

Preface

AS I FIRST APPROACHED the theme of liberty in Milton, little room seemed to be left for further study and definition. In moving deeper into my research, however, it became clear to me that the Milton community had to a large extent read liberty through the spectacles of liberalism. In so doing, Milton studies had largely failed to tackle liberty from the point of view of Milton's Christian beliefs. The latter show that the Christian paradigm of liberty speaks of an inward microcosm, a place of freedom whose precincts are defined by man's fellowship with God. All other forms of freedom relate to the outer world, be they freedom to choose the good, absence of external constraint and oppression or freedom of alternatives. All of these are not true liberty, but they are pursued by Milton in concert with true liberty. This driving concept prompted me to read Milton's work from the inside out, that is, from the inward dimension to the outward. Theology suddenly became key to this progress. Yet what theology? If it is anything but simple to make one's way through the many and various nuances of seventeenth-century theology, it is even harder to try to relate Milton's personal theological synthesis to its broader theological milieu. Nevertheless, a few striking analogies stand out which align Milton's thought with strains of Independency as well as with General Baptist and Quaker theology. This work does not concern itself with settling matters of influence. What it does attempt to do is interact with texts that appear to shed light on Milton. It attempts to engage in a hermeneutical circle that intersects Milton and his theological background with the Bible. The Bible itself proves the ultimate crossroads and the final synthesis for a world seeking liberty. It is there that Milton found it.