

**“THE BRAND OF GENTILISM”:**

**MILTON’S JESUS AND THE AUGUSTINIAN CRITIQUE OF PAGAN KINGSHIP,  
1649-1671<sup>1</sup>**

Professor John Coffey (University of Leicester)

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How should we understand the relationship between Milton’s revolutionary prose and his Restoration verse? For many scholars since the eighteenth century, the political tracts bear little relevance to *Paradise Lost*. Milton’s transcendent epic exists on a literary or spiritual plane far above the murky world of politics.<sup>2</sup> Others have engaged the prose more directly, but detected a sharp disjuncture between the regicidal pamphleteer and the author of *Paradise Regained*; after the Restoration, they claim, the poet withdrew from politics to faith, or from Cromwellian militarism to Christian pacifism. Against this view, a growing chorus of Miltonists has insisted that he remained true to ‘the good old cause’, that the long poems published in 1667 and 1671 are the work of a defiant Puritan revolutionary.<sup>3</sup>

This essay goes further. It suggests that Milton’s republican works identified a problem that became the political leitmotif of his Restoration poems: the problem of Gentilism. The term was a standard English synonym for “Paganism” or “Heathenism”. From 1649, however, Milton applied it to heathenish *kings*. His inspiration was an incident recorded in all three synoptic Gospels when Christ warned his disciples against imitating “the kings of the Gentiles”. By 1660, Milton was insisting that Christ had placed “the brand of *Gentilism* upon kingship”, and in his major poems he would pit the politics of Jesus against the politics of Satan. *Paradise Lost* revealed the demonic source of pagan monarchism; in *Paradise Regained*, the Son proved impervious to Satan’s offer of the kingdoms of the world; in *Samson Agonistes*, heathenish rule was exposed and toppled.

The bridge between the anti-Gentilism of the prose tracts and the sustained assault of his Restoration works was Augustine's *City of God*, a work which Milton reconsidered in the late 1650s. Recent scholarship on his republicanism has focussed on his classical sources and "neo-Roman" credentials (Armitage, Norbrook, Skinner, Rahe). Yet Milton's admiration for the Roman republic needs to be set alongside his Augustinian critique of Roman imperialism. *The City of God* maintained that pagan politics was driven by the lust for domination and glory, and traced this pathology to demonic origins. It also used the classical republican critique of imperial Rome to sharpen its dichotomy between humility and pride, service and dominion, the City of God and the City of Man. It was this theopolitical vision that was to shape the content and even the structure of Milton's later poetic works. His great poems dramatized a concern that first appeared in his regicidal and republican prose – a preoccupation with the fatal lure of heathen political culture.

### 1. Jesus and Gentilism

"Gentilism" was typically used to refer to pagan religion, but in Reformation polemic it was often tied to the charge of "gentilizing". The terms were analogous to "Judaism" and "judaizing", concepts that also played an important role in Protestant discourse, and in Milton's own writings (Brooks, esp. ch. 4). Together, "Gentilism" and "Judaism" represented the Scylla and Charybdis between which godly reformers must navigate (Shoulson 47). Protestants claimed that the rituals of the Church of Rome were of pagan origin. Joseph Mede maintained that "Gentilizing Idolatry" had arisen within the church from the end of the fourth century (Mede, 588). Thomas Hobbes alleged that the worship of images and the canonisation of saints were relics of "Gentilisme"; popish clergy had poured "the new Wine of Christianity" into "old empty bottles of Gentilisme" (Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 45; 3: 1024, 1046, 1050). Milton agreed that paganism had infected Christianity, but he was unusual in training his anti-Gentilism on Christian monarchs rather than popish clergy.

His notion of *political* Gentilism arose from a reading of Matthew 20:25-28, Mark 10:42-45, and Luke 22:25-26, which record a dispute among Christ's followers over who should be the greatest in his coming kingdom. Upon learning of this unseemly row, Jesus rebukes the disciples

(in particular, James and John, the sons of Zebedee), explaining that his kingdom was quite unlike the kingdoms of the Gentiles. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus declares:

The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve (Luke 22:25-26, *Authorized Version*).

As we shall see, Milton quotes or alludes to this episode in key passages of five different works written in the two decades after 1649: *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* (1649), the *First Defence* (1651), *The Readie and Easie Way* (1660), *Paradise Lost* (1667), and *Paradise Regained* (1671). In each of these, he develops a contrast between two kinds of politics, a polarity that owes much to Augustine's *City of God* and probably to Erasmus' reading of the Gospel story. Gentile or heathen rule is marked by the idolatrous craving for power and glory; its origins lie in Satan's original revolt, his attempt to usurp the sovereignty and worship that belong to God alone. Christian governance, however, should be guided by the politics of Jesus, who himself laid aside his power and glory to become a servant or a slave. Yet the entire history of the people of God has been marred by what Milton terms "gentilizing". Jews and Christians alike have found God's politics too demanding and the attractions of "heathenish" rule too alluring. This is one reason why all three of Milton's late, great poems centre on the temptation to usurp divine power and glory and to imitate Gentile lordship.

Christ's strictures on Gentilism had often been exploited for polemical purposes. Typically though, the context was anti-clerical rather than anti-monarchist. The episode was a favourite of sixteenth-century Protestant reformers, who turned it against the pretensions of the papacy. As early as 1520, in his *Appeal to the German Nobility*, Luther cited it against the Pope's claim to be "the legal heir of the empire if the throne becomes vacant". Did Christ, he asked, confer this right when he said, "The princes of the Gentiles are lords, but ye shall not be so"? (Luther 440). The Swiss Reformer, Heinrich Bullinger deployed the text against "champions of the monarchy of Rome", declaring that "the supremacy of the Pope is flatly repugnant to the doctrine of the Gospels and the Apostles" (Bullinger 87). During the Elizabethan Admonition Controversy, Puritan critics of episcopal hierarchy, led by John Field and Thomas Cartwright, insisted that Christ's rejection of Gentile "dominion" counted against bishops and archbishops.

In replying to these Presbyterians, the conformist John Whitgift argued that Christ “condemne[n]t not rule, but violent and heathenish rule”. This reading, he suggested, was in line with Erasmus, Bucer, Musculus and Beza; Christ’s words were anti-papal, but not anti-episcopal. (Whitgift 1: 148-68). Another leading conformist, Richard Hooker, maintained that those who thought Jesus was condemning “distinction in titles and callings” were propounding an “Anabaptist” line of interpretation (Hooker 3: 603-04).

During the English Revolution, anti-clerical readings of the text were common. The Puritan Erastian, William Prynne, turned Christ’s words against “the English Lordly Prelacie”, bishops who neglected their pastoral duties and sought secular power (Prynne 335; 323, 405, 437-38). The republican member of Parliament, Henry Marten, charged the Westminster Assembly of Divines with acting like the sons of Zebedee: they “would faine take Christ out of his Throne, that themselves might sit in it, and place the House of Lords on their right hand, and the House of Commons on the Left” (*Mercurius Politicus*, 25 July-1 August 1648, 5). The radical preacher and university reformer, William Dell, argued against academic titles and honours for pastors on the grounds that Christ had rebuked his disciples when they sought superiority and pre-eminence (Dell 3). Decades later, John Locke would open his *Letter concerning Toleration* (1689) with an appeal to the same text. Luke 22 taught that Christians were not to “exercise lordship” like “the kings of the Gentiles”; true religion “did not come into the world in order to establish outward pomp and ecclesiastical domination and violence” (Locke, 3). This reading of Christ’s admonition had deep roots in the Protestant tradition, though Locke gave it a tolerationist (even Miltonic) twist.

While Milton may have been familiar with previous Protestant uses of the Gospel passage, his most influential precedent was Erasmus’ paraphrase of the New Testament.<sup>4</sup> Published in Latin as the *Annotationes* (1516-22), it appeared in English translation as *The Paraphrase of Erasmus* during the reign of Edward VI (1548-49). Milton hailed its author as “the wonder of his age” and held his biblical commentary in high regard (*CPW* 2: 478, 620, 709; 4.1: 609; 7: 252-53).<sup>5</sup> Erasmus expounded all three Synoptic accounts of the incident, and we will find his emphases echoed in Milton’s own glosses. First, Erasmus underscored the categorical character of Christ’s remarks. The Messiah had spoken against worldly “affections” for power and glory “to th’ intent he would plucke them utterly out of mindes of them all,

whiche should succeed in the roumes of th apostles”, and “that he mighte fasten this doctrine in all mennes hartes”. He had often warned his disciples against the peril of pride, but on this occasion, he “beateth it into theyr heades”. Second, Erasmus stressed the gulf between “the worldly kingdom”, and “the kingdome of the gospell”. Things were “not so ordered in the kingdome of heaven” as they were “in princes courtes”. With a silent nod to Augustine’s *De Civitate Dei*, which he elsewhere called the Latin Father’s *chef d’oeuvre* (Fitzgerald 313), he noted that Gentile rule was marked by pride, lordliness, tyranny, subjection and oppression; the city of God by benevolence and humility, “a farre other sorte of reygnyng”. Whoever wished to exercise “Evangelyke and chrystian soueraigntye” would “not exalte himself to beare rule, but humble himself to do all men good”. Finally, Erasmus highlighted the “ensample” of Christ and the imitation of Christ. Jesus was telling his followers, “loke upon me...I take not upon me dignitie and honour...be thus minded”. Christ had been a servant towards his disciples, and he promised that “If ye shal be true folowers of my humilitie, ye shall also be partakers of my glorie”. Indeed, this was a fundamental principle of the gospel kingdom – “by means of lowenesse my father shall exalte me to the glorye of a kyndome”. (Erasmus, *Paraphrase*, on Matt. 20, Mark 10, Lk 22; Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 45: 287-89; 48: 190-93; 49: 129-31).

Erasmus’ exposition of the passage carried a polemical edge. Although he did not expressly mention the papacy, his anticlerical thrust was hard to miss. Like the sons of Zebedee, Renaissance Popes “dreamed upon a certayne corporall kyndome”, and “theyr myndes were upon the primacy” (Erasmus, *Paraphrase*, on Mark 10, fol. lxxii). Moreover, Erasmus was willing to apply the text to secular princes as well as ecclesiastical rulers. In his *Education of a Christian Prince* (1516), he noted that Christ “has marked very clearly the distinction between Christian and pagan princes”:

If it is the part of pagan princes to dominate, domination is not the way for a Christian to rule. For what can he mean by “it shall not be so among you”, except that a different practice must obtain among Christians, among whom the office of prince means orderly control, not imperial power, and kingship means helpful supervision, not tyranny? Nor should the prince soothe himself with the thought, “These things apply to bishops, not to me”. They do indeed apply to you; if, that is, you are a Christian! (Erasmus, *Education*, 32).

## 2. Political Prose, 1649-1660

Milton, then, had notable precedents for his use of this text. He had failed to see its potential when writing his anti-prelatical tracts, but it would come into its own in his regicidal and republican works. He first latched onto it in January 1649, as he drafted *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* to defend the trial and execution of King Charles I. He needed to answer a standard royalist objection – that Christianity taught submission to the powers that be, even tyrants. While the *locus classicus* of this doctrine was Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, chapter 13, it was most powerfully exemplified by Christ himself, who had submitted to death on a cross, and refused to retaliate. Monarchists and loyalists were confident that they had Christ on their side, and delighted in reminding their audience that the Saviour had taught and exemplified non-resistance even in the face of tyranny. According to the Royalist divine Henry Hammond, Christians were to conform to Christ’s pattern “in suffering, not fighting for Religion” (Hammond 7).

Thus Jesus was a problem for Puritan resistance theorists. The majority of their proof texts derived from the Old Testament. “What Would Jesus Do?” was not among their Frequently Asked Questions. It was easy enough to argue that among the Jews the “custom of tyrant-killing was not unusual” (*OCW* 6: 162; *CPW* 3:213). But surely Christ himself provided no support for regicides?

Milton begged to differ, appealing to Luke 22: 25-26:

...our Saviour himself, how much he favoured Tyrants, and how much intended they should be found or honoured among Christians, declares his mind not obscurely; accounting thir absolute authority no better then Gentilism, yea though they flourish’d it over with the splendid name of Benefactors; charging those that would be his Disciples to usurp no such dominion...(OCW 6: 164; CPW 3: 216-17).

The monarchy of Charles I, with its idolatrous claims to “dominion” and “absolute authority”, its showy titles and its sycophantic court, was a classic case of “Gentilism”. It contradicted the mind of Christ by imitating heathen rule. Christ and his Gospel were not “a Sanctuary for Tyrants”. Had not “his Mother the Virgin Mary” sung in “her profetic song” that God “had now by the coming of Christ *Cutt down Dynasta’s or proud Monarchs from the throne*”? “Surely it is not for nothing that tyrants by a kind of natural instinct both hate and feare none more then the true Church and Saints of God, as the most dangerous enemies and subverters of Monarchy, though indeed of tyranny” (*OCW* 6:164; *CPW* 3: 217). The godly regicides of 1649 were not flouting the politics of Jesus, they were putting them into practice.

Appropriating Jesus for the cause of tyrannicide required some chutzpah, but it was also a seminal moment in the development of Milton’s political ethos. In Christ’s rebuke to the sons of Zebedee, he had found a key concept. For the rest of his career, he would devote himself to unmasking the politics of “Gentilism”.

In *Eikonoklastes* (1649), Milton set out to show that the Caroline monarchy had usurped divine power and glory. The tract aimed to demolish the *Eikon Basilike*, the literary icon of King Charles I erected in prose by his idolatrous admirers. Milton was worried by the book’s immense popularity. The “Image-doting rabble” were “ready to fall flatt, and give adoration to the Image and Memory of this Man”, though he had undermined English liberties and “put Tyranny into an Art”. The people were prone “to a civil kinde of Idolatry in idolizing thir Kings” (*OCW* 6: 424; 282-83; *CPW* 3: 601, 343-44). The English were warned not to emulate “those foolish *Israelites*” who “depos’d God and Samuel to set up a King” like the surrounding heathen nations (*OCW* 6: 412; *CPW* 3: 580). They should remember that “the first King” was Nimrod, the builder of Babel and “the first that founded Monarchy” (*OCW* 6: 422, 350; *CPW* 3: 598, 466). “Tyranny and fals Religion” were intertwined; Charles I like Pharaoh had sought to destroy “the true Church” (*OCW* 6: 375-76; *CPW* 3: 509-10). “Pharaoh’s Divinity” was diametrically opposed to the teaching of Christ, for “*parity* and *poverty*” were “two special Legacies left by our Saviour to his Disciples” (*OCW* 6: 367; *CPW* 3: 496-97). Parity, of course, was the point of Christ’s rebuke to the sons of Zebedee, so Milton still had that text in mind as he gave Charles Stuart the tell-tale marks of pagan monarchism (see *OCW* 6: 683 n.1524; *CPW* 3: 496 n.6).<sup>6</sup>

In *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio* (1651), Milton's *First Defence* of the English republic, the Gospel text was cited more explicitly. Chapter 3 addressed the question: "whether the gospel...sentences us to slavery under kings and tyrants". If this was the case, Milton asked, why did Mary prophesy that Christ had "scattered the proud...dragged down rulers from their thrones"? Politicising the Pauline concept of Christian liberty, he asserted that Christ had taken "the form of a slave", not to recommend slavish submission, but to buy liberty for his people. He "never lost the heart of a liberator" (*PW* 105-06; *CPW* 4.1: 374-75). His own teaching confirmed that he had come to humble the proud and raise the humble. Was this not the point of his words to the sons of Zebedee? Like Erasmus, Milton treated Christ's advice as a political manifesto binding on all subsequent generations of Christians. Jesus had spoken:

...so that he might at once impress upon all Christians what kind of right of magistrates and civil power he wanted to set up amongst them... so that the Christian people should in no way ask for one to be their ruler, like the other nations... (*PW*, 109; *CPW* 4.1: 378).

The Messiah had been unambiguous about the shape of Christian politics - "among you it will not be so":

What could be said more clearly than this? Amongst you there will not be this proud rule of kings, even though they are called by *the plausible title of Euergetes and benefactors*. But whoever wishes to become great among you (and who is greater than the prince?) "let him be your attendant": and whoever wishes to be "first" or "prince" (Luke 22) "let him be your slave"... a king will either be no christian at all, or will be the slave of all. (*PW* 109-10; *CPW* 4.1: 378).

By 1651 then, Milton had tightened his reading of Christ's injunction. Jesus had not simply outlawed tyranny among Christians; he had denounced "this proud rule of kings". The gospel did not sentence Christians to slavery under despots; Christ's example mandated a politics of service, in which rulers acted more like slaves than like masters.<sup>7</sup>

When Milton published *The Readie and Easie Way* in 1660, his interpretation of the text was yet more emphatically republican. "A free Commonwealth", he insisted, had been preferred "by the wisest men in all ages":

but also (I may say it with greatest probabilitie) planely commended or rather enjoind by our Saviour himself, to all Christians, not without remarkable disallowance and the brand of *Gentilism* upon kingship...*the kings of the gentiles*, saith he, *exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise autoritie upon them, are call'd benefactors. But ye shall not be so...* The occasion of these his words, was the ambitious desire of *Zebede*'s two sons to be exalted above their brethren in his kingdom, which they thought was to be ere long upon earth. That he speaks of civil government, is manifest.... And what government comes neerer to this precept of Christ, then a free Commonwealth... (*OCW* 6: 485-86; *CPW* 7: 359-60, 424-25).

Contemporary critics of Milton expressed amazement at this idiosyncratic reading of Christ's words. A satirical pamphlet claimed to report on discussion of *The Readie and Easie Way* at James Harrington's Rota Club; here one speaker attacked Milton for "your *Brand of Gentilism*, upon King-ship, for which you wrest Scripture most unmercifully". The passage clearly referred to Christ's "spiritual Reigne", not to "Civill Government". Jesus did not erect "a Republique of his Apostles" or talk about "the Common-wealth of Heaven", "for if our Saviour had meant to brand Kingship with any evil Character, he would never have styld himself King of the Jewes, King of Heaven, King of Righteousnesse, &c. as he frequently do's" (*Censure* 10). The royalist George Starkey agreed that Christ was not denouncing kingship, but the use of "Kingly Authority" among the disciples, and thus church claims to "temporal power". The text bolstered Erastianism, not republicanism. And besides, Milton himself knew that "many of the Gentiles were governed by Republicues" (Starkey 87-88, 90; 20-22).

Milton, however, was convinced that he had identified a theme that ran through the Old Testament as well as the New. In putting "the brand of *Gentilism* upon kingship", Jesus was reiterating and intensifying the warnings of the Hebrew Scriptures. There were two proof texts here – Deuteronomy 17, in which God commands that whoever governs the Hebrews must not to elevate himself as "a king and lord over his brethren", and I Samuel 8, in which Yahweh reluctantly gives in to the Israelites' clamour for a king. As Eric Nelson has recently shown, the gloss which Milton puts on this text in the *First Defence* owes much to his immersion in rabbinic commentaries. For Nelson, it was this encounter with Hebraic sources that turned Milton into an advocate of what he calls "republican exclusivism" (Nelson ch. 1).

What Nelson fails to register is that Milton's reading of the Old Testament passage developed alongside his interpretation of Christ's stricture on Gentile rule, a text that had been on his mind since 1649. In *The Tenure*, both were cited, but not linked together. In the *Defence*, he argued that Christ's words "summarized" Yahweh's warning in I Samuel 8 (*PW* 109). In *The Readie and Easie Way*, the two texts were once again yoked together under the rubric of Gentilism, the concept that Milton derived from the Gospels. Christ had placed "the brand of *Gentilism* upon kingship" (*OCW* 6: 486-87; *CPW* 7: 359, 424); he had "forbid in express words" the "Gentilish imitation" of "regal splendour" and "extraordinary honour and worship"; he had "expressly declar'd that such regal dominion is from the gentiles, not from him, and hath strictly charg'd us, not to imitate them therein" (*OCW* 6: 490-91; *CPW* 7: 364, 429). In the second edition, Milton added that I Samuel 8 recorded "God's known denouncement against the gentilizing *Israelites*", who "affecting rather to resemble heathen...clamourd for a king" (*OCW* 6: 507-09; *CPW* 7: 449). But whereas Yahweh had indulged the *Israelites*, Christ was uncompromising:

God in much displeasure gave a king to the *Israelites*, and imputed it a sin to them that they sought one: but Christ apparently forbids his disciples to admitt of any such heathenish government... (*OCW* 6: 486-87; *CPW* 7: 359, 424).

Insofar as Milton did adopt an exclusivist republicanism it was more forcefully articulated in 1660 (as Stuart restoration threatened) than in 1651 (when the Stuarts had been vanquished). He took his doctrinaire stand not simply on rabbinic commentaries, but on the words of Jesus himself.

For Milton, Luke 22: 25-26 (together with its parallels) was a weight-bearing text, the basis for his famous dichotomy between the public servants of a free commonwealth and the divine pretensions of monarchs. Christ had commanded his followers to govern by serving others:

And what government coms neerer to this precept of Christ, then a free Commonwealth; wherein they who are greatest, are perpetual servants and drudges to the public at their own cost and charges, neglect their own affairs, yet are not elevated above their brethren;

live soberly in their families, walk the streets as other men, may be spoken to freely, familiarly, friendly, without adoration. Whereas a king must be adored like a Demigod, with a dissolute and haughty court about him...to set a pompous face upon the superficial actings of the State, to pageant himself up and down in progress among the perpetual bowings and cringings of an abject people, on either side deifying and adoring him for nothing done that can deserve it... (OCW 6: 486-89; CPW 7: 360-61; 425-26).

Milton's idealistic depiction of a Christian commonwealth was not entirely utopian, for it had some footing in the humdrum reality of local government in England's "unacknowledged republic" (Goldie). Aldermen and councillors, sheriffs, constables and churchwardens could seem like "perpetual servants and drudges to the public". Officeholders served at their own cost and charges, neglected their own affairs, yet were not elevated above their brethren; lived soberly in their families, walked the streets as other men, and might be spoken to freely, familiarly, friendly, without adoration. While this ethos of public service had classical sources, above all Cicero's *De Officiis*, it was reinforced by Christian humanist ideals and scriptural principles. Erasmus published an edition of Cicero's textbook, but his *Education of a Christian Prince* also appealed to the example and teaching of Christ.

At a national level, the ideal was far more difficult to realise, but Milton believed that some rulers conformed to the Erasmian model of the Christian prince. Dynastic monarchy naturally veered towards Gentilism, but the occasional monarch (like the good kings of Judah) shunned the vices of pagan lordship. Queen Christina was "to be preferred to countless kings" because she recognised that "her being a queen" was "the least of her glories"; she "takes thought for something far more august and sublime than to rule" (CPW 4.1: 606). At Westminster and Whitehall, Milton's greatest hope lay in the godly statesmen of the English Revolution, men like John Bradshaw, Sir Henry Vane the younger and Oliver Cromwell. In the *Second Defence*, Bradshaw was praised as a model public servant, "hospitable and generous" at home, "the most faithful of friends" (CPW 4.1: 638).

On Cromwell, however, Milton must have been increasingly ambivalent (Worden chs. 11-13; Sharpe; OCW 6: 84-86). Under the Protectorate, Bradshaw and Vane were ostracised, while church and state were bound more closely together by magisterial Independents and

Presbyterians. Cromwell became ever more regal, emulating Gentile kings as he revived the court, took up residence in former royal palaces, embraced the pageantry of state occasions, and succumbed to the pomp of title. He was styled “Lord Protector”, “His Highness”, and even flirted with “King Oliver”. Milton never denounced Cromwell by name. He processed in the Lord Protector’s magnificent state funeral, and while his blindness spared him the spectacle, he would have heard the drums, trumpets and cannons, and marvelled (like the Venetian ambassador) at the “extraordinary pomp and magnificence” of the occasion (Sharpe 187). To the Quaker Edward Burrough, the funeral was “sinful idolatry”, evidence that Cromwell “too much sought the greatness and honour of the world and loved the praise of men and took flattering titles and vain respects of deceitful men” (Sherwood chs. 12-13, quotation at 163).

There is good reason to believe that Milton shared this opinion. The *Second Defence* had excused the expulsion of the Rump while warning the Protector “to flee from the pomp of wealth and power” (CPW 4: i: 674). By 1659, Milton had changed his mind about the events of 1653 and the wisdom of rule by a single person. His unpublished “Letter to a Friend” now condemned the dissolution of the Rump (OCW 6: 447, 726 n.9). In 1660, he invoked the biblical hero Gideon who (like Cromwell in 1657) “refus’d to be a King or Monarch, when it was offered him”, but (unlike Cromwell) declined to pass power to his son, preferring “a free Commonwealth” to rule by “a single person” (OCW 6: 543; CPW 7: 473-74). Milton now implied that Oliver had wronged the nation in 1653 and 1657-58, and he surely concluded that the Protector had failed the test set for him in the *Second Defence*, succumbing to “the pomp of wealth and power”. As Kevin Sharpe noted in one of his final essays, the regal splendour of the Protectorate flew in the face of the austere aesthetic that lay at the heart of Milton’s godly republicanism. It is not surprising that his mind turned to the Fall (Sharpe 182-91).

### 3. Augustine’s *City of God*

It was around this time, indeed, that Milton revisited Augustine’s great treatise, *De Civitate Dei* (*Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans*). A quotation in his Commonplace Book from Book 19 has been dated to 1658-60 (CPW 1: 474 n.3). The same quotation was inserted into the revised edition of his *First Defence* published in 1658, alongside another from Book 4 (PW 146-

47). Salmasius had cited Augustine, and Milton recognised the need to return fire, but by the late 1650s he may have been increasingly receptive to Augustine's world-weary account of human politics. In the aftermath of the regicide, Milton had been positively Eusebian, valorising the revolution as a providential deliverance, a turning point in sacred history. By the end of the Cromwellian era, he was more like Augustine after the Sack of Rome.<sup>8</sup> He wished to save the English Revolution, as Augustine had wanted to save the Christian revolution, but he was more aware than ever of the gentilizing tendencies of the godly themselves, and more sensitive to the fatal attraction of pagan power. In *Paradise Lost*, the millenarian optimism of 1641 and 1649 had been replaced by a bleaker, more Augustinian outlook (*Paradise Lost* 12.531-43; Lewalski).

Studies of *Paradise Lost* have long acknowledged the importance of *The City of God* for understanding Milton's account of the fallen angels, man's Edenic state, original sin, incarnation and redemption (Lewis, 66-70; Patrides; Fiore; Poole). Yet they have focussed largely on Augustine's survey of the scriptural narrative in Books 11-22, rather than the critique of pagan Rome in Books 1-5. As a consequence, there has been remarkably little discussion of how Milton's reading of *The City of God* may have shaped the political theology of his great poem. Scholars of his republicanism have naturally explored classical rather than patristic sources, and the vogue for Milton the heretic (including the anti-Augustinian features of his thought) has obscured his debts to the mainstream theological tradition. In major recent overviews of Milton's life and thought, Augustine has an unduly low profile.<sup>9</sup> Yet the Augustinian connection demands serious attention, for we have firm evidence that Milton was familiar with sections from the early books of *The City of God* (specifically Books 4 and 5), and it is of some significance that he was reflecting on this great work around the time that (according to his nephew Edward Philips) he began to compose *Paradise Lost*, "about 2 yeares before the K[ing] came-in" (Darbishire 13).

Four features of the treatise would have been particularly useful to Milton. First, Augustine offered an extended critique of Gentile (specifically, Roman) politics. He defined "the city of this world" as "a city which aims at dominion, which holds nations in enslavement, but is itself dominated by that very lust of domination" – the *libido dominandi* (Augustine 1: Preface). Its founder was Adam's son, Cain, and it was initiated by an act of fratricide. So too was the city of Rome, whose founder Romulus killed his brother (Augustine, 15: 1, 5). Roman politics was driven by "the love of domination, the greed for praise and glory" (Augustine 5: 12). The

Romans boasted of “the extent and grandeur of empire”, but their “empire-building and empire-maintaining trade” had brought “the horrors of war”, “the shedding of men’s blood”, “the shadow of fear” and “the terror of ruthless ambition” (Augustine 4: 3, 7). In 1658, Milton cited the notorious passage in which Augustine compared unjust kingdoms to “great robbers’ dens; for what are robbers’ dens themselves, except little kingdoms?” (Milton, *Political Writings*, 146; Augustine 4: 4). This was the chapter which related the pirate’s “witty and truthful rejoinder” to Alexander the Great: “...because I do it [infest the sea] with a tiny craft, I’m called a pirate: because you have a mighty navy, you’re called an emperor” (Augustine 4:4). This Augustinian critique of empire would be writ large in *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*. In those poems, Satan is both an imperialist and an apologist for empire, while the Son in the brief epic condemns imperial conquest in terms that seem uncannily close to *The City of God*.<sup>10</sup> Milton, like Augustine, would write ‘against the pagans’.

A second feature of the treatise would have been equally appealing to Milton. In Book 5, Augustine drew an explicit contrast between the civic virtue of the early republic and the decadence of the later empire. In order to show pagans that Rome had degenerated long before the triumph of Christianity or the assault of Alaric the Goth, Augustine appealed to the witness of the republican historians, Sallust and Livy (Augustine 2: 18-22; 3:14; 5: 19). The moral character of the ancient Romans was highly commendable. Although they had been driven by their “greed for praise” and “passion for glory”, “in early times it was the love of liberty that led to great achievements” (Augustine 5: 12). Republican Rome had produced citizens of “heroic quality” who put the interests of the state above their own, men like Quintius Cincinnatus, Fabricius, and Marcus Regulus. When contemplating the self-denial of these exemplary figures, Christians should “feel the prick of shame” (Augustine 5: 18; see also 1: 15, 2: 29). However, subsequent generations of Roman statesmen had been motivated not by the love of liberty but by “the burning passion for domination”. Imitating the Persians and the Greeks, they had learned “to subdue cities and nations”, to see “the lust for domination as an adequate cause for war, to think that the highest glory lay in the widest empire...” The worst was “Nero Caesar who first scaled, as it were, the heights of this vice, and gained the summit” (Augustine 3: 14; 5: 19). The corruption of later imperial Rome stood in stark contrast to the republican virtue of the early republic, and legitimized Milton’s selective approach to classical politics. In *Paradise Regained*,

the Son would excoriate Roman imperialism while commending the virtuous republicans singled out for praise in *The City of God*.

Third, Augustine offered a Christian account of just rule as a form of humble service to the governed. In the revised version of the *Defensio*, Milton inserted a quotation from Book 19 of *The City of God*: “In the house of a just man who lives by faith, even those who command serve those whom they seem to command” (*PW* 146; Augustine 19: 14). This was the same quotation which an amanuensis copied into his Commonplace Book (*CPW* 1: 474-75, n.3). It was this Augustinian ideal that he expressed so memorably two years later in *The Readie and Easie Way*, when he declared that “they who are greatest, are perpetual servants and drudges to the public”. For Milton, as for Augustine and Erasmus, it was an ideal embodied in the incarnate Christ.

Finally, and most importantly, Augustine taught that idolatry and heathen politics could be traced to demonic influence. Identifying the demons behind the idols was a standard patristic line of argument, but *The City of God* gave it political purchase. By engaging in idolatry, it argued, Rome had become subject to “the oppressive domination of demonic powers” (Augustine 1: 31). As a result, the fallen angels’ lust for power and glory had become a defining feature of Roman political culture. The Romans had come to resemble the demons they worshipped. Indeed, Augustine explained the degeneration of Rome by reference to its increasing enthrallment to the demons. Anxious to propitiate the gods, the pagans had established theatrical shows, in which the obscene and violent behaviour of their deities was depicted and celebrated. Such productions had a coarsening effect – having witnessed their “objects of worship and veneration” shown as “fighting amongst themselves”, citizens were more likely to “imitate such battles” and excuse their crimes (Augustine 2: 8, 25, 27). Far from restraining tyranny, Rome’s gods had fostered it. Soothsayers had assured Marius and Sulla that the gods were on their side, giving divine sanction to their “appetite for conquest” (Augustine 2: 23-24). “Like spectators in the amphitheatre”, who relish the brutality of gladiatorial combat, the gods “put up with the violence involved in their chosen amusements”, enjoying the “blasphemous spectacle” of two peoples being slain on the battlefield. The demons were “the patrons of the Roman empire” and its imperial wars (Augustine 3: 14). It was a point not lost on the author of *Paradise Lost*.

#### 4. *Paradise Lost*

By 1658, Milton had spent a decade reflecting on the perils of political Gentilism. With Augustine in mind, he would turn to the two opposing archetypes standing behind human politics - Satan and the Son. In *Paradise Lost* and eventually in *Paradise Regained*, he would offer a panoramic view of the history of salvation. He would explain how pride had caused the fall of Satan and of man, and how Christ had come to cure that pride by his own humiliation. Both the epic and the brief epic would set the world-denying Son against the power-hungry Satan. The conflict between the pagan and the Christian ethos would be played out on a cosmic stage.

The anti-pagan character of *Paradise Lost* is announced in the invocations that open Books 1, 3, 7 and 9. The “heavenly muse” to whom Milton appeals at the outset of his “advent’rous song” is set against the Greek muses. This is the muse that inspired Moses “on the secret top/Of Oreb, or of Sinai”, and delights in “Sion hill”. Implicitly, the shepherd Moses is favoured over the shepherd Hesiod, and “Siloa’s brook” is set against the fountain of the pagan Muses. The “heavenly muse” enables Milton’s song “to soar/Above the Aonian mount” of Helicon (*PL* 1.6-16). In Book 3 it assists him to sing “With other notes than to the Orphean lyre” (*PL* 3.15-21). While Book 7 invokes the ancient muse of astronomy, Urania, she is sharply distinguished from the nine pagan muses; she does not dwell on “old Olympus”, but is “heavenly born”, sister of the Wisdom depicted in the Hebrew Scriptures. She empowers Milton’s poem to soar “above the Olympian hill” (*PL* 7.1-12). In Book 9, his “celestial patroness” inspires a story “more heroic” than any told by Homer and Virgil (*PL* 9.13-24).

In mounting his Augustinian critique of Gentilism, Milton would turn the classical genre of the epic against the pagans. At the beginning of Book 9, he expresses contempt for the traditional values and subject matter of the epic. Inspired by the Hebraic muse, he will break with Homer, Virgil, and their Christian imitators. He is not inclined to write about:

Wars, hitherto the only argument

Heroic deemed, chief mastery to dissect

With long and tedious havoc fabled knights

In battles feigned: the better fortitude

Of patience and heroic martyrdom  
 Unsung: or to describe races and games,  
 Or titling furniture, emblazoned shields,  
 Impresses quaint, caparisons and steeds;  
 Bases and tinsel trappings, gorgeous knights  
 At joust and tournament... (*PL* 9.28-37)

While tilting at the medieval romance, Milton has bigger targets. As David Loewenstein observes:

In many ways, *Paradise Lost*, for all its apparent classical and epic features, is remarkably critical of pagan values whose heroic and martial codes it continually reevaluates. After all, the character in *Paradise Lost* who most nearly embodies the old-style martial virtues and heroic ideology of the epic tradition – as he manifests the rage of Achilles, as well as the skill and cunning of Odysseus – is Satan in his unwavering pursuit of personal glory and imperial ambitions (Loewenstein, *Milton*, 32-33).

Milton structured his great epic so as to foreground the fallen angels and their gentilish power politics. “Paradise Lost” or “Adam Unparadized” had originally been conceived as a tragedy, and draft outlines of the drama survive in Milton’s Trinity College manuscripts written around 1640. Lucifer had featured in these early drafts, but the action was to take place in heaven and on earth, not in hell; the focus was on the fall of man, and apart from Satan himself the fallen angels were not on the cast list (*PL* pp. 1-3). According to Edward Phillips, the tragedy was to begin with Satan’s soliloquy, which we now find in Book 4:32-41 (Darbishire 13, 72-73). Although Milton had long contemplated an epic poem, he had thought in terms of a patriotic British epic centred on a heroic “K[ing] or Knight” before the Norman conquest (*CSP* pp. 264-65, 275; *CPW* 1: 813-14). By the late 1650s, however, his plans had been radically reshaped in line with his Augustinian critique of kingship. In place of an Arthurian epic that would idealise a Christian king, he began to compose a Satanic epic that would reveal the demonic sources of worldly monarchism. “Paradise Lost” was no longer a tragedy on a conventional theological

theme; it was an epic of extraordinary ambition, and (among much else) a vehicle for Milton's republican political theology. The epic opened with two books dedicated to the infernal council of demonic "Princes" and "Potentates" (*PL* 1.315). It is in these books that we see and hear the progenitors of political Gentilism.

Milton's demons are bursting with *libido dominandi*. They are desperate to usurp the divine prerogatives of absolute power and glory. Their revolt against heaven has taken "ambitious aim against the throne and monarchy of God" (*PL* 1.41-42). Satan will not humble himself. Having "once fawned, and cringed, and servilely adored/Heav'n's awful Monarch" (*PL* 4.958-60), he now refuses to "bow and sue for grace/With suppliant knee" (*PL* 2.111-12), and is contemptuous of "Knee-tribute" and "prostration vile" (*PL* 5.782). According to the Father, he "intends to erect his throne/Equal to ours" (*PL* 5.725-26). His "royal seat" is raised high, "with pyramids and tow'rs", "The palace of great Lucifer" (*PL* 5.756-60). Like the Gentile kings, he and the other fallen angels revel in their "imperial titles, which assert/Our being ordained to govern, not to serve" (*PL* 5.801-02). They address each other as "Powers and Dominions, deities of heaven" (*PL* 2.1), "Thrones and imperial Powers" (*PL* 2.310), "Synod of gods" (*PL* 2.391).

Milton insists on the Gentile character of Satanic politics. He explicitly compares the fallen angels to heathen despots. Satan is "their great Sultan" (*PL* 1.348). Pandemonium, "the palace of Satan", dwarfs the "greatest monuments" of "Memphian kings", the pyramids and sphinxes of the Pharaohs (*PL* 1.692-99). It eclipses the temples and palaces of Babylon and Cairo, "when Egypt and Assyria strove/In wealth and luxury" (*PL* 1.717-22). We learn that Satan's "throne of royal state", "Outshone the wealth of Ormus and of Ind/Or where the gorgeous East with richest hand/Show'rs on her kings barbaric pearl and gold" (*PL* 2.1-4). As Alastair Fowler puts it, "Kings and sultans are all ectypes of the satanic archetype" (*PL* p. 110 n. 104).

These affinities between pagan emperors and the fallen angels are no coincidence. As Book 1 explains, it was the demons who corrupted "the greatest part/Of mankind...to forsake/God their Creator", to set up "gay religions full of pomp and gold,/And devils to adore for deities". They were "known to men by various names,/And various idols through the heathen world" (*PL* 1.367-75; see also 10: 578-84). Moloch, was worshipped by the Ammonite; Chemos by "Moab's sons" (*PL* 1.406); Baalim and Ashtaroth by Phoenicians and Canaanites; Thammuz

in Lebanon; Dagon among the Philistines; Rimmon in Damascus; “Osiris, Isis, Orus and their train” in “Fanatic Egypt” (*PL* 1.478, 480); Belial in violent and “luxurious cities” like Sodom and Gibeah (*PL* 1.498).

The pagan deities had fascinated and haunted Milton’s imagination for many years, as their depiction in the Nativity Ode testifies (*CSP* 108-112), but in *Paradise Lost* they served a political purpose. The association with tyranny was not lost on later readers. Satan’s tears reminded Thomas Newton of Xerxes weeping, and as John Leonard observes, “Critics in the ensuing centuries will often liken Satan to sentimental tyrants, especially Napoleon and Hitler” (Leonard 2: 402-03, 413-14, 427, 429, 447, 452). According to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, we see in Milton’s Satan the nature of despotism magnified on a grand scale:

The character of Satan is pride and sensual indulgence, finding in self the sole motive of action. It is the character so often seen *in little* on the political stage. It exhibits all the restlessness, temerity, and cunning which have marked the mighty hunters of mankind from Nimrod to Napoleon. The common fascination of men is, that these great men, as they are called, must act from some great motive. Milton has carefully marked in his Satan the intense selfishness, the alcohol of egotism, which would rather reign in hell than serve in heaven...But around this character he has thrown a singularity of daring, a grandeur of sufferance, and a ruined splendour, which constitute the very height of poetic sublimity (Coleridge, 427).

That final point is vital, for Milton’s depiction of Satan and the fallen angels is at once damning and alluring. It was the sublime grandeur of the poet’s Satan that led Blake to write that Milton was “of the devil’s party without knowing it”, a claim given critical teeth by William Empson (Empson). The resurgence of interest in Milton’s republicanism has focussed attention on the fact that the poet puts anti-monarchist words into Satan’s mouth, so that the rebellion against God is justified in much the same way as the rebellion against Charles I (Armitage chs. 6-7).

The care that Milton takes to render Satan plausible reflects his acute interest in the seductiveness of Gentilism. C.S. Lewis was correct to make the historical point that the Protestant Milton did not write for post-Romantic readers: “The poet did not foresee that his work would one day meet the disarming simplicity of critics who take for gospel things said by

the father of falsehood in public speeches to his troops” (Lewis, 100). Yet Blake and Empson were not conjuring Satan’s appeal out of nothing. Stanley Fish may have exaggerated the gullibility of Milton’s intended reader, but his basic point remains plausible: the author wants his readers to recognise their own vulnerability to temptation (Fish). Indeed, the point becomes more persuasive when we consider Milton’s political agenda. In order to expose the ever present danger of gentilizing, Milton had to invest Satan with charisma and give him a voice. As we read about the fallen angels, we feel the gravitational force of the pagan drive for power and glory.

We also learn that many before us have fallen. As he lists the demon gods worshipped by the heathen in Book I, from Moloch to Belial, the poet relates the history of gentilizing among the Hebrews. Moloch is not content with pagan worshippers: “the wisest heart/Of Solomon he led by fraud to build/His temple right against the temple of God” (*PL* 1. 400-02). The Moabite god Peor “enticed/Israel.../To do him wanton rites” (*PL* 1.412-14). Faced by the appeal of Baalim, “The race of Israel oft forsook/Their Living Strength...bowing lowly down/To bestial gods” (*PL* 1.432-35). Solomon, “that uxorious king”, “Beguiled by fair idolatresses, fell/To idols foul”, building the temple of Ashtaroth on the Mount of Olives (*PL* 1.443-46). In the time of Ezekiel, Judah fell into “dark idolatries”, worshipping Thammuz, so that “Sion’s daughters” were “infected” by lust, displaying “wanton passions in the sacred porch” (*PL* 1.453-56). The idol god Rimmon “drew” King Ahaz “God’s altar to disparage and displace/For one of Syrian mode” (*PL* 1.472-74). “Nor did Israel scape/Th’ infection” of “Fanatic Egypt” when Aaron and later King Jeroboam fashioned golden calves (*PL* 1.479-89). Finally, the sons of the high priest Eli became devotees of Belial, as they “filled/With lust and violence the house of God” (*PL* 1.495-96)

Throughout this section of Book 1, Milton associates idolatry with monarchy, as he had done in *Eikonoklastes*, the work that first developed his “republican aesthetic” (Sharpe 177, 185). Moloch is a “horrid king”, Ashtoreth the “queen of heav’n”, and Belial reigns “in courts and palaces” (*PL* 1.392, 439, 497). The reader is confronted with the demonic sources of heathen despotism. As for Israel and Judah, they are led astray by the monarchs Solomon, Jeroboam and Ahaz. Milton does note the exceptional case of “good Josiah” (*PL* 1.418), whom English Protestants took to be the biblical model for Edward VI, but he implies that for the most part Hebrew kings were gentilizers, who fell for pagan idolatry and mimicked Gentile princes.

In Book 9, the temptation of Eve shows how “fraudulent temptation” works. Following the standard Augustinian view that pride is the archetypal sin (Augustine 12: 6, 14: 13-14; Fitzgerald 679-84), Milton elaborates on Genesis 3:5 where Satan promises Eve that by eating the forbidden fruit “ye shall be as gods”. The serpent tempts Eve by flattery. She is stuck in an “enclosure wild”, among dumb beasts, with no adoring audience save for one man. Such is her “celestial beauty” that she should “be seen/A goddess among gods, adored and served/By angels numberless, thy daily train” (*PL* 9.540-48). As the “Empress of this fair world”, Eve deserves to be obeyed and worshipped as the “Sovran of Creatures, universal dame”. She suspects that the snake is “overpraising” her, but he persists in calling her “Queen of this universe” and tells her that God wants “to keep ye low and ignorant,/His worshipers” (*PL* 9.684, 704-05). He makes the tantalising promise that “ye shall be as gods”, repeating the word “gods” half-a-dozen times, before concluding: “Goddess humane, reach then, and freely taste” (*PL* 9.708-18, 732). When Eve succumbs, Milton makes sure that we know her motivation: “nor was Godhead from her thought” (*PL* 9.790). She has replicated Satan’s original rebellion, as pagan kings will do after her. Lucifer, Eve and the kings of the Gentiles yearn to be adored and deified.

Finally, in Books 11 and 12, Michael shows how this satanic temptation has poisoned human politics. He offers a recognisably Augustinian account of the origins of the City of Man. For Milton, as for Augustine, “violent deeds” began with Cain, and the downward spiral intensified when the sons of God married the daughters of men and produced giant offspring, the Nephilim (Augustine 15: 1, 5-8, 22-23). It was this mysterious episode (recorded in Genesis 6) that inaugurated the politics of Gentilism:

Such were these giants, men of high renown;  
 For in those days might only shall be admired,  
 And valor and heroic virtue called;  
 To overcome in battle, and subdue  
 Nations, and bring home spoils with infinite  
 Manslaughter, shall be held the highest pitch

Of human glory, and for glory done  
 Of triumph, to be styled great conquerors,  
 Patrons of mankind, gods, and sons of gods,  
 Destroyers rightlier called and plagues of men. (*PL* 11.688-96).

Although it is sometimes missed in critical editions, “Patrons of mankind” was a clear allusion to Luke 22:25, where in Milton’s paraphrase, Gentile rulers cover over their tyranny “with the splendid name of Benefactors”. The Gospel passage on which Milton had laid such stress in 1649, 1651 and 1660, had not been forgotten. Indeed, since his account of the Nephilim follows that given in Book 15 of *The City of God*, he may well have been consciously fusing Christ’s warning against Gentile lordship with Augustine’s attack on imperial conquest.<sup>11</sup>

Michael predicts the increasing depravity that will follow the rise of “the great conquerors”. Having “spilt much blood, and done much waste/Subduing nations, and achieved thereby/Fame in the world, high titles, and rich prey”, the conquerors will descend into “pleasure, ease and sloth,/Surfeit, and lust” (*PL* 11.791-95). While the corruption of mankind will be temporarily halted by the Flood, a new tyranny will arise in the shape of Nimrod, a man:

Of proud, ambitious heart, who not content  
 With fair equality, fraternal state  
 Will arrogate dominion undeserved  
 Over his brethren... (*PL* 12.25-28).

This was the besetting sin of kings in Deuteronomy 17 (where God warned that the king’s heart must not “be lifted up above his brethren”), and it was the ambition of the sons of Zebedee (who had sought “dominion” over their fellow disciples). Nimrod displays all the hallmarks of political Gentilism. He is swollen with pride, “from Heav’n claiming second sovranity” (*PL* 12.35). Like Satan, he is an imperialist, “a mighty hunter” of men who “refuse/Subjection to his empire tyrannous” (*PL* 12.31-33). He and his crew wish “to get themselves a name”, and so they set out

to build “A city and tow’r, whose top may reach to heav’n” (*PL* 12.38, 44-45). This time, God is not angry but derisive. He sends not a cataclysmic Flood but a farcical confusion of languages, occasioning “great laughter” in heaven (*PL* 12.59). The proud Nimrod is humiliated, his empire dispersed, his assault on Heaven’s prerogatives ended (compare Augustine 16: 4-5).

Adam is appalled to hear of Nimrod’s usurpation of divine sovereignty. He knows instinctively that pagan power politics are a violation of human equality:

O execrable son so to aspire

Above his brethren, to himself assuming

Authority usurped, from God not giv’n (*PL* 12.64-66).

The Creator had granted humanity dominion over the animals, but “man over man/He made not lord”. Even worse, Nimrod was trying to dethrone God himself: “to God his tower intends/Seige and defiance: wretched man!” (*PL* 12.67-74). The same is true of Pharaoh, “th’ obdurate king”, who picks a fight with God by enslaving the chosen people and killing “their infant males” (*PL* 12.205, 167-68). He too is humbled, by plagues and the waves of the Red Sea. The archangel Michael, like the Virgin Mary, knows that God will “*Cutt down Dynasta’s or proud Monarchs from the throne*”.

The bitter irony of Michael’s narrative lies in the corruption of the Christian church. Despite the humbling vision of Mary’s Magnificat, and the primitive simplicity of the apostles, Christians had failed to break the mould of Gentile kingship. Adam learns that after the apostolic era, the leaders of the church will pursue dominion and glory. “Wolves shall succeed for teachers”; driven by “lucre and ambition”, they will seek “names,/places and titles” and “Secular power”, lording it over their brethren through the use of “carnal power” and “heavy persecution” (*PL* 12.508-33). The history of Christianity will be a story of gentilizing. Milton’s prose works had offered a sustained critique of such “heathenish rule” in church and state, but at the Restoration, the dominion of ecclesiastical hierarchy and dynastic monarchy had been re-established.

However, *Paradise Lost* does more than expose the satanic source and historic course of pagan dominion; it also delineates the politics of Jesus. The mission of the Son as introduced in

Book 3 stands in the starkest contrast to the imperialist venture of Satan instigated in Book 2. Satan and his minions are guilty of “Affecting Godhead” (*PL* 3.206); the Son “though throned in highest bliss/Equal to God, and equally enjoying/God-like fruition, quitted all to save/A world from utter loss...” (*PL* 3.305-08). Satan seeks glory; in the Son, “Love hath abounded more than glory abounds” (*PL* 3.312). Satan cannot even contemplate bowing or kneeling; the Son willingly humbles himself, “descending to assume/Man’s nature” (3.303-04). He pities Adam and Eve in their nakedness and shame, and comes down to clothe them with animal skins, assuming “the form of servant”, and prefiguring the day when he will kneel to wash “his servants’ feet” (*PL* 10.213-217). Thus Milton reprises “one of the most characteristic themes in Augustinian theology” – human pride being cured by Christ’s humility (Fitzgerald, 682-83). The Son comes “in the flesh/To a reproachful life and cursed death” (*PL* 12.4-5-06). God accomplishes great things by small, “by things deemed weak/Subverting worldly strong” (*PL* 12.566-68). Satan’s pride will end in his downfall, the Son’s “humiliation” in his exaltation (*PL* 3.313-22).

Satan’s only hope lies in tempting Christ to gentile imitation. When in Book 11, Michael takes Adam to Eden’s highest peak to show him “The hemisphere of the world”, Milton reminds us of the Temptation in the Wilderness when Satan showcased “all earth’s kingdoms and their glory” (*PL* 11.376-84). Adam is given a global survey of pagan empire:

His eye might there command wherever stood  
 City of old or modern fame, the seat  
 Of mightiest empire, from the destined walls  
 Of Cambulu, seat of Cathaian Can,  
 And Samarkland by Oxus, Temir’s throne,  
 To Paguin of Sinaean kings, and thence  
 To Agra and Lahore of Great Mogul  
 Down to the golden Chersonese, or where  
 The Persian in Ecbatan sat, or since  
 In Hispahan, or where the Russian Czar  
 In Moscow, or the Sultan in Bizance,  
 Turkestan-born; nor could his eye not ken

Th' empire of Negus to his utmost port  
 Ercoco and less maritime kings  
 Mombaza, and Quiloa, and Melind,  
 And Sofala thought Ophir, to the realm  
 Of Congo, and Angola farthest south;  
 Or thence from Niger flood to Atlas mount  
 The kingdoms of Almansor, Fez and Sus,  
 Marocco and Algiers, and Tremisen;  
 On Europe thence, and where Rome was to sway  
 The world: in spirit perhaps he also saw  
 Rich Mexico the seat of Motezume  
 And Cusco in Peru, the richer seat  
 Of Atabalipa, and yet unspoiled  
 Guiana, whose great city Geryon's sons  
 Call El Dorado... (PL 11.384-411).

This spectacular catalogue of exotic place names provides a panorama of the Gentile world from Asia to Africa, and from Europe to America. It is a world of wealth and power, empires, thrones, kingdoms and kings: the domain of Genghis and Kubla Khan, Tamburlaine, the Great Mogul, the Russian Tsar, the Ottoman Sultan and the Aztec Montezuma. In *Paradise Regained*, the Son will view such vast dominions for himself, heroically resisting the temptation to imitate “the kings of the Gentiles”.

### 5. *Paradise Regained*

Milton's obsession with political Gentilism helps to explain why the sequel to *Paradise Lost* addresses Christ's Temptation rather than his Passion. Of course, the choice was over-determined, and there was an obvious logic to pairing Satan's successful temptation of the first Adam with his failed temptation of the second Adam. Nevertheless, the confrontation in the wilderness enabled Milton to set the politics of Jesus against the politics of Satan. His concern

with gentilizing also explains why the second temptation – to receive the kingdoms of the world as Satan’s gift – is granted far more space than the other two put together. Milton takes four short verses in Luke’s Gospel and spins them into almost a thousand lines, occupying the end of Book 2, the whole of Book 3 and much of Book 4. By making this temptation the centrepiece of his brief epic, he allows the Son to deliver a full-scale diatribe against the kings of the Gentiles. Milton had once hoped to be qualified “to sing high praises of heroick men, or famous Cities” (*CPW* 1: 890); he now praises a different kind of hero, the founder of a heavenly city who critiques the City of Man.

Once again, Milton may have taken his lead from the paraphrase of Erasmus. When commenting on Luke chapter 4, the great humanist scholar had drawn particular attention to the temptation involving the kingdoms of the world. Satan understood that:

Honoure is sweet: a gaye thyng it is to bee a reowler: and a royall matter to excel and passe others. And reinyng dooeth utterly in all behalves, seeme to bee a certayne poynte of Godhed among menne. With this same swete flatteryng poyson were the firste parentes Adam and Eve caught. (Erasmus, fol. liv, on Luke 4).

The imagination of Erasmus went to work on this temptation in ways that are familiar to any reader of *Paradise Regained*. He put substantial speeches into the mouths of Satan and Jesus, and speculated on what Christ had seen from the high mountain when Satan “sodaynlye in a momente layeth all the kyndomes of the worlde before his eyes”:

...richesse, servauntes, palayces, armies, troumpettes, servyce and attendance of menne, crouchyng and knelyng unto them, shewes of royalte when they goe abrode, tryoumphis, ambassades, power to commaunde and to have all thynges dooen at a becke, and other thynges a greate maygnye, wherewithall the flaterye of all peoples, dooeth worshippe and exalte mortal prynces of the worlde, beyng oftetyms both foolishe and ungodlye... yet the people use them as veraye Goddes: yea and the princes selues beeyng sette in a pryde throughe the prosperouse fortune of thynges transytorye, thynke themselves better then God almygtyes felowes... (Erasmus, fol. lii, on Luke 4).

It is hard to imagine a reading of the temptation narrative more congenial to Milton himself. Indeed, it is hard not to hear echoes of this paraphrase in *The Readie and Easie Way* as well as *Paradise Regained*.

Milton's Jesus, like the Jesus of Erasmus, has nothing but disdain for worldly pomp and power. In Book 1 we learn that in the Wilderness the Son will "first lay down the rudiments/ of his great warfare". He will conquer Sin and Death not through brute force, but "By Humiliation and strong Sufferance:/ His weakness shall o'ecome Satanic strength" (*PR* 1.157-61). Satan is introduced as the "great Dictator", the one who led "th' infernal Crew" from Hell "to dwell in light/Regents and Potentates, and Kings, yea gods" (*PR* 1.113-17). The demons have reigned on earth, and monarchs do their bidding. Andrew and Simon observe that "the Kings of the Earth" oppress the godly (*PR* 2.44-45); Mary recalls how the holy family fled to Egypt to escape "the Murd'rous King" (*PR* 2.76); as in *Paradise Lost*, Belial lurks "In Courts and Regal Chambers" (*PR* 2.183). But the Son has come to announce the end of Satan's reign over pagan nations:

No more shalt thou by oracling abuse  
 The Gentiles, henceforth Oracles are ceast,  
 And thou no more with Pomp and Sacrifice  
 Shalt be enquir'd at *Delphos* or elsewhere (*PR* 1.455-58).

Satan, however, seeks to perpetuate his reign by tempting the Son with worldly power and glory. Jesus is "unknown, unfriended, low of birth/A Carpenter...Bred up in poverty". If he wishes to accomplish his "high designs" he needs riches, wealth and treasure (*PR* 2.410-15, 427). The Son replies that "Virtue, Valour and Wisdom" are to be prized far above gold: "Men endu'd with these have oft attain'd/In lowest poverty to highest deeds". Besides the biblical figures Gideon and Jephtha, he cites worthy men "Among the Heathen", "Who could do mighty things, and could contemn/Riches though offer'd from the hand of Kings". Three of the four heroes he names are ones commended in Book 5 of *The City of God*: "Quintius, Fabricius...Regulus" (*PR* 2.443-49; Augustine 5: 18). Like Augustine, Milton's Jesus holds these names in "esteem" (*PR* 2.447). Here were virtuous pagans untarnished by the lust for wealth and domination. Later on in Book 5, Augustine defined the kind of rulers whom Christians call happy: ones that "are not

inflated with pride, but remember that they are but men”; who “put their power at the service of God’s majesty, to extend his worship far and wide”; who “do not fear to share the kingship”; who “prefer to have command over their lower desires than over any number of subject peoples” (Augustine 5: 26). The Son tells Satan that “he who reigns within himself, and rules/Passions, Desires, and Fears, is more a King” than those who merely rule over “Cities of men”; “to guide Nations in the way of truth/By saving Doctrine” is “yet more Kingly” than to reign over other bodies by force (*PR* 3.466-480).

In Book 3, Satan responds by recommending pagan models far removed from the self-denying heroes of the early republic. Instead of quenching “the thirst for glory”, Jesus should seek to emulate the triumphs of Alexander the Great, the young Scipio, the young Pompey, and the “Great Julius”. The Son’s reply conveys a Ciceronian contempt for popular acclaim: “For what is glory but the blaze of fame,/ The people’s praise...” (*PR* 3.47-48). Then comes a searing indictment of imperial conquest:

They err who count it glorious to subdue  
 By conquest far and wide, to over-run  
 Large countries, and in field great Battels win,  
 Great Cities by assault: what do these Worthies  
 But rob and spoil, burn, slaughter and enslave  
 Peaceable nations, neighbouring, or remote,  
 Made Captive, yet deserving freedom more  
 Then those thir Conquerours, who leave behind  
 Nothing but ruin wheresoe’re they rove,  
 And all the flourishing works of peace destroy,  
 Then swell with pride, and must be titl’d Gods,  
 Great Benefactors of mankind, Deliverers,  
 Worship’t with Temple, Priest and Sacrifice;  
 One is the Son of Jove, or Mars the other,  
 Till Conqueror Death discover them scarce men,  
 Rowling in brutish vices, and deform’d,  
 Violent or shameful death their due reward. (*PR* 3.71-83)

This passage closely parallels the critique of Roman imperialism in Book 4 of *The City of God*. There Augustine challenged the imperial pride of the Romans, suggesting that they had no more reason to glory in their conquests or in the favour of the gods than successful pirates, or Spartacus and his all-conquering gladiators, or the Assyrian Emperor Ninus (whom Satan praises in *PR* 3.275-77). Even the greatest emperors have “the fragile brilliance of glass”, which may be “shattered in a moment”; “no man’s life is very long!” Expansionist empires are no better than robber bands: “to attack one’s neighbours, to pass on to crush and subdue more remote peoples without provocation and solely for the thirst for dominion – what is one to call this but brigandage on the grand scale” (Augustine, 4: 3 – 4: 6). The Son’s diatribe also incorporates Christ’s remarks in Luke’s Gospel on the kings of the Gentiles, who “must be titl’d Gods/Great Benefactors of mankind”. Once again, as in Book 11 of *Paradise Lost*, we have firm indications that Milton was fusing Christ’s anti-Gentilism with Augustine’s anti-imperialism. The Jesus of *Paradise Regained*, like the Jesus of the prose tracts, is exposing the pagan lust for domination and glory.

Satan is perplexed by Christ’s contempt for fame, but “murmuring” he offers a reply: “Think not so slight of glory; therein least/Resembling thy great Father: he seeks glory,/And for his glory all things made” (*PR* 3.108-111). The Son is angered by this Satanic misrepresentation of God, and replies “fervently”. To begin with, God has every reason to seek glory, “since his word all things produc’d”. The creature who seeks glory on the grounds that the Creator is glorified makes an ontological category mistake. Moreover, God’s “prime end” in creating the world was “chiefly not for glory” (as high Calvinists were wont to teach). Instead, Milton’s Jesus tacitly endorses the Boethian and Thomist view that the Father seeks “to shew forth his goodness, and impart/His good communicable to every soul/Freeely”. The least he can expect from the recipients of his goodness is “glory and benediction, that is thanks” (*PR* 3.121-27). Those who seek glory are not emulating the Father’s character, they are trying to seize “That which to God alone of right belongs” (*PR* 3.141). The reply leaves Satan dumbfounded, “struck/With guilt”, for “he himself Insatiable of glory had lost all” (*PR* 3.145-48).

Foiled, the tempter tries a subtler approach. If Jesus will not join the pagan imperialists, he has a duty to beat them at their own game, a “Duty to free/Thy Country from her Heathen servitude” (*PR* 3.175-76). Should he not imitate the great Jewish rebel, Judas Maccabeus? Don’t the “ten Tribes” who have never returned from captivity need a deliverer? This really is a temptation for the Son, who has entertained youthful dreams of rescuing “Israel from the Roman yoke” (*PR* 1.217), and quelling “proud Tyrannick pow’r” “o’er all the earth” (*PR* 1.219). Yet even here, the Messiah refuses the bait, chiefly on the grounds that his time has not yet come – first he must “Be try’d in humble state”, suffer and die (*PR* 3.188-89). Moreover, as he later explains, Israel’s ten captive Tribes are not worthy of liberation, being thoroughly gentilized. Falling off from God, they have embraced “all the Idolatries of Heathen round” and indulged in “worse than heathenish crimes”; they are “distinguishable scarce/From Gentils, but by circumcision vain” (*PR* 3.424-25).

Convinced that Jesus is a naïve yokel, Satan tells him that he needs to get out more. The Son has lived a sheltered life, “scarce view’d the Galilean Towns”. “The world thou hast not seen, much less her glory,/Empires, and Monarchs, and thir radiant Courts” (*PR* 3.233, 236-37). Taking Jesus to a high mountain, Satan shows him “the seats of mightiest Monarchs” (*PR* 3.252). The passage parallels the panorama shown to Adam in *Paradise Lost* Book 11, with the difference that Jesus only views the dominions of the contemporary Near East; the incarnate Son is the historical Jesus, his vision being regional and contemporary rather than global and atemporal. In both passages, however, Milton underscores the regal and imperial pretensions of the City of Man. Jesus, like Adam, sees the kings of the Gentiles in all their power and glory, their mystique enhanced by a litany of foreign names. In the 1671 edition, these names were highlighted in italics, while the morally loaded nouns were capitalised (“Empires...Monarchy...City...Kings”):

...here thou behold’st  
*Assyria*, and her Empire’s antient bounds,  
*Araxes* and the *Caspian* lake; thence on  
 As far as *Indus* East, *Euphrates* West,  
 And oft beyond; to south the *Persian* Bay,

And, inaccessible, the *Arabian* drouth:  
 Here, *Ninevee*, of length within her wall  
 Several days' journey, built by *Ninus* old,  
 Of that first golden Monarchy the seat,  
 And seat of *Salmanassar*, whose success  
 Israel in long captivity still mourns;  
 There *Babylon*, the wonder of all tongues,  
 As ancient, but rebuilt by him who twice  
*Judah* and all thy father *David's* house  
 Led captive, and *Jerusalem* laid waste,  
 Till *Cyrus* set them free; *Persepolis*  
 His city, there thou seest, and *Bactra* there;  
*Ecbatana* her structure vast there shews,  
 And *Hecatompylos* her hunderd gates;  
 There *Susa* by *Choaspes*, amber stream,  
 The drink of none but Kings; of later fame,  
 Built by *Emathian* or by *Parthian* hands,  
 The great *Seleucia*, *Nisibis*, and there  
*Artaxata*, *Teredon*, *Tesiphon*,  
 Turning with easy eye, thou may'st behold.  
 All these the *Parthian*, now some ages past  
 By great *Arsaces* led, who founded first  
 That Empire, under his dominion holds,  
 From the luxurious Kings of *Antioch* won (*PR* 3.269-97).<sup>12</sup>

The Son has seen for himself that the kings of the Gentiles “exercise lordship”.

To cap it all, he is shown the colossal Parthian army pouring out of the gates of Ctesiphon “In coats of Mail and military pride” (*PR* 3.312). Assembled from a host of exotic provinces, it boasts “Cuirassiers...Chariots...Elephants...Towers of Archers” (*PR* 3.328-30). Satan offers to put this awesome force at Christ's disposal that he may sit “on the Throne of David in full glory”

(*PR* 3.383). Yet once again, Milton's Erasmian Jesus is thoroughly inured to the appeal of pagan kings and their military hardware:

Much ostentation vain of fleshly arm  
 And fragile arms, much instrument of war,  
 Long in preparing, soon to nothing brought,  
 Before mine eyes thou hast set, and in my ear  
 Vented much policy, and projects deep  
 Of enemies, of aids, battles, and leagues,  
 Plausible to the world, to me worth naught (*PR* 3.387-93).

Finally, in Book 4, Satan shows Christ the imperial and cultural capitals of the Gentile world – Rome and Athens. Here too, there are signs that Milton is following Augustine. Books 1 to 5 of *The City of God* had unmasked the civil theology of Roman polytheism; Books 6 to 10 had debunked the natural theology of the Greek philosophers. Milton follows the same pattern.

First, the Son is shown “great and glorious Rome, Queen of the Earth” and the “Imperial Palace” on Mount Palatine (*PR* 4.45, 50-51). Satan offers him the chance to expel the monster Tiberius from his throne; the kingdoms of the world can belong to Jesus, if only he will “worship me as thy superior Lord” (*PR* 4.167). The Son is “unmov'd” by “this grandeur and majestic show/Of luxury, though call'd magnificence” (*PR* 4.109-11). Listening to the “Outlandish flatteries” of embassies would be a “tedious waste of time” (*PR* 4.121-25). Milton may write from personal experience as Cromwell's Latin Secretary, but he derives the Son's next argument from Sallust and Augustine. Why should he deliver the Romans from Tiberius when they have become “degenerate”, “inward slaves” to their vanity, cruelty and greed, and so “Deservedly made vassal” to their imperial overlord (*PR* 4.127-45)? When the Son's “season” finally comes, his kingdom will cover all the earth and last forever, quite unlike the localised and transitory empires of men. As Daniel prophesied, it will be “as a stone that shall to pieces dash/All Monarchies besides throughout the world” (*PR* 4.146-51).

Persuaded at last that the Son has no interest in “a worldly Crown”, Satan concludes that Jesus is only interested in “contemplation and profound dispute” (*PR* 4.213-14). This opens up a new line of attack; perhaps the wisdom of the Greeks can tempt Jesus to gentilize. Satan duly lays the trap:

All knowledge is not couch't in *Moses* Law,  
 The *Pentateuch* or what the Prophets wrote,  
 The *Gentiles* also know, and write, and teach  
 To admiration, led by Natures light;  
 And with the *Gentiles* much thou must converse... (*PR* 4.225-29).

The Son responds with a scathing attack on classical thought. Milton's Jesus is well versed in Greek philosophy, but this familiarity has bred contempt. Socrates is exempted from criticism because he knew that “he nothing knew”. But Plato “to fabling fell and smooth conceits”; Sceptics “doubted all things, though plain sence”; Aristotelians tied virtue to “riches and long life”; Epicurus wallowed in “corporal pleasure” and “careless ease”; and the Stoic was guilty of “Philosophic Pride”. In short, the Greek philosophers were “Ignorant of themselves, of God much more”. They knew nothing of the great Pauline and Augustinian doctrines of human fallenness and divine grace. They sought virtue in themselves, “and to themselves/All glory arrogate, to God give none...” (*PR* 4.285-315). The teaching of the Hebrew prophets was better far “Then all the Oratory of Greece and Rome” (*PR* 4.360); it was the Hebrew seers, not the pagan intellectuals, who had laid down “the solid rules of Civil Government” (*PR* 4.358). Godly commonwealths (and Christ's own kingdom) would be erected on Hebraic foundations.

The Son's sweeping denunciation of pagan learning has perplexed many admirers of the poet. Milton the Renaissance humanist was steeped in classical texts, indebted to Greek philosophy and Roman republicanism. Even in *Paradise Regained*, he cannot help comparing the Son to Hercules, while Jesus himself praises the austere heroes of the Roman republic. But when we read the poem as the culmination of Milton's critique of Gentilism, a work inspired by Christ's words to the sons of Zebedee, it begins to look less puzzling. This was not the place to praise Greek wisdom or Roman virtue; this work was designed to present Milton's final assault

on “the kings of the Gentiles”. A powerful consistency of vision unites *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* with *Paradise Regained*.

Yet Gentilism was never simply other people’s problem. Milton himself had felt the enticement of the Gentile ethos. He knew that it exercised a fatal attraction for God’s people – for Hebrews and Christians, monarchists and revolutionaries. He had longed for fame and glory as a benefactor of mankind. In *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (1644), he had hoped to “be reck’n’d among the publick benefactors of civill and humane life; above the inventors of wine and oyle” (CPW 2: 240). Elsewhere he boasted of his writings in defence of liberty, “Of which all Europe talks from side to side” (“To Mr Cyriack Skinner upon his Blindness”). He remembered that in the early days of the republic “the English boasted” that they would build a Commonwealth “to overshadow kings and be another Rome in the West” (CPW 7: 357). By contrast, the tone of *Paradise Regained* is chastened. If the Son seems sympathetic to the virtue of the Roman republic, he has no time for Roman imperialism; and he repudiates Jewish rebels as well as Gentile emperors, Maccabeus along with Alexander. As a youth, he admits, “victorious deeds/Flam’d in my heart, heroic acts”. In his dreams, he would liberate Israel from Rome, and then “subdue and quell o’re all the earth/Brute violence and proud Tyrannick pow’r”. He soon learns to conquer not by fear, but by “winning words”, a “more humane, more heavenly” way (PR 1.215-19). He resists the temptation to reach a godly end by pagan means.

## 6. *Samson Agonistes*

So had Milton renounced revolutionary violence as a species of Gentilism? Some scholars have detected a pacifist or quietist turn in the later Milton (Freeman; Marx; Wilding chs 7-9; Worden, “Milton’s Republicanism”; Donnelly). Yet in its first edition, the brief epic was published alongside *Samson Agonistes*, a paradoxical pairing that has generated much debate. Readers are clearly meant to admire Milton’s Jesus, but what are we to make of his Samson? For all their disparity, the two poems share the theme of temptation, and more specifically the temptation to “gentilish imitation”. Jesus scorns the kings and philosophers of the Gentiles, but Samson finds pagans and their ways irresistible. He is a circumcised hero ill-suited for a culture war with an “unforeskin’d race” (SA 1100). Initially, of course, he inflicts heavy defeats on the Philistines –

on a single day, “A thousand fore-skins fell” as he slaughtered “the flower of Palestin” with “The Jaw of a dead Ass” (SA 143-44). Yet Samson’s physical power is morally compromised. Like the Gentile kings, he is “swoll’n with pride”; he walks about “like a petty god”, “Softn’d with pleasure and voluptuous life” (SA 529-34). He falls for the charms of “Philistian women”, the daughters of “an Infidel” (SA 216, 221).

*Samson Agonistes* offers a picture of Gentilism that coheres with Milton’s earlier works. It is seductive, militaristic and idolatrous; obsessed with spectacle and glory. It presents two faces: Dalila flatters with her “enchanted voice” and “honeyed words”; the giant Harapha intimidates with his “rougher tongue” (SA 1065-66). Both are dangerously appealing. Dalila’s sexual charms are matched by Harapha’s military glamour:

...thy gorgeous arms, thy Helmet

And Brigandine of brass, thy broad Habergeon,

Vant-brass and Greves, and Gauntlet, add thy Spear

A Weavers beam, and seven-times-folded shield (119-22).

Dagon’s Temple is the epitome of Gentilism, “a spacious Theatre” of idolatry and domination (SA 1605). For Augustine, the theatre and the temple were the characteristic institutions of the City of Man, and Milton’s Philistines – like Augustine’s Romans – revel in “Sacrifices, Triumph, Pomp, and Games” (SA 1312; Augustine, 1: 32; 2: 8-14, 25-27; 4: 26; 6: 10). On the day of the Feast, the Philistines assemble with “Great Pomp, and Sacrifice, and Praises loud to Dagon” who has delivered Samson into their hands. Dagon is “magnifi’d”, the God of Abraham “Disglorifi’d” (SA 436-42). As befits a culture fixated on status and titles, the prime seating is reserved for “Lords, Ladies, Captains, Councillors, or Priests,/Thir choice nobility and flower...”. The “vulgar” stand without, excluded (SA 1653-54, 1659). Samson knows that he will face “Lordliest” Lords, and “the well-feasted Priest” (SA 1418-19). The “imperious”, “Lordly” Lords will exult in their dominion, their subjugation of a former foe, who is now “our Slave/Our Captive, at the public Mill our drudge” (SA 1352-53, 1391-93).<sup>13</sup>

The problem is that their slave has recovered his powers. In his humiliation and blindness, Samson has come to see through Gentilism. Confronted by Harapha, he has the

temerity to “disparage glorious arms/Which greatest Heroes have in battle worn” (SA 1130-31). His hair has grown back, a visible mark of the Hebrew, Nazirite identity once shorn by Dalila and the Philistines. He now disdains their Lords and Priests, their Idols and their “spectacle” (SA 1604). By shaking the pillars of their temple, he destroys “thir choice nobility” (SA 1654), thus bringing down the mighty from their thrones. He becomes the “faithful Champion” of Israel’s God (SA 1751). Samson does what the youthful Jesus of *Paradise Regained* had dreamt of doing. Jesus imagined performing “heroic acts”; Samson accomplishes “acts indeed heroic” (SA 527). The Son had hoped to “deliver Israel from the Roman yoke”, to “subdue and quell o’re all the earth/Brute violence and proud Tyrannick pow’r”; the Chorus tells us that God empowers his deliverer “To quell the mighty of the Earth...Tyrannic power” (SA 1270-75).

Such “heroic acts” could never match the “deeds/Above Heroic” of the Son in the Wilderness (*PR* 1.14-15); Samson’s physical triumph over the Philistines was but a type of Christ’s spiritual conquest of the powers of evil. Nevertheless, the inferiority of Samson’s action did not invalidate it. The Chorus’s endorsement of his deed was firmly in line with Augustine, who argued that the self-destruction of the biblical hero was plainly sanctioned by God (Augustine 1: 26). This was also the unanimous verdict of Reformed commentaries on the Book of Judges (Serjeantson). Moreover, the poem contained numerous indications that Milton continued to sympathise with militant Puritanism, and Samson can be seen as the personification of the flawed protagonists of the Good Old Cause (see Loewenstein, *Representing Revolution*, chs. 8-9; Worden ch. 15; Coffey; Gregory). The critical consensus now dates the drama to the early Restoration, and we can be confident that its author shared the outlook of the martyrologist who commemorated the execution of Sir Henry Vane Jr. in 1662 – England’s “most successfully acquired liberty” was “ready to be completely swallowed up again into downright heathenish idolatry and prophaneness” (Sikes 130). Yet Milton did not despair. Contemporary readers of the 1671 poems found encouragement to persevere under persecution; they also found hope that tyranny would not last forever (*OCW* 2: lxix-lxxiv). Milton concurred with Augustine that all empires were as fragile as glass, and he continued to share Mary’s faith in a providential God who cuts down dynasties. He also believed that the Son’s “season” would one day come “as a stone that shall to pieces dash/All Monarchies besides throughout the world” (*PR* 4.149-50). *Samson Agonistes* may have been written to assure godly revolutionaries that, sooner or later, the saints would participate in the final overthrow of “heathenish idolatry” and “Tyrannic power”.<sup>14</sup>

Alternatively, perhaps, the 1671 poems were designed to remind revolutionary readers that the temporary and temporal triumphs of the saints could not compare to the lasting spiritual victory of the Son. What is unambiguously clear is Milton's settled aversion to the pagan politics of dominion and glory.

## 7. Conclusion

Milton's Restoration poems share a theopolitical vision that arose from his conviction that Christ had placed "the brand of *Gentilism* upon kingship". In *Paradise Regained*, Gentilism is verbally dismantled by Jesus; in *Samson Agonistes* it is physically toppled in an apocalyptic denouement. In both, Mary's "profetic song" is being enacted – God is scattering the proud and dragging down rulers from their thrones. *Paradise Lost* traces Gentilism to its satanic origins, displaying it on a cosmic scale and uncovering its tragic trail in human history. When the royalist John Beale read the account of Nimrod in Book 12 he had no doubt that the poet "holds to his old Principle" (Norbrook 467).

All three works were structured so as to give special prominence to the phenomenon of Gentilism. The opening books of *Paradise Lost* centred on the demonic council, allowing Milton to depict the lust for domination and glory that had corrupted the fallen angels, who in turn seduced the pagans and through them the gentilizing Israelites. Books 2 and 3 contrasted the imperious mission of Satan with the self-abasing mission of Christ. Book 9 depicted an Eve who sought godhead, replicating the sin of Satan and prefiguring the pride of Gentile kings. The final two books gave Milton the opportunity to relate the history of gentilizing from Cain and Nimrod to the apostasy of clerical Christendom. *Paradise Regained* was dominated by the second temptation to worship Satan in exchange for the kingdoms of the world. The Son's reply can be read as an extended gloss on his words to the sons of Zebedee. Finally, in *Samson Agonistes*, Milton invented the non-biblical character of Harapha who would embody and articulate the ethos of Gentilism with its passion for arms and martial glory. In all three of his late, great poems, as in his revolutionary prose, Milton was preaching against pagan lordship and its Christian imitators.

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<sup>1</sup> Earlier versions of this paper were presented at Trinity College Dublin; the Tenth International Milton Symposium in Tokyo; the Institute of Historical Research in London; and the British Milton Seminar in Birmingham. For the opportunity to test my ideas on these occasions, I am most grateful to Crawford Gribben; the IMS Committee; Gordon Campbell, Thomas Corns, Hugh Adlington; and Quentin Skinner. Tobias Gregory, John Hales, Neil Keeble, and Quentin Skinner read earlier drafts and offered valuable feedback. Most of all, I am indebted to a former student, Gai Ferdon, whose 2004 PhD thesis first alerted me to the importance of “Gentilism” in Milton’s prose tracts. See Ferdon, 118-20, 126-28. Her work did not pursue Milton’s critique of Gentilism into his major poems, but it is the germ from which this paper grew.

<sup>2</sup> Even writers who do recognise that Milton’s epic is saturated with political language can set up false dichotomies: “*Paradise Lost* is a poem, not a political testament, one, moreover, whose purpose is to delineate universal spiritual values, not partisan ideologies” (Fallon, ix).

<sup>3</sup> For a nuanced evaluation of the debate see Loewenstein, “From Politics to Faith in the Great Poems?”

<sup>4</sup> I am grateful to Thomas Fulton for suggesting that I examine Erasmus’s critical role in the interpretive tradition.

<sup>5</sup> This paper cites the Yale edition of Milton’s *Complete Prose Works* (CPW); the available volumes of the *Oxford Complete Works* (OCW), including Laura Knoppers’ edition of *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes* (PR, SA); Alastair Fowler’s edition of *Paradise Lost* (PL); John Carey’s edition of the *Complete Shorter Poems* (CSP); and Martin Dzelzainis and Claire Grunzelier’s edition and translation of the *Defensio* in Milton’s *Political Writings* (PW).

<sup>6</sup> Francis Oakley’s *Kingship* does not discuss Milton, but it gives grounds for thinking that iconoclastic Christian republicanism was the culmination of a long tradition of religious opposition to the sacralization of royal power. Oakley’s argument runs as follows: sacral kingship was a core feature of numerous ancient civilisations; biblical monotheism threatened to subvert it by demanding that worship be exclusively reserved for the one true God; under Constantine and Charlemagne, Christianity accommodated itself to sacral kingship; but late medieval and early modern political theology revived the biblical critique of civil idolatry, thus instigating the de-sacralization of kingship that became a key feature of Western modernity. Oakley elaborates the argument in a projected three-volume trilogy on “The Emergence of Western Political Thought in the Latin Middle Ages” published by Yale University Press. The first volume, *The Empty Bottles of Gentilism*, cites Hobbes’ claim that though “the new wine of Christianity” was poured into “the empty bottles of Gentilism”, “it will in time not fail to break them”.

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<sup>7</sup> Since chapter 3 of the *First Defence* argues that Jesus outlaws Gentile monarchism, it is hard to agree with the claim that “Milton does not seek to derive any specific precepts from the scriptures” (Dzelzainis in Milton, *Political Writings*, xxii).

<sup>8</sup> The classic study of Augustine as a critic of empire and a demystifier of political power is R.A. Markus’s *Saeculum*. On his account, *The City of God* stands in contrast to the celebratory *Life of Constantine* by Eusebius.

<sup>9</sup> According to the indexes, *The Oxford Handbook of Milton* has just seven fleeting references to Augustine or Augustinianism, while the *Blackwell Companion* and *Milton in Context* have three each. Augustine is missing altogether from the index to Campbell and Corns’ valuable biography, and from the influential collection on *Milton and Republicanism*. Richard Hardin is unusual among Miltonists in highlighting the significance of Augustine’s political theology. In *Civil Idolatry*, Hardin argues that Milton desecralizes monarchy by developing an Erasmian critique of the idolization of rulers that is prefigured in Augustine. Hardin’s monograph only came to my attention after this essay had been completed, but its argument complements my own.

<sup>10</sup> Recent works on the imperial theme in Milton contain almost no reference to Augustine, and none consider his critique of imperial Rome or its relevance to *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* (see Armitage, ch. 11; Quint; Fallon; Evans; Rajan and Sauer).

<sup>11</sup> In *Paradise Lost*, Milton follows the dominant Augustinian interpretation of Genesis 6 – the “sons of God” are descendants of Adam’s third son, Seth (Augustine, 15: 23). But in *Paradise Regained* 2.178-81, Satan endorses the minority view derived from the apocryphal Book of Enoch, ch. 15, that the “False titl’d Sons of God” were a “lusty Crew” of fallen angels led by Belial (see Ericson Jr.). On this latter account, the pagan lust for domination and glory was quite literally inseminated into the human race by the demonic beings who sired the Nephilim.

<sup>12</sup> Laura Knoppers notes that the printing house altered italics and capitalization (*OCW* 2: lxxvii), so we cannot be sure of Milton’s intentions. Nevertheless, the capitalisation and italics tell us something about how the printers’ read Milton’s text and what struck them as significant. I am indebted to John Hale for discussion on this point.

<sup>13</sup> If *Samson Agonistes* was written in the early 1660s, not long after *The Readie and Easie Way*, the contrast between Milton’s uses of the term “drudge” is striking. In a free commonwealth, it is the rulers who are the “perpetual drudges” of the public; in Philistia, the rulers make their enemy their “drudge” and Samson is brought before them “as a public servant...In their state Livery clad” (1615-16).

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<sup>14</sup> It is intriguing that Milton's prefatory note on tragedy justified the Christian use of the genre by observing that the Reformed commentator Paraeus "divides the whole Book [of Revelation] as a Tragedy, into Acts distinguish'd each by a Chorus of Heavenly Harpings and Song between" (*OCW* 2:66-67). By making this generic link between *Samson Agonistes* and the Book of Revelation, Milton perhaps suggests that his tragedy should be read alongside the Apocalypse.

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