

Introduction

The years 2011 and 2012 were years of revolution in Northern Africa and the Middle East. Rising in Tunisia, the revolutionary wave has spread through Egypt, Libya, Syria and other countries. The common denominator of all insurgencies has been the people's desire to shake off a long-endured yoke of tyranny which had resulted in a stagnant economy, poor life conditions and poorer public liberties. The word *democracy* has become the catalyst of all aspirations. However, where the overthrowing of the dictator has succeeded, reform has been slow to come to pass, opening the door to new, potentially worse, forms of tyranny.

The revolution John Milton envisioned during the years of England's Interregnum was itself one of liberty. Toward such end he worked tirelessly. He worked to see liberty projected in all areas of social and political life. Criticism has largely read this as the result of Milton's apprehension of individual liberty as only fully definable within the context of public liberties. The present work argues that true individual liberty is more appropriately defined in Milton as Christian liberty. Liberal laws and institutions might afford relative liberties, through negotiation of individual and collective freedom,¹ but never true liberty. The latter, in fact, resided within. The man who was inwardly a slave, a slave must remain, irrespective of outward liberties. The man who was inwardly free, free must remain, irrespective of outward restraint. Inasmuch as it entails the restoration of mind and conscience from sin to inward liberty, Christian liberty is found setting the terms for the creation of an inward microcosm of rest and authority. This microcosm is in turn the forge of liberal conclusions. In due course, Rationalism would retain these very conclusions, not so their Christian source.

1. See n. 5.

Theo Hobson has recently reasoned from Milton's liberal conclusions in an attempt to make them argue for the ultimate compatibility of Christian liberty and secular liberalism. Hobson's end is to underscore that no dichotomy exists between the two. The two did coexist and indeed may coexist, for Hobson, today. Even more so, in "the liberal Protestant tradition that he [Milton] helped to launch, secular liberalism and Christianity are allies rather than enemies. They need each other."²

The present work reasons from the causes in an attempt to show that in Milton Christian liberty *is* true freedom and the sole ground in which full outward liberties may be born and thrive. Hence I intend to show that in Milton liberal effects cannot be disjoined from their cause. In fact, liberty—both inward and outward—cannot be disjoined from Christianity.

In the final analysis, while Hobson reads Milton's work as an endeavor to free the gospel from the rule of law and of men, the present work deals with how the gospel frees man from the rule of the law and of men.

If the work of Milton's prose, his left hand, is best read as his attempt at actualizing liberty in the domestic, ecclesiological and political realms, failure to see freedom reflected in his temporal community would alert the poet to the need for man to individually appropriate it. In the conclusion to his extensive study of Christian liberty, Arthur Barker first pointed to a similar movement:

As he had feared, his hopes had "passed through the fire only to perish in the smoke"; but that tempering experience bore its fruit in his great poems. In them the ideal of Christian liberty was translated, by a process already under way in the prose, into a contemplation of the freedom to be obtained through obedience to eternal law, not in a temporal community which should make possible the achievement of something like the happiness enjoyed by Adam in his natural perfection and promised the saints in Christ's Kingdom, but in "a Paradise within thee happier far" (*PL* 12.587).³

Barker here identifies a substantial shift from an outward to an inward-based dimension of Christian liberty in the passage from the prose to

2. Hobson, *Milton's Vision*, ix.

3. Barker, *Milton and the Puritan Dilemma*, 333.

Paradise Lost. If in the latter Christian liberty unfolds as an inward reality, Barker contends with respect to the former that

the end and good of a people free by nature could not be achieved otherwise than through the real and substantial liberty fully to be enjoyed in a commonwealth modelled on that only just and rightful kingdom . . . ⁴

Moving from such premises with respect to the prose, subsequent criticism has largely failed to picture true liberty as a fully defined inward reality, hence also falling short of its poetical representation in *Paradise Lost*. The general attitude is well represented in Joan Bennett's *Reviving Liberty*. For Bennett, Milton "shares with Marxism and other calls to continual social reform a commitment to see the private good as definable only in the public, or community's good—to do as Milton, on the eve of his political imprisonment in 1659, exhorted the readers of his last attempt to avert the monarchy's restoration—to place every one his privat welfare and happiness in the public peace, libertie and safetie' (*Ready and Easy Way*, CPW 7:443)."⁵

4. *Ibid.*, 332.

5. Bennett, *Reviving Liberty*, 2. Inscribed in this same rationale, ever since Roland Bainton's *The Travail of Religious Liberty* (1958) scholarship has largely equated liberty in Milton with domestic and public liberties. A recent example of this is *Milton and Toleration* (2007), a collection of sixteen essays edited by Achinstein and Sauer aiming to contextualize Milton's idea of toleration. Following in the same strain, eds. Parry and Raymond's *Milton and the Terms of Liberty* (2002) features twelve essays, six of which relate to political facets of liberty, and the remaining six to elements of Milton's persona, life, work, language and theology which are only relevant to the discussion on inward liberty in terms of contiguity. In turn addressing political liberties, eds. Armitage, Himy and Skinner's *Milton and Republicanism* (1995) encompasses thirteen essays on Milton's political thought and the neo-classical approach to the role of law and government with respect to freedom. This work largely hinges on Skinner's lesson in liberty. In *Liberty Before Liberalism* (1998), Skinner examines the dialectic between individual and collective freedom in the political writings of the *Interregnum*, not least Milton's prose: if individual freedom amounts to the unrestrained expression of one's will, external restraint is indispensable where contrasting wills are expressed, namely within the context of a society. Hence, for the neo-roman theory of free states, laws, as opposed to monarchs, are called to uniformly limit individual freedom in order to enhance the shared ground of individual and collective liberties. The philosophical work of Isaiah Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty* (in *Four Essays on Liberty*, 1958), variously underlies Skinner's depiction of liberty in the seventeenth century and supplies a helpful synthetic categorization. Berlin divides liberty into the two categories of negative and positive liberty. The former is that kind of freedom which the individual experiences insofar as he is not "prevented by other persons from doing what [he wants]"

In depicting the prose as purposing the integration of external freedom and Christian liberty in a free commonwealth shaped after the principles of God's kingdom, scholarship has maintained the interdependence of outward and inward liberty in the pursuit of individual freedom. Nevertheless, in his *Defensio Secunda* Milton claims that the keystone to his entire engagement with public liberties is to be traced to "true and substantial liberty, which must be sought, not without, but within."⁶ The identification of true and substantial liberty as an inward principle in turn implicitly points to the moral and spiritual dimension of liberty which underlies action, namely that which Northrop Frye identifies as the "condition in which genuine action is possible."⁷ If so, inward liberty is not seen as dependent on outward liberties. The latter are rather seen as resulting from the former.

Ever since *Of Reformation* Milton identifies inward liberty as Christian liberty, but it is only in *De Doctrina Christiana* that a full definition transpires. In the Latin treatise Milton understands liberty as that reality whereby

CHRIST OUR LIBERATOR FREES US FROM THE SLAVERY
OF SIN AND THUS FROM THE RULE OF THE LAW AND OF

(Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty*, 56–57). In other words, negative liberty is absence of external coercion in the expression of one's will. External coercion is exerted, in Berlin's words, "by other persons." Once again, individual liberty can only be prevented by external restraint, thus amounting to that space of opportunity which is left in between the individual and the outward source of limitation. In his philosophical approach, Berlin need not distinguish between 'persons' and 'laws,' since the latter are but the expression of the former's will. This is true of both human and divine law. This is where the second concept of liberty comes in. Positive liberty amounts, in Skinner's words, to "self-realization" (Skinner, *Liberty Before Liberalism*, 114). Or, to put it in plain terms, if negative liberty is tantamount to being able to do what one wants to do, positive liberty is the freedom to act in a moral way, that is to say, to act in accordance with a moral law. A notion of quality is therefore attached to one of neutral possibility. Hence Skinner: "Rather than connecting liberty with opportunities for action—as in the neo-roman as well as in the liberal analysis—the 'positive' view connects liberty with the performance of actions of a determinate type." Skinner goes on to argue that "whether the understanding of liberty as . . . an 'exercise' and not merely an 'opportunity' concept can be vindicated is a separate question, and one with which I am not concerned" (Skinner, *Liberty Before Liberalism*, 114). In that they explore the results of Milton's public appropriation of liberty, the above works shed light on the extent and practical limitations of Milton's idea of liberty. The present work concerns itself with that same question of positive liberty which the above works variously discard.

6. CPW 4.624.

7. Frye, *Return of Eden*, 94.

MEN, AS IF WE WERE EMANCIPATED SLAVES. HE DOES THIS SO THAT, BEING MADE SONS INSTEAD OF SERVANTS AND GROWN MEN INSTEAD OF BOYS, WE MAY SERVE GOD IN CHARITY THROUGH THE GUIDANCE OF THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH.⁸

In light of this definition the present work resolves to construe Milton's libertarian revolution as inherently inward. To this end, also, it seeks to identify two conflicting principles around which Milton's entire production revolves: the way of self, or the way of inner slavery hinging on law-empowered self-complacency and self-assertion, and the way of grace, or the way of the cross resulting in freedom and love. Whereas the prose expands on the contingency of this dialectic, *Paradise Lost* is given to project it in its characters only to hand the human characters over to true freedom as the prototypes of all that would choose to become children of liberty.

In the final analysis, in envisioning Christian liberty as sole true liberty, this study aims to reassess the concept in Milton's work leading up to *Paradise Lost* only to confront its explicit theological synthesis and poetical translation in the poem.

Chapter 1 identifies the substantial Pauline underpinnings of Milton's formulation of Christian liberty against the backdrop of Reformed thought and overtones of Independent, General Baptist and Quaker belief. The chapter largely deals with the ways in which the inward microcosm of Christian liberty is projected outwardly in a constant dialectic of love and liberty. This same dialectic turns in the prose into a process of negotiation which must run through the institutional channels, calling for laws that reflect the terms of Christian liberty.

Chapter 2 expands on Milton's theology of Christian liberty in the poem. Essential continuity is found in Milton's apprehension of the concept from *Of Reformation* to *Paradise Lost*. Its movement, as opposed to its substance, is shown to differ. Even so, a linear, if nuanced, progress from rationalism to spiritualism variously surfaces which is best defined within the context of Amyraldism and Quaker as well as Independent and General Baptist thought.

Chapter 3 focuses on the poet and on light as the poetical transposition of Christian liberty. Like Satan, the poet wanders in inward darkness. Unlike Satan, he ultimately turns to the celestial light. Active

8. CPW 6.537. See Egan, *Inward Teacher*, 1.

in creation, the light of heaven is life which descends from heaven to make a new creation and thus lay the foundation for the poetical one. The light is identified with the Son, whose grace frees and gives the poet a knowledge of God that overcomes the bounds of nature. Falling short of poetical expectations, the ability to tell of God's will and nature must be seen as unfolding in spiritual terms. Overtones of Quakerism appear here to be intertwined with Johannine symbolism only to magnify certain traits of Milton's Pauline vision.

Against the backdrop of the tragic denial of inward liberty in the ultimate choice of self on the part of Satan—chapter 4—it is given to the human characters in the poem to illustrate and embody the terms of inward liberty in the progressive unfolding of an inaugurated eschatology—chapter 5.

If in outlining the intent of the book I have already pointed to critical stances and trajectories, I shall now turn more specifically to the critical context against whose backdrop this work stands and with which it is bound to come to terms.

Paramount though the attention toward liberty in Milton has been, I have noted how criticism has largely neglected its defining unfolding as an inward reality. Much of the emphasis on the latter, in fact, dates back to the Thirties and early Forties. The intuition that Christian liberty was foundational to Milton's very apprehension of public liberties is to be ascribed to A. S. P. Woodhouse. In *Puritanism and Liberty: Being the Army Debates* (1638) Woodhouse refers to Christian liberty as "the very corner-stone of his [Milton's] theory of toleration."⁹

It was Arthur Barker, however, who defined and extensively read the concept in the prose. For Barker Milton's idea of Christian liberty largely hinged on Calvin's three tenets of liberty: 1. "the law of works is abrogated by the gospel of faith, and Christians are freed from the impositions of the Mosaic Law, though the moral part of the Law is still in force . . ." 2. "Depraved mankind is manifestly incapable of fulfilling the law of righteousness; but the elect, freed from the necessity by Christ's vicarious suffering, 'cheerfully and alertly' follow God's guidance in the Law as the spontaneous result of grace." 3. "All things concerning which there is no gospel prohibition are sanctified to the Christian use."¹⁰

9. Woodhouse, *Puritanism and Liberty*, 65. See also Woodhouse, "Milton, Puritanism and Liberty," 395–404, 483–513.

10. Woodhouse, *Puritanism and Liberty*, 101.

For all the foundational significance of Calvin's tri-fold reading of Pauline liberty in Milton, arguments of continuity and discontinuity variously contributed to a redefinition of its boundaries. Woodhouse traces the general bearing of the concept in Milton's prose back as early as 1642.¹¹ For his part, Sewell argues for a germinal stage of Milton's elaboration of the doctrine up to 1659, when it fully develops along heterodox lines in an ultimate revision of Picard's manuscript of *De Doctrina Christiana*.¹² Barker provides the middle ground by envisioning an earlier date (some time between 1643 and 1645) for Milton's heterodox commitment.

The crux of the matter is the identification of Milton's shift to the understanding of the moral law as abrogated in its Mosaic formulation. While the antiprelatical tracts insist that the moral portion of the law is still in force after Christ, *De Doctrina* makes an extensive case for the abrogation of the law in its entirety, only to then maintain the subsistence of the essence of the law, or the law of love, as an eternal law. Barker detects a progressive shift to the latter view in the 1644 additions to *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* and in *Tetrachordon* (1645). Diverting Barker's trajectory, Lowell W. Coolidge, in his introduction to the divorce pamphlets in the *Yale Prose* edition, argues that "much of the new matter [in the 1644 additions] is brought to reinforce the contention that Christ did not abrogate the Mosaic law of divorce."¹³ Rather, for Coolidge, the evolution of Milton's argument is to be traced to his subordination of Christ's ruling to the natural law.¹⁴

The present work will contend that, when seen in light of *De Doctrina*'s definition above, discontinuity in the definition of the moral law in the antiprelatical tracts, the divorce tracts and the Latin treatise appears less than substantial—ever grounded in liberty, love is indeed the essence and the end of God's eternal moral law. Nevertheless, the work of divinity seems to make it more than formal by turning the abrogation of the law into a cause of Christian liberty. In so doing, the treatise's extensive discussion contradicts the premise of its initial formulation. While in light of this and other idiosyncrasies the debate on the authorship of the Latin treatise is not without merit, I have chosen

11. *Ibid.*, 66.

12. Sewell, *Study of Milton's Christian Doctrine*, 51–53.

13. CPW 2.150. "Introduction to the Divorce Tracts."

14. CPW 2.150–58. "Introduction to the Divorce Tracts."

to analyze divergences in terms of continuity and discontinuity with the Miltonic *corpus*.

In regarding freedom by nature and spiritual freedom as ultimately integrated as “the right only of those who will act in accordance with that perfect law which is being cleared in their hearts by the Spirit,”¹⁵ Barker is once again setting the stage for subsequent criticism. For Michael Schoenfeldt, “Milton . . . wishes to gear the achievement of liberty to the performance of obedience.”¹⁶ Along the same lines, Joan Bennett resorts to the definition “humanist antinomianism” to “characterize John Goodwin and John Milton and to indicate that these thinkers descend in the Christian humanist line that reaches from Saint Thomas Aquinas through Richard Hooker into the seventeenth century where, with these thinkers, the traditional beliefs were radicalized.”¹⁷ All such contentions work to the effect of making Christian liberty out to be an effect rather than a cause of compliance with divine eternal law. Nonetheless, if freedom by nature and spiritual freedom must be understood as ultimately impaired by sin, their assimilation in Milton can only be regarded as effected under the banner of grace, in the strain of the Reformed tradition. Accordingly, man is not free because he obeys, but he obeys because he is free.

Though largely subscribing to mainstream stances and only marginally turning to the poetical representation of liberty in *Paradise Lost*, the following contributions to the bibliography of liberty in Milton have their place here:

James Egan's *The Inward Teacher: Milton's Rhetoric of Christian Liberty* (1980) appears to revive the discussion on the foundational significance of inward liberty in the prose. Even so, the vast majority of the book expands on rhetoric without engaging liberty.

In *Milton and the Pauline Tradition: A Study of Theme and Symbolism* (1982), Timothy J. O'Keeffe helps shed light on Milton's significant adherence to Paul and his ties to the Augustinian, Thomist and Reformed traditions. In tracing patterns of Pauline thought in Milton, however, this work only partially commits Milton's libertarian ideas to the unifying foundation of Christian liberty. Also, the author mistakenly views faith in Milton in Thomist terms, as obedience, that is, resulting

15. Barker, *Milton and the Puritan Dilemma*, 118.

16. Schoenfeldt, “Obedience and Autonomy in *Paradise Lost*,” 366.

17. Bennett, *Reviving Liberty*, 99.

from love. Scholastic and Reformed theology end up being juxtaposed in a dialectic which finds little synthesis. Finally, the book's reading of Paul in *Paradise Lost* is scarcely a reading of Christian liberty therein.

As we enter the domain of theological studies, we are immediately confronted with a number of works on the fall and Milton's divinity which are yet little more than contiguous to the theme of Christian liberty. Will Poole's *Milton and the Idea of the Fall* (2005) is undoubtedly the most relevant recent accomplishment in this respect and provides helpful references.

A direct theological reading of liberty in *Paradise Lost* is, on the other hand, found in Benjamin Myers' *Milton's Theology of Freedom* (2006). Like O'Keeffe, Myers defines Milton's idea of liberty against the backdrop of traditional theological categories. He aptly traces the roots of the theological debate on freedom back to Augustine and patristic theology, only to lead us through Aquinas and Scholasticism and ultimately address the Reformed and post-Reformed tradition. He then attempts to read liberty in Milton in light of his overview. For all the lucidity of his analysis, Myers fails to see Milton's personal theology past the backdrop of *De Doctrina Christiana*'s anti-trinitarian and Episcopian outlook and the fixed categories of post-Reformed Scholasticism. In this respect, the relation between Scholastic tenets of reason and will and Reformed soteriological apprehensions of faith and grace remains in part unsorted. Myers regards Milton's true liberty as freedom to choose amongst alternatives, with prevenient grace as the pivotal factor. The present work reverses this perspective to view the freedom of reason and will to choose among alternatives as a consequence of true liberty. As regards Milton's soteriology, Myers is bound to leave postlapsarian Adam and Eve to struggle in the mire of dynamic achievements. In so doing, he overlooks overtones of Independent, Quaker and General Baptist theology that are largely looming in the years prior to and concomitant with *Paradise Lost* and which work to the effect of magnifying certain traits of Milton's Johannine and Pauline theology. In the final analysis, Myers does not in fact trace Milton's theology of freedom back to the Pauline conception of Christian liberty.

In attempting to mend theological misapprehensions, critical imbalances and omissions, the present work accords the poem conclusive emphasis. As it graphically outlines the reality which the prose builds upon, *Paradise Lost* teaches the lesson that the true Eden is within.