

PRE-MILTONIC REPRESENTATIONS OF ADAM AS A CHRISTIAN*

IN THE Genesis account of the original sin, after Adam and Eve have tasted the forbidden fruit, the Lord God pronounces on them and on the serpent who seduced them three curses. The first of these dooms is spoken to the serpent: "Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: and I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." Thus the curse is translated in the King James version of the Bible; in Roman Catholic translations there is a significant difference about which I shall comment later. It is hardly necessary to point out that this primitive story, purporting as it does to explain how the serpent came to lose his legs and how the hostility originated between men and snakes, is remarkably similar to other tales of metamorphoses—ranging from the classic myth of Philomela's transformation into a nightingale down to Kipling's story of how the elephant got his trunk and Uncle Remus's explanation of how Brer Rabbit lost his tail.

The second of God's curses is directed against the woman, who is told that henceforth all women shall be ruled by their husbands and shall suffer agony in giving birth to children. And the third curse is spoken to Adam: because of man's sin, says the Lord God, the very earth shall lose its original perfection and shall hereafter bear thorns and thistles as well as fruit; consequently man shall from now on labor for his

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food; and worst of all, mankind (originally created immortal) shall henceforth be mortal.

The book of Genesis has very little more to say about Adam. He is driven out of Eden; he has three sons: Cain, Abel and Seth; and at the age of 930 he dies. The tragedy of his biography, such as it is, is unrelieved by any note of hope.

In strong contrast to this gloomy ending is the close of John Milton's version of the same story. The subtle mood with which *Paradise Lost* ends is one in which the poignant sadness of Adam and Eve is alleviated by an interfusion of Stoic resignation to the human lot, and of triumphant Christian hope.

It will be interesting to discover how Milton, who as a Puritan certainly believed that the Bible story itself was sacred and literally true and that it contained all that a Christian need know, could justify himself in altering even the spirit of the original account.

How is it that the effect produced on the modern reader by *Paradise Lost* is so entirely different from that produced by the Genesis story? Anyone remembering the last two books of the poem is likely to answer that the triumphant hope with which the epic closes is a result of the vision of the future which is shown to Adam by the Archangel Michael. After Adam and Eve have sinned and after the Lord has pronounced the judgments on them and on the serpent, God in Heaven sends the Archangel to dismiss them from the Garden—an action which is faithful enough to the Biblical source. But here Milton adds something which is not even suggested in Genesis. God instructs Michael to

Dismiss them not disconsolate; reveal
To Adam what shall come in future days,
As I shall thee enlighten, intermix
My Cov'nant in the woman's seed renewed;
So send them forth, though sorrowing, yet in peace.

Consequently, before banishing Adam from the Garden, the angel shows him a vision of the entire history of the world from his own time down to Judgment Day. Thus informed of the role which Christ will play in the salvation of mankind, Adam puts his faith in salvation through Christ and says to the angel:

Greatly instructed I shall hence depart,
 Greatly in peace of thought, and have my fill
 Of knowledge, what this Vessel can contain;
 Beyond which was my folly to aspire.
 Henceforth I learn, that to obey is best,
 And love with fear the only God, to walk
 As in his presence, ever to observe
 His providence, and on him sole depend,
 Merciful over all his works, with good
 Still overcoming evil, and by small
 Accomplishing great things, by things deem'd weak
 Subverting worldly strong, and worldly wise
 By simply meek; that suffering for Truth's sake
 Is fortitude to highest victory,
 And to the faithful Death the Gate of Life;
 Taught this by his example whom I now
 Acknowledge my Redeemer ever blest.

Even if this quite unfounded revelation of the future by Michael were the only method by which Milton could convert Adam to Christianity, the modern reader would find in it nothing objectionable. The device is obviously derived from the great epic poems of antiquity. Homer in the *Odyssey* and Vergil in the *Aeneid* permit Ulysses and Aeneas to see visions of *their* respective futures; for Milton to grant Adam the same privilege is to preserve the epic tradition. Milton's avowed purpose in writing *Paradise Lost* is to make men see that God's inscrutable ways are just; and this aim can be accomplished only if the reader sees that not one member of the race of man was lost simply because of Adam's first sin. That Milton converted the story of harsh justice in

Genesis into one of tender mercy is reason enough—in the opinion of modern readers—for his adding a great deal of revelation not to be found in the original tale.

But seventeenth-century Christians were less indulgent about any writer's taking liberties with Biblical history, and Puritans especially would have resented Milton's distorting the spirit of the original story of Adam. That there was no contemporary criticism of the representation, in *Paradise Lost*, of Adam as a converted Christian is evidence enough, then, that there was nothing exceptionally novel about such a representation and that, in fact, Protestants were already accustomed to reading into the very verses of Genesis a proof that Adam knew of a Redeemer to come. Such readers, in perusing *Paradise Lost*, would take the episode of the angel's revealing the future to Adam for what it was: a pleasant poetic fiction cleverly patterned after similar episodes in Homer and Vergil, useful but not essential to the poet's serious explanation of how God's mercy triumphs over his justice. For, such readers would have understood that *before* Michael came to talk with him, Adam had already realized that the sentence of death passed on him by God was not so severe as it had at first seemed and had found, by pondering over a double meaning in God's words to him immediately after the Fall, enough Gospel to make him a Christian. Without departing from the words of Genesis, Milton had already shown that after the Fall God renewed his covenant with Adam and promised him salvation.

Before examining more closely the way Milton has Adam reflect on the enigmatic words of his Judge and gradually come to realize their full significance, I will first review the attitude which Christians in the first centuries of the Church and during the Middle Ages had toward Adam himself and

toward the question whether or not he knew anything of the Redeemer who was to be born one of his descendants.

One might expect that Adam, since he had brought about the downfall of the human race, would be regarded by his descendants with contempt and loathing—in other words, as the villain of the Genesis story. Such, however, appears never to have been the case. Among the Jews the traditional attitude toward Adam was one of pious filial respect for the founder of the race and indulgent sympathy for a fellow human being: the attitude that anybody in Adam's place would probably have done the same. This point of view was adopted by the early Christians, persisted through the Middle Ages, and survives into the twentieth century. The tradition grew up—and was never disputed—that Adam was a righteous man; that, sadder and wiser after his first sin, he passed the remainder of his 930 years in irreproachable piety. (Eve was less fortunate in the judgment passed on her by posterity). There was a widespread belief that Adam had eventually achieved salvation and was now in Paradise, but the manner of his victory was explained in a way quite different from that described by Milton.

From the earliest days of the Christian Church the salvation or damnation of those righteous men who had lived before Christ—and Adam was usually, if not always, included in this group—was a matter of serious concern. Salvation, all agreed, was possible only through the mediation of Christ; and yet the great-hearted fathers of the Church perceived in the strict interpretation of this plan of divine *justice* something indistinguishable from *injustice* according to the noblest human conception. That *all* men should die for Adam's sin was just, and the exemption provided by the new covenant was a dispensation unmerited by man and illustrat-

ing an attribute over and beyond justice: God's mercy, or grace. But though no man deserved this blessing, if it was offered to all who lived in Christian times, how in fairness had grace been withheld from those who had died before the proclamation of the Gospel? If the question could arise in the first century, when the post-mortem state of non-Christians was regarded by many of the greatest Christian minds as mere cessation of life and when the contrast between the fates of those souls which went to Heaven and those which merely sank into oblivion was consequently not so pronounced as it later became, the same question had become an issue of major importance by the Middle Ages, when the idea of a local Hell of excruciating pain had been universally accepted.

Soon after the beginning of the Christian Church, then, it became customary to explain that pre-Christians had *not* been excluded from salvation. Commentators were by no means unanimous in their opinions as to how such men had been or would be saved, but within a few centuries after the Crucifixion the common belief was that during the two nights and one day when Jesus' body lay in the tomb his soul descended into Hell, where either (1) he preached the Gospel to all the dead and rescued all who believed and accepted baptism, or (2) without preaching and baptizing he simply released from death all who during their lifetime had looked forward to his incarnation and had led just lives. In either case, it was almost universally agreed that Adam—along with Noah, Abraham, David and others—was one of those whom Christ led to Paradise at this time of his descent into Hell.

It seems highly improbable that such a belief was held at the time that the canonical books of the New Testament were written, although *after* the belief was established certain ob-

scure verses in Scripture were cited in support of it. The article, "he descended into Hell," was not included in the Nicene Creed. It was not until the fourth century that it came to be included in the Apostles' Creed, and even then the reason for its inclusion was probably only to stress the doctrine that Christ was human as well as divine—that he suffered as human beings suffer by really dying and being placed in the tomb—against the Docetic heresy that Christ was actually never a human being at all.

But whether such a belief in the descent into Hades was held by the apostles or not, by the time of St. Augustine, in the fifth century, it was generally accepted. And the belief seems to have grown out of the popularity of a purely fictional book which the Church at no time accepted as divinely inspired—the epigraphical story known as *The Gospel of Nicodemus*. When this curious story was first written it is impossible to say: the oldest extant manuscripts date no earlier than the ninth century, but some scholars believe that the story must have been known in the second century. As background for *Paradise Lost* it is of interest because its account of the salvation of Adam is so entirely different from that used by Milton. That part of *The Gospel of Nicodemus* which is pertinent to Adam is the part called "The Harrowing of Hell." It is narrated by two men who claim to have been dead and in Hell until released by Christ at the time of his descent and sent back to earth to report the event to living human beings. Their story begins with a description of the arrival of John the Baptist in Hell after he has been murdered by Herod. John joins Adam, Noah, Abraham, David and all the other souls who have died since the creation of the world; but the Baptist brings a message of great hope. He tells his fellow-prisoners that in a short while Christ will de-

scend into Hell and free them from Death and Hades. The glad tidings are received with enthusiasm, and while the expectant dead await deliverance Adam urges his son Seth to relate to the others in Hell an account of how he (Adam) first came to hear about the Redeemer. (It will be noted that there is no reference here to the double-meaning which Milton found in the words of the Lord God after the Fall, as given in Genesis.)

Seth explains that when his father Adam lay on his death-bed his last request had been for Seth to make a journey to the Garden of Eden (which no human has ever entered since Adam and Eve were expelled) and to beg for oil from the tree of mercy in order to administer it to his dying father. The angel who stopped Seth at the Garden gate refused the request for oil of mercy and refused to allow Seth to enter the Garden, but he did give him a message of hope to take back to Adam. He explained to Seth that 5500 years after the Creation God himself would become a man; that he would then anoint Adam and others with the oil of mercy; and that he would wash away their sins and raise them from the dead.

When Seth has finished relating this story, there is further rejoicing among those in Hell. In a short while, then, Christ, having been crucified, arrives in Hell, breaking down Hell's gates and leading the Old Testament saints out of captivity. It is interesting to note that Christ pays the most marked attention to Adam, taking him by the hand and leading him, while Noah, Abraham, and David follow behind—though this special attention to Adam must be due, not so much to Adam's exceptional righteousness, as to the fact that he symbolizes the entire human race.

By the time of St. Augustine in the fourth and fifth centuries it must have been an orthodox belief that Christ really

did descend into Hell and rescue certain righteous pre-Christians in a manner similar to that described in the appealing story from the fictitious *Gospel of Nicodemus*, though the Church did not presume to know for certain who were the just men saved at the time of Christ's descent. When a fellow bishop wrote to Augustine to ask his opinion on the matter, Augustine replied that he could find no authority in canonical Scripture for determining whom Christ loosed from the pains of Hell. Certain passages in the Bible seemed to prove that some men were so delivered, he said, but "who these were it is presumptuous for us to define. For if we say that *all* who were found there were then delivered without exception, who will not rejoice if we can prove this? Especially will men rejoice for the sake of some who are intimately known to us by their literary labors." (One suspects that St. Augustine, like Dante, was reluctant to believe that Homer and Plato and Vergil and other great pagans were excluded from salvation.) Regarding Adam in particular, however, St. Augustine was familiar with an oral tradition entitled to as much consideration, he thought, as Scriptural authority. "As to the first man, the father of mankind," he continued in his letter to the bishop, "it is agreed by almost the entire church that the Lord loosed him from that prison: a tenet which must be believed to have been accepted not without reason." In fact, verses from the uncanonical *Book of Wisdom* appear to state positively that Adam was freed from Hell: "She [Wisdom] preserved the first formed father of the world, that was created alone, and brought him out of the fall, and gave him power to rule all things." "Some add to this," said St. Augustine in concluding, ". . . that the same favor was bestowed on the holy men of antiquity—on Abel, Seth, Noah and his house, etc."

I am suggesting that although the Church never considered *The Gospel of Nicodemus* as anything but fiction, the vivid account which it contained of the descent into Hell not only came to be accepted by the uneducated masses as historical truth, but also gradually influenced the belief of even the most learned. In the thirteenth century St. Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologica* discusses the descent into Hell and the question whom Christ rescued at the time. By Aquinas' day a belief had become firmly established that Hell was an inclusive term comprehending not only the place where the utterly lost were imprisoned but also Purgatory (from which eventually all souls would be released) and the Limbo of the Fathers, a painless place sometimes called Abraham's Bosom, where all righteous men who had died since the Creation were detained until Christ's resurrection. St. Thomas argues that at the time of Christ's descent into Hell he rescued all the patriarchs of this Limbo and nobody else—not even infants who had died in original sin. St. Thomas does not cite by name the patriarchs who were liberated on this occasion, but Dante, in his *Inferno*, does list some of them. On his tour through Hell Dante notices evidence of violent wreckage in part of the masonry and asks his guide to explain. Vergil answers that the ruins were made at the time of Christ's descent, when he led out of Hell and into Paradise the souls of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Rachel and others.

The story of the Harrowing of Hell remained popular throughout the Middle Ages. A translation into Anglo-Saxon is one of the best extant examples of Old English literature. Middle English translations, both in verse and in prose, were numerous. Wynken de Worde's printed version was issued at least five times between 1507 and 1620. Stained-glass windows all over Europe testify that scenes of Christ's tread-

ing Satan or Death underfoot and leading Adam out of Hell were favorites with medieval artists and with the churchmen who commissioned their work. The cycles of mystery plays in the later Middle Ages invariably included a stage representation of this dramatic episode.

Although none of this popular medieval literature represented Adam as becoming a Christian because he understood a mystical meaning in God's words of judgment after the Fall, much of it suggested that early in his lifetime Adam learned of the Christ to come through revelation granted him in addition to that reported in Genesis. In *Cursor Mundi*, a Northumbrian poem written about 1300, there is an expanded form of the same story given in *The Gospel of Nicodemus*. Here Adam, *before* he is expelled from the Garden, is told by the Lord that he will later receive oil of mercy. In the meantime he is to effect a reconciliation with God by establishing the custom of tithing. Here again Adam at the point of death sends Seth back to the Garden. The guardian angel allows Seth to push his head inside the gate three times. Seth sees a babe at the top of a tree and is told about Christ so that he can carry back to Adam the joyful tidings. Moreover, the angel gives Seth three seeds from an apple of the tree, which, placed in Adam's mouth at his burial, grow into three trees of cedar, cypress and palm that survive the Flood, are tended by Abraham and others, and are eventually formed into the Cross on which the Saviour dies.

In the medieval plays dealing with the Fall of Man and the Expulsion from Paradise, Adam always learns, by one means or another, about the Redeemer. In the Chester play, long years after the Fall Adam tells Cain and Abel that while he was asleep during the creation of Eve he saw a vision of

Christ's defeating the devil and a vision of the last Judgment of those good and evil men descended from himself. In the Norwich play, *after* Adam and Eve have been driven out of the Garden the Holy Ghost appears, announces to them the Gospel of Christ, and comforts them. In the Towneley cycle the play depicting the Fall and the Expulsion has been lost; but in the so-called Coventry cycle the angel who expels Adam from the Garden hints to him of the coming of Christ. This latter play, by the way, contains an explanation of the double-meaning of the curse on the serpent; but this explanation is made by God to the serpent, not to Adam.

Why were none of these particular accounts of the antiquity of the Christian faith acceptable to Protestants after the Reformation? The reasons were many. In the first place, they almost invariably depended on a belief in the Limbo of the Fathers, a pleasant place in Hell where good men of the Old Testament rested until Christ delivered them; and Protestants rejected such a place, along with Purgatory, as a superstitious Roman addition to the true religion. Even though Protestants retained in their Creed the article about Christ's descent into Hell, they devised other explanations of the article than that centered around the Harrowing of Hell. In the second place, these medieval accounts never based Adam's knowledge of Christ on any statement in the Bible that Adam had been told about the Messiah; and the Protestants stressed always the sufficiency of the Bible alone as a source of all one need know about the Christian religion. And in the third place, Protestants must have objected to the suggestion that Adam had been saved at the time of Christ's descent into Hell principally because he had led a just life after his first sin of disobedience—in other

words, that he was saved because of his own merit. After the Fall, argued the Protestants, human nature was debased and no man could hope to achieve salvation through his own merit or his own works; salvation depended on faith, and on faith alone, though the works of a faithful man would of course be of a kind that would demonstrate his Christianity. Protestants, therefore, with their doctrine of salvation by faith, must either find Biblical proof that such a faith was possible to every man since the beginning of the world or else bow to the charges of their opponents that this scheme of salvation was manifestly unfair to men like Adam, Abel, and Seth.

A short German treatise entitled *Der Alt Glaub*, published in 1537 by Heinrich Bullinger, pastor of the Grossmünster at Zurich, has every appearance of introducing for the first time the account of Adam's christianization which Milton uses in *Paradise Lost*. In 1539 this work was translated into Latin as *Antiquissima Fides*, and an English version by Miles Coverdale—more famous for his translation of the Bible into English—was published in 1541, again in 1547, and yet again in 1624. The names of Bullinger, who in his old age befriended refugee English divines during the Marian persecution, and Coverdale, whose Puritan views had necessitated his exile from England even before the end of Henry VIII's reign, must certainly have won familiarity in Puritan circles with the interpretation of the Genesis story given in this treatise. (Although only the Coverdale translation is available for the following summary, and its strict fidelity to the original German cannot be asserted, I shall refer to the treatise as Bullinger's.)

The full title of the English translation is *The old fayth, an evident probacion out of the holy scripture, that the*

christen fayth (which is the right, true, old and undoubted fayth) hath endured sens the beginnyng of the worlde. It is frankly an apology for a Protestant religion based on salvation by faith alone, an effort to prove the antiquity of that religion, and an answer to recent taunts by Roman Catholics who have labeled the Protestants as “new brethren,” “fellows of the new learning,” and “new-fangled gospellers.” It would serve the author’s interest to cite a mass of traditional authority for his claim that Adam had faith in Christ, and the fact that he does not do so argues for the originality of this interpretation with Bullinger. Bullinger is aware that his exposition will strike at least some of his readers as novel. He says:

I suppose plainly that many simple christian men will not a little wonder at this mine enterprise; they are so persuaded and think, the christain faith did first begin under Tiberius the emperor. . . .

As Bullinger interprets Genesis, God created the first man perfect and without blemish, so that both his body and his soul should have endured forever if he had not sinned. (This is contrary to the Catholic doctrine after Trent that death of the body would have been natural to Adam, even had he not sinned.) Having imbued man with reason and high understanding, God required of him only thankfulness and obedience, which was to be symbolized in his abstaining from the token fruit. To have abstained would have meant that Adam recognized all good to consist in what God permitted and all evil to consist in what God prohibited. Indulging in the fruit, as Adam did, showed that he had been persuaded to take the form of good and evil out of himself, or at least out of something other than God. Adam’s first sin was mental infidelity—allowing himself to be persuaded

that God had withheld something from him which he needed. The physical act of eating the apple naturally followed, but was relatively insignificant. Even before eating, Adam had shifted faith from God to the Devil and was the thrall of Satan.

The righteousness and truth of God required now that man be destroyed, for death had been named as the penalty for eating the fruit. But fortunately for Adam, in the interim between his receiving the command and his breaking it, God's wisdom had found a way by which his righteousness could be satisfied and yet other qualities of his—his goodness and mercy—could be exercised and declared. This device of God's wisdom, which no doubt was determined from everlasting, was also directly opened unto Adam after his fall in the following manner.

From his disobedience man acquired shame, a quality not divinely given and not adequate to make man realize his powerlessness to raise himself. Shame evinced the futility of man's effort to cover his sin by his own devices.

As Adam was later to realize, the questions of God reported in Genesis were fraught with meaning and were all intended to convince him and his posterity that there was nothing left in fallen human nature capable in itself of enabling man to rise from the Fall. The depraved creature was, before he received a donation of grace, utterly powerless even to confess his guilt. When the Lord, walking in the Garden where Adam was hiding, called out: "Adam, where art thou?" he meant, Bullinger explains, "Knowest thou what misery thou art fallen into from great felicity?" Adam did not know, or could not confess his sin. The second question reported in Genesis, "Who told thee that thou art naked?" and the third, "Hast thou eaten of the fruit, of

which I forbid thee that thou shouldest not eat?" both offered Adam chances to try his ability to confess, as did also the question directed to the woman. But both were now degenerate and powerless. Later, when they had been Christianized, they were to recall this interrogation and remember it as proof of the true state of human nature when without grace; in fact, the purpose of the interrogation, says Bullinger, was to fix this understanding in their minds.

Man's inability to raise himself being established now beyond dispute, God mercifully proceeded, even before sentencing Adam and Eve, to the promise of redemption, the first sure evangel. This Gospel is contained in Genesis 3:14-15, which I shall now read again from the King James Version of the Bible:

14. And the Lord God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou are cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of they life:

15. And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

Let me digress from Bullinger's treatise long enough to say that by all Christians in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the second of these two verses from Genesis was interpreted as a prophecy of the coming of Christ, "the seed of the woman" being explained as a reference to the Virgin Birth of the Messiah. Catholics and Protestants were in ardent disagreement as to the correct translation of the last two clauses of the curse. Catholics gave this translation: "*She* shall bruise thy head"—that is, the Virgin Mary shall bring about thy downfall, Satan—"and thou shalt bruise his heel"—that is, thy forces, Satan, shall cause the Crucifixion of Jesus, the Seed of the Virgin. A famous seventeenth-

century painting by Murillo depicts the Virgin standing with her right foot on the serpent. Protestants, however, unwilling to attribute to the Virgin so important a role in the scheme of man's redemption, translated the words thus: "It (meaning the woman's seed, or Jesus) shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." In *Paradise Lost*, Milton's wording of the passage is "Her Seed shall bruise thy head, thou bruise his heel." The novelty of Bullinger's interpretation, then, is not that he finds Genesis 3:15 to be a prophecy of the coming of Christ, but that he contends that Adam heard this curse—which after all was spoken, not to him, but to the serpent—and that Adam understood its mystical meaning.

In detail, Bullinger's exegesis of the verse is as follows: God's referring to Christ as a "seed" indicates definitely the human nature of the Son. "Of the woman" indicates Christ's divinity, his difference from other human beings, his conception by the Holy Ghost and by no human father. "I will put enmity between the woman and thee" further praises the Virgin, stressing the contrast between her lowly, simple, virtuous, faithful, upright, chaste, and clean nature and the nature of the Devil—proud, subtle, wicked, false, and untrue. The head of the serpent, which is to be crushed, is the power and kingdom of the Devil; and the heel of the Saviour, which will be bruised, obviously refers to his lowest part, his flesh, since his human soul is immortal and his godhead is impassive. Through his members—Caiaphas, Annas, Herod and Pilate—the Devil will bruise Christ's flesh. This action will be turned by God into the greatest of all good—in fact, is so turned from the beginning of time, since time does not affect eternity. By Christ's suffering, death is destroyed and life is brought to all believers. The enmity which God puts

between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent is the difference in nature between faithful men and the children of sin. They who put their trust in the Blessed Seed take on the nature of the Seed; their works, accidental manifestations of their faith, will always show them to be occupied with fulfilling God's will.

Although Bullinger does not state directly that Adam fully understood this promise at once, the implication is that through God-given grace he did so either immediately or after he had had time to think it out, and that when he did understand it, his conversion was complete.

Only after announcing this covenant of grace did God proceed to pass his easy sentences of temporal punishment on Adam and his wife. The woman must bear her children in pain and serve her husband in fear and obedience; the man must labor for his living; and both must suffer temporal death.

In summary, man through his own fault had fallen into death and damnation, was utterly displeasing to God and powerless to do anything but evil; God promised life again in his Son, who would become man and suffer death in order to destroy the Devil, death, sin, and Hell; God promised also to endow any believer in Christ with a heart and a power different from those of his degraded human nature, so that the believer might work and suffer as God willed and be an enemy to the works of the Devil. So reborn in Christ, Bullinger adds,

Adam and Eve had faith in God, and stood so toward God, that they knowledged themselves to be sinners, and trusted to be saved only through the blessed Seed, giving themselves over willingly to the discipline and nurture, travail and trouble of this time; no man can say contrary, but it followeth that our first elders were christian.

Bullinger finds final proof that Adam and Eve were Christians in the Biblical evidence that they taught the Christian faith to their three sons, who were expected in turn to pass it on to their offspring. Though all Adam's sons were, by inherent fallen human nature, children of wrath, Abel accepted the Christian faith explained to him by his father, was justified by his faith, and performed righteous deeds of faith. The sacrifice with which he pleased God was not a deed of saving power in itself, but a token of his gratitude and fear of God and a prefiguration of the only perpetual sacrifice of Christ—about which Abel had been instructed by his parents.

As Abel was a model of God's seed and a regenerate Christian (called in Genesis "the seed of the woman"), so Cain was the first of the seed of the serpent or the first of those men who reject proffered salvation and trust in the Devil or in the rightness of their own inclinations. Moreover, he was a hypocrite. He professed to serve God, observed the outward forms of worship, and ostensibly shared the faith of Abel. But actually he did not believe in the depravity of his human nature and in his utter dependence on God for salvation. Secretly, then, he was unfaithful and trusted by his works alone to fulfill all obligations. Bullinger expects his readers to infer that Cain was very much like a sixteenth-century Roman Catholic. Abel, whom Cain killed, became the first Christian martyr. Even then, God gave Cain a chance to acknowledge his sin and to be redeemed, by asking him "Where is Abel thy brother?" But Cain was unrepentant and so was cursed by God.

Adam, still a true Christian, realized that with Abel dead and the race of Cain unlikely to produce any man who would continue the faith, the promised Saviour must come from

another line. Adam therefore begot a third son whom he called Seth, meaning "a plant," expressing Adam's hope that the promised Seed would come from this branch. In fact, Seth repaired the holy faith, which had suffered a great hurt in the death of Abel. From Seth proceeded the generation of the righteous unto Noah, and from Noah to Abraham, and so unto David, and thence unto Christ. As for the cursed generation of Cain and of the ungodly, it was almost destroyed at the time of the Flood, but was preserved in the descendants of Noah's wicked son Ham.

I do not suggest that Milton had a copy of Bullinger's *The Old Faith* about him as he wrote Book X of *Paradise Lost*. It is not improbable that this vigorously Protestant interpretation of the story of Adam after the Fall became known through the German and Latin versions and the three English editions to a large number of Englishmen and, associated as it was with the respected names of Henry Bullinger and Miles Coverdale, that some of its features gradually insinuated themselves into the minds of many as the reasonable reading of the Genesis narrative. If such is the case, the channels by which the tradition may have reached Milton are too numerous to repay investigation. But I am convinced that for the general student of Milton an examination of *The Old Faith* will considerably enrich his understanding of that part of *Paradise Lost* treating Adam's conduct between the time of his fall and the time when Michael arrives in Eden, and that even the specialist may find in the treatise a helpful gloss to certain disputed verses in this section of Milton's poem. Many of the features wherein *Paradise Lost* is similar to Bullinger's treatise in departing from what to us seems the spirit of the Genesis text were commonplaces long before the Reformation, and others

derive from Protestant writings earlier or more significant than *The Old Faith*. On several important points Milton and Bullinger differ significantly. Even so, the fact that both writers purport to show Protestant Christianity in the Garden of Eden is enough to make a comparison of their works profitable.

The importance in *Paradise Lost* of Adam's solving God's riddling curse on the serpent will be obvious in a summary of what happens between the time of the Fall and the time of Michael's arrival to give Adam and Eve a vision of the Christ to come.

From the moment Adam tastes the apple—or, better say, from the moment he resolves to taste it, which is the real moment of his fall—his superb reasoning ability is impaired. Adam can no longer think straight. His every speech is full of fallacious rationalization. He still has magnificence, just as Satan in Hell still preserves much of his celestial splendor, but it is magnificence tainted by illogical thinking. He and Eve have gained knowledge, but it is the wretched knowledge that good is what they have lost and evil is what they have acquired. For a while they revel like two drunkards. Then they go to sleep and awake feeling quite dejected. Adam accuses Eve of their downfall, and she accuses him. He is not only unwilling but actually unable, so impaired is his reason, to condemn himself for his offense.

In Book X, God the Son—the Second Person of the Trinity—arrives to pass doom on them. Before leaving Heaven he has announced to the celestial host that he will pass this sentence in a way that will “mitigate their doom,” and temper Justice so with Mercy that Adam and Eve will be fully satisfied. The words which God the Son says to Adam, then, will be the most important words in all of *Paradise*

Lost. In these words, if anywhere, Milton will “justify the ways of God to men.” These words must contain the doctrine of Christianity: that fallen man may yet achieve salvation through faith in a Redeemer. At such a critical point no poetic license is possible: the words must come from the Bible. And so they do. After hearing Adam accuse Eve and Eve accuse the serpent, God the Son utters a riddle. The curse on the serpent, in Genesis 3:15, is a promise of redemption for man, although at the moment Adam is no more capable of interpreting it thus than is the average twentieth-century reader. “I will put enmity between thee and the woman,” says God in Adam’s presence to the absent serpent, “and between thy seed and her seed; her seed shall bruise thy head and thou shalt bruise his heel.” In reality, Milton explains, this is a curse on Satan, who has used the serpent’s body to deceive Eve, and the true meaning is presented “in mysterious terms, judged then as best.” Furthermore, the riddle contains a message for Adam: the statement that the woman’s seed shall bruise the serpent’s head means that One shall be born of a human mother but of no human father—in other words, God incarnate—who shall undo all the evil which Satan disguised as a serpent has recently accomplished. “Thou shalt bruise his heel” means that through Satan’s agents Christ’s body, the least important part about him, shall be crucified.

The sentences passed on Adam and Eve—that he shall work for his living, that she shall be subordinate to her husband and shall suffer pain in bearing children, and that both shall eventually return to the dust from which they came—seem mild even at the time when they are spoken and merciful in the extreme later when Adam has been able to solve the riddle of the earlier sentence on the serpent.

But how can Adam, whose reason has been drastically impaired since his fall, ever solve the riddle? It must be recalled that God, after passing the judgment on Adam and Eve, took pity on their nakedness and clothed them in the skins of beasts. Milton takes this passage to have both a literal and an allegorical meaning. This gesture means, he says, that God and the Son clothed Adam and Eve's inward nakedness with his robe of righteousness. They are given—and I believe he means that all their descendants are also given—grace enough that, if they will voluntarily believe in Christ, they may achieve salvation. By this God-given sufficient grace man's reason, which for a short while was hopelessly debased, is considerably elevated. Adam will be enabled now, through his improved reason, to solve the riddle of the mysterious curse on the serpent. This he does in the last part of Book X and the first part of Book XI *before* the Archangel Michael comes down and shows him the vision of the future of the world. His solving the riddle is a laborious process, because his reason is not even now what it was in his state of innocence, but when he and Eve have forgiven each other, he makes his first step toward the full solution: he suddenly realizes that the curse on the serpent is a hidden promise of revenge on Satan. After further deliberation he recalls the graciousness with which God passed sentence on him and on Eve and the pity with which he clothed them in animal skins. Then with contrite hearts he and Eve begin to pray, confessing their faults and begging forgiveness. In Heaven, the Son presents their prayers to the Father, interceding for mankind and asking that all man's sins be ingrafted on him, the Christ. This mercy is granted, and consequently Adam, still kneeling in prayer on earth below, feels his heart fill suddenly with hope, with joy,

and with conviction that his prayers have been heard with favor. He now makes the final step in solving the riddle of the curse. Explaining this blessed assurance to Eve, he says:

. . . peace returned
Home to my breast, and to my memory
His promise that thy Seed shall bruise our Foe;
Which then not minded in dismay, yet now
Assures me that the bitterness of death
Is past, and we shall live.

His very next words to Eve are strangely reminiscent of the Ave Maria—of the Angel Gabriel's annunciation to the Virgin Mary in Luke 1:28. Adam says,

Whence Hail to thee
Eve rightly called, Mother of all Mankind,
Mother of all things living, since by thee
Man is to live, and all things live for Man.

It is characteristic of seventeenth-century Protestantism for Milton to imply here that the Virgin is no more important than Eve to the ultimate working out of the plan of salvation.

For artistic purposes Milton will reserve a fuller description of the plan of redemption until Adam's conversation with Michael, but for all practical purposes Adam has understood, simply by pondering over Genesis 3:15, everything that is necessary to make him a Christian. He will explain it to Eve, in words simple enough for even a woman to understand, and together they will teach the fundamental doctrines of Christianity to the children who shall be born to them.

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