

The Use of Bible in Milton's Epics: Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained

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Abstract

This paper will try to trace out the poetic use of biblical incidents, events, illusions, tone, paraphrases and materials that are found in the passages and quotes of John Milton's two great and remarkable masterpieces, Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained with references to the Bible. This paper will present a clearer sense of the aura of truth which Milton was striving to achieve in those parts of his epics based clearly on certain biblical passages and in those parts which his own imagination develops from germinal biblical text. A lot of important passages and quotations are mentioned that represent the significance and use of Bible in both the incredible epics. For example- In Paradise Lost, the lines- "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 Wast present" state that Milton's invocation to the spirit are soundly scriptural based with the use of biblical language and his view of the spirit also has Biblical authority. John Milton employs hundreds of such biblical references in significant ways in both the texts.

Keywords- John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, Bibles references, Biblical Allusions and Authorities.

Introduction

John Milton was one of the most important and prominent English writer, intellectual and author of the most controversial epics, *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* which are incredibly creative masterpieces of the 17th century based on Biblical Stories of Fall of Man due to his disobedience of god, "*Of Mans First Disobedience, and the Fruit of that Forbidden Tree*" and His Spiritual Redemption and finally towards Consummation.

John Milton was born in 1608 to a puritan, cultured, religious bourgeoisie family. He came of a family remarkable for its religious zeal. Due largely to his parents, Milton had great interest in

Christian tradition which is firmly based on the *Bible*. Everyone knows that Milton's interest and knowledge of *Bible* is as thorough as his knowledge of classics and that his epics are

classical in form and biblical in content. He was one of the most astute literary critics of the *Bible*.

John Milton is most famous for his epic poetry through which he cast a formidable shadow over English poetry in the 18th and 19th century. Milton as the master of epics wrote several greatest epics which are *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, *Samson Agonistes*, *Lycidas*, etc. These works confirm John Milton's reputation as one of the most dedicated figure in the 17th century of English literature. All epic poems contain some common features and Milton follows this outline with great precious and style. His every poem uses the guidelines of an epic poem and elaborates upon them to make his poem one of the most popular epics written. He published his first collection of poems in 1646. He composed the ten books of *Paradise Lost* between 1658 and 1663. He had first prearranged the work as early as 1640, expanding to write a tragedy titled *Adam Unparadise*. *Paradise Lost* first published in 1667 and its sequel *Paradise Regained* was published in 1671.

This present paper tries to ground how the producer of these monumental epics, John Milton has used the Biblical references as an influential and special theme in his great texts.

Milton epics can be called as the detailed versions of *Bible*. His epics contain stories that are mostly taken from the *Bible*. His epics are saturated with *Bible*, Biblical events and materials. *Bible* becomes the most important source in his epic poems or prose. Blind Milton may be when he wrote his masterpieces but to him remained an open book. After reading his *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, any one shall appreciate the exactness of his knowledge in taking the references from the *Bible*. The

biblical elements in poems can't be ignored as like the classical elements. No one can separate Milton from the *Bible*. His biblical faith shows that he was a great Christian and *Bible* holds the primary position in his estimation and always been to him the inspired words of God and his soul guide of faith which has become the chief source for his literary work. He considered Bible as the revelation of divine truth and the only source of true doctrine. John Milton epics not only made him famous but gave him the status of man of biblical Learnings. Milton makes use of Bible and biblical materials to give the realistic touch to his poems. Basil Millie has described- "***There is still remained one source and only from which the 17th century Protestant poet could draw images and fables which were not only poetic but also true: The Bible.***" The various editors of Milton through the eighteenth century held differing views of Milton as a man, as an artist, and as a Christian.

Paradise Lost and *Paradise Regained* are the two works which involved Milton's highest power as a poet on the one hand and as a man of Biblical Learning on the other. It is especially true of *Paradise Lost* but also true of *Paradise Regained* that the Christian reader who has a knowledge of the scriptures as well as religion will gain the most instruction and light from these texts because John Milton wrote as he strives to achieve a clearer sense of the aura of truth by reference to biblical illusions in which some parts are clearly based on certain Biblical passages and some parts are imaginative expansion of biblical texts through Milton's own imagination. Bible contributes a great deal to the music and imagery of Milton's poetry. He used biblical illusions for the authoritative establishment of mood and setting, the movement of the present action and the suspense of the foreshadowing action, the

suggestions of biblical language and the delineation of character. Milton's peculiarly epics uses of the Bible are shown as aiding him in his achievement of the sublimity, variety and thematic unity so vital to the literary epic.

Bible and *The Paradise Lost* and *The Paradise Regained*

Bible plays the most significant role in *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*. We must say that both the texts are the poetic rewriting of the book of Genesis from the Bible. *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* concern the stories of Genesis of the Fall of Man and tells the story of Lucifer, the fallen angel the temptation of Adam and Eve by the fallen angel Satan and man's Redemption and Restoration and Jesus' work of Salvation and the defeat of Satan and his followers. In the lines from *Paradise Lost*:

“Of Mans First Disobedience, and the Fruit; Of that Forbidden Tree, whose mortal tast; Brought Death into the World, and all our woe, With loss of Eden, till one greater Men Restore us,..”

Milton sets atmosphere of biblical illusion and an atmosphere in which every action, every speech, every description is fraught with background and reaches back into the past as chaos, creation, fall and then redemption and restoration, which we can see in the very opening lines of *paradise lost* where there are no less than fifteen different biblical references in just thirteen lines. Biblical allusions set up an aura of authoritative reality early by their reference to particular places and persons and by their suggestion of some of the central doctrines of Christianity (the fall and conquest Death, redemption by Christ and an inspired revelation of God in the Bible). Milton is

appealing us to make a kind of connection which we can make while reading *Bible*.

In *Paradise Regained*, there is much more of a clear Scriptural record of the temptation of Christ by Satan than of the subject matter of *Paradise Lost*. In *Paradise Regained*, book opens with frank appraisal by Satan of events leading up to and including the baptism of Jesus. Satan tells the truth in spite of himself, for his Biblical allusions are accurately used although he occasionally interjects doubt. Within the text there are two hundred and twenty-two definite references to the Bible of which nineteen are to longer passage, with only fourteen used twice or more and with thirty references to more than one Scriptural passage. There are only eighty references to the Old Testament, probably because the subject is a New Testament one, with ninety-five references to the Gospels, some of which are of more than two verses. More than half books of the Bible are represented and nearly all the longer ones. The whole purpose of Satan's temptation is stated in the poem in Biblical Language.

Biblical record is briefer and less dramatically conceived but Milton has built practically his whole structure on the text of the *Bible* and its connotations. In his epics Milton takes ideas from the *Bible* and makes some deviations and extensions to give the wide picture of the scenes like, in *Genesis*, God created the world in seven days, as he created all the things in six days and took rest for the seventh day but in Milton's text, for the seven nights Satan encircled the earth and on eighth night he entered the garden of Eden to tempt the Eve. Similarly, *Genesis* talks about the creation of world, creation of men, woman and their fall but in Milton's epic, it gave the back stories of the war in heaven and why God created man and birth of Sin, Death and Hell Hounds.

There is no detailed description of Satan in the book of Genesis unlike in John Milton's poems. When Adam and Eve ate the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, their paradise was lost and they would now taste it. And God leaves the story open to the future with the possibility of redemption and regaining of paradise. *Paradise Regained* is consistent with biblical descriptions of Jesus plainness in his life and his teachings. In *Paradise Regained*, Milton puts the particular episode of the temptation into a biblical perspective. Many illusions recalled biblical passages which emphasize Christ's humanity his diligence in the study of the scripture, his compassion for all men and his passion and death. Man's pathos begins tragically in *Genesis* with paradise being lost but ends biblically and triumphantly in revelation chapter with paradise being regained. The defeat of Satan as tempter fulfills the prophecy in Genesis- "*the seed of Adam shall bruise the serpent's head*", this is one of several such images in the *Bible*.

Aside from having provided the basic stories for Milton, the *Bible* and Biblical allusion works for him as a means of making the action former characters, and setting believable, probable, and real and as a means of establishing an illusion of biblical authority even for the invented parts of great epic poems.

Conclusion

John Milton was a proponent of monism and animist materialism, the notion that a single material substance which is animate, self-active and free composes everything in the universe, from stones and trees and bodies to minds, souls, Angels, and God. Similarly from this paper it can be seen that how John Milton has intellectually made the use of Bible as an influential source in

his remarkable epics *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*. Both the texts clearly dramatizes the stories from the Bible which can be seen in the passages and images formed by Milton everywhere in his poems. This study of Milton's use of the Bible in his epic poems reveal the great mind of Milton acting as a prism through which the light of the Bible passes to be broken up into all the colors of the rainbow: he communicates the authority of Biblical truth, instills confidence in the ultimate triumph of god and good, dramatically develops character and action, orders emotion, and raises awe and admiration for the Almighty, especially as he is manifested in his Son.

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