit, as personified in the Angel, is working with the community to guide and protect them. As for the possibility of the Angel having the Spirit within instead of being the Spirit, the simplest answer would be that the Holy Spirit would not need to perform the same functions for the angels as for humanity. The functions already discussed in this paper (community building, sanctification, and creating a union with God) are necessary only for humanity because of the division created by the Fall. Therefore, considering that the Angel's actions can be directly compared to the roles of the Spirit and that the Spirit would not need to be within other angels, then the Angel present with the Israelites must be the Holy Spirit.

What meaning, then, does the presence of the Holy Spirit in the form of the Angel have for the community of Israel, both in this moment at the Red Sea and beyond? The presence of the Spirit creates union and communion. There is already a community formed even before the exodus due to the Israelites' faith in the Lord's promise and His choice to make them His people. Belief in God means that the Holy Spirit is with them, and the two go hand in hand – the Spirit creates this community as a defining feature of it while being a part of it as well. The people are united over one common goal to worship the Lord, and that goal is aided by the work of the Holy Spirit; the actions of believers are important because of the existence of free will and their choice to follow God. In the specific example of the exodus of the Israelites, the Spirit is directly working with and for them because they follow and obey the Lord. The presence of the Angel further strengthens the community of the Israelites by protecting them as a group and leading them through the wilderness, similar to how the Spirit acts with and for believers. God is giving protection and guidance to His chosen people, which means that He (and the Spirit) are treating them as a community. Each of these points prove that the Israelites are a community united in belief and aided by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Even though the Angel and God could perform miracles for the Israelites, it was through Moses that God parted the Red Sea. God allowed Moses the ability to use his rod to part the waters, as one line says, “Such wondrous power God to his Saint will lend” (*Paradise Lost* 12: 200). Why wouldn’t God part the sea Himself or just allow the Angel to do so instead of Moses? An answer to this question is that God doesn’t do the work for His creation or treat them as puppets, and He works *through* them instead of *using* them. Moses had to believe in God and submit his actions to God’s will, and after doing that, God gave him the ability to fulfill the tasks He had planned for him. There would be no point to these events if God did all the work for them and faith was not needed. The Spirit would also not be needed to create a community if the community would then be one-sided, with God doing all the necessary actions. God’s children must do the work of participating in the community formed by the Spirit, and when He works through His chosen leaders, such as Moses, they are glorifying Him by showing how He chooses to do His perfect work in imperfect vessels. Let this not be confused with salvation based on works – perhaps it could be viewed as works based on salvation, instead. These works fulfill God’s purpose and allow His children to grow in their faith in Him, but free will and reason are still essential to this system functioning properly. As Alexander concludes, “We are able to create for ourselves the kind of beings we want to be, and our relationship to God motivates us to pursue the path of righteousness” (Alexander 7). This applies to all of humanity. Returning to the previously mentioned example put forth by Alexander, Adam had the opportunity to continue living in sin, but he chose to repent; Alexander points to Adam’s faith as the deciding factor for this choice. Moses had this same option, and he allowed God to work through him. The very existence of choice and the freedom to do what one wishes are defining aspects of the

community formed by the Holy Spirit in that the believer must be able to choose to take part in this restoration and to consciously strive to do what is pleasing to the Lord.

The communion between creation and God is exemplified through the descriptions in Book 12 of the nation of Israel and the times when the Holy Spirit is with them, before and after leaving Egypt. The Holy Spirit is present in Israel throughout the course of the various scenes described by Michael in *Paradise Lost*. The presence of the Holy Spirit creates a community of believers within the nation of Israel that is led and protected by an Angel of the Lord. This Angel is the personification of the Holy Spirit and performs roles for the Israelites that the Spirit also does for the rest of humanity. God is also present within the miracles that protect the Israelites. The ability of Moses to part the Red Sea, rather than God or the Angel doing so alone, emphasizes the importance of actions and choice for believers, and God working through Moses signifies the power that belief and humility have for those who listen to God and accept the Holy Spirit. The community established and maintained by the Spirit is created by a common belief in the Lord and His promises for them as well as a conscious decision to trust in God, and the instances where God, through His Holy Spirit, assists the Israelites prove how they are recognized as a community that is chosen by God and is directed and protected by Him.