Graceful Symmetry: The Politics of Grace in Shakespeare, Spenser, and Milton

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of English
University of Toronto

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2017

Abstract

*Graceful Symmetry* explores the relationship between grace and political agency in the work of William Shakespeare, Edmund Spenser, and John Milton. These writers were part of a Protestant culture that understood grace through the slogan *sola gratia*, or “grace alone,” which means that God has the prerogative to save or condemn human beings freely. Protestants inherited this vision of salvation from St. Paul, who imagines grace as a form of liberation within submission to God—so that liberty is, paradoxically, the experience of being bound. Shakespeare, Spenser, and Milton explore the political ramifications of these scriptural paradoxes. They suggest that, by magnifying the freedom of God, and by redefining the believer’s agency as a form of submission to the divine, grace challenges existing political obligations between subjects and their human sovereign. Shakespeare and Spenser deploy the rhetoric of religious grace to explore the degree to which monarchical power is compatible with active political participation from Protestant citizens. Taking this approach to a radical extreme, Milton argues that grace regenerates ordinary Christians to the extent that that they become capable of wielding sovereignty as citizens of a free republic, thus making monarchy unnecessary. Shakespeare, Spenser, and Milton ultimately coopt the religious language of grace to reimagine a wide range of political concepts—such as imperialism, absolutism, nationalism, and republicanism—during political crises such as
Tyrone’s rebellion in Ireland and the English Civil Wars. I argue that grace is central not only for Protestant theology but also for the political ideals of Renaissance humanism, such as republicanism. The interdisciplinary resonance of grace was ultimately due to the tendency among a wide variety of early modern writers—including the literary writers I explore—to use Paul as an authority on legal and political questions as well as religious ones. By demonstrating how Paul’s writing on grace influenced early modern culture and religion, I argue that politics is inseparable from theology in post-Reformation English literature.
Acknowledgments

This dissertation is the product of six years’ study at the University of Toronto. I am profoundly indebted to the many teachers, advisors, and friends who have made this institution a home for me in these years. Although it is impossible to recount in full everyone who has made this project possible in this limited format, I would like to begin by acknowledging my special debt to my Michael Donnelly, who has carefully reviewed and edited the entire dissertation. Michael has been my friend, intellectual guide, and chief emotional support. He has believed in this project more than anyone else, and the end result is inconceivable without him. This dissertation is dedicated to him.

I am indebted to my doctoral supervisor, Paul Stevens, who met me at a turning point in my life and convinced me to pursue my doctoral studies at the University of Toronto. From the beginning of my project, Paul helped nurture my ideas and articulate my thoughts in their best light without sacrificing my own voice as an independent researcher. Paul has also gone beyond all professional expectations in encouraging me during moments of illness, uncertainty, and other taxing challenges that I encountered while writing this project. I am very indebted to Mary Nyquist and David Galbraith, the other two members of my supervisory committee. David Galbraith has been a constant guide and source of encouragement throughout the project. David’s wide-ranging expertise in Spenser criticism, early modern law, literary theory, and many other fields, was instrumental in helping me to integrate these fields in my chapters. Mary’s incisive feedback on each of my chapters, especially the chapter on *Paradise Lost*, transformed the entire dissertation and provided it with its final shape. Mary also helped me to develop my pedagogical style in the classroom by generously advising me on her own teaching methods. In addition to the members of my supervisory committee, I am indebted to my internal examiner, Lynne Magnusson, and my external examiner, Laura Lunger Knoppers, for providing excellent feedback on how to improve this project during my defense.

This dissertation is a product of the broader academic community at the University of Toronto, which has welcomed and encouraged me throughout my studies. I am indebted to Liza Blake for her extensive feedback on my research and professional development throughout our shared time at the University of Toronto. Elizabeth Harvey provided me with crucial advice during the beginning of my project that helped me focus on the appropriate writers for the project. I am
indebted to Jeff Espie, Sarah Star, John Estabillo, Sam Kaufman, Janine Harper, Aaron Donachuk, Leslie Wexler, Tristan Samuk, and Jeremy Lopez for providing feedback on my work. Terry Robinson, Daniel Wright, Thom Dancer, Andrea Charise, Katherine Larson, Heather Murray, Tim Harrison, Mark Knight, and Tom Lachlan have provided valuable feedback on the direction and presentation of this project. I am indebted to Karen Weisman and Arthur Ripstein for helping me to conceive future avenues for research based on this project. I am indebted to Ato Quayson, Carol Percy, Cheryl Suzack, Neal Dolan, Christopher Warley, Jill Levenson, and many others for their valuable feedback on research methodologies connected to this project. I am indebted to the intellectual community at the Center for Renaissance and Reformation Studies, especially Matt Kavaler, Natalie Oeltjen, and Catherine Bates for stimulating this project. Finally, I am indebted to Chester Scoville, Andrew Lesk, and John Reibetanz for advising me on how to integrate my research and my pedagogical strategies.

This project is also indebted to many other researchers in other institutions. I am highly indebted to the faculty at Lancaster University, including Jo Carruthers, Terry Eagleton, Michael Greaney, Liz Oakley-Brown, John Schad, and Andrew Tate, who provided detailed feedback on the project at a formative stage during a research exchange. The project benefitted immensely from the conversations I have had with researchers attending and presenting at the yearly Canada Milton Seminars, such as Linda Gregerson, Elizabeth Hanson, Victoria Kahn, John Leonard, Ann Baynes Coiro, Nick von Maltzahn, Tobias Gregory, Thomas Luxon, Brian Cummings, Debra Shuger, Travis DeCook, Gary Kuchar, Stephen Fallon, Jennifer Rust, Mary Fenton, Rachel Trubowitz, David Norbrook, Ryan Hackenbracht, Erin Webster, Dayton Haskin, Kenneth Graham, and many others. I have a special debt to Feisal Mohamed, who has generously advised me in several key questions arising at my research, especially in the last few years of research. Jason Kerr and Ethan Guaglaido sharpened the theoretical focus of this project, particularly in my chapter on Paradise Lost. Noam Reisner has provided invaluable feedback and support for the future direction of research arising from this project. Naomi Baker and Gideon Baker have been very valuable source of feedback throughout the project. There are many others who have shaped this project both directly and indirectly at conferences such as the MLA, SCSC, and SAA yearly meetings; this project would be impossible without these intellectual exchanges.

Finally, I would like to thank the institutions that have supported this project financially through fellowships, grants, travel awards, and other forms of compensation. I would like to thank
especially SSHRC, the Government of Ontario, the University of Toronto, Folger Library, and Lancaster University for their generous financial support at various stages of the project.
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Introduction

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul defines the identity of his church with a series of metaphors: “For we are labourers together with God: ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s building” (1 Cor. 3:9). 1 The people of God are both the temple and its builders. The basis of this paradox is grace: “According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 3:10-11). Paul’s original Greek word for “grace” is χάρις, a word that can be translated as “gift” but also as “favour,” “concession,” and “liberality.”2 Although Paul has the grace to be a “masterbuilder” for this spiritual temple, other members of the community are expected to build upon Paul’s foundations as “labourers together” with God. Individuals must submit to a predefined structure—a temple, a foundation, an emerging religious identity—but this submission is paradoxically enabling, because grace gives everyone an opportunity to contribute to this new temple. Hence Paul’s warning: “let every man take heed” because being God’s co-worker entails finding agency within obedience.

John Milton’s Aeropagitica adopts key aspects of Paul’s understanding of grace, but it also invests the scriptural text with Milton’s own ambitions as a humanist-educated Englishman. In a well-known passage, Milton compares the growth of Protestant sects during the English Civil Wars to the “cutting” and “hewing the cedars” necessary for building “the Temple of the Lord” (Complete Prose Works 2:555).3 As in Paul’s epistle, grace unites these sects in a single architectural structure: “out of many moderat varieties and brotherly dissimilitudes that are not vastly disproportionall arises the goodly and the gracefull symmetry that commends the whole pile and structure” (CPW 2:555). On the one hand, the English sectarian is independent

1 Here and throughout, my biblical citations in English are from the King James Version at www.biblegateway.com. For Latin and Greek scriptural citations, I use the Vulgate and Stephanus New Testament 1550 at www.biblegateway.com.

2 Edward Leigh gives a sense of the semantic range of grace (χάρις in Greek) in his 1650 dictionary of New Testament Greek. Leigh translates Paul’s χάρις to Latin not only as “Gratia” (grace) but also as “Gratiarum” (thanks), “Gaudium” (joy), “Beneficentia” (kindness), “Eleemosyna” (alms, pity), “ Favorem” (favour), “Dona ex gratia data” (the gifts of grace that have been given), and “to be freely and frankly given” or “having freely forgiven” (286). Grace thus covers a broad semantic range that centers on the idea of divine mercy and gift-giving.

3 The Yale edition of Milton’s Complete Prose Works will hereafter be abbreviated as “CPW.”
builders of a new church, but on the other hand, the common source of their agency is grace, the key word in “graceful symmetry.” Milton’s difference from Paul lies in the kind of activity that he describes as co-working with God. Unlike the fledgling 1st-century church at Corinth, the English nation builds its temple by “reasoning, reading, inventing, discoursing” about politics and Protestant doctrine (CPW 2:555). For Milton, grace not only saves souls but also elevates the social status of the Christian, transforming him—and Milton does usually have a him in mind—into an active participant in public debate and political life.

This empowering approach to grace might be surprising in the work of a Protestant poet, because early modern Protestantism typically understood grace as a force that overpowers the human will in the process of salvation. Most reformers summarized their view of grace with the slogan sola gratia, or “grace alone,” which meant that grace justifies human beings without human effort. In practice, sola gratia involved magnifying divine freedom at the expense of human freedom. Martin Luther demonstrates this tendency when, during his debate with Erasmus, he contrasts grace and free will: “imagine whatever you may as being within the power of free choice, Paul will still persist in saying that the righteousness of God remains ‘apart from’ that kind of thing” (307). At his most polemical, Luther insists that there is no common ground between Erasmus’s view of free will and Paul’s view of grace. Similarly, John Calvin argues that the human will is totally depraved, and that grace redeems the elect by uprooting their natural inclination for sin: “When the Lord establishes his Kingdom in them, he restrains their will by his Spirit that it may not according to its natural inclination be dragged to and fro by wandering lusts. That the will may be disposed to holiness and righteousness, He bends, shapes, forms, and directs, it to the rule of his righteousness” (Institutes II.v.14). For Calvin, as for Luther, grace is an authoritarian force that moves and “shapes” the elect according to God’s will.

However, Milton’s remarks on the temple in Areopagitica signal the political dangers in emphasizing the freedom of grace at the expance of the human will. In practice, the Calvinist approach to grace often implied that the human power to fashion the polis must be subsumed by religion, so that the sinfulness of earthly politics may be curbed by the will of God working

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4 Martin Luther defines sola gratia in The Bondage of the Will while discussing Rom. 11:6: “grace would not be grace if it were earned by works, so that [Paul] quite unmistakably excludes all works in the matter of justification in order to establish grace alone and free justification” (312).
through his elect and their godly ministers. In the Dutch Netherlands, Calvinists used these arguments to repress religious groups such as the Remonstrants. The theocratic implications of Calvinism became especially clear in England during the 1640s, when the Presbyterians began to promote censorship and other forms of religious repression. These measures drew sharp criticism from Independent and Erastian groups in Parliament, who argued that the Presbyterians were eroding religious liberty and the authority of Parliament to rule on religious matters. Milton’s understanding of grace in Areopagitica participates in this broader challenge to politicized Calvinism. His point is that Protestantism is fully compatible with active citizenship and the toleration of religious dissent, because grace empowers the will instead of taking away its agency completely. Whereas Calvin sees Christians as passive instruments before God, Milton considers those who are guided by grace to be God’s active builders and co-workers.

Milton was of course not the first writer to address these problems. Christian theology had long sought to balance grace and the human will so as to avoid the conclusions drawn by theologians such as Luther and Calvin. Paul’s epistles lent themselves not only to the Lutheran and Calvinist readings of grace, but also to a range of alternative perspectives, some of which saw grace as working together with the will. Augustine, who was closer to Paul than Luther or Calvin, theorized a “co-operative” understanding of grace, which sought to reconcile the

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5 See Freya Sierhuis, 19-35, for an account of the repression of the Dutch Remonstrants by the Calvinists. Sierhuis explains that Oldenbarnevelt, the Remonstrants’ chief political ally, challenged political Calvinism because it infringed on his Erastian views on sovereignty: “For Oldenbarnevelt, the States’ power to decide what doctrine could be taught in the churches of Holland followed directly from their rights as the sovereign authority. There was no way in which he could compromise on this position without violating the principle of States’ sovereignty” (27).

6 For an account of Presbyterian religious repression, see Ernest Sirluck’s introduction to Milton’s prose, CPW 2:92-107. For the theories of toleration that emerged in reaction to the Presbyterians, see Sirluck, CPW 2:73-92.

7 Sirluck (CPW 2:107-30) provides Independent arguments against Presbyterianism. In CPW 2:130-6, Sirluck summarizes Erastian perspectives.

8 Cf. William Halewood’s notes on Milton’s theology in The Poetry of Grace, esp. 168-75. Halewood rejects the Arminian interpretation of Milton (171) and argues that Milton’s thought is compatible with Calvin’s on account of their mutual interest in the interaction of reason and grace (172-3). In Halewood’s reading of Paradise Lost, Milton’s Calvinism manifests in his choice of God’s perspective at the expense of the human (165). Halewood’s study is a compelling reminder that the different strands of the Reformation were always in dialogue with one another. Nevertheless, a wide range of critics have demonstrated that Milton’s Arminianism does inflect his particular reception of Reformed doctrine. I engage this criticism and its effect on Paradise Lost in chapter 3, where I argue that Arminianism shaped how Milton envisioned human freedom in response to grace, so that the human and divine perspectives on sin and salvation may be reconciled through cooperative grace.

9 Augustine outlines his views on cooperative grace in On Grace and Free Will, especially XXXIII.1. I provide a more extended commentary on this text in Chapter 2.
majesty and sovereignty of God with Paul’s repeated injunctions to become God’s co-worker. In his debates with Luther, Erasmus interprets Augustine’s idea of cooperative grace:

St. Augustine and those who follow him, considering how harmful to true godliness it is for a man to trust in his own powers, are more inclined to favour grace, which Paul everywhere stresses. For this reason, he denies that man liable to sin can turn to amend his life by his own powers, or do anything which will bring him to salvation unless he is moved by the free gift of God to desire those things which lead to eternal life. This grace which others call ‘prevenient,’ Augustine calls ‘operative.’ For faith, which is the doorway to salvation, is the free gift of God. To this, charity is added by the more abundant gift of the Spirit, which he calls ‘cooperative grace,’ which is always present in those who strive until they attain their end, but on condition that at the same time and in the same work both free choice and grace operate; grace, however, as the leader and not as a companion. (52)

According to this Erasmian reading of Augustine, “operative grace” is a “free gift” and thus an expression of God’s absolute authority in the work of salvation. This emphasis on operative grace is a concession to Luther, who repeatedly stressed the absolute sovereignty of God and the utter bondage of fallen human beings to sin. However, Erasmus adds that after this initial free gift, Christians may grow in their faith through works of charity that require a freely-willed cooperation with grace. Charity is “co-operative” in the sense that it requires both grace and free choice, albeit with grace “as the leader and not as a companion” of the will. Thus “operative grace” maintains the majesty of God and the freedom of his gifts, while “co-operative” grace leaves room for free will and human agency. Erasmus’s point is that grace does not need to be an all or nothing affair. In his reading, Augustine imagined grace in a way that preserves divine authority without taking away human agency entirely.

Although Erasmus failed to persuade his immediate interlocutors, the desire to strike a balance between grace and human agency never disappeared entirely from Protestantism. To be sure, Luther vehemently rejected Erasmus’s argument as a confused reading of Augustine (181). John Calvin later reclaimed cooperative grace for his own view of salvation, which stressed the total depravity of the human will (II.iii.11). On the other hand, some reformers emphasized the importance of voluntary obedience, and the human desire to obey God, in the process of
regeneration. A reformer as respected as Philip Melanchthon was willing to suggest, well into the 1550s, that the human will must desire God and respond actively to grace:

Chrysostom says that God draws man. However, he draws the one who is willing, not the one who resists. (Trahit Deus, sed volentem trahit.) And Basil says that God comes first toward us, but nevertheless that we should also will that he come to us. And take the wonderful parable in which the son who had squandered and wasted his inheritance in riotous living comes home. As soon as the father sees him from afar, he pities him, runs to him, falls on his neck, kisses him. Here the son does not turn back, does not scorn his father, but instead goes also toward him, acknowledges his sin, and begs for grace. From this illustration we should learn how this teaching is to be used and how this passage in Basil is to be taken. (60)\(^{10}\)

Melanchthon stresses the primacy of grace in salvation, but he also adds, following Basil and Chrysostom, that grace “draws the one who is willing,” and that we should actively “will that [God] comes to us.” In other words, God initiates the process of regeneration, but human beings must play a part in this process by co-operating actively with God. In the parable that Melanchthon uses as his illustration, the father’s love is free and unmerited, but the prodigal son must voluntarily accept what the father offers. Although the son acknowledges his sin and begs for grace, this submissive begging is itself a paradoxical form of agency, because it allows the son to co-operate with his father. Despite being closer to Luther than Erasmus in his theology, therefore, Melanchthon continues to describe co-operative grace as a source of subjective agency.

Co-operative grace continued to influence theologians well into the late 16\(^{th}\) century and beyond. Melanchthon’s students and followers, who were known as the Philippists, spread their teacher’s views across Europe as they fled persecution.\(^{11}\) In the Netherlands, they likely

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\(^{10}\) Cf. Robert Stillman’s discussion of this passage in Philip Sidney and the Poetics of Renaissance Cosmopolitanism, 45.

\(^{11}\) See Stillman, 6-28, for an account of Melanchthon, the Philippists, and the migration of their ideas to England through figures, such as Philip Sidney.
influenced Jacob Arminius and the Dutch Remonstrants. The Dutch Arminians in turn split the Reformed church by insisting that grace was universally available to Christians, and that all believers were therefore responsible for voluntarily co-operating with grace. Similar opinions appeared in England in the late 16th century in the works of Peter Baro, and they resurfaced again with a vengeance during the 1620s and 1630s when the Laudian church underwent its controversial shift from Calvinist to Arminian theology. By the time William Prynne and Peter Heylyn published their polemics on Arminianism, England had become a battleground between several different perspectives on grace, all of which claimed the authority of scripture and Protestant orthodoxy. The persistence of these voices in Protestant Europe so long after the publication of Erasmus’s treatise demonstrates that early modern Protestantism was capacious enough to entertain a diversity of opinions on grace, some of which sought to see grace as an empowering influence on the human will.

Co-operative grace was especially attractive to Protestant humanists, who wished to distinguish themselves from pre-Reformation conceptions of humanism. If Protestantism emphasized original sin, Italian humanism, at its most extreme, was equally strident in its optimism about human potential. Thus, in Oration on the Dignity of Man, Pico della Mirandola claims that man will reach the divine “when the soul, by means of moral philosophy and dialectic shall have purged herself of her uncleanness” (23). Although Protestant humanists continued to emphasize human agency, they diverge from Pico and other pre-Reformation

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12 Nicholas Tyacke has proposed a direct theological line of influence from Melanchthon to Arminius through intermediaries such as the Danish theologian Niels Hemmingsen (Aspects 181). The common feature between these theologians is their synergestic understanding of the will as active in response to grace.

13 For an example of Arminius’s views on cooperative grace, see his Opera Theologica (265). Peter White usefully summarizes Arminius’s main argument as follows: “Certainly, mercy is to sinners; the non-election of others, their reprobation in wrath, presupposes persistence in sin and rejection of grace offered. But the first decree of all is the offer of Christ as Mediator to all men. If there is one distinctive feature of ‘Arminianism’, it is this” (31). I provide my own reading of Arminius and Milton’s borrowings from Arminianism in “Chapter 3.”

14 For an account of the rise of Arminian ideas in England, see Nicholas Tyacke’s Anti-Calvinists (223-46) and Aspects of English Protestantism (133-50, 196-7). Tyacke’s view is that the Church of England was almost unanimously Calvinist until the 1620s until Arminianism disrupted this pre-existing consensus (Anti-Calvinists 223). Tyacke’s point is that the Puritans of the 17th century were reactionaries seeking an earlier church settlement. Peter White challenges this account in Predestination, Policy, and Polemic (1-12). According to White, there was always a “spectrum” of belief in England, which included a “middle area” between Calvinism and Laudianism (11). See also Charles Prior’s Defining the Jacobean Church (1-21) for an overview of these historiographical debates.

15 William Prynne attacks Arminianism in his highly polemical Anti-Arminianisme, and Peter Heylyn defends the Arminian side with equal vigour in Aerius Redivivus. See Peter White (1-11) for a summary of the polemical debates and their role in English belief at the time.
humanists insofar as they ascribe redemption primarily to grace, with moral philosophy as a secondary and assisting cause. For example, in *A Defence of Poesy*, Philip Sidney imagines poetry as both a means of instruction and a sign of human corruption:

give right honor to the Heavenly Maker of that maker, who, having made man to His own likeness, set him beyond and over all the works of that second nature. Which in nothing he showeth so much as in poetry, when with the force of a divine breath he bringeth things forth far surpassing her doings, with no small argument to the incredulous of that first accursed fall of Adam,—since our erected wit maketh us know what perfection is, and yet our infected will keepeth us from reaching unto it. (24-5)

Sidney balances the “erected wit” that human beings receive from their “Heavenly Maker” with a typically Protestant emphasis on original sin and the “infected will.” Unlike Pico, therefore, Sidney does not believe that learning may supplant grace altogether. Nevertheless, poetry contributes to the work of salvation by teaching sinners “what perfection is,” thus preparing them to accept grace. Brian Cummings has demonstrated that Sidney departs from Calvinism when he describes human wit as “erected,” because Calvinists saw both reason and the will as depraved (269). Therefore, as Robert Stillman has argued, Sidney’s view of poetry stems from the idea of cooperative grace as understood by Melanchthon and other Philippists such as Sidney’s tutor, Hubert Languet (16-7).16 For Sidney, poetry and humanist learning prepare the will so that it may actively and voluntarily cooperate with grace.17 In terms of the broader argument of the *Defense*, this cooperative understanding of grace is what reconciles the Protestant emphasis on sin with Sidney’s humanist defense of poetry and learning.

Understood through the rubric of cooperative grace, Sidney’s *Defence* demonstrates the theological complexity of what an earlier generation of literary critics would have described as “Christian humanism.” For critics such as Douglas Bush, Christian humanism is the Renaissance tendency to see grace as enabling humanity’s God-given powers of creation and self-

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16 Cf. Cummings’s argument in *Grammar and Grace* that Sidney was mostly influenced by Calvinist views on grace (269-70).

17 For a parallel argument, see Paul Stevens’s reading of the concept of poetry as religious and national discipline in *The Reason of Church Government* (“Milton and National Identity” 353).
fashioning. I argue that the cooperative understanding of grace provides the theological justification for Protestant versions of Christian humanism. Cooperative grace fulfils this role because it paradoxically suggests that while grace is an absolute expression of God’s will, it is also compatible with human agency. Although this approach to grace appears in innumerable early modern texts, the writers I explore in this dissertation are Edmund Spenser and William Shakespeare before Arminian influences began to shape England’s state church—thus producing Anglicanism—and John Milton after they do.

The complexities of cooperative grace, most importantly the degree to which it promotes particular forms of politics, are clearest in Spenser’s writing on equity, Shakespeare’s writing on patience, and Milton’s writing on prophecy. Each of these concepts convey the political opportunities in the paradoxical agency-in-submission that human beings are supposed to derive from cooperative grace. Although equity had multiple definitions in the early modern period, Protestant theologians saw equity primarily as the process of subsuming human laws to the Gospel. This kind of equity relied on the activity of godly magistrates who allow grace to complement their judgment. Drawing on this approach, Spenser justifies the Elizabethan colonization of Ireland as a means of spreading the equity of the Gospel—and with it, English empire—to Catholic lands. Like equity, patience implied a balance between grace and the will. Patient Christians were supposed to submit to worldly persecution, but grace provided them with an empowering perspective on their suffering. Shakespeare politicizes this discourse in *King Lear* and *The Tempest* by exploring the degree to which Christian patience may promote voluntary obedience to the political authorities. Similarly, Christian theologians defined prophecy as a form of public preaching that requires both human eloquence and the aid of the Spirit. Drawing upon Arminian understandings of cooperative grace, Milton argues that the gift

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18 Bush’s thesis in *The Renaissance and English Humanism* is that “the classical humanism of the Renaissance was fundamentally medieval and fundamentally Christian” (68). For Bush, however, Protestantism was initially hostile to humanism until Anglicanism achieved a more temperate synthesis in England (83). Although I borrow Bush’s term for heuristic purposes here, I do not accept his historical claims for the evolution of English Protestantism.

19 Cf. Stevens’s argument in *Imagination and the Presence of Shakespeare in Paradise Lost* that grace is related to Christian humanism through the imagination: “[t]he educated imagination is then the peculiar instrument of grace. It provides the psychological mechanism by which we come to see and believe the evidence of things not seen” (5-6). I am suggesting that the cooperative understanding of grace is what reconciles this approach to the imagination with Protestant theology.
of prophecy empowers all Protestant citizens to participate actively in religious and political life as preachers and prophets. Equity, patience, and prophecy foreground the political implications in the balance between agency and submission that was implicit in cooperative grace.

These approaches to grace suggest that Protestant humanism thrives on certain kinds of theological contradiction. Brian Cummings has noted that the “literary culture” of the Reformation (5), which includes not only poets such as Sidney and Fulke Greville but also theologians such as Luther, is fundamentally paradoxical.20 According to Cummings, “Puritan humanism hardly understands its own contradictions. It stakes its faith in a literary power apparently without limits, and then places the severest constraints on the powers it has invoked” (277). This assessment of Puritan—and, I would add, Protestant—humanism is correct as far as it goes, but the contradictions are not always as confused and poorly understood by early modern humanists themselves as Cummings suggests. Shakespeare, Spenser, and Milton actively exploit the contradictions in Protestant humanism for aesthetic and political ends. They explore the degree to which cooperative grace, and closely related concepts, may reconcile the contradictory drives in Protestant humanism towards subjective agency on the one hand and submission to God on the other. By linking cooperative grace to equity, patience, and prophecy, these writers question whether political agency is compatible with a Protestant view of salvation. At times, the result may be theologically inconsistent, but literary treatments of grace are more comfortable with such contradictions than professional theologians.

By exploring the politics of early modern religion, this dissertation participates in the ongoing critical effort to re-evaluate the theological origins of secular modernity.21 Building on

20 The central paradox in Cummings’s Grammar and Grace is that the Protestant Reformation promised “the literal truth” of scripture while at the same time foregrounding the literary and interpretive processes—collectively, the “literary culture of the Reformation”—through which the truth became manifest (5). This paradox maps onto several others in Cummings’s study, including the contradiction between agency and submission that human beings receive in response to grace. For literary applications of this idea, see Cummings’s reading of Greville and Sidney (264-77); for theological applications, see his discussion of co-operative grace in Calvin and the Council of Trent (340-6).

21 Since the publication of Arthur Marotti’s and Ken Jackson’s “The Turn to Religion in Early Modern Studies,” criticism has increasingly distinguished secularist readings of early modern religion from early modern theology itself. Marotti and Jackson acknowledge that religion never disappeared from early modern studies (166), but they suggest that the Foucauldian and Marxist commitments of New Historicism in the 1980s and 1990s sometimes distorted early modern theology (167). A wide range of critics working on religion have engaged, challenged, and revised this “turn.” For more information on this critical movement and a revision of its central claims, see Marotti’s and Jackson’s introduction to Shakespeare and Religion.
Carl Schmitt, Ernst Kantorowicz, Walter Benjamin, and Giorgio Agamben, literary critics have increasingly argued that early modern “political theology” cannot be explained through a purely secular analysis of the period. For example, Deborah Shuger identifies equity as the cornerstone of absolutism in *Measure for Measure* (78-81). Similarly, Victoria Kahn and Feisal Mohamed argue that Protestant theology inspired Milton and some of his contemporaries to challenge sovereignty in ways that anticipate our “postsecular” moment. For Julia Reinhard Lupton, Paul’s epistles inspire in Shakespeare’s works the concept of the “citizen-saint,” a hybrid politico-theological subject who points towards a politics to come. Although these critics draw from many different theoretical sources, they all suggest that early modern theology is profoundly political in ways that remain suggestive.

Yet despite their efforts to uncover the relationship between politics and early modern religion, these critics often overlook the centrality and theological complexity of grace in post-Reformation English culture. Part of the problem is that grace, unlike sovereignty or citizenship, is no longer a prominent category for thinking about political agency today. However, as Paul Stevens has demonstrated, the early modern period saw grace as a means of translating religious ideas into politics. While this dissertation is in conversation with critics interested in political theology, I explore concepts such as equity, sovereignty, and citizenship primarily through early modern understandings of grace rather than the terms introduced by 20th century theory. Grace is how early modern writers imagined some of the questions posed by modern criticism. The discourse of grace provides Spenser with a means of justifying colonization as an expression of the ruler’s equity. It becomes for Milton a way to imagine the liberty of the Protestant citizen.

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22 Political theology is a vast field, but its main trends and concerns are summarized in the essay collection *Political Theology and Early Modernity*. Key theoretical texts for this movement include Ernst Kantorowicz’s *The King’s Two Bodies*, Carl Schmitt’s *Political Theology*, Giorgio Agamben’s *Homo Sacer* series, and Walter Benjamin’s “Critique of Violence” and *The Origins of German Tragic Drama*.

23 Mohamed suggests that Samson in *Samson Agonistes* anticipates our own “post-secular” moment because of his conviction in the truth of his cause (121-2). Kahn, on the other hand, sees Samson as a proto-secular and rational subject who privileges interpretation at the expense of theology (276-8). They both argue that Milton anticipates modern sovereignty as imagined in the work of 20th-century theorists such as Carl Schmitt and Walter Benjamin.

24 Lupton provides an updated reading of political theology in Shakespeare in *Thinking with Shakespeare*.

25 See for example “Milton and National Identity,” where Stevens argues that, in Milton’s work, “Education is imagined as both being facilitated by and facilitating grace. It is this relation which, according to Milton, ultimately explains the triumph of the Revolution and the heroic success of the English of 1649” (354). Cf. Stevens’s *Imagination* (5-6).
and for Shakespeare it is a means of defining sovereignty in relation to patient suffering. These writers deploy grace in parallel ways not because they subscribe to the same religious ideas—in fact, they certainly did not—but rather because this was the language for interrogating the relationship between religious and political agency in post-Reformation England.

Moreover, by focusing specifically on the cooperative dimension of grace, these writers foreground the exclusionary and often repressive elements in Protestant humanism. As David Loewenstein has demonstrated, Milton and his contemporaries were in dialogue with Diggers, Levellers, Quakers, and other radical groups. Notwithstanding these radical connections, Milton’s Protestant humanism suggests that he was more committed to his social status than some of the radicals in his milieu. For example, the antinomians that flourished during the Civil Wars downplayed human agency in response to grace because they insisted that the Spirit could inspire anyone, including women and uneducated laymen, to become “prophets” and religious leaders. This was not Milton’s approach any more than it was Spenser’s or Shakespeare’s. Cooperative grace stresses human effort in response to God, and these writers tend to imagine the appropriate effort as civic virtue, nobility, and intellectual rigour. Thus Milton finds the “gracefull symmetry” of English national reform not among self-declared prophets, such as Mary Cary, but rather in the sophisticated “discoursing” and “reasoning” that characterizes members of his own social class. Although Shakespeare, Spenser, and Milton explore the degree to which grace can be politically emancipatory, their arguments ultimately privilege a minority of

26 For Spenser’s Calvinism, see Carol Kaske’s *Spenser and Biblical Poetics*, John King’s *Spenser’s Poetry and the Reformation Tradition*, and Darryl Gless’s *Interpretation and Theology in Spenser*. Shakespeare’s religious influences are more doctrinally heterogenous. See David Scott Kastan’s *A Will to Believe* for an overview of recent criticism on Shakespeare’s complicated religious history, including recent debates about whether or not he borrows more from Catholicism or Protestantism. I discuss the criticism around Spenser’s and Shakespeare’s religion in chapters 1 and 2. Milton’s views were highly idiosyncratic, but he exhibits signs of Arminianism in his mature theology. Key studies on this topic include Dennis Danielson’s *Milton’s Good God* and Maurice Kelley’s *This Great Argument*. See my notes in chapter 3 for a fuller treatment of the criticism on Milton and Arminianism.

27 See Loewenstein’s *Representing Revolution* (244-62) for a reading of Quaker radicalism in Milton’s work.

28 Cf. Nicholas McDowell’s discussion of radicalism in *The English Radical Imagination* and Jeffrey Shoulson’s similar approach in “Milton and Enthusiasm.”

29 As I explain in Chapter 4, this kind of radical antinomianism informs the writing of self-declared prophets such as Mary Cary. For an overview of radical English antinomianism, see Tim Cooper’s *Fear and Polemic in Seventeenth-Century England* and David R. Como’s *Blown by the Spirit*. 
humanist-educated Protestants, who have the requisite social capital to respond actively to grace.\textsuperscript{30}

This exclusionary aspect to cooperative grace links the concerns of this dissertation to recent revisions of early modern republicanism. Critics such as Paul Stevens, Mary Nyquist, Richard Tuck, and Eric Nelson have demonstrated that early modern republicanism was not simply a form of “liberty before liberalism,” as Quentin Skinner once argued, but rather a wholly different and ideologically problematic alternative to the modern conception of liberty.\textsuperscript{31} Early modern republicanism was often complicit in various justifications of slavery, empire, nationalism, and theocracy that are incompatible with liberty as understood by secularized democracies today.\textsuperscript{32} My work builds upon these critics by suggesting that Shakespeare, Spenser, and Milton approach agency, including the agency of the republican citizen, through a paradoxical view of grace that is incommensurable with the negative liberties of the late modern liberal subject.\textsuperscript{33} The complicated dynamic between grace and the will in early modern texts suggests that agency is not an individual right but rather an ongoing dialogue with God. This approach explains why Shakespeare, Spenser, and Milton often think about the growth of individual agency as part of a programme that also includes Protestant imperial expansion and the violent punishment of unbelievers. After all, part of the point of 1 Cor. 3 is to provide a warning—“let every man take heed,” in Paul’s words—to those who refuse to cooperate with God, or who fail to do so in the appropriate way. One of the recurring concerns of this dissertation is to explore how different writers define what counts as legitimate cooperation with grace.

\textsuperscript{30} Cf. Stevens’s “Milton and National Identity” (355).

\textsuperscript{31} The phrase “liberty before liberalism” refers to Skinner’s highly influential book of the same title. Skinner argues that early modern republicanism assumed a “neo-Roman” theory of freedom as the positive freedom to participate in a free state. For more on this theory, see especially his first chapter, “The Neo-Roman Theory of Free States” (1-58). The critical reaction to Skinner has challenged his tendency to present republicanism as a more favourable alternative to liberalism.

\textsuperscript{32} Nyquist discusses the link between antityrannicism and slavery in Arbitrary Rule. For republicanism and early modern theocracy, see Eric Nelson’s The Hebrew Republic (88-137). Stevens explores nationalist republicanism in “How Milton’s Nationalism Works.” See also the other essays in Early Modern Nationalism and Milton’s England. In The Sleeping Sovereign, Richard Tuck challenges the link between modern liberty and early modern republicanism by arguing that absolutists such as Hobbes and Bodin provide a closer parallel to modern democracy than early modern republicanism.

\textsuperscript{33} For representative essays on liberalism and negative liberty, see Isaiah Berlin, Two Concepts of Liberty; Judith Shklar, “The Liberalism of Fear”; and Michael Ignatieff, Human Rights as Politics and Idolatry.
The first chapter explores the politics of grace and equity in Book V of Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*. Since the 1990s, critics such as Andrew Hadfield have argued that Spenser justifies English imperialism in *The Faerie Queene* and *A View of the Present State of Ireland*. While I too engage with this context, I argue that Spenser’s imperialism depends, more specifically, upon a Protestant understanding of equity. Drawing upon Calvinist theology, Spenser defines equity as the power in a Christian magistrate to diverge from the written law in order to preserve the unwritten precepts of divine justice. Understood in this way, equity participates in the paradoxes of grace: the magistrate has the authority to diverge from the law, but this interpretive power also requires the assistance of divine aid. Spenser transforms this Protestant view of equity into an argument for empire by suggesting that divine justice requires English expansion into Catholic lands such as Ireland and the Spanish colonies. Mercilla, who represents Queen Elizabeth in the poem, is both an exemplar of equity and a ruler with “soveraine grace” (V.viii.17.4) whose power and fame must extend globally, “[f]rom th’utmost brinke of the Americke shore, / Unto the margent of the Molucas” (V.x.3.3-7). Artegall supports this global expansion of Protestantism by appealing to equity and grace, thus illustrating the degree to which Spenser understood Protestant theology as complicit in English imperialism.

Whereas my first chapter focuses on imperialism in late Elizabethan England, the second chapter explores the relationship between cooperative grace and political authority in two of Shakespeare’s Jacobean plays, *The Tempest* and *King Lear*. Shakespeare engages Protestant discourses on grace through his rendering of Christian patience, a virtue that theologians from Augustine to the Reformation understood as the definitive example of cooperative grace. According to this theological tradition, grace transforms the suffering of Christian martyrs so that they voluntarily come to see their humiliation as a source of nobility. Shakespeare foregrounds the political repercussions in this approach to patience. Although Lear and Gloucester attempt to be patient throughout *King Lear*, they envision this virtue in Stoic rather than Christian terms. Grace is absent from the pre-Christian universe of the play, and this absence is made conspicuous by Shakespeare’s frequent allusions to scripture. By thus contrasting pagan Britain to Christian England, Shakespeare suggests that patience is politically ineffective in this play because its characters cannot justify their political authority using Christian theology. In *The

34 All citations from the *Faerie Queene* are from the Longmand 2nd edition, which is edited by A. C. Hamilton.
Tempest, on the other hand, Prospero alludes directly to scriptural depictions of patience in order to instil voluntary obedience in Miranda and Ferdinand. His argument is that suffering is a matter of perspective: although the shipwreck might appear disastrous, it will benefit those who obey Prospero voluntarily, as Miranda and Ferdinand learn to their advantage. As a result, The Tempest explores how rulers may appropriate the martyr’s experience of suffering for dynastic and political ends. At the same time, the play also ironizes Prospero’s role by foregrounding the perspective of Caliban, who challenges Prospero’s use of Christian theology.

The second half of this dissertation argues that John Milton draws openly upon Arminian views of grace to support his republican politics. Chapter 3 explores this approach in Milton’s republican prose and Paradise Lost. Although Arminianism was a predominantly royalist movement in this period, Milton adapts Arminian ideas in order to support the view that “all men naturally were born free… born to command and not to obey” (Tenure 8). Building upon the Arminian view of grace, Milton argues throughout his prose that God regenerates Christians from sin and bestows on them the native sovereignty that Adam and Eve possessed before the Fall. Moreover, Milton suggests that this spiritual regeneration depends on the political and theological “discoursing” that he once praised in Aeropagitica. In Paradise Lost, the ideal pattern for cooperative grace and appropriate “discoursing” is the Son of God, who combines submission and assertiveness as he speaks to the Father in Book 3. Adam and Eve reproduce the Son’s interpretive habits when they pray for forgiveness in Book 10: the fallen couple cooperate with grace in order to find redemption within their curse, thus demonstrating the enabling effects of grace even after the Fall.

My fourth and final chapter builds upon the third by exploring how cooperative grace shapes Milton’s conception of prophecy in Paradise Regained. Shortly before he celebrates the “gracefull symmetry” of the nation in Aeropagitica, Milton argues that “all the Lord’s people are become Prophets” by preaching and debating the meaning of scripture publicly (CPW 2:266). Milton understood this public preaching in humanist terms. Unlike antinomian radicals at the time, who claimed direct inspiration from the Spirit, Milton argues that prophecy involves an admixture of rhetorical skill and grace. Understood in this way, prophecy resembles once again the “discoursing” that Milton envisions as the central feature of the English public sphere elsewhere in Aeropagitica. Milton returns to this argument in Paradise Regained by making Jesus’s identity as a prophet depend on both grace and human effort. Thus Jesus’s words are
“full of grace and truth” (2.33-4), but he also relies throughout the poem on reason and rhetoric in order to recuperate scripture from Satan’s misreading of it. By representing Jesus’s prophetic role as a cooperation between human skill and divine grace, Milton suggests that every would-be Christian “prophet,” including his contemporaries in Restoration England, should imitate Jesus by preaching about religious matters openly. As a result, Paradise Regained returns to Milton’s youthful vision of England as a republican body of citizen-prophets.

The chapters that follow are meant to be read in pairs. The first and second chapters describe the politics of grace in a predominantly Calvinist England, whereas the third and fourth chapters address Milton’s idiosyncratic approach to grace in a post-Arminian context. However, this Calvinist-Arminian distinction is only a heuristic tool, and part of the argument of these chapters is that both Arminianism and Calvinism build upon a shared religious heritage that originated in scriptural paradoxes and patristic exegesis. To that end, the chapters can be paired in a way that reflects the common ground between different strands of Reformed Christianity. The second and third chapters demonstrate the shared conceptual territory between Calvinist and Arminian views of cooperative grace, while the first and fourth chapter demonstrate a common concern in regaining paradise through political action.
Chapter 1
“Soveraine Grace”: Empire and Protestant Equity in Book V of *The Faerie Queene*

In the central cantos of Book V of *The Faerie Queene*, Britomart enters into the temple of Isis and learns about Isis and Osiris, who represent equity and justice, respectively.¹ The union of these gods represents divine justice, which Spenser associates with grace: “Well therefore did the antique world invent, / That Justice was a God of soveraine grace” (V.vii.2.1-2). By inserting “soveraine grace” into the iconography of justice, Spenser calls into question the relationship between religion and the law in his society. This link was central in the immediate historical context for Book V, namely, the conflict between Protestant magistrates and Catholic rebels in Elizabethan Ireland. Given Spenser’s firsthand experience with political and religious conflict in Ireland, it is not surprising that much of Book V deals with the religious responsibilities of the ideal magistrate in hostile territory. Arthur argues, for example, that a human ruler such as Mercilla has the power to wield “soveraine grace, with which her royall crowne / She doth support” (V.viii.17.4-5). These moments in Book V suggest that Spenser is interested not only in the abstract concepts of equity and “soveraine grace,” but also in the ways that a human ruler should deploy this juridico-religious discourse to support her “royall crowne.” In this chapter, I suggest that the pressures of rebellion and interreligious conflict in Elizabethan Ireland manifest in Book V of *The Faerie Queene* as a sustained meditation on equity, grace, and the human rulers who are supposed to embody them. Spenser questions what it means for a monarch to become the vehicle of Christian grace, and his representation of equity and grace ultimately signal the religious dimensions of English imperialism in Ireland.

Spenser’s negotiation of grace and sovereignty in Book V reflects the ramifications of Protestant understandings of equity. From the medieval period onwards, Christian theologians defined equity as the ruler’s authority to amend human laws so as to reflect the unwritten standards of divine justice. In the 16th century, however, Protestant theologians argued that

¹ For Spenser’s allegory of justice as the gods Isis and Osiris in the temple, see V.vii.2-3.
equity was the province of inferior magistrates as well as monarchs. According to John Calvin, scripture should be the source of equity: “the entire scheme of this equity of which we are now speaking has been prescribed in [the moral law of God]. Hence, this equity alone must be the goal and rule and limit of all laws” (Institutes IV.xx.16). For Calvin and other Protestant theologians, rulers and inferior magistrates should work together to establish laws that reflect divine justice as understood by Protestant interpreters of scripture. This understanding of equity presupposes that grace aids godly magistrates in coming to a correct judgment. Spenser participates in this approach by imagining equity as a justification for Protestant empire. In Book V of The Faerie Queene, Britomart and Mercilla work together with inferior magistrates, such as Arthur and Artegall, to expand Protestant empire and equity throughout the world. Britomart is the agent of equity because of her association with Isis, while Mercilla spreads equity by embodying divine justice. Spenser’s approach to equity suggests that the eschatological promise of global Protestant empire—an empire that extends, like Mercilla’s fame, “From th’utmost brinke of the Americke shore, / Unto the margent of the Molucas” (V.x.3.6-7)—depends upon the active political participation of godly magistrates in the project of English imperialism.²

By situating Spenser’s approach to equity in this theological and political context, I engage ongoing debates about the boundaries between politics and religion in Spenser’s work. Critics have long recognized that Protestant theology is central not only to the Legend of Holiness in Book I but also the apparently secular virtues analyzed in Books II-VI.³ However, the postcolonial and New Historicist criticism of the 1990s shifted critical attention from Spenser’s theology to his colonial context.⁴ According to critics such as Andrew Hadfield, Spenser’s approach to equity in Book V reveals a predominantly secular and republican vision of

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² Critics have disagreed on the degree to which Protestantism influenced the genesis of the British Empire. In The Ideological Origins of the British Empire David Armitage takes the view that Protestantism did not play a major role because of ideological contradiction (63-4). Stevens, on the other hand, argues that scriptural universalism did influence imperial ideology; see for example his “Leviticus Thinking.” I build upon the latter approach in this essay.

³ See Anthea Hume, Protestant Poet, 68-69, for the view that the apparently “secular” virtues in Books II-VI are in fact a function of cooperative grace. Darryl J. Gless provides a more extended engagement with cooperative grace and its effect on Spenser’s view of the will in Interpretation and Theology in Spenser (30-6). Other important studies of the theological background of Book II-VI include Kaske’s Spenser and Biblical Poetics and John King’s Spenser’s Poetry and the Reformation Tradition (136-41).

⁴ See Richard McCabe, Spenser’s Monstrous Regiment: Elizabethan Ireland and the Poetics of Difference; Ciaran Brady’s “Spenser’s Irish Crisis: Humanism and Experience in the 1590s,” Andrew Hadfield’s Spenser’s Irish Experience, and the essays in the collection Spenser and Ireland: An Interdisciplinary Perspective.
empire (*Irish Experience* 154-6). Hadfield’s reading reflects a broader tendency in early modern history to see the colonization of Ireland in secular terms. More recently, however, critics have challenged this approach. For example, Stevens has argued that Spenser’s “colonial situation is itself an effect of Scripture’s totalizing imaginations” (12). For Stevens, Protestant views on grace are especially important for Spenser’s imperialism (14).

I intervene in these debates by arguing that Spenser’s approach to equity sutures his imperialist politics and his religious commitments. While *sola gratia* regenerates individual believers in a primarily spiritual sense, Spenser suggests that grace regenerates the *polis* by aiding magistrates in their application of equity and divine justice. This politico-theological dimension to justice explains why equity seems to convey, throughout Spenser’s work, both mercy and what early modern legal theorists would describe as the “rigour” of the law. The religious dimension of equity makes sense of this contradiction: mercy is the sign of divine favour to those who participate voluntarily in the Protestant reformation, while rigour is appropriate for Catholics and others who reject the grace mediated by Protestant magistrates. Therefore, while a variety of critics have already discussed the legal and political dimension of equity in Spenser’s work, I suggest that Spenser’s understanding of equity developed in response to his Protestant religious culture as well as his colonial context. Ultimately, Spenser’s account of equity demonstrates how Protestant political theology was complicit in the justification of Ireland’s colonization.

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5 See for example Nicholas Canny, “The Ideology of English Colonization: From Ireland to America.” Canny recognizes contemporary attacks on the Irish as quasi-pagan, but he insists that the justification for empire was “the secular one of drawing the Irish to civility” (588). Cf. Armitage (63-4).

6 See for example Lambarde (68). Mark Fortier’s *The Culture of Equity in Early Modern England* provides a compelling summary of the different strands of criticism on equity in *The Faerie Queene* (116-22). Whereas Fortier concludes that the poem is contradictory in its representation of mercy and rigour (121-2), I am suggesting that Protestant theology helps make sense of these contradictions, and that their ultimate purpose is to facilitate imperialism.

7 For two recent studies of the legal dimension of Spenser’s equity, see Andrew Majeske, *Equity in English Renaissance Literature*, and Andrew Zurcher, *Spenser’s Legal Language*.

8 See Fortier’s *The Culture of Equity* for a survey of the religious basis of equity in early modern England.
1.1 The Theological Context of Christian Equity

In *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, Spenser argues that English law is more equitable than the native Brehon law of Ireland. Although Irenius acknowledges that “often there appeareth great show of equity in determining the right between party and party” in Brehon law, this native Irish legal tradition is “in many things repugning quite both to God’s law and man’s” (5). By describing “God’s law” as the criterion for assessing the equity of a legal system, Spenser alludes to early modern debates about the religious basis of equity. By the Middle Ages, “equity” came to describe the power of Christian magistrates to set aside human law so as to obey divine justice. In Spenser’s context, there were two major perspectives on equity. On the one hand, absolutists such as Jean Bodin argued that only the sovereign possessed the authority to interpret and apply divine justice as Christian equity demanded. On the other hand, Protestant theologians, such as Calvin, Luther, Perkins, and Hooker, argued that scripture was a universally available guide to divine justice and equity. Although Spenser incorporates both arguments in his work, I argue that he was especially receptive to the Protestant definition of equity because it allowed him to justify English Protestant rule in Ireland as the fulfillment of divine justice.

Aristotle defines equity (*epiekeia* or ἐπιείκεια in Greek) in *The Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Rhetoric* as a form of justice that bypasses the written law. Although magistrates usually submit themselves to the laws in order to avoid tyranny (*Ethics* 91), Aristotle adds that in some circumstances the letter of the law is too general to account for every unforeseen circumstance. In these cases, the magistrate must use equity:

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9 Literary critics have long recognized Spenser’s knowledge of legal equity. For an overview of equity courts such as Chancery and their effect on Spenser, see Joel Altman’s “Justice and Equity” in the *Spenser Encyclopedia*.

10 As R. S. White has demonstrated, equity was also understood as a means of exploring the relationship between positive law and natural law. For an overview of natural law’s relationship to equity, see White’s *Natural Law in English Renaissance Literature*, 1-40.

11 In this period, the term “conscience” described the sovereign’s prerogative over the law in absolutist legal theory. See Majeske (96) and Zurcher (131-2) for longer discussions of the link between terms such as “conscience” and “equity.”

12 See Majeske, 2-14, for a detailed outline of the etymology of equity and Greek *epiekeia*.
When the law speaks universally, then, and a case arises on it which is not covered by the universal statement, then it is right, where the legislator fails us and has erred by over-simplicity, to correct the omission—to say what the legislator himself would have said had he been present… And this is the nature of the equitable, a correction of law where it is defective owing to its universality.

(99)

In other words, equity is a form of judgment according to unwritten principles of justice, and it becomes appropriate in cases that were unforeseen by the written law. The main aim of this Aristotelian equity is to provide the magistrate some interpretive freedom vis-à-vis law without endorsing outright arbitrary rule.

Christian theologians assimilated this definition of equity by positing that God has established divine standards of justice in nature and scripture that should guide the magistrate when administering equity. Thomas Aquinas restates Aristotle’s definition of equity almost verbatim (Q. 120, Art. 1), but he also Christianizes this concept by circumscribing human laws with various forms of divine law. He argues that human laws should be based on the “eternal law” of divine providence (Q. 91, Art. 1), the “natural law” that God has made available to reason (Q. 91, Art. 2), and the “divine law” that God has revealed in scriptural commandments (Q. 91, Art. 4). He accordingly defines equity as the sovereign’s authority to ensure that human

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13 Aristotle describes what he considers to be the unwritten guidelines for equity in the *Rhetoric*: “Equity must be applied to forgivable actions; and it must make us distinguish between criminal acts on the one hand, and errors of judgement, or misfortunes, on the other… Equity bids us be merciful to the weakness of human nature; to think less about the laws than about the man who framed them, and less about what he said than about what he meant” (I.xiii).

14 For an expanded discussion of the Renaissance reception of Aristotelian and Roman equity, see Maclean’s *Interpretation and Meaning in the Renaissance* (175-7). Maclean argues that equity changes the relative balance between the interpreter and the law: “equity as interpretation becomes also equity as application; the jurist or judge performs the law by deciding its relationship to an individual case… interpretation thereby passes from a subservient to a dominant role vis-à-vis the text” (177). In other words, the equitable magistrate takes over authority from the law so that his interpretation threatens to become a supplement or addition to the law. This development introduces the specter of arbitrary rule and tyranny—a problem that Aristotle attempts to control in the passage cited here. MacLean’s arguments about the primacy of interpretation vis-à-vis the text had a long history in the Judaeo-Christian approach to passages such as Gen. 18:25. See Stevens’s “Spenser and the End of British Empire” (14) for the view that equity enables a balance of authority between God and Abraham in Gen. 18.
laws are in fact compatible with these divine laws. Therefore, as Gunther Haas has argued, Christian equity differs from its Aristotelian counterpart because it appeals not to the practical problem of curbing tyranny but rather to “a higher sense of justice” that is used “to evaluate and modify existing law” (24). In particular, Christian equity is part of the monarch’s religious role as a mediator between God and the political community.

By ascribing this power to the sovereign, Aquinas prepared the way for later developments in early modern political theology. Basing themselves largely on the Thomist approach, absolutist thinkers in the 16th century transformed Christian equity into one of the conceptual pillars for their theories of sovereignty. For example, Bodin uses equity in his efforts to defend sovereign power from religious zealots during the French Wars of Religion. He argues that kings wield a special kind of equity based on their conscience:

Equity in a ruler is the power to declare or to correct the law. In a magistrate it is the power of applying it by relaxing its rigour or stiffening its leniency when there is need, and by supplying its defects where its provisions are inadequate to a given case… in this respect the most humble judges have the same kind of discretion as the most exalted, but neither of them can do what a sovereign court can, that is to say reverse a judgment on appeal, or exempt an accused person entirely […].

(207-8)

Whereas ordinary judges have access to the Aristotelian form of equity, which corrects the letter of the law in exceptional circumstances, sovereign rulers use a higher form of equity through which they directly interpret divine justice and declare human laws based on it. By thus dividing

15 In the Codex of the Corpus Iuris Civilis, the Emperor Justinian writes: “Inter aequitatem iusque interpositam interpretationem nobis solis et oportet et licet inspicere” (1.14.1). Aquinas cites this passage verbatim to support his view of equity. In the Benziger edition of the Summa, the Emperor’s words are translated as “It is fitting and lawful that We alone should interpret between equity and law” (Q. 120, Art. 1, Obj. 3). In other words, equity is a distinctly sovereign prerogative to mediate between human law and divine law.

16 See Donal Reed Kelley, Foundations of Modern Historical Scholarship (155-71) for an overview of the sectarian context of legal dispute in France.
equity into two forms—a more authoritative equity for rulers, and a lesser form for judges—Bodin establishes the sovereign as the only absolute legal authority on Earth.\(^\text{17}\)

Similar arguments about equity and sovereignty structured English debates about the authority of Chancery vis-à-vis the common law. Absolutist theorists such as William Lambarde followed Bodin in separating the equity of kings from that of judges. Basing himself on this assumption, Lambarde argues that Chancery, which was known as a court of equity, is more authoritative than other legal courts because it embodies the monarch’s conscience before God:

considering that the Prince of this Realme is the immediate minister of Justice under God, and is sworne at his Coronation, to deliver to his subjects *aeuam & rectam Iustitiam*; I cannot see how it may otherwise be, but that besides his Court of mere Law, he must either reserve himself, or referre to others a certaine soveraigne and preheminent Power, by which he may both supply the want, and correct the rigour of that Positive or written Law, which of it selfe neither is nor can be made such a perfect Rule, as that a Man may thereby truly square out Justice in all Cases that may happen […]. (68)

English courts of Chancery derive their power from the monarch’s “soveraigne and preheminent Power” over the common law—a power that is crucial, according to Lambarde, for upholding the monarch’s role as the “immediate minister of Iustice under God.” Lambarde thus follows continental absolutists such as Bodin in privileging the monarch’s equity as superior to that of other judges.\(^\text{18}\) Lambarde’s definition of sovereignty proved influential: King James I\(^\text{19}\) and Lord

\(^{17}\) In order to further support this view of the sovereign as the final judge of justice, Bodin argues that “the sovereign prince can set aside the laws which he has promised or sworn to observe, if they no longer satisfy the requirements of justice, and he may do this without the consent of his subjects” (30).

\(^{18}\) English common lawyers responded to this absolutist argument by insisting that the common law was itself the source of equity. See Christopher St. Germain, *Doctor and Student* (45); Edward Hake, *Epiekeia* (11); Selden, *Table Talk* (61); Edward Coke, *Reports* (432-4). Spenser criticism often situates Spenser’s arguments about equity in the context of this debate between the proponents of Chancery the common lawyers. For a representative example, see R.S. White (46-60).

\(^{19}\) It is important to distinguish between civil law approaches to equity and the role of this concept in an English context. However, James I wove these traditions together because he was familiar with both legal systems due to his experience in ruling Scotland, where Civil Law predominated. Fortier demonstrates that equity buttresses James’s absolutism in his *Basilikon Doron, The Trewe Lawe of Free Monarchies*, and—in a more English idiom—his address to the Star Chamber in 1616 (Fortier 93-6). Similarly, in *Political Theologies in Shakespeare’s England*,
Ellesmere\textsuperscript{20} went on to offer similar defenses of Chancery, thus providing the legal basis for Jacobean absolutism.

The Protestant Reformation qualified sovereign power by insisting that scripture, rather than the monarch’s conscience, is the true and universally available guide to divine justice. According to Calvin, scripture empowers inferior magistrates to use equity:

\begin{quote}
Since those who serve as magistrates are called “gods” [Ex. 22:8; Vg.; Ps. 82:1, 6], let no one think that their being so-called is of slight importance. For it signifies that they have a mandate from God, have been invested with divine authority, and are wholly God’s representatives, in a manner, acting as his vicegerents… it is [God’s] doing “that kings reign, and all benevolent judges of the earth” [Prov. 8:14-16]. This amounts to the same thing as to say: it has not come about by human perversity that the authority over all things on earth is in the hands of kings and other rulers, but by divine providence and holy ordinance. For God was pleased so to rule the affairs of men, inasmuch as he is present with them and also presides over the making of laws and the exercising of equity in courts of justice […]. \textit{(Institutes IV.xx.4)}
\end{quote}

Calvin’s point is that scripture does not distinguish sharply between kings and magistrates because all public authorities derive their power from God. For example, Psalm 82:1-6 mentions “gods” in the plural to indicate that magistrates as well as kings have a “mandate from God.” As a result, Calvin concludes that God is present not only with kings but also with “other rulers” in “the making of laws and the exercising of equity in courts of justice.” Although this statement is not an outright indictment of absolutism, Calvin does undermine Bodin’s absolutist separation of equity into two streams. For Calvin, all forms of equity stem from the same source, namely scriptural articulations of divine law:

\begin{quote}
Debora Shuger argues that Jacobean approaches to equity—which drew upon Elizabethan theorists like Lambarde—were crucial for James’s absolutist political theology \textit{(Measure 78-90)}.\textsuperscript{20} See “The Earl of Oxford’s Case” (1-16).
\end{quote}
the law of God which we call the moral law is nothing else than a testimony of natural law and of that conscience which God has engraved upon the minds of men. Consequently, the entire scheme of this equity of which we are now speaking has been prescribed in it. Hence, this equity alone must be the goal and rule and limit of all laws. (IV.xx.16)

In contrast with Bodin, who privileges the monarch as the only legitimate interpreter of divine justice, Calvin makes “the law of God” available to all Christians who read scripture correctly. Kings still have the supreme legal authority, but the difference from Bodin is that Calvin does not give kings a monopoly on the interpretive process through which they learn about divine justice. Instead of privileging the monarch’s conscience, Calvin argues that equity derives from a shared conscience among all the regenerate—“that conscience which God has engraved upon the minds of men” (IV.xx.16). By thus opening the interpretive process up to others beyond the ruler, Calvin’s approach empowers inferior magistrates to administer Christian equity alongside the monarch.

Not all Protestant reformers were as systematic in their definition of equity as the legally-educated Calvin, but for the most part they emphasized the importance of scripture in legal interpretation. For example, Luther argues that scripture defines equity in 2 Cor. 10, 1 Titus 3, and above all the “golden rule” of Matt. 22:40. In his Temporal Authority, he goes as far as to argue that the golden rule is more helpful to judges than legal training: “when you judge according to love you will easily decide and adjust matters without any lawbooks” (128). Luther’s implication is that scripture, not the private judgment of any given legal authority, is the ultimate source of equity. The key difference between these Protestant theologians and

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21 See Haas’s *The Concept of Equity in Calvin’s Ethics* (50-88) for a similar reading of equity in Calvin. Haas’s main claim is that “for Calvin equity, as summarized in the Golden Rule, provides the guideline for the implementation of love in our dealings with others” (50).

22 See Luther’s *Commentary* on 1 Titus 3:1-2 for his discussion of Pauline equity in these scriptural passages (74-6).

23 See *Judgment of Martin Luther on Monastic Vows* (393).

24 Martin Bucer repeats Luther’s argument in his *De Regno Christi*, which he addressed to the young Edward VI. According to Bucer, “all the law of God and the entire teaching of the prophets depend on these two headings as our Savior Jesus Christ has affirmed: ‘thou shalt love God Jehovah with thy whole heart, thy whole soul, and all thy strength, and thy neighbour as thyself’ (Luke 10:27), certainly all laws, whether divinely handed down or issued by men, must be referred to these two headings” (359). This approach to legal interpretation presents scripture as a guide to all Christians, and especially all public authorities, besides the monarch who is Bucer’s principal audience.
absolutist theorists is their account of the origins of equity: whereas Bodin, Lambarde and similar writers argue that Christian equity originates in the monarch’s private conscience, the theologians insist that it comes from scripture, which is ostensibly clear to every believer.25

These continental Protestant reformers inspired English theologians such as Richard Hooker and William Perkins to redefine equity as a virtue that should belong to all Christians. Hooker bemoans the lack of equity in quotidian life:

We see in contracts and other dealings which daily pass between man and man, that, to the utter undoing of some, many things by strictness of law may be done, which equity and honest meaning forbiddeth. Not that the law is unjust, but unperfect; nor equity against, but above, the law, binding men’s consciences in things which law cannot reach unto […]. (Laws of the Ecclesiastical Polity V.ix.3)

Like the continental reformers, Hooker describes equity as an obligation to obey scriptural standards of justice even when the law permits “strictness.” He adds that magistrates must enforce equity when Christians fail to live up to this ideal, but he insists that the people should be equitable on their own (V.ix.4). Similarly, in his Epiekeia, Perkins argues that “[men] must not stand onely vpon the law, and the advantage that the law gives. As they are men, they have a law of the country, which may allow extremitie; but as they are Christians, they live under a law of God” (440). Like Hooker, Perkins argues that all Christians have access to the law of God and are therefore expected to refrain from uncharitable litigation. The underlying assumption here is that grace makes believers capable of living in civil harmony without compulsion. The magistrate becomes necessary only when believers fail to self-regulate:

then must the godly Magistrate exercise his power, and by the force of his authoritie, cause them to mitigate their extremitie, and to put in practic that equitie which becommeth Christians. And let every Iudge and Magistrate know, that by the law of the everlasting God, hee not onely may, but is bound thus to doe

25 Elliot Visconsi has demonstrated that Paul’s universalism informs the representation of Christian equity. He argues that “the Pauline hypothesis of universal Christian charity” in Gal. 3:23-28 “undergirds, or subtly inflects, the later Stuart flirtation with the idea that all subjects might be capable of exercising, and not just benefiting from, an equitable imagination” (10). Reformation theologians anticipate this view of equity well before the Stuart period.
Perkins assumes throughout this passage that a godly nation, a nation that experiences the spiritual effects of grace, should not need the magistrate, because it should uphold divine justice voluntarily. Scripture should be sufficient as a guide to divine justice. Unlike the absolutists, therefore, these theologians argue that scripture guides ordinary citizens as well as monarchs: “all men in this case are alike, & therefore one hath good cause to beare with another. The Prince is flesh and blood as well as his subjects” (436). Even though Perkins and Hooker do not critique absolutism itself in these passages, their scriptural view of equity challenges absolutist ideas about justice.

This Protestant approach to equity privileges the beliefs and interests of the Protestant church over those of other religions. In principle, scripture is supposed to be the guide to equity, but Protestants also believed that their doctrine was more faithful to scripture alone, or *sola scriptura*, than Catholics and other versions of Christianity. Therefore, by insiting that equity is based on scripture, they also implied that equity supports the Protestant church. Perkins foregrounds this sectarian argument when he claims that equity demands harsh punishment for heresy:

> In thy owne right thou maist yield… but this caution holdeth, especially when the cause is not ours, but Gods, or his Churches; for when it is such a truth, which directly concerneth the honour of God, or the good of his Church, then must a man take heed he yield not, without warrant from Gods word. For as it is Equity often to yield thy right, so to yield in Gods causes is to betray the truth […]. (445)

Although equity demands tolerance and forbearance among Christians in their private dealings, a swift and decisive response is more appropriate for those who challenge what Perkins considers the “truth” of God and “the good of his Church.” The “truth” outlined in scripture is inseparable from “the good of [God’s] Church,” because the true, Protestant church is defined by its insistence on the supposedly unadulterated truth of scripture. This emphasis on the overriding importance of the Protestant church in legal interpretation distinguishes Perkins from absolutist theorists. Bodin gives monarchs an exclusive right to interpret divine justice precisely because he
wished to protect the sovereign’s legal authority from religious challenges. The Protestant theologians did not necessarily oppose absolutism, but they hoped to persuade monarchs to support their own cause rather than competing forms of Christianity, and to achieve this aim they were willing to give equity a sectarian inflection. By grounding equity in scripture, they effectively transformed the Protestant slogan *sola scriptura* into a justification for religious expansion at the expense of other churches, which supposedly threatened God’s truth.

Spenser’s attack on Irish law and religion in *A View of the Present State of Ireland* is part of this broader Protestant tradition of thinking about equity. While Spenser’s chauvinist and colonial attitudes in the *View* are well known, critics have largely overlooked the extent to which Protestant theology shapes his legal assumptions. In keeping with contemporary Protestant theology, Spenser presupposes that English law is equitable because the Protestant norms enshrined in it derive from scripture. He describes Irish customs in general as barbaric on account of Catholic superstition: “it is the manner of all barbarous nations to be very superstitious and diligent observers of old customs and antiquities which they receive by continual tradition from their parents” (60). “Superstition,” “custom,” and “antiquity” are typical terms of disparagement in Protestant anti-Catholic polemic. The opposite of superstition is the clarity of scripture, which Spenser implicitly associates with English culture and law. The native Irish Brehon law is inequitable because it is part of Catholic superstition: “it is a certain rule of right unwritten, but delivered by tradition from one to another, in which often there appeareth great show of equity in determining the right between party and party, but in many things repugning quite both to God’s law and man’s” (5). Since Brehon law is transmitted orally, it is yet another symptom of the Irish people’s superstitious respect for “old customs and antiquities” that are unwarranted by scripture. As a result, Brehon law has only the “show” but not the substance of equity, which is to be found only in scriptural definitions of “God’s law” and, by extension, the laws of Protestant England. By describing Brehon law and the Common law in

26 See McCabe, *Monstrous Regiment* (61-3) for a representative reading of Spenser’s denigration of Irish culture in the *View*.

27 Cf. Nicholas Canny, *Making Ireland British* (33). According to Canny, some critics believe that “for Spenser and his associates, reform always had to include religious reform, and they accepted that the promotion of reform through education and evangelization would prove illusory unless it was supported by the authority and rigour of the state” (33). Canny rejects this argument because it doesn’t fit his view that Spenser “was a consistent critic of government policy” (33). Despite these critiques of government, however, Spenser drew upon theological arguments about equity to support the colonization of Ireland.
this religiously inflected way, Irenius suggests that Irish legal reformation virtually depends upon the expansion of Protestant religious sentiment and English empire.

This religious approach to equity explains the critical disagreement around Spenser’s view of Lord Grey. Critics have long recognized that the View considers Lord Grey to be the ideal Protestant magistrate because he had the political wisdom and religious commitment to pacify Ireland. Some critics, however, have suggested that this valorization of Lord Grey implies an absolutist idea of equity. According to Andrew Hadfield, Spenser alludes to Bodin’s absolutism:

The main principle Spenser appears to wish to establish as vital to the government of the British Isles is that of equity, a concept largely associated with the writings of Jean Bodin, which demanded that the precepts of the code of law needed to be overridden by the representatives of the law when the foundations of the constitution or the authority of the monarch were under threat. Under such a legal system, magistrates were granted quite draconian powers in supposed defence of the centre; a simultaneously centripetal and centrifugal shift of power […]. (Irish Experience 157)

For Hadfield, Spenser appeals to equity in order to empower colonial administrators such as Lord Grey. The problem with this argument is that Bodin generally opposes this kind of decentralization. Hadfield attempts to explain the paradox by presenting Spenser as a republican, but other critics have challenged his usage of this term. However, Spenser’s deployment of equity in the View becomes more coherent in the context of Protestant writing on

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28 See Hadfield’s “Was Spenser a Republican?” for the view that equity motivates Spenser’s endorsement of republican notions about the virtue of judges and administrators (173). Hadfield relies on Markku Peltonen’s Classical Humanism and Republicanism in English Political Thought, 1570–1640, which argues that republicanism persisted as a language for articulating political agency in early modern Europe during a period when actual republics were relatively rare. Peltonen’s work is itself a response to Richard Tuck’s Philosophy and Government, which emphasizes the rise of Tacitism and absolutism at the expense of republicanism in the same period.

29 See David Scott Wilson-Okamura’s challenge to Hadfield in “Republicanism, Nostalgia, and the Crowd” (259-66) where he argues that Spenser advocates a return to elitist aristocracy rather than republicanism. Hadfield provides a rejoinder in “Was Spenser Really a Republican After all?” See also Graham Hammill’s “The thing/ Which never was’: Republicanism and The Ruines of Time” for a theological reading of Spenser’s republicanism. The most recent entry into this debate is Andrew Sisson’s “After Rome; or, Why Spenser Was Not a Republican,” which argues that Spenser was not a republican because he did not support any institutional changes in the state (85-8).
this concept. Whereas Bodin does not allow judges to use the same kind of equity as the sovereign, Protestants claimed that divine justice is clear in scripture and thus accessible for inferior magistrates. Spenser appeals to this tradition by arguing that inferior magistrates such as Grey have a religious duty to promote Protestant norms. In these cases, equity is compatible with colonial violence because, as Perkins explains, “as it is Equity often to yield thy right, so to yield in Gods causes is to betray the truth” (445). The unyielding pursuit of “Gods causes” is equitable even if such an approach requires Gray’s tactics in Ireland.

In other words, I am suggesting that the View’s defense of imperialism depends upon the intersection between Protestant equity on the one hand and the colonial situation of Spenser’s Ireland on the other. As we have seen, the recurring assumption among Protestant theorists of equity in the early modern period was that grace and scriptural truths were in theory sufficient to guide a nation towards divine justice. However, the same theologians insist that this ideal harmony between justice and legal practice is always precarious in a fallen world. Equity requires not only grace and scripture but also the political effort of kings and magistrates, who would ideally wield their public authority to protect Protestantism from rival religions. Protestant equity thus has a built-in tension between the promise of a perfected reformation through sola gratia and the practical need to support this religious project with legal and political action. This tension tends towards open warfare in the colonial context of Elizabethan Ireland, which Spenser represents as a barbarous and idolatrous landscape and a place where backwards customs, such as Brehon Law, threaten to engulf the beleaguered Protestant minority. In these circumstances, Spenser suggests, equity requires not only spiritual guidance but also the military effort and the realpolitik of magistrates such as Lord Grey. As a result, the View transforms grace, equity, and divine justice into parallel components of a broader justification of Protestant imperialism in Ireland. As we shall see, Spenser returns to this argument in The Faerie Queene.

1.2 Artegall’s Education in Equity

In his proem to Book V, Spenser describes sovereignty as a partial remedy for the Fall. He imagines the past as the Golden Age, an age modelled on the myth of Saturn and the biblical Eden, in which the people obeyed divine justice without compulsion: “Peace universall rayn’d mongst men and beasts, / And all things freely grew out of the ground: / Justice sate high ador’d
with solemn feasts” (V.proem.9.6-8).\textsuperscript{30} Human beings no longer have access to this idyllic justice, but God demonstrates his grace to them by giving sovereign power to monarchs:

Most sacred vertue she of all the rest,  
Resembling God in his imperiall might;  
Whose soveraine powre is herein most exprest,  
That both to good and bad he dealeth right,  
And all his workes with Justice hath bedight.  
That powre he also doth to Princes lend,  
And makes them like himselfe in glorious sight,  
To sit in his owne seate, his cause to end,  
And rule his people right, as he doth recommend. (V.proem.10.1-9)

Sovereign rulers wield God’s “soveraine power,” sit on God’s throne, and judge God’s people so as to approximate, as much as is possible in a fallen age, the peace and justice that Adam and Eve once experienced in Eden. Godly monarchs return the community to some measure of the prelapsarian state, thus giving political expression to religious grace. However, Spenser argues that God gives rulers duties as well as privileges. The sovereign power belongs to Justice first, and monarchs only hold it in tenure from God. Moreover, like the power and the throne, the monarch’s subjects are ultimately “his”—God’s—people. Spenser’s implication is that monarchs have a responsibility to make their subjects worthy of this epithet by teaching them how to obey divine justice. The return to the Golden Age is therefore both a promise to the people and a duty for monarchs.

In the first half of Book V, Spenser represents equity as the means through which sovereigns introduce their nation to the “imperiall might” of divine justice. He engages equity during Artegaill’s enslavement to Radigund and his subsequent liberation by Britomart. These characters represent two diametrically opposed approaches to equity: whereas Radigund refuses to obey any authority above her, Britomart bases her equity on the Protestant destiny of the

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\textsuperscript{30} Cf. Dunseath’s view that this “peace universall” is an evocation of Jesus’s peace after the Second Coming (63). Dunseath concludes that Artegaill’s quest aims at a partial restoration of Edenic peace in a fallen world.
English nation. Britomart liberates Artegall from his servitude, and in so doing she demonstrates that Christian equity challenges those who attempt to halt or delay the growth of Protestant values in England. Moreover, Britomart demonstrates that good monarchs teach their inferior magistrates to wield Christian equity in this way on behalf of the monarch. By thus emphasizing the religious implications of equity, Spenser transforms Artegall’s experience of captivity, redemption, and education into a scripturally-defined pattern for political agency more generally.

Spenser begins to elaborate on the theological aspects of equity in Artegall’s earliest conflicts. Equity is the subject of Astraea’s first lessons to Artegall:

There she him taught to weigh both right and wrong
In equall ballance with due recompence,
And equitie to measure out along,
According to the line of conscience,
When so it needs with rigour to dispence. (V.i.7.1-5)

By having Artegall learn equity from Astraea, the goddess of divine justice, Spenser signals that Artegall’s equity has a theological as well as a legal dimension. This implication becomes clearest during Artegall’s debate with the so-called “Egalitarian” Gyant. The Gyant is a literalist who needs to weigh everything, including divine justice, in his own “ballance” (V.ii.30.3). By hearkening back to Astraea’s “ballance,” Spenser signals that the Gyant represents among other things a distortion of Astraea’s lessons in equity. Artegall’s response to the Gyant suggests that he correctly understands the theological implications of equity. He insists that divine justice appeals to one’s “eare”: “The eare must be the ballance, to decree / And judge, whether with

31 R. S. White has argued that Artegall’s relationship to Astraea allegorizes the relationship between positive law and natural law (60). According to this perspective, Artegall embodies a fallen world because positive law can only imperfectly, and with great difficulty, manifest its equity vis-à-vis natural law. While this is an incisive analysis, I emphasize the degree to which “natural law” reflects Protestant ideas in Spenser’s thinking.

32 Critics have long felt that Artegall, not the Gyant, fails to be equitable here. For example, Judith Anderson argues that there is a “robotistic, and inhuman element in Artegall’s justice” (68). In Protestant theology, however, equity is not necessarily the same as leniency or rigorousness. Rather, equity dispenses with the “rigour” of the law, or what Hooker calls the “strictness” of the law (V.ix.3), in the sense that it enforces scriptural norms of behaviour when a literal interpretation of law threatens Protestant interests. As a result, the Gyant is the prototype of sinful “rigour” because he undermines Protestant interests by questioning God and divine justice through faulty interpretation.

33 Cf. Zurcher’s reading of Artegall’s encounter with the Egalitarian Gyant as a contest between equity and the rigidity of the common law (143). Zurcher does not focus on the scriptural or religious aspects of equity.
truth or falsehood they agree” (V.ii.47.8-9). This aural metaphor evokes the Protestant idea that
the Word of God seizes the believer’s imagination by the ears. The implication is that the Gyant
should open his ears to the Word and use scripture as the guide to divine justice. In order to
support this view further, Artegall alludes to the Book of Job several times throughout this
passage, and the Gyant’s failure to grasp the allusions proves that he is indeed deaf to scriptural
definitions of divine justice. In keeping with Protestant approaches to equity, therefore,
Artegall suggests that scripture should be the ultimate ground of all human justice.

Artegall’s encounter with Radigund is another test of his understanding of Christian
equity. Spenser signals the religious dimension of this encounter by alluding to Isaiah 41, which
describes God’s liberation of Israel from pagan kings through a messianic saviour (Isa. 41:2). Talus
defeats the first waves of the Amazons with a flail that resembles the divine weapon
described in Isaiah 41:15: “Behold, I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument having
teeth: thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shalt make the hills as chaff.”
Moreover, Artegall fashions himself as the messianic saviour of Isaiah 41. When Turpine first
tells him about the humiliation that knights suffer in Radegone, Artegall promises: “wend with
me, that ye may see and know, / How Fortune will your ruin’d name repaire” (V.iv.34.7-8).
These words allude directly to Isaiah 41:20: “That they may see, and know, and consider, and
understand together, that the hand of the LORD hath done this.” Thus Artegall promises Turpine
a victory that will reveal the hand of God in gendered relations by defending Protestant
patriarchy against the Amazons. By appealing to scripture in this way, Artegall suggests that he
will use equity to reintroduce divine justice to the community.

34 As Abraham Stoll points out in his annotations to the Hackett edition of The Faerie Queene, V.ii.40.4-5 alludes to
Job 14:2 (28, n.7), V.ii.41.9 alludes to Job 42:2 (29, n. 2), and V.ii.43.2 alludes to Job 28:25 (29, n. 4). Dunseath
argues on the basis of these allusions that the debate is primarily theological (97). He adds that Job 38:4 (“Where
wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?”) underlies the whole dialogue (104)
35 In Reading Between the Lines, Annabel Patterson argues that Spenser undermines Artegall’s argument by
committing him to a stable cosmology that Spenser denies in the proem (94-6, 102-3). The allusions to Job suggest,
however, that Spenser follows Job in asserting the need for faith in God despite apparent cosmic disorder. Patterson
also argues that Artegall is a literalist because he asks the Gyant to weigh words on the scale, but Artegall’s point is
precisely that scripture cannot be weighed in this way, and that the Gyant should therefore open his ear to God.
36 See Anthony M. Esolen’s “‘The isles shall wait for His law’: Isaiah and The Tempest” for a reading of literary
applications of Isaiah in Shakespeare. Although Esolen does not discuss Spenser directly, he demonstrates that
Isaiah was especially central to early modern sermons on the ideal Christian government.
Artegall fails to live up to this role, however, because he agrees to engage Radigund on her own terms rather than in terms of divine justice. Spenser presents Radigund’s terms of engagement as a legalistic trap: “if I vanquishe him, he shall obay / My law, and ever to my lore be bound, / And so will I, if me he vanquish may” (V.iv.49.2-5). These words allude to Goliath’s challenge to the Israelites in 1 Sam. 17:9: “If he be able to fight with me, and to kill me, then will we be your servants: but if I prevail against him, and kill him, then shall ye be our servants.” Radigund does not resemble Goliath physically, of course, but the allusion suggests that she resembles the Philistine giant insofar as she wants to enslave a godly people through this contract. She succeeds because Artegall agrees to her terms without appealing to God, as David does when he responds to Goliath (1 Sam. 17:45). In the aftermath of the battle, Spenser suggests that the equitable response would have been to refuse negotiations with Radigund altogether. Radigund muses on the mercy he showed her during the battle: “What right is it, that he should thraldome find, / For lending life to me a wretch unkind; / That for such good him recompence with ill?” (V.v.32.4-6). Radigund presents Artegall’s enslavement as a conflict between equity and the letter of the law: Artegall is her slave according to the letter of their contract, but the unwritten principles of justice stipulate that she should have repaid Artegall’s mercy in kind by allowing him to go freely. Even though she recognizes this problem, Radigund ultimately ignores it. The implication is that Artegall has no access to equity because he has agreed to deal with Radigund on her terms.37 By giving up his role as the champion of divine justice, Artegall also abandons any recourse to the kind of Christian equity that ordinarily guides monarchs.

The broader significance of Artegall’s enslavement is that it foregrounds the political implications of Protestant conceptions of equity more generally. Even though Radigund is the de facto sovereign in her domain, Spenser suggests that she is not equitable because she fails to uphold the right religious norms. Whereas an absolutist thinker such as Bodin would argue that Radigund’s laws are valid no matter how unorthodox they might appear to outsiders,38 Spenser insists that her laws offend the patriarchal norms of the Bible: “vertuous women wisely understand, / That they were borne to base humilitie, / Unlesse the heavens them lift to lawfull soveraintie” (V.v.26.7-9). These lines allude to the Elizabethan view that women must not rule

37 Cf. Zurcher (143).
38 Cf. Bodin’s thoughts on the sovereign’s legal supremacy (67).
over men unless they have special dispensation from God.\textsuperscript{39} Unlike Elizabeth and her allegorical types in the poem, Radigund does not support the Protestant church, and her matriarchal laws give women a dominion over men that Spenser considers unbiblical. As a result, Spenser suggests that Arthegal should never have negotiated with her. This approach stems from the Protestant conception of equity, which stipulated that scripture—or, more precisely, Protestant interpretations of scripture—should be the foundation of human laws. Arthegal’s failure to uphold this cardinal rule leads Spenser to shift his attention to Britomart, who takes over his role as the agent of Christian equity.

Spenser associates Britomart with equity in canto vii when she goes to the temple of Isis to learn about “That part of Justice, which is Equity” (V.vii.3.3). Critics have long considered the “Isis Church” episode to be central for Book V.\textsuperscript{40} According to an influential reading, Britomart learns equity during her dream vision. In the dream, she sees herself transfigured into Isis as fires overcome the temple. The crocodile at the feet of Isis’s statue comes to life, eats the flames, becomes “swolne with pride of his owne peerelesse powre,” (V.vii.15.7-8), and threatens to eat Britomart too. She tames the crocodile with her rod and, “turning all his pride to humblesse meeke” (V.vii.16.1), she becomes pregnant by him until she gives birth to a lion. Aided by the priests of Isis, Britomart learns that the crocodile represents Arthegal and that her taming of the crocodile represents equity: “To shew that clemence oft in things amis, / Restraines those sterne behests, and cruell doomes of his” (V.vii.22.8-9). As Andrew Zurcher notes, the vision suggests an equitable “balance, even a conjugal union, between rigour and mercy” (66).

While this reading goes a long way towards explaining equity in the dream, it does not sufficiently focus on Britomart’s special dispensation from God. The priest claims that Britomart is important to the gods because of her lineage: “They doe thy linage, and thy Lordly brood; / They doe thy sire, lamenting sore for thee; / They doe thy love, forlorne in womens thraldome see” (V.vii.21.4-9). The priest situates Britomart conceptually and grammatically between her

\textsuperscript{39} Spenser’s lines allude to a well-known debate on female rule between Knox and Aylmer. Knox’s argument against female rule, which was intended against Mary, Queen of Scots, appeared in his \textit{First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women}. Aylmer gave his response in defense of Elizabeth in \textit{An Harborovve for Faithfull and Trewves Subiectes}.

\textsuperscript{40} Clifford Davidson summarizes traditional critical views when he describes Isis Church as “one of the two iconographic centers of Book V (the other is the court of Mercilla in ix.21-50)” (407).
sire, her love, and her future son, thus reminding her of the dynasty that she will engender through these relationships. Britomart has of course already learned about the providential role of this dynasty from Merlin in Book III, who foretells her lion-like child (III.iii.30) and the peace that her successors, the Tudors, will bring to Britain (III.iii.49). Merlin also explains that her love for Artegaill is predestined by “the streight course of hevenly destiny, / Led with eternall providence” (III.iii.24.3-4). The underlying assumption in Merlin’s prophecy is that Britomart and her successors, the Tudors, have special dispensation from God to unify the British nation and to reform its religion. This providential role is also what makes Britomart’s marriage to Artegaill a fitting symbol for equity. Spenser claims earlier that women may not rule unless “the heavens them lift to lawfull soveraintie” (V.v.26.9), but the priest of Isis repeats Merlin’s prophecy here in order to prove that Britomart does have special dispensation from God, so she can legitimately overrule Artegaill (as the crocodile) in the dream.

This explanation of Britomart’s special dispensation evokes Protestant justifications of Elizabeth’s rule. John Aylmer defended Elizabeth against John Knox precisely on the grounds that she had a mandate from God to save England from Catholicism. In his reply to Knox’s First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women, Aylmer argues that God chose a woman for this job in order to demonstrate the power of grace to dispense with human strength:

Placeth he a vvoman vveake in nature, feable in bodie, softe in courage, vnskilfull in practise, not terrible to the enemy, no Shilde to the stynde, vvel, Virtus mea (saith he) In infirmate perficitur. My strengthe is moste perfight vvwhen you be moste vveake, if he ioyne his strengthe; she can not be vveake. (S110398, sig. B2v-B3r)

In other words, God chose a woman “feable in bodie” in order to teach the English that their deliverance from Catholicism comes from God rather than a human prince. In fact, God works through the prince because, in a Protestant polis, divine aid transforms human weakness into

41 See for example Judith Aptekar’s claim that Britomart’s dream “is an emblem of the proper submitting… of the god to the goddess, of rigor to clemency, and of law to equity” (96).
strength. Aylmer’s reading of England’s Reformation politicizes Paul’s description of grace in relation to human weakness: “he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 9). A similar approach underlies the priest’s interpretation of the dream in Spenser’s poem: Britomart tames the crocodile because the gods have chosen her and her dynasty, which includes Elizabeth Tudor, to act as the vehicles of grace and divine justice. As a result, the conjugal union between Britomart and Artegall represents not only equity in an abstract sense but also the specifically Protestant kind of equity that Elizabeth was supposed to bring to England. Spenser thus associates the vision of equity in the dream with Elizabeth’s divinely appointed role as a sponsor of Protestantism. In so doing, he suggests that equity cultivates the Protestant religion through a mixture of human effort and divine aid.

Britomart proves herself to be an agent of equity during her battle with the Amazons. She fights Radigund immediately after the Isis Church episode, thus establishing a causal link between her experiences at the temple and the ensuing battle. She also upholds equity by rejecting Radigund’s terms: “For her no other termes should ever tie / Then what prescribed were by lawes of chevalrie” (V.vii.28.8-9). This response corrects Artegall’s mistake in negotiating with Radigund. Finally, Britomart displays equity when she spares some of the remaining Amazons from Talus’s fury (VII.vii.36). Throughout the scene, therefore, Britomart embodies the flexibility vis-à-vis the written law that characterizes equity.

However, the most prominent feature of Britomart’s equity is her willingness to teach her new subjects about Protestant notions of grace and divine justice. Her first pupil is the captive Artegall:

42 See Phillips’s “Renaissance Concepts of Justice,” 109-10, for a similar reading of Britomart’s special election.

43 David Lee Miller argues that Arthur’s and Gloriana’s “union in marriage is less an achievable telos than… a kind of vanishing point” (139). I would add that the dream represents equity as a deferred marriage in order to show that equity, too, is a historically ongoing process of spiritual and legal reformation.

44 See Jill Delsigne’s “Reading Catholic Art in Edmund Spenser’s Temple of Isis” for a counter-argument that associates the dream with Catholic iconography (210-1). See also Brian Lockey’s “‘The Perils of Imperial Imitation in Edmund Spenser’s The Faerie Queene” for the view that Catholic overtones in Book V make Spenser’s sectarian approach to equity unstable.
“Ah my deare Lord, what sight is this” (quoth she)
“What May-game hath misfortune made of you?
Where is that dreadfull manly looke? where be
Those mighty palmes, the which ye wont t’embrew
In bloud of Kings, and great hoastes to subdew?
Could ought on earth so wondrous change have wrought,
As to have robde you of that manly hew?
Could so great courage stouped have to ought?
Then farewell fleshly force; I see thy pride is nought.” (V.vii.40.1-9)

Britomart catalogues the signifiers of chivalrous masculinity only to dismiss them all in the final line as signs of “pride” and “fleshly force.” This volta and the word “flesh” inscribe Artesall’s slavery in terms of Pauline binaries between flesh, law, and sin on the one hand and faith, spirit, and grace on the other. By deploying Pauline language in this way, Britomart compares Artesall not only to scripture but also to the Redcrosse knight. Redcrosse wields “more then manly force” (I.i.24.6) when he ascribes all his strength to God (I.i.19.3), but he succumbs to the “huge force” (I.vii.11.2) of Orgoglio, the giant of pride, when he trusts in his own power.45 By describing the captive Artesall as the allegorical emblem of “fleshly force,” Spenser suggests that his defeat is comparable to Redcrosse’s enslavement by pride.46 The implication is that Artesall, like Redcrosse, was invincible as long as he pursued divine justice, but he fell from grace when he became overconfident and bound himself to Radigund’s law. Moreover, Artesall’s emaciated appearance recalls Redcrosse’s “feeble thidges, unhaule to uphold / His pined corse, him scarce to light could beare, / A ruefull spectacle of death and ghastly dreere.” (I.viii.40.7-9). Both knights experience physical weakness and humiliation as the prelude to their spiritual regeneration, thus embodying the Pauline progress from flesh and spiritual death to regenerative grace. However, while Redcrosse undergoes a primarily spiritual regeneration, Artesall experiences grace as a form of legal and political instruction in equity. By reforming Artesall in this way, Britomart demonstrates that equity is among other things an expression of grace.

45 Cf. Darryl J. Gless’s view that this scene in Book I illustrates Protestant notions of cooperative grace (65-8).
46 See Donald J. Stump’s “Isis Versus Mercilla” for the view that Artesall’s progress in Book V closely mirrors the narrative trajectories of the heroes in Book I (88).
In addition to liberating Artegall, Britomart also fulfills Protestant expectations for the equitable ruler by teaching her subjects to accept patriarchy. Even though she humbles the fleshly force of the knights, she also emancipates them and trains them to be magistrates: “all those Knights… she did from thraldome free / And magistrates of all that city made” (V.vii.43.1-3). This pedagogical method resembles Fidelia’s teaching in Book I: “For she was hable, with her wordes to kill, / And rayse againe to life the hart, that she did thrill” (I.x.19.8-9). In addition to training new magistrates, Britomart teaches the Amazons to accept this new order:

she there as Princes rained,
And changing all that forme of common weale,
The liberty of women did repeale,
Which they had long usurpt; and them restoring
To mens subjection, did true Justice deale:
That all they as a Goddesse her adoring,
Her wisedome did admire, and hearkned to her loring. (V.vii.42.3-9)

Britomart administers “true Justice” because she restores what Spenser represents as the divinely ordained hierarchy among the genders. By appealing to this religious dimension, Britomart supposedly returns the Amazons to the Golden Age. Her “wisedome” and “loring” associate her with Astraea’s “righteous lore” (V.i.4.9), and the Amazons’s “adoring” evokes the voluntary obedience of the people during the Golden Age, when “Justice sate high ador’d with solemne feasts” (V. proem.9.8). The “lore” and “true Justice” also echo the “righteous lore / Of highest Jove, who doth true justice deale” (V.vii.1.4-7). Britomart’s equity is thus a political analogue to grace: by cultivating piety in her magistrates and scripturally sanctioned gender norms on her subjects, Britomart effectively enables her political community to experience some measure of the prelapsarian condition.

The first seven cantos of Book V thus end with a robust defense of the monarch’s equity as the best means of implementing divine justice. Having learned of the providential role that her

47 For a reading of Fidelia’s teaching as an example of the Protestant ideal of the priesthood of all believers, see John King’s Spenser’s Poetry and the Reformation Tradition (63).

48 See also Maureen Quilligan’s “On the Renaissance Epic: Spenser and Slavery” for the view that Spenser appeals to classical theories of natural slavery in order to justify patriarchal labour relations as natural and divinely ordained.
dynasty will play in unifying Britain, Britomart begins to live up to that role by reforming the Amazons. At the same time, Spenser suggests that the power of the sovereign is no more than a means towards the general telos of religious reformation. He shows that a monarch who offends scripture, as Radigund has, will incur the wrath of Isaiah’s God, and magistrates who rely only on “fleshly force” will become captive to unjust laws.

1.3 Equity and Empire

The second half of Book V focuses on Arthur’s and Arthegall’s quests, which allegorize Elizabethan military expeditions in the Spanish Netherlands and in Ireland. Louis Montrose argues that these quests idealize a belligerent form of Protestant masculinity:

[T]hese chivalric allegories of late Elizabethan military actions against the forces of Spain and Catholicism in France, the Low Countries, and Ireland clearly manifest Spenser’s affinity with the strategic and ideological positions of Sidney, Essex, and the forward Protestant party in affairs of state. For these Elizabethan Englishmen, the threat of dishonourable effeminization was less likely to be associated with turning native in Ireland or America than with the condition of female regiment at home. (933)

According to this reading, Spenser endorses Sidney’s and Essex’s aggressive foreign policy in order to oppose what he saw as the enfeebling effects of Elizabeth’s rule. While Montrose is correct to see a shift to foreign policy at the end of Book V, I argue that Spenser’s deployment of Christian equity in these cantos reveals a synergistic relationship between the knights and their queens. During Duessa’s trial, Mercilla teaches Arthegall and Arthur how to wield Christian equity against Catholic powers abroad. In so doing, she transforms equity into an instrument of Protestant imperial expansion over Catholic-dominated lands. Spenser’s broader argument is that the eschatological promise of a universal Protestant empire requires religious peace at home and zealous intervention abroad. In order to acquire political agency, Arthur and Arthegall must participate in Protestant expansion.
Spenser initially describes Mercilla as an idealized Protestant ruler because she allows God to rule directly through her. The description of her appearance contains several scriptural allusions which her closeness to God:

All over her a cloth of state was spred,
Not of rich tissew, nor of cloth of gold,
Nor of ought else, that may be richest red,
But like a cloud, as likest may be told,
That her brode spreading wings did wyde unfold;
Whose skirts were bordred with bright sunny beams,
Glistring like gold, amongst the plights enrold,
And here and there shooting forth silver streames,
Mongst which crept litle Angels through the glittering gleames. (V.ix.29)

By differentiating Mercilla’s “cloth of state” from works of human artifice such as the “rich tissew” and the “cloth of gold,” Spenser implies that her authority stems from grace rather than human effort. His scriptural allusions reinforce this point. The cloth’s resemblance to a “cloud” alludes to Ex. 20:16: “And the glory of the Lord abode upon mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days.” Mercilla’s “litle Angels” evoke the seraphims around God’s throne in Isa. 6:1-2: “I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims.” Moreover, the phrase “kings and kesars at her feet did them prostrate” (V.ix.29.9) evokes the submission of all creation to Christ in Rev. 7.11 and Rev. 4.10. Finally, Spenser presents Mercilla as the representative grace because she commands Jove’s daughters, the Litae, who are the vehicles of divine mercy (V.ix.31.9). 49 Each of these iconographic details signals that Mercilla is God’s representative on Earth. 50 To illustrate this point, Spenser makes Mercilla herself quite literally disappear into the many signs of divine election all around her: he spends nine stanzas on the scriptural allusions encoded in her clothes and royal regalia, but he does not pause at all on her face or body. 51

49 Cf. Aptekar reading of the Litae as signs of religious authority (17-20).
50 For an overview of traditional arguments in favour of seeing Mercilla as a symbol of divine justice, see Richard F. Hardin, “Mercilla,” in The Spenser Encyclopedia.
51 See Hume’s Protestant Poet for a similar reading of Mercilla as a figure that disappears into scripture (136-7).
Spenser surrounds Mercilla with the signifiers of divine favour in order to demonstrate that her justice is a seamless reflection of divine justice. When her courtiers are visibly shocked by the sight of the knights’ armour, the narrator explains: “Ne ever was the name of warre there spoken, / But joyous peace and quietnesse alway” (V.ix.24.7-8). Mercilla’s peace associates her with the Golden Age in which divine justice ruled the people, thus setting her up as another living Astraea. This praise may be ironic because Mercilla punishes multiple criminals, but Spenser also goes out of his way to suggest that Mercilla’s punishments are justified. For example, she punishes the slanderous poet Bon Fons by nailing his tongue to a post and rewriting Malfont over his name, but Spenser’s grammar places the onus on Bon Fons: “For the bold title of a Poet bad / He on himselfe had ta’en” (V.ix.25.8-9). The verb “had ta’en” gives Bon Fons the agency, as if he punished himself voluntarily. A similar pattern structures Mercilla’s other foes:

Thus she did sit in soverayne Majestie,
Holding a Scepter in her royall hand,
The sacred pledge of peace and clencie,
With which high God had blest her happie land,
Maugre so many foes, which did withstand. (V.ix.30.2-5).

Mercilla’s only action in this passage is to “sit in soverayne Majestie”; the “foes” in the final line appear almost as an afterthought, and they seem to defeat themselves without any effort on her part. Another example of criminal self-indictment in Mercilla’s court is Duessa’s trial, where the defendant’s crimes literally bear witness against her: “The plot of all her practise did display, / And all her traynes, and all her treasons forth did lay” (V.ix.47.8-9). The implication is that Mercilla sees Duessa’s guilt with almost divine clarity.

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52 According to an influential tradition of criticism, the Mercilla episode is an ironic demystification of power. See Johnathan Goldberg’s *James I and the Politics of Literature* for a representative reading (1-6). See also John D. Staines’s “Elizabeth, Mercilla, and the Rhetoric of Propaganda in Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*.”

53 As Jeff Dolven has argued, Spenser often makes punishment appear to be compatible with peace: “Punishment differs from violence in that it is performed as retribution, by authority and according to some implicit or explicit law… punishment therefore necessarily raises the question of justice, which simple violence need not do” (140). If the justice backing the punishment is grounded in the divine, as Mercilla’s justice clearly is, then her actions are supposed to be more than naked violence.

54 John Staines argues that, during Duessa’s trial, “Spenser holds up Elizabeth’s government as… an amoral machine that stage-managed Mary’s execution so that equity’s messy negotiation between mercy and revenge appears to be a virtue” (304). The problem with this view is that Spenser presents the execution of Mary Stuart as a moment of national deliverance from Catholicism. I read Duessa’s execution as a defense of Christian equity.
sense that she punishes only the truly guilty. In so doing, she manifests the ideal union between human law and divine justice that Spenser associates with the Golden Age.

By representing Mercilla in this way, Spenser suggests that she, like Britomart, is an agent of equity. Spenser’s historical allegory connects these characters closely. Not only do they allegorize the same monarch, Queen Elizabeth, but their foes, Radigund and Duessa, also represent different aspects of the same Catholic queen, Mary Stuart. In addition to these historical connections, Britomart and Mercilla represent similar aspects of divine justice. Whereas Radigund ignores the authority of scripture, Britomart uses equity to introduce divine “loring” to the Amazons. Similarly, Mercilla is, so to speak, the anti-Radigund: here is a monarch who is so receptive to scripture that her very clothes are a network of biblical allusions. Therefore, Britomart and Mercilla represent complementary aspects of Christian equity. Britomart reforms Amazonian law with her Pauline teaching; Mercilla completes the process by channelling divine justice to such an extent that criminals seem to punish themselves voluntarily in her presence.

Like Britomart, Mercilla fulfils the demands of equity by teaching her inferior magistrates how to promote Protestant interests. She gives Arthur and Artegall a judicial role in the trial of Duessa so as to teach them equity. Their main example for emulation is Zele, the prosecutor. Zele’s name and his actions during the trial suggest his commitment to the Protestant cause. He is “a person of deepe reach, / And rare in-sight, hard matters to revele” (V.ix.39.1-2), and he demonstrates this insight in practice by calling forth Duessa’s crimes as witnesses against her (V.ix.47-49). By revealing Duessa’s conscience, Zele evokes Una’s punishment of Duessa in Book I. Whereas Una demands that Arthur “spoile her of her scarlot robe, and let her fly” (I.viii.45.9), Zele unmasks Duessa’s “wretched semblant,” which “did sure / The peoples great

55 Michael O’Connell’s entry in the *Spenser Encyclopaedia*, “The Faerie Queen, Book V,” summarizes the perspective that Radigund and Duessa allegorize Mary Stuart. Cf. Donald J. Stump’s “The Two Deaths of Mary Stuart,” which explains the historical correspondences between Duessa, Radigund, and Mary.

56 O’Connell argues that Mercilla is a political manifestation of equity while Britomart is strictly jurisprudential (739). Critics such as Angus Fletcher have argued that Mercilla’s court is a court of equity because the trial of Mary Stuart, which inspired Duessa’s trial, fell outside of the jurisdiction of the common law (*Prophetic Moment* 281). Fortier has challenged this claim (118-9).

57 For a parallel reading of the Mercilla-Britomart connection as a reflection of the English ideal of the queen-in-parliament, see Fletcher’s *Prophetic Moment* (173-4). Cf. Stump’s “Isis Versus Mercilla,” which contrasts Isis and Mercilla and argues that Mercilla represents a superior, Christian justice that overrides Isis’s pagan equity (89-91).
compassion unto her allure” (V.ix.38.8-9). Spenser’s implication is that Zele completes Una’s work in Book I. Whereas Protestant doctrine requires only a theoretical exposure of Catholic error, godly magistrates such as Zele go beyond doctrinal disputation in order to provide a legal and political solution for Catholic threats to Protestantism. At the level of historical allegory, Spenser’s representation of Zele suggests that the trial and execution of Mary, Queen of Scots was the political expression of the religious ideas that he discussed in Book I. In terms of Spenser’s broader depiction of Christian equity in Book V, Zele teaches Arthur and Artegall that inferior magistrates must uphold divine justice by vigorously prosecuting Catholic agents.

By giving Christian equity this anti-Catholic dimension, Spenser suggests that equity ultimately requires the expansion of Protestant empire. Mercilla trains Arthur and Artegall specifically so that they may spread her justice abroad: “Which that those knights likewise mote understand, / And witsesse forth aright in forrain land” (V.ix.37.4-5). Given Duessa’s Catholic associations, the “forrain land” Mercilla has in mind here is most likely Catholic. Spenser strengthens this implication by suggesting that Catholic subjects yearn for Mercilla:

What heavenly Muse shall thy great honour rayse
Up to the skies, whence first deriv’d it was,
And now on earth it selfe enlarged has,
From th’utmost brinke of the Americke shore,
Unto the margent of the Molucas? (V.x.3.3-7)

Mercilla’s fame extends globally from the “Americke shore” and “the Molucas,” which were the westernmost and easternmost limits of the Catholic empires of Spain and Portugal. By suspending his allegory and reflecting on real Catholic empires, Spenser suggests that England has a religious mandate to take over Catholic colonies. The implication is that Catholic subjects acknowledge Mercilla-Elizabeth as the living embodiment of divine justice and are waiting for an Arthur or an Artegall to liberate them in her name. At the same time, Spenser suggests that Catholic people abroad do not understand Mercilla as well as the English: “Those Nations farre thy justice doe adore: / But thine owne people do thy mercy prayse much more” (V.x.3.8-9). What Mercilla’s “owne people” in England know, and what the “Nations farre” fail to understand, is that Mercilla’s rule depends on divine grace: “[Mercy] first was bred, and borne of heavenly race; / From thence pour’d down on men, by influence of grace” (V.x.1.8-9). Thus
Mercilla’s domestic subjects “prayse much more” her mercy than her justice because, being Protestants, they are more responsive to a theology based on grace than the Catholic-dominated nations in the Molucas and the Americas. Spenser’s vision of empire is expansive and universal in its scope, but Protestant, English subjects retain a privileged position because of their religious beliefs. Spenser thus treats the union of human and divine justice in Mercilla’s court as a specifically Protestant phenomenon that must expand outwardly to include and convert Catholic subjects currently living in colonial Spain and Portugal.58

In other words, I am suggesting that these cantos deploy Christian equity as a justification for Protestant imperialism.59 My reading challenges the critical tradition that sees Spenser’s representation of Mercilla as a demystification of monarchical power. For example, Jonathan Goldberg argues that, in Spenser’s work, “[p]ower—the ruler’s, the poet’s—styles itself in denial; the poet points to the ruler, the ruler to abstract principles” (6-7). From Goldberg’s Foucauldian perspective, rulers resemble poets because they reify literary or political fictions by appealing to transcendent authority.60 Although power may in fact operate in this way, Spenser does not necessarily demystify this process. In common with Protestant writing on equity, he suggests that Protestant dogma should guide legal interpretation because Protestantism is based on the infallible authority of scripture. As we have seen, Spenser’s argument is consistent with the views of theologians, such as William Perkins, who argues that Christian equity demands vigorous punishments for those who offend “God’s truth” (445). For Spenser and Perkins, scripture is not a political fiction but rather a clear and infallible guide to divine justice. By the same token, Spenser invests rulers who uphold scripture with an almost messianic potential. Thus Spenser depicts Mercilla’s court as a partial return to Eden, and he emphasizes Britain’s religious destiny during Britomart’s dream. In both cases, Spenser emphasizes the religious

58 Maureen Quilligan has shown persuasively that religion intersects with racial and gendered identities in these scenes. See “On the Renaissance Epic: Spenser and Slavery” for a reading of Britomart’s victory over the Amazons as a justification of slavery in the New World (34-6).

59 Cf. Stevens’s argument in “Paradise Lost and the Colonial Imperative.” Stevens demonstrates that Milton’s Protestantism is inseparable from the discourse of civility that facilitates colonialism (17-8). As Stevens demonstrates, there is a clear link between Pauline universalism and English empire that shapes not only Milton’s thought but also that of Hakluyt and similar writers. I am suggesting that these Protestant justifications of empire are already clearly visible in Book V of The Faerie Queene.

60 This argument extends beyond Goldberg. See for example Gordon Teskey’s view that Spenser justifies the English conquest of Ireland through “the right of conquest, that is, of violence pure and simple” (181). Teskey’s implication is that, for Spenser, the violence of sovereign precedes the justification of that power.
aspect of equity in order to provide a defense of Protestant sovereignty. Finally, Spenser suggests in the trial scene that England’s religious and political stability will not be secured until pious magistrates spread Protestant justice to Catholic lands. As we shall see, the final cantos of Book V present Christian equity as the bridging concept that connects England’s deliverance from Catholicism to its destiny as a global Protestant empire.

Arthur’s quest to liberate Belge’s lands from Geryoneo situates Spenser’s arguments about equity and divine justice in the context of the Eighty Years’ War. In 1585, Elizabeth sent an expedition to the Spanish Netherlands under the command of her most important military advisors, including the Earl of Leicester, Phillip Sidney, and John Norris.\(^1\) In Spenser’s allegory, Arthur represents the group of courtiers who went abroad to support the Dutch Protestants, while Geryoneo represents Phillip II, the Spanish ruler of the Netherlands.\(^2\) Spenser recognizes Phillip II’s legal claim to the Low Countries because, in his rendition, Belge gives Geryoneo the “soveraine powre / To doe, what ever he thought good or fit” (V.x.13.1-3). However, Spenser also suggests that Geryoneo behaves like a Catholic tyrant. As a result, the battle between Arthur and Geryoneo foregrounds the tension between Protestant interests and the letter of the law, which in this case favours the Catholic monarch.

Equity does not appear by name in Arthur’s quest, but Spenser evokes this concept by suggesting that Geryoneo’s religion offends divine justice. Like Radigund, Geryoneo adopts legalistic language before the battle. He demands that Arthur “[d]eliver him his owne, ere yet too late, / To which they had no right, nor any wrongfull state.” (V.xi.3.8-9). “Right” and “state” are legal terms that describe justice according to the written law, and Geryoneo believes he can defend these legal rights through brute strength: “he there did stand / That would his doings justifie with his owne hand” (V.xi.4.8-9). By suggesting that force is sufficient to “justifie” his legal claim, Geryoneo implicitly rejects divine justice as the measure of equity. Spenser, however, suggests that Geryoneo has offended God by forcing Catholicism on his subjects: “So now he hath new lawes and orders new […] And forced it, the honour that is dew / To God, to

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\(^1\) For an overview of the historical allegory in the latter cantos of Book V, with an emphasis on the possible identities of Artegall and Arthur, see Josephine W. Bennett, *The Evolution of “The Faerie Queene”* (187-205).

\(^2\) For the link between Geryoneo and Philip II, see James Bednarz’s entry, “Geryoneo,” in *The Spenser Encyclopedia* (331).
doe unto his Idole most untrew‖ (V.x.27.6-9). In this passage, Spenser uses the language of Protestant iconoclasm to present Geryoneo’s Catholic policies as infringing on Moses’s first commandment.63 Later in Book V, he associates the Catholic Mass with cannibalism,64 a practice that Catholics themselves had condemned in Amerindigene societies and used as a justification for European imperialism.65 Although Spenser does not mention equity by name, he nevertheless engages in the Protestant approach to equity by representing Geryoneo as offensive to divine justice despite his legal claim to the throne.

The fighting styles of Arthur and Geryoneo allegorize the sectarian basis of their disagreements. Geryoneo’s monstrous physicality reflects his Catholic reliance on human effort to achieve his aims: “great advauntage eke he has / Through his three double hands thrise multiplyde, / Besides the double strength, which in them was” (V.xi.6.1-3). On the other hand, Arthur’s strength is concentrated in his shield, which symbolizes grace in both Book I and Book V. The symbolism of the shield is clearest when it saves Arthur’s life: “had he chaunced not his shield to reare, / Ere that huge stroke arrived on him neare, / He had him surely cloven quite in twaine” (V.xi.10.5-6). As in Arthur’s fight against Orgoglio in Book I, the shield saves Arthur without his active knowledge or effort in order to reflect the Protestant understanding of grace.66 A similar chance exposure is fatal for Geryoneo (V.xi.13) because, being Catholic, he values human effort at the expense of grace. Whereas the Catholic Geryoneo sees justice as a purely

63 See Deut. 7:5: “ye shall destroy their altars, and break down their images, and cut down their groves, and burn their graven images with fire.” Benjamin Myers has argued that this passage inspires much of Spenser’s iconoclasm as well as the anti-Catholic activities of the New English in Ireland (“Spenserian Theodicy” 402). Stevens offers more context on the relationship between scripture and colonial violence in “Spenser and the End of the British Empire” and “‗Leviticus Thinking.’”

64 See V.x.8.3-4: “For twelve of them he did by times devour, / And to his Idols sacrifice their blood.”

65 For this insight, I am indebted to Nyquist’s lecture on Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz’s The Divine Narcissus, which was delivered at the University of Toronto on Feb. 10th, 2016. In Arbitrary Rule, Nyquist argues that “many early modern references to cannibalism frame it as a right of war—the victors’ power of killing or sparing—that Amerindigenes have turned into an unnatural, barbarous rite” (90). Spenser may be associating Catholicism and cannibalism ironically here so as to turn this Spanish justification for empire against Spain’s religion. In the View, Spenser apparently attributes cannibalism to the Irish without any irony (104). As Richard McCabe has argued, Spenser’s depiction of Irish cannibalism is part of his justification for their extermination (61). Cf. Lockey’s view that Spenser’s deployment of equity against Catholics is ironized by the fact that Catholic English communities on the continent used similar arguments to encourage a Spanish invasion of England (59).

66 See Arthur’s victory by “chaunce” in I.viii.19. Darryl Gless argues that Arthur’s victory allegorizes Protestant doctrine on grace: “Arthurs’ fall unleashes his true strength, by a “chaunce” which announces more emphatically than ever that divine foreordination guides events which human perceptions are likely to assign to accident” (137).
human construct propped up by human force, Arthur appeals directly to God and divine justice, as the Protestant doctrine of equity demands.

Spenser also foregrounds the sectarian basis of Christian equity when Arthur uproots Catholicism from Belge’s lands. Belge asks him to wipe out Geryoneo’s religion: “Till ye have rooted all the relickes out / Of that vile race” (V.xi.18.6-7). This is a turning point in the quest because Mercilla gives Arthur a mandate to liberate Belge’s land, but not necessarily to reform its religion. As a result, the question in this scene is whether or not equity enables Protestant magistrates to expand their religion when they lack an explicit order to do so from the sovereign. Arthur’s response suggests that Protestants do have this power. He defaces Geryoneo’s church, and the people crown him for his efforts:

So him they led through all their streetes along,
Crowned with girlonds of immortall baies,
And all the vulgar did about them throng,
To see the man, whose everlasting praise
They all were bound to all posterities to raise. (V.xi.34.5-9)

Although Arthur rejects Belge’s offer of political sovereignty, he nevertheless appears as a crowned figure at the head of a liberated Protestant nation. Spenser’s implication is that although Arthur is not actually a king, he nevertheless participates in the overall aim of Mercilla’s sovereignty, which is to spread Protestant equity across the whole world. The rhyme between “everlasting praise” and “raise” supports this connection because Spenser uses the same rhyme in V.x.3.1-3 to describe Mercilla’s global praise. Thus Mercilla’s and Arthur’s shared commitment to equity allows them to earn similar praise despite their inequality in political rank. Moreover, Arthur demonstrates himself as an agent of equity by educating the “vulgar” throng to

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67 Belge asked for “ayde, against that cruell Tyrants theft” (V.x.14.4), but not for religious reform.

68 Arthur’s refusal also implies an implicit critique of the historical Leicester, who accepted the position of Governor-General of the United Provinces in 1585 against Elizabeth’s wishes. See Harline’s Pamphlets, Printing, and Political Culture in the Early Dutch Republic (7) for more on this historical context.

69 Kaske explains that Arthur’s iconoclasm corrects his earlier negligence after the fight with Orgoglio: “Although Arthur kills Orgoglio, he commits no iconoclasm; he does nothing about his altar. In Book V he encounters a similar altar; along with killing its owner and its monster guardian, he destroys it. It is almost as if Arthur went back to the same altar in Book I to finish what he started” (81). What Arthur has learned in Book V is that justice and reformation must go hand in hand—a view that is central, as we have seen, to Protestant writing on equity.
accept divine justice. This description of the crowd evokes the Egalitarian Gyant’s listeners in the second canto: “the vulgar did about him flocke / And cluster thicke unto his leaseings vaine” (V.ii.35.1-2). By uprooting the Catholic religion, Arthur reforms the vulgar mob that was once susceptible to the Gyant, thus demonstrating that inferior magistrates have as much responsibility as the ruler to instruct the nation through equity.70

Arthur’s religious reformation of Belge’s lands demonstrates the political stakes of equity and the closely related concept of grace. In The View, Spenser argues that colonial officers like his former employer, Lord Grey, would have been much more efficient in Ireland if the Queen had allowed them to be more independent.71 Arthur demonstrates this missed opportunity in practice. Although the historical expedition to the Netherlands was a failure, Arthur’s quest is a success because he is semi-autonomous in his pursuit of equity. By wielding equity alongside the monarch as Protestant theologians recommended, Arthur manages to restore some measure of grace to the political community. Thus Spenser demonstrates that the “soveraine grace” that Arthur praises in Mercilla does not belong to the monarch alone, but also to every magistrate who pursues Protestant interests.

While Arthur’s quest represents the benefits of giving magistrates more leeway in uprooting Catholicism, Artegall’s mixed results in the final canto foreground the problems in restraining magistrates too strictly. Artegall’s quest allegorizes English efforts to pacify the Earl of Tyrone’s rebellion in Ireland. Grantorto represents the rebels and Artegall stands for Lord Gray and John Norris, who were sent to defeat the Irish rebels.72 As we have seen, The View supports Gray’s tactics in Ireland and argues that he was recalled to London prematurely.73 Artegall reflects this historical context because, like Lord Gray, he sidesteps Grantorto’s

70 Cf. Wilson-Okamura’s description of Spenser’s crowds in “Republicanism, Nostalgia, and the Crowd” (266).
71 In the View, Spenser argues that the “the chief evil in that government is that no governor is suffered to go on with any one course, but upon the least information here of this or that he is either stopped or crossed, and other courses appointed him from hence…and therefore this should be the one principle in the appointment of the lord deputy’s authority, that it should be more ample and absolute than it is” (168).
72 See Bennett for the view that Artegall represents both Lord Gray and John Norris (194-5).
73 Cf. Eudoxius’s defense of Gray in the View (106).
legalistic wrangling in order to engage in swift and decisive action.\(^{74}\) Moreover, Artegall focuses on cultural and religious reform: “day and night employ’d his busie paine / How to reforme that ragged common-weale” (V.xii.26.3-4). He restrains Talus long enough to give the people a chance to convert (V.xii.8), thus embodying Mercilla’s view that it is “better to reforme, then to cut off the ill” (V.x.2.9)—a strategy that the View presents as the best means of dominating Ireland.\(^{75}\) Like the historical Lord Gray, however, Artegall cannot finish what he starts because of royal meddling: “But ere he could reforme it thoroughly, / He through occasion called was away, / To Faerie Court” (V.xii.27.1-3). This intervention from the crown suggests a critique of Elizabeth’s treatment of Grey. While this parallel between Grey and Artegall is well-known, my point is that Spenser implicitly presents Artegall’s quest as a failure of Christian equity.

The broader significance of Artegall’s failure is that it foregrounds Spenser’s inability to incorporate history into his idealized vision of English empire. I have been arguing that Book V idealizes Christian equity as the means by which Protestant monarchs and their zealous magistrates instruct the nation in divine justice, thus preparing the way for the emergence of England as a global Protestant empire. However, Spenser was well aware of the fact that the historical relationship between Elizabeth and her magistrates was not quite so smooth. According to Spenser, Grey’s withdrawal from Ireland was proof that Protestant monarchs do not always pursue the best interests of the church. By ending Book V with an allusion to these historical events, Spenser foregrounds his own inability to incorporate England’s historical setbacks into the optimistic vision of Protestant expansion that occupies much of Book V. In theory, the clarity of scripture was supposed to guarantee that monarchs and magistrates would have the same understanding of equity, but there was plenty of room for disagreement in practice, and Spenser presents these disagreements as largely responsible for the failure of English policy in Ireland. Artegall’s mixed results temper the apparent defense of imperialism that dominates much of Book V.

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74 According to an influential line of criticism, Grantorto represents Irish manipulations of the legal system, which were designed to exploit English equity. For example, Kaske argues that the battle with Grantorto “could allegorize the way in which the native Irish manipulate trial by jury” (78). Cf. McCabe’s Monstrous Regiment (224).

75 Andrew Hadfield argues that Artegall stands for Lord Gray as he is described in the View because they both use effective but unpopular tactics that lead to a premature withdrawal (Spenser’s Irish Experience 154-6).
Spenser articulates these anxieties even more forcefully in Detraction’s slander of Artegaill, which concludes Book V. Detraction reinterprets the meaning of the central events of Book V in a way that presents Grantorto as the hero:

Then th’other comming neare, gan him revile,
And fouly rayle, with all she could invent;
Saying, that he had with unmanly guile,
And foule abusion both his honour blent,
And that bright sword, the sword of Justice lent
Had stayned with reprochfull crueltie,
In guiltlesse blood of many an innocent:
As for Grandtorto, him with treacherie
And traynes having surpriz’d, he fouly did to die. (V.xii.40.1-9)

In a single stanza, Detraction rewrites the main plot of Book V to present Artegaill as the villain. The word “invent” suggests that Detraction’s accusations are untrue, but the narrator cannot provide any evidence that his own allegorical inventions are less scripted. Scripture cannot settle this question because Detraction merely challenges Artegaill’s reputation, not the scripturally defined fundamentals of divine justice. Bypassing the issue of divine justice altogether, Detraction brings Spenser’s theory of equity into the realm of historical contingency. Detraction demonstrates that some political and legal problems cannot be settled through scripture. In particular, she shows that reputations are made and unmade by gossip, intrigue, and other malignant forces that bypass the questions of divine justice upon which the imperialism of Book V seems to be built. A different virtue is necessary to address this threat, and Spenser moves on to discuss the legend of Courtesy in Book VI.

76 Eudoxius’s describes the slanders of Gray’s reputation in terms that clearly evoke Detraction’s speech here: “I remember that in the late government of that good Lord Gray, when after long travail and many perilous assays, he had brought things almost to this pas that ye speak of, that it was even made ready for reformation, and might have been brought to what Her Majesty would, like complaint was made against him, that he was a bloody man, and regarded not the life of her subjects, no more than dogs, but had wasted and consumed all, so as now she had almost nothing left but to reign in their ashes. Ear was soon lent thereunto, all suddenly turned topsy turvy, the noble Lord eftsoones was blamed, the wretched people pitied, and new counsels plotted” (106).
However, it would be a mistake to conclude from these final stanzas in Book V that Spenser withdraws entirely from the ideal of Christian equity or from the promise of Protestant empire. For most of Book V, Spenser envisions an expansive Protestant empire in which monarchs and inferior magistrates wield equity together, but he never accepts this imperial future as an unproblematic or inevitable destiny. Like Perkins, Calvin, and Luther before him, Spenser understands and acknowledges that all Christians, including magistrates and even the Queen herself, frequently fall short of the standards demanded by Christian equity. What makes Spenser a Protestant imperialist is not a naïve belief in the equity of actual English magistrates but rather his confidence that the scriptural narrative of grace and redemption promises England a path to imperial expansion—if only the leaders of the English nation refrain from infighting and gossip in order to actively take up the challenge to reform God’s people.

Understood in this way, Book V of *The Faerie Queene* suggests that grace cannot produce lasting legal and political changes in the nation without human effort. It is not enough for the nation to wait upon “soveraine grace.” It is also necessary for virtuous magistrates such as Grey to help grace along by spreading equity actively, as Arthur does in Belge’s lands. Already in *The Faerie Queene*, we can observe the beginnings of a cooperative understanding of grace that flowered later in the history of the English reformation. As we shall see in my next chapter, the politics of grace continued to shape the English political imagination during the Jacobean period.
Chapter 2
Patience, Grace, and Dynastic Succession in King Lear and The Tempest

John Milton was a confident poet, but in Sonnet 19 (“On his blindness”), he describes a rare moment of self-doubt. The speaker struggles with his blindness and begins to doubt his ability to serve God. As his anxiety reaches its peak, however, “patience” intervenes:

Doth God exact day labour, light deny’d,
I fondly ask; But patience to prevent
That murmur, soon replies, God doth not need
 Either man’s work or his own gifts, who best
Bear his milde yoak, they serve him best, his State
Is Kingly. (7-11)

Although Milton is nominally concerned with patience in this passage, part of his aim is to probe how patience is related to grace. God does not need “man’s work” because, as Protestant theologians insisted, human beings are saved by grace alone. However, the speaker also feels an overwhelming desire to prove himself worthy of his religious calling by demonstrating his exceptional virtue. Patience resolves the problem for Milton by balancing submission and assertiveness. The patient Christian is submissive because he accepts God’s “milde yoak.” He experiences his own patience as a gift of grace,¹ a fact that Milton captures by imagining patience as a second voice that speaks to him authoritatively, as if it were God’s messenger. At the same time, the poem also suggests that patience empowers suffering Christians because it allows them to serve God best. Patience thus captures a delicate balance between human agency and God. It transforms the speaker’s perspective on blindness so that he may reinterpret his helplessness and suffering as an opportunity for noble, virtuous service.

Milton’s poem is part of a long literary and theological tradition that associates patience with grace. As Erich Auerbach has shown in Literary Language & Its Public, the earliest

¹ Cf. Stevens’ s reading of the poem as a dramatization of the moment when grace seizes the suffering Christian from doubt and despair (“Obnoxious Satan” 291-2).
Christian martyrologies imagined patience as *gloria passionis*, or “the triumph of suffering” (65). In contrast with the Roman Stoics, who saw patience primarily as indifference towards the passions, the aim of *gloria passionis* was to reimagine suffering as a new form of nobility (68-9). These martyrological accounts influenced early modern texts such as Foxe’s *Actes and Monuments*, which joined *gloria passionis* to the Protestant understanding of grace. For Foxe and other Protestant writers, grace is God’s way of transforming the martyr’s experience of humiliation and pain into an opportunity for renewed agency.\(^2\) Christian patience thus implies a psychological tension in the martyr between the perspective of grace and the immediacy of suffering. Milton’s sonnet expresses this problem formally through the dialogue between patience and the murmuring speaker. In this chapter, I argue that there is a similar tension in the dramatic texture of *The Tempest* and *King Lear*. Although these plays do not concern religion directly, they draw upon religious rhetoric and biblical allusions to stage how characters may reimagine passivity, humiliation, and pain as a source of subjective agency. Shakespeare thus explores the degree to which the sufferer’s point of view shapes the experience of patience. Ultimately, these plays draw upon the rhetoric of *gloria passionis* in order to question whether patience can be a source of political agency.

*The Tempest* and *King Lear* represent Christian patience in terms of their broader concern with the politics of dynastic succession.\(^3\) In *The Tempest*, Prospero’s dynastic ambitions succeed in large part because he appropriates the rhetoric of *gloria passionis* in order to persuade Miranda and the Italian nobles to cooperate with his plans for Naples. Using his magical art, Prospero sets up a series of theatrical illusions that reproduce the shifts in perspective that

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\(^2\) For a theological articulation of this view, see Calvin (III.viii.2). Calvin’s view of grace informs his broader contrast between Stoic and Christian patience in Book III, chapter viii of the *Institutes.*

\(^3\) Patrick Collinson summarizes the succession anxieties and emergency measures that emerged as a result of Elizabath’s childlessness in his influential essay, “The monarchical republic of Queen Elizabeth I.” James I eventually quelled these anxieties because he had multiple heirs, but his legitimacy was nevertheless problematic because of his mother’s execution by Elizabeth. As Peter Sherlock has demonstrated, James sought to outdo Elizabeth’s memory by “emphasiz[ing] his masculinity and his inheritance of multiple kingdoms” (269). As a result, late Elizabethan succession anxieties continued to influence how the Jacobean period understood James’s absolutism and his unification of the British Isles. Critics such as Emily Jones have argued recently that James’s propaganda inspired a counter-argument in Jacobean drama (“Hereditary Succession and Death”). Within Shakespeare Studies, *King Lear* and *The Tempest* are sometimes understood as a response to this historical context. See, for example, Kastan’s *Shakespeare After Theory* (169-82). For a more philosophical take on the relationship between Prospero, Lear, and Jacobean absolutism, see Sarah Beckwith’s *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*, which approaches these issues through Stanley Cavell’s ethical philosophy.
characterize gloria passionis. For example, the shipwreck initially inspires acute suffering in Miranda—“I have suffered / With those that I saw suffer,” she laments (1.2.5-6)—but Prospero encourages her to embrace this suffering as the basis for her romantic and dynastic future. By teaching Miranda and the other characters on the island the language of gloria passionis, Prospero persuades them to see their obedience to him in positive terms. In other words, Prospero simulates the effect of grace on the sufferer’s mind by changing their perspective on suffering; however, his main purpose in doing so is to secure voluntary political obedience rather than religious faith. The political stakes in this approach are especially clear in Prospero’s encounter with Caliban, who reveals the coercive potential in Prospero’s teaching, including his teaching on patience.

If The Tempest is the comedy of a ruler who translates Christian rhetoric into a stable dynastic succession, then King Lear is the tragedy of a ruler who sometimes approaches, but cannot fully understand, these Christian terms. Part of the tragedy of King Lear is that characters such as Gloucester and Lear attempt to be patient during their tribulations, but they lack the scriptural guidance that might transform this virtue into political advantage and stability. Gloucester promises to “Shake Patiently [his] great affliction off” (4.6.36) by killing himself; however, this approach fails in part because it is closer to Stoicism than Christianity. King Lear alludes to scripture in order to demonstrate, through dramatic irony, that the characters in the play do not comprehend the Christian understanding of patience. They lack the crucial element of grace, which distinguishes Christian gloria passionis from Stoic patience. While the failure of religion in King Lear is a common critical observation, I argue that Shakespeare’s characters lack, more specifically, the understanding of grace that proves so politically advantageous for Prospero.

The broader aim of this chapter is to demonstrate that the early modern theatre stages the shifts in perspective that characterize religious experience. Gloria passionis is inherently

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4 See Elton’s King Lear and the Gods for a classic study on the failure of Lear’s gods as a demystification of Christian providence.

5 For an expanded analysis of the theatricality in religious experience, see Brian Cummings’s Mortal Thoughts. For Cummings, drama and religion shaped one another by redefining selfhood more generally. Thus the soliloquy was originally "a form of colloquium with God as silent witness," but “[i]n the post-medieval theatre, this is transferred to an implied presence beyond the self" (182). I am suggesting that the religious understanding of patience implied
dialogical, because it presumes a set of seemingly antithetical perspectives on suffering and the self. It requires a leap from worldly wisdom, which sees suffering as shameful, to a perspective informed by grace. Shakespeare draws upon the resources of the theatre to represent these perspectives and their implications for political power. Both *The Tempest* and *King Lear* allude to scriptural descriptions of patience, but only Prospero manages to reorient the perspective of the characters within the play towards a scripturally inflected politics. As a result, these plays illustrate Sarah Beckwith’s view that human experience is for Shakespeare the “medium of grace” (144). In these plays, the “medium” of grace is the human experience of politics and suffering. What concerns Shakespeare is the experience of patience and, more importantly, the ways in which political and religious authorities appropriate this discourse to maintain social inequalities.

2.1 Patience and Cooperative Grace

The modern words “patience” and “passion” derive from the same Latin root, *patior*, which means “to endure” and “to suffer.”

6 This etymology points to the history of these words in the early Christian church.7 As Auerbach has argued, pre-Christian philosophy considered suffering to be shameful, but early Christians reimagined suffering as an opportunity to imitate Christ. Auerbach demonstrates that early martyrologies such as the *Acts of Perpetua* imagine this Christian *gloria passionis*, or “triumph of suffering,” as an alternative to pagan philosophy:

The aim of Christian hostility to the world is not a passionless existence outside of the world, but countersuffering, a passionate suffering in the world and hence also in opposition to it; and to the flesh, to the evil *passiones* of this world, the Christians oppose neither the apathy of the Stoics nor “good emotions” (*bonae passiones*) with a view to attaining the Aristotelian mean by rational compromise,

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6 See Auerbach, 67-8, for the etymology of patience.
7 For an overview of Christian and Stoic patience, see Schiffhorst, “Prolegomena,” esp. 1-35.
but something hitherto unheard of: the *gloriosa passio* that springs from ardent love of God. (68-9)

Whereas Stoic and Aristotelian philosophers sought to ameliorate suffering, early Christians redefined suffering itself as the basis of a new form of nobility. Persecuted Christians are “in the world” insofar as they experience genuine pain, but they are also “in opposition to [the world]” because, contrary to worldly expectations, they see suffering as an ennobling experience (Auerbach 68-9). This approach to patience suggests that Christian subjectivity emerges at the intersection of two incompatible perspectives on reality. While the worldly perspective sees noble suffering as an absurd oxymoron, the Christian perspective trusts in God’s ability to make such absurdities possible. By choosing between these perspectives, Christian martyrs take back from their persecutors the power to define the ultimate meaning of their torture and eventual death. As a result, *gloria passionis* implies a paradoxical form of agency that is possible only through utter submission to one’s persecutors.  

However, later Christian theologians recognized that *gloria passionis* could be subversive in the wrong hands. This concern eventually led Augustine to reimagine this concept in terms of his theory of co-operative grace. For Augustine, grace is what allows Christians to make the imaginative leap from worldly wisdom to a genuinely patient perspective. On the one hand, he argues that Christians may work together with grace and so experience a sense of agency when they obey God. On the other hand, Augustine adds that only orthodox Christians may cooperate with grace. His argument implies a double standard: the orthodox can acquire agency through patient suffering, but heretics have no access to true patience no matter what they do. Augustine’s approach proved very influential because it gave orthodoxy more control over the meaning of martyrdom. After the Reformation, Protestant theologians were attracted to his argument because it allowed them to lionize their own martyrs while simultaneously undermining the patience of their religious opponents. As we shall see, Calvin adopted

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8 The pattern for this paradoxical agency is Jesus’s Passion. For more on the link between patience and the Christian Passion, see Georgia Ronan Crampton’s *The Condition of Creatures* (1-44).

9 For an overview of Augustine’s influence in this period, see Arnoud S. Q. Visser’s *Reading Augustine in the Reformation* (1-5).
Augustine’s view of patience and cooperative grace for sectarian reasons, and similar ideas informed John Foxe’s popular *Actes and Monuments*. By appealing to Augustine, these writers transformed patience into a means of controlling who had access to *gloria passionis*.

In his *On Patience* (c. 417 CE), Augustine identifies Pelagianism and Donatism as the major heresies that challenged the orthodox view of patience. The Pelagians downplayed original sin and argued that the human will may perform good works independently of grace. Augustine flatly rejects this approach: “There are those who attribute [patience] to the powers of man’s will, not those which men have from divine assistance, but from their own free will. But, that is an arrogant error” (23). On the opposite extreme stood the North African Donatists, who emphasized God’s power at the expense of the church hierarchy. Augustine addresses the Donatists indirectly when he considers heretics who appear to demonstrate genuine patience despite their heresy: “We must be on our guard lest, if we call that patience the gift of God, those who possess it are also believed to belong to the kingdom of God” (*Patience* 35). Thus if grace inspires true patience in excommunicated heretics, God might appear to be at odds with ecclesiastical discipline. While Augustine does not address the Donatists by name, he engages their privileging of patience over ecclesiastical discipline. In these preliminary remarks, Augustine captures the theological problem implicit in all Christian representations of patience: too much emphasis on free will leads to Pelagian works-righteousness, but too much emphasis on grace undermines church authority. In order to steer clear of both extremes, Augustine sought to redefine patience in a way that struck a balance between grace and the human will.

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10 The Donatists refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of bishops that submitted to the emperor during Diocletian’s persecutions in 303-305 CE. When the official Church in Rome admitted these bishops, the Donatists broke away from Rome. They prided themselves on their patience under persecution and they stressed martyrdom as a more important signifier of authority than the titles of the church hierarchy. Augustine argued against the Donatists frequently, and a sermon on patience would be a natural place to challenge their approach given their emphasis on martyrdom. See Frend’s *The Donatist Church* for a classic study, and Evers’s “Augustine and the Church.” See also the more recent collection of essays *The Uniquely African Controversy*, especially Wysocki (5-6). Wysocki links Donatism to *Passio Cantarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, which is incidentally the same early Christian martyrology that inspired Erich Auerbach’s theorization of *gloria passionis* in *Literary Language & its Public*.

11 Recent manuscript discoveries have indicated that Donatism and Pelagianism shared more theological ground than was once thought, thus explaining, perhaps, why Augustine might have been inclined to deal with both heresies at once. See Alden Bass’s “An Example of Pelagian Exegesis in the Donatist Vienna Homilies” for an analysis of these similarities. For an introduction to Augustine’s disputations with a variety of North African heresies, including the Donatists and Pelagians, see Humfress’s “Augustine in Combat.”
Augustine eventually found this balance in *On Grace and Free Will* (426 CE), where he divides grace into “operating” and “co-operating” sub-divisions:

[God] perfects by His co-operation what He initiates by His operation … He works in us that we may have the will, and in perfecting works with us when we have the will. On which account the apostle says, “I am confident of this very thing, that He which has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” [Phil. 1:6]. He operates, therefore, without us, in order that we may will; but when we will, and so will that we may act, He co-operates with us. (XXXIII.1; my parentheses)

Human beings cannot earn the “operative” grace that initially regenerates Christians. After this process begins, however, the human will co-operates actively with God by doing good works voluntarily. Christians earn merit by cooperating with grace in this way, but God retains his absolute sovereignty because he initiates the process: “If, then, your good merits are God's gifts, God does not crown your merits as your merits, but as His own gifts” (XV.1). Thus individuals have merit, but this does not challenge divine authority because the merit is itself a gift from God. Augustine uses patience to illustrate this complicated negotiation of grace:

[O]f His co-working with us, when we will and act by willing, the apostle says, “We know that in all things there is co-working for good to them that love God” [Rom. 8:28]. What does this phrase, all things, mean, but the terrible and cruel sufferings which affect our condition? That burden, indeed, of Christ, which is heavy for our infirmity, becomes light to love. (XXXIII.1; my parentheses)

Augustine suggests that the co-operating grace described in Rom. 8:28 manifests in the believer’s response to “terrible and cruel sufferings,” or *terribiles savasque passiones* in the original Latin. The word *passiones* means “suffering,” thus evoking the etymologically related concept of *gloria passionis*, or “triumph of suffering,” as the paradigm of Christian patience. For

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12 For more on this tension between grace and human agency in Augustine, see Donato Ogliari’s *Gratia et Certamen*.

13 The original Latin text for this passage is: “De cooperante autem cum jam volumus et volendo facimus: Scimus, inquit, quoniam diligentibus Deum omnia cooperatur in bonum. Quid est: omnia, nisi et ipsas terribiles saevasque passiones?” (*De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio* in *Patrologia Latina*, caput 17).
Augustine, Christian patience is an example of cooperative grace—it is a form of “co-working for good to them that love God”—because it involves active and strenuous effort from the believer in response to grace. At the same time, this argument preserves divine sovereignty by insisting that God initiates the regenerative process by making suffering “light to love.” God makes patience possible, but human beings must still exert themselves.

Augustine’s understanding of co-operative grace gives God the dominant role in all human virtues, including patience, but it also allows him to write metaphorically as if Christians may acquire agency through these means. Augustine acknowledges God’s role in the title of the 45th chapter: “The Reason Why One Person is Assisted by Grace, and Another is Not Helped, Must Be Referred to the Secret Judgments of God” (XLV). In other words, not every Christian may cooperate with grace because God in his “Secret Judgments” extends the capacity for cooperation only to a select and predetermined group. When Augustine wants to celebrate the enabling effects of grace, however, he writes as if all Christians may cooperate with God. For example, he argues in On Patience that for “the man with true patience, the human will does not suffice unless it is aided and inflamed from above, for the Holy Spirit is its fire” (26). By speaking of “the human will” in general, Augustine writes as if grace “aid[s]” and “enflame[s]” the will of all Christians—even though, in practice, this privilege extends only to a predetermined elect.

Ultimately, Augustine’s approach to patience sets up a double standard that restricts true patience to orthodox believers. He praises orthodox martyrs as heroes for cooperating with God, but he excludes heretics from patience on the grounds that they are, by definition, alienated from grace. He sums up the argument as follows: “true patience is recognized only through its cause. When this is good, then you have true patience…but when it is maintained by a criminal act, then it is much misrepresented in name” (14-5). Later theologians would describe this sentiment with the maxim non poena sed causa, which Susanna Monta translates as “the cause, not the death, makes the martyr” (9). The maxim means that the Church’s decision on what constitutes a good cause precedes the patience of the martyr despite the fact that the Church presents its

14 Augustine is of course not the only theologian to use this rhetorical approach to grace. For more examples, see my discussion below of Calvin, other Calvinist reformers, and Foxe.

15 Monta provides the historical context of this dictum in Martyrdom (9-34).
encomia as a *reflection* of the martyr’s virtue. By attributing patience sometimes to the cooperation of the individual martyr and at other times to God’s “secret judgments,” Augustine mystifies the ways in which the Church was responsible for deciding whose patience becomes commemorated as martyrdom. The propagandistic usefulness of this approach explains its later influence during the Reformation.

In his *Institutes* (1559), Calvin incorporates Augustine’s cooperative grace into his argument against Catholic works-righteousness. Although Calvin recognizes that Catholics claim Augustine’s cooperative grace as part of their own theological heritage,¹⁶ he accuses medieval scholastics such as Peter Lombard of distorting the patristic father’s meaning (*Institutes* II.iii.7). For Calvin, cooperative grace preserves divine authority above all else:

> our adversaries usually say that after we have accepted the first grace, then our own efforts co-operate with subsequent grace. To this I reply: If they mean that after we have by the Lord's power once for all been brought to obey righteousness, we go forward by our own power and are inclined to follow the action of grace, I do not gainsay it. For it is very certain that where God's grace reigns, there is readiness to obey it. Yet whence does this readiness come? Does not the Spirit of God, everywhere self-consistent, nourish the very inclination to obedience that he first engendered, and strengthen its constancy to persevere? Yet if they mean that man has in himself the power to work in partnership with God’s grace, they are most wretchedly deluding themselves. (II.iii.11)

In contrast with Lombard’s Catholic reading of Augustine, Calvin argues that co-operative grace does not imply an equal “partnership with God’s grace” (II.iii.11). Rather, cooperative grace “nourish[es] the very inclination to obedience that [God] first engendered” through the prevenient or operative grace that initially seizes the human will (II.iii.11). Operative grace and co-operative grace are thus complementary ways of manifesting the utter bondage of the human will: “It is the same grace but with its name changed to fit the different mode of its effect” (1:305). Having emphasized human submission, Calvin goes on to describe the agency that the elect seem to acquire through grace: “[the elect] go forward by [their] own power and are

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¹⁶ For the context of competing Calvinist and Catholic readings of cooperative grace, see Cummings, (340-6).
inclined to follow the action of grace‖ (II.iii.11). Calvin is not claiming here that the elect have any power apart from God; on the contrary, his point is that God dominates the elect so completely that what seems to be their own power is, in fact, God’s power working through them. Through these means, Calvin challenges Catholic readings of Augustine and assimilates his view of cooperative grace into a Reformed understanding of divine sovereignty.

Nevertheless, Calvin, like Augustine, sometimes praises the patience of the Christian martyrs as though it is a voluntary and praiseworthy act of virtue. In his sermons on the Book of Job, Calvin argues that Christian patience is an effect of grace. He answers Job’s agonizing question in Job 9:29 (“If I be wicked, why labour I in vain?”) in a way that privileges the agency of the elect who display patience in times of affliction:

there is great diuersitie between the despizers of God, and the faithful. For although the faithful may haue many infirmities in him, and cannot walke so right as he faine would: yet notwithstanding he hath a desire to serue God, hee laboureth in it, and he inforceth himselfe to it: wheras the faithlesse taketh scorne of al goodnesse, casting God of, and making none account of him, but is giuen to his owne sensualitie […]. (Sermons 170)

The desire of the faithful to serve God distinguishes them from the “despizers of God.” Calvin’s point is that the elect do not labour to obey God in vain, as Job’s question implies. While God has predestined all events, human beings manifest their agency by cooperating with grace in the pursuit of patience.\(^\text{17}\) Despite the generally authoritarian emphasis of his theology, Calvin sometimes writes as if patience grants agency and merit to human beings. This tendency is especially visible in his sermons, which edify ordinary believers rather than formally and systematically outlining the finer points of Protestant doctrine.\(^\text{18}\)

\(^\text{17}\) Calvin considers Job to be an exemplar of patience. See Calvin, Sermons, 1-5.

\(^\text{18}\) This tendency is common enough in the early modern period that one should always distinguish between the official definition of grace and its reception in the popular social imaginary. Perry Miller describes the popular understanding of cooperative grace as follows: “sanctification… was not left for God to work while the man stood idly by, but the will was enlisted and pledged, according to the stipulation, to see that all the faculties bestirred themselves. The covenanted saint does not supinely believe, but does the best he can, and God will not hold his failures against him; having pledged himself, the saint has taken the responsibility upon himself and agreed to cooperate with God in the difficult labor” (383).
English Protestant preachers and martyrologists popularized Calvin’s understanding of patience for a wider audience. For example, Foxe deployed the rhetoric of *gloria passionis* to celebrate the Marian martyrs as symbols of the English Protestant nation.\(^{19}\) Despite his Calvinist allegiances, Foxe frequently writes as if these martyrs earn merit through their patience. For example, he emphasizes John Hooper’s agency while comparing his martyrdom to that of the ancient bishop Polycarpus of Smyrna:

though Polycarpus being set in the flame was kept by miracle from the torment of the fire till he was stricken down with weapon and dispatched; Hooper, by no less miracle armed with fervent spirit of God’s comfort, despised the violence thereof, as though he had felt little more than did Polycarpus the fire flaming round about him. Moreover as it is written of Polycarpus, when he should have been tied to the stake he required to stand untied saying, ‘Let me alone, I pray you; for he that gave me strength to come to this fire will give me patience to abide in the same without tying;’ so likewise Hooper, when he should have been tied with three chains to the stake, requiring them to have no such mistrust of him was tied with but one; who, if he had not been tied at all, no doubt would have no less answered to that great patience of Polycarpus. (228)

God saves both martyrs miraculously, but instead of stopping the flames from burning Hooper as he did with Polycarpus, God merely “arm[s]” Hooper and allows the bishop to voluntarily despise the fire—as if Hooper has some choice in the matter. The miracle is the psychological event that makes Hooper willing to voluntarily cooperate with grace by choosing to endure the flames patiently. By focusing on psychological motivation, Foxe emphasizes Hooper’s agency and celebrates his choice to suffer the death of a martyr. To be sure, Foxe does not diverge from orthodox and deterministic Calvinism, but his description betrays a desire to see grace and patience as a source of genuine agency for suffering Protestants.

In addition to Protestant martyrology, the Calvinist view of patience influenced a wide range of Puritan sermons, pamphlets, and godly life treatises, thus bringing the concepts of

gloria passionis and cooperative grace to an even wider English audience. Ann Thompson has demonstrated that Puritans such as Richard Rogers, Paul Baynes, John Downname, Henry Scudder, and Thomas Gouge included entire chapters on Christian patience in their influential treatises on godly living (25).\(^{20}\) She explains that “the experience of affliction” in these Puritan texts “becomes an opportunity for the godly man to ‘grow from’ his affliction, and thus to validate his status as elect” (11). Downname in particular expresses this desire to see patience as spiritual agency:

\[\text{[F]or the attaining vnto grace and glory, let vs not thinke it enough to be afflicted in the world; but let vs labour withal to make such an holy vse of our troubles, (humbling our selues vnder the mighty hand of God, bewailing our sins wherby we haue deserued them, and drawing neare vnto God by hearty repentance, and an earnest indeauor of seruing and pleasing him in holinesse and newnesse of life) that they may be vnto vs testimonies of his loue, and so assure vs of all the former benefits. (586)\(^{21}\)}\]

The suffering Christian passively submits to his “troubles,” but this submission is paradoxically active because it includes the difficult “labour” of “humbling,” “bewailing,” “drawing neare vnto God,” and “earnest indeauor” towards a new life. These activities do not earn grace outright, but they do contribute to the work of salvation by transforming the believer’s perspective on “troubles” until they appear to him as “testimonies of [God’s] loue.” This approach to patience as a paradoxical form of agency-in-submission is the defining feature of gloria passionis, especially when understood in terms of the Augustinian and Calvinist view of cooperative grace. Downname concludes with a note on grace: “let vs continually implore by faithfull & feruent praier his gracious assistance, that by his blessing [our sufferings] may be made fit meanes for the working of his grace in vs” (586). Grace is both a form of “assistance” and a divine presence “in vs.” It aids the human will but is not an effect of good works. Downname’s paradoxes show signs of the enabling form of grace that I explore more closely in the next chapter, but as a committed Calvinist, he understands patience through Calvin’s reading of Augustine’s cooperative grace.

\(^{20}\) Thompson, 25-83 provides an extended discussion of godly life treatises shaped the relationship between Puritanism, suffering, and grace.

\(^{21}\) Cf. Thompson’s reading of this passage in Art of Suffering, 11.
Since Downname addresses himself to ordinary Puritans, his treatise demonstrates that the theology of *gloria passionis* trickled down from Calvin’s theology to English Protestant culture more generally.

However enabling Christian patience might appear, Reformed discourse also insisted on a fundamental boundary between the elect and the reprobate.\(^{22}\) This boundary became especially useful for Reformed writers who wished to control who had access to true patience. Within a generation of the first publication of the *Actes and Monuments*, separatist puritans such as Henry Barrow imitated Foxe’s depictions of patience and martyrdom so as to challenge the very church that Foxe’s martyrs had died to preserve.\(^{23}\) The religious authorities at the time typically responded that radicals such as Barrow are not really martyrs, because orthodoxy is a prerequisite for true patience. Thus William Cowper claims that “[heretics] may make a shew of voluntary Religion in *not sparing the body*, but seeing they haue not the truth of God, how can they haue true Patience?” (286). Using Augustine’s logic of *non poena sed causa*, Cowper argues that martyrs must suffer for an orthodox cause in order for their patience to be genuine. The martyr’s patience is supposed to prove the truth of his cause, but in practice the decision on what actually counts as “the truth of God” logically precedes the martyrdom. As we have seen, Augustine’s doctrine of cooperative grace enables this approach because it allows martyrologists to write *as if* all Christians may cooperate with grace while at the same time restricting this privilege to an institutionally defined group. Even though Protestant grace is supposed to transcend all human institutions, Augustine’s cooperative grace enabled established Protestant churches and martyrologists to control who had access to the patience of a genuine martyr.

Patience and cooperative grace may have emerged as a result of sectarian conflict, but the cultural impact of these concepts was more widespread. Foxe demonstrates that theological dispute shaped the symbols and intellectual life of the emerging English nation. As we shall see, Shakespeare was concerned with the same issues, and particularly with the multiplicity of perspectives that was always implicit in the Christian understanding of patience.

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\(^{22}\) See Stachniewski, 66, for an explanation of how this boundary structures Puritan thought.

\(^{23}\) For a similar and expanded account of Barrow’s trial, see Knott, 123-128.
2.2 The Pattern of Stoic Patience in *King Lear*

Most critics now agree with William Elton that *King Lear* is not a straightforward religious allegory as its source text, *King Leir*, had been (70-1).\(^{24}\) According to an influential critical tradition, the indifference of Lear’s gods to human suffering implies a critique of Christian providence and religious belief more generally.\(^{25}\) *King Lear* has accordingly been described as a materialist, godless, and agnostic play.\(^{26}\) In a recent monograph, Hannibal Hamlin has added that Shakespeare’s depiction of patience in particular undermines Christian providence (326-33). He argues that Lear speaks of patience frequently enough to make him an analogue to Job; however, Lear’s failure to earn an audience with his gods amounts to a secular rewriting of the theophany that concludes Job’s complaints in the Book of Job: “*King Lear* is like Job without God’s voice from the whirlwind. There are no answers, no voices from heaven, in *King Lear*” (330).\(^{27}\) The implied assumption here is that Christian and pre-Christian beliefs are comparable forms of “religion” to the extent that the absence of divine justice in a pagan context implies an analogous critique of the Christian God.\(^{28}\)

I argue that the representation of patience in *King Lear* looks backwards to a pre-Christian form of Stoicism rather than forwards to modern and secularist critiques of providence.\(^{29}\) As we shall see, Lear and his foil, Gloucester, imagine patience primarily as a Stoic virtue that is based on rational endurance rather than cooperative grace.\(^{30}\) In Shakespeare’s historical moment, these Stoic assumptions implied a contrastive relationship between Lear and

\(^{24}\) See also Elton (1-6) for a summary of the optimistic Christian readings of the play, which he rejects.

\(^{25}\) See Elton (70-1). See also Stephen Greenblatt, “Shakespeare and the Exorcists” (94-128).

\(^{26}\) For a materialist take on *King Lear*, see Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy* (190-203). For an agnostic reading, see David Loewenstein, “Agnostic Shakespeare?: the Godless World of *King Lear*” (155-71). See Jan Kott’s *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* for an atheist reading (100-33).

\(^{27}\) For a parallel reading of Job, see Victoria Kahn’s essay “Job’s Complaint in *Paradise Regained,*” which Hamlin cites as one of his central sources.

\(^{28}\) For the view that *King Lear* undermines all religious rationalizations of suffering, see Hamlin (333) and Elton (338).

\(^{29}\) A variety of critics have argued that *King Lear* is iconoclastic without necessarily being atheist or secular. See René Fortin (113-25); Sean Lawrence (142-59); John Cox (1-95). Ivor Morris, 28-30, argues that both Lear and Job provide parallel expressions of iconoclastic, but not necessarily atheistic, sentiment.

\(^{30}\) See Reid Barbour for an overview of Calvinist and Stoic readings of Job in this period (228-39).
scriptural precedents such as Job. As a result, Shakespeare’s allusions to Christian patience in *King Lear* accentuate the differences rather than the similarities between the Protestant view of human agency and the Stoic beliefs dramatized by the play. This pattern of allusion demonstrates the centrality of grace in the Christian understanding of patience that was widespread in Shakespeare’s England, but was unavailable to the pagan Britons of the play.\(^{31}\)

Shakespeare’s *King Lear* calls forth a vision of pagan Britain that is politically related to Christian England, even though these worlds are culturally and religiously distinct. This double-vision on the nation is already implicit in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *History of the Kings of Britain*, where the story of Leir is part of a broader meditation on Christian kingship. Geoffrey presents King Arthur as the ideal Christian ruler, but he begins his account with a long line of pagan kings, including King Leir, who establish a pattern of civil wars that lasts well into Britain’s Christian era (36-44). Geoffrey’s account asks its audience to consider the meaning of Christian kingship by contrasting it to a pre-Christian vision of political culture in legendary Britain. In Shakespeare’s adaptation, there is some continuity between pagan Britain and Protestant England, because both kingdoms confront similar political anxieties. As a variety of critics have noted, Lear’s behaviour in the first scene may allude to James I’s ambition to unite the British Isles under his rule.\(^{32}\) On the other hand, Lear’s pre-Christian world is also very different from Shakespeare’s England because the Britons have no access to Christian revelation.

These religious differences become especially conspicuous when Shakespeare alludes to well-known scriptural passages that would be familiar to any Christian audience, but remain unknown to the characters onstage.\(^{33}\) Like Geoffrey’s version of the Leir narrative, *King Lear* encourages its audience to consider how the absence of Christian revelation might impinge on a political culture gripped by some of the same political anxieties as Jacobean England.

In the first scene of *King Lear*, Shakespeare alludes to scripture at the level of dramatic irony so as to emphasize the centrality of grace in Christian patience. When Lear disavows

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31 Although Shakespeare deploys Protestant concepts in his work, this fact does not by itself prove that he was a committed Protestant in his private life. For the complicated relationship between Shakespeare’s work and his personal beliefs, see Kastan’s *A Will to Believe* (15-48).

32 For example, see Parker (111) and Heinemann (75-84).

33 See Roland Mushat Frye (101-8, 165-73) for a parallel reading.
Cordelia, France replies: “Fairest Cordelia, that art most rich being poor, / Most choice forsaken and most loved despised” (1.1.252-3). This response alludes to Paul’s words in 2 Cor. 6.10, “as poor, and yet making many rich” and 2 Cor. 8:9, “ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that he being rich, for your sakes became poor” (Shaheen 608). In the original scriptural context, St. Paul’s words are part of a broader description of a Christian co-working with God: “We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain” (2 Cor. 6:1). As Paul goes on to explain, those who wish to become “workers together” with God must display patience: “in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities” (2 Cor. 6:4). Paul links patience, along with affliction and suffering, to what Christian theologians would later describe as cooperative grace. Despite the allusion, however, France intends his words simply as a declaration of love for Cordelia and not as a conscious engagement with any specifically Christian messiah. The dramatic irony in the scene suggests that grace—specifically, the cooperative grace implicit in Christian patience—is the key difference between France’s pre-Christian point of view of Shakespeare’s audience. Patience and grace are central, therefore, to the broader contrast between religious and pagan perspectives in King Lear.

In Shakespeare’s England, Protestant preachers highlighted the centrality of grace in Christian patience by contrasting it to Stoic versions of the same virtue. As Thompson has demonstrated, Puritan preachers were conflicted about the Stoics: although they often used examples from Stoic moral philosophy, they also attacked the Stoics for failing to understand grace (53). The Stoics did not see patience as submission to a god. Cicero defines patience as “a voluntary and sustained endurance, for the sake of what is honourable or advantageous, of difficult and painful labours” (De Inventione 331). Similarly, Marcus Aurelius associates patience with apatheia, the Stoic ideal of freedom from the passions (69). These arguments were of course older than Christianity, but Protestant writers sometimes presented them anachronistically as examples of works-righteousness. ³⁴ In the Institutes, for example, Calvin derides Stoic patience as a sinful version of its Christian analogue:

³⁴ See Geoffrey Miles for more information on the ambivalent relationship between Stoicism and Christianity in Shakespeare’s culture (63-70).
Patiently to bear the cross is not to be utterly stupefied and to be deprived of all feeling of pain. It is not as the Stoics of old foolishly described “the great-souled man”: one who, having cast off all human qualities, was affected equally by adversity and prosperity, by sad times and happy ones—nay, who like a stone was not affected at all. (1:709)

English preachers popularized these views for a wider audience in their sermons and pamphlets. When he sets out to “mark the right difference between the heathenish and the Christian patience,” Otto Werdmueller explains that “Socrates, in his manly sufferance and patience, neither desireth nor looketh for any help, comfort, or mitigation of his afflictions from God... But David in his patience and obedience calleth upon God for help and deliverance” (178). 35 Werdmueller thus rejects philosophical patience because it depends on human reason to the exclusion of grace. Similarly, William Jeffray argues that Christian patience is not to be confused with “a Stoicall stupiditie, as when a man seems to be senseless in affliction” (8-9). To be sure, Werdmueller, Jeffray, and similar preachers did not necessarily reject Stoicism wholesale, 36 but they did attack Stoics opportunistically when they wished to emphasize the centrality of grace in Protestant virtue. 37

*King Lear* evokes these polemics by depicting Stoic versions of patience onstage while at the same time alluding, at an extradiegetic level, to the Christian understanding of patience. As critics have long recognized, the play as a whole stages the absence of religious redemption for suffering. 38 This failure is due in part to the fact that Lear sees his suffering in Stoic rather than Christian terms. When Lear loses his knights, he exclaims:

> You heavens, give me that patience, patience I need!
> You see me here, you gods, a poor old man,

35 Myles Coverdale translated Werdmueller’s text in 1550 as *A Spirituall, and Most Precious Pearle Teaching All Men to Love and Embrace the Cross*. Thanks to Coverdale’s influence, Werdmueller’s tract influenced later writing on the spiritual profit of patience (Thompson 10).

36 Miles (63-70) and Barbour (114) provide more information on Christian neo-Stoicism and its historical context.

37 For the contrast between Stoic and “Augustinian” virtue in this period, see William Bouwsma (3-60).

38 For a recent summary of this view, see Hamlin (324-6). Building on an older tradition of allegorical criticism, Hamlin demonstrates that Cordelia resembles Christ in some ways, but her redemption, if there is any redemption at all to be found in this play, is at best ethical and moral rather than religious.
As full of grief as age, wretched in both:
If it be you that stirs these daughters’ hearts
Against their father, fool me not so much
To bear it tamely; touch me with noble anger,
And let not women’s weapons, water drops,
Stain my man’s cheeks. (2.2.460-7)

Because Lear briefly imagines patience as a gift from the “heavens,” it is tempting to read this passage as a foreshadowing of Christian belief and Job-like patience. However, Lear reveals a distinctively Stoic approach to passions and femininity when he prays to keep his “man’s cheeks” unstained by “women’s weapons, water drops” (2.2.466). Seneca describes weeping in a similar vein as a sign of effeminacy, barbarism, and lack of education (“Marcia” 44-5).

Christian writers, on the other hand, pointed to Biblical passages such as Job 16:16 (“My face is foul with weeping”) and argued that spiritual nobility is wholly compatible with passionate suffering. When Lear confronts the blind Gloucester, he once again imagines patience in Stoic terms while unknowingly evoking scripture. He urges patience on the grounds that life is full of suffering: “Thou must be patient. We came crying hither: / Thou know’st the first time that we smell the air / We wawl and cry” (4.6.174-6). One possible source for this passage is Seneca’s *Consolation to Polybius* (43-4 CE), which argues that the weeping of infants foreshadows the hardship of human life: “[Nature] wanted humans to cry as soon as they were born. This is our first act, and the entire succession of our years matches it” (165). Having characterized suffering as part of the human condition, Seneca concludes with a typically Stoic call to cease weeping and exercise “moderation” (165). As Shaheen notes, however, the line also alludes to the Book of Wisdom 7:3: “When I was borne, I receyued the common ayre…. crying and weeping at the first as all other doe” (qtd. in Shaheen 618). Cyprian takes up this image in his *On the Good of Patience* (256 CE): “when anyone is born and enters the abode of this world, he begins with tears… With natural foresight he laments the anxieties and labors of this mortal life” (274).

Unlike Seneca, Cyprian argues that the newborn’s suffering is due to the devil and to sin, thus

39 Cf. Hamlin’s reading of this scene in *The Bible in Shakespeare* (321).
40 For a parallel reading, see Sams (67-78). Sams suggests that there were a number of theological and non-religious arguments against Stoic *apatheia* in the early modern period.
associating patience with grace rather than rational moderation (275). Lear’s speech evokes both Stoic and Christian perspectives, but the end of the speech reveals a decisively this-worldly attitude: “when I have stol’n upon these son-in-laws, / Then, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill!” (4.6.183-4). By insisting on personal vengeance, Lear demonstrates that he does not share Cyprian’s religious vision or the expectation of otherworldly justice. Although he is certainly not a successful Stoic either, he accepts the Stoic assumption that suffering and patience are this-worldly problems that do not concern theological concepts such as grace.  

Shakespeare juxtaposes Stoic and Christian ideals of patience again during Gloucester’s attempted suicide. Gloucester prays: “O you mighty gods, / This world I do renounce and in your sights / Shake patiently my great affliction off” (4.6.34-6). By presenting his suicide as a form of patience, Gloucester evokes the Stoic defense of suicide as a legitimate response to tyranny. He alludes to this tradition more explicitly after his attempt fails: “‘Twas yet some comfort, / When misery could beguile the tyrant’s rage / And frustrate his proud will” (4.6.62-4). Like the Stoics, Gloucester thinks of suicide as a patient response to tyranny because it grants victims the capacity to assert their will against tyrants. On the other hand, Edgar claims that Gloucester should bear “free and patient thoughts” (4.6.79) because “the clearest gods, who make them honours / Of men’s impossibilities, have preserved thee” (4.6.73-4). Shaheen finds in these words an allusion to Matt. 19: 26, “With men this is vnpossible, but with God all things are possible,” and Luke 18:27, “The things which are impossible with men, are possible with God” (qtd. in Shaheen 616). These allusions demonstrate the same pattern as other representations of patience in King Lear: the characters onstage imagine patience as a Stoic virtue while at the same time alluding—unwittingly, of course—to scripture. The result is dramatic irony, an effect that reminds Shakespeare’s audience of the differences between a Christian perspective and that of the Britons in the play.

41 For the view that Lear approaches Christian grace without grasping it fully, see Strier (189).

42 Cicero gives an example of the Stoic approach to suicide in De Finibus: “When a man’s circumstances contain a preponderance of things in accordance with nature, it is appropriate for him to remain alive; when he possesses or sees in prospect a majority of the contrary things, it is appropriate for him to depart from life” (279). Compare this Stoic approach to the link between patience and anti-tyrannicism in The Winter’s Tale, which makes no mention of suicide: “innocence shall make / False accusation blush and tyranny / Tremble at patience” (3.2.29-31).

43 For a Calvinist reading of this scene, see Keefer’s “Calvin’s God in King Lear.”
If Gloucester’s attempted suicide embodies the Stoic ethos, then this scene does not, as some critics have argued, imply a generalized scepticism towards all religion. In a classic essay, Stephen Greenblatt argues that “performance kills belief; or rather acknowledging theatricality kills the credibility of the supernatural” (109). His main example of this principle in King Lear is Gloucester’s attempted suicide: “Walking about on a perfectly flat stage, Edgar does to Gloucester what the theater usually does to the audience: he persuades his father to discount the evidence of his senses—‘Methinks the ground is even’—and to accept a palpable fiction: “Horrible steep” (4.6.3)” (118-9). In other words, Edgar’s fabrication of the miracle reveals that religious faith is as irrational as the suspension of disbelief that enables dramatic fiction. Greenblatt’s reading continues to be influential for critics such as Hamlin, who sees the failure of religion in the play as a demystification of Christian approaches to suffering. I am suggesting, on the other hand, that this scene does not stage a demystified world. Gloucester attempts suicide because he believes that suicide is a form of patience and, moreover, that patience involves resisting “the tyrant’s rage” (4.6.63). His failure not only saves his life but also shows that such Stoic assumptions are as ungrounded in what Greenblatt calls “the evidence of his senses” as various forms of religious belief. In other words, the main opposition in Gloucester’s attempted suicide is not between belief and unbelief in general but rather between two different kinds of belief—one Stoic and the other Christian. Shakespeare foregrounds the differences between these worldviews without necessarily privileging either option as the basis for a secularist or otherwise modern sensibility.

Shakespeare’s juxtaposition of Stoic and Christian patience reveals the centrality of grace in his culture’s Protestant conception of human agency. Despite the fact that Cordelia, Lear, and

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44 This argument continues to be influential for many critics. In addition to Hamlin, see for example Richard McCoy, who links religious faith to dramatic suspension of disbelief (4-23). See Mayer for a counter-argument (92).

45 Hamlin argues that Shakespeare’s theater undercuts theological rationalization of suffering: “No theological argument proves convincing in the face of innocent suffering; neither Job’s comforters, nor the voice from the whirlwind, nor commentators like Calvin provide a satisfying answer to Job’s basic question, “Why me?” The questions posed by King Lear prove to be equally intractable. But this is probably because Shakespeare was a more skeptical reader of Job than was Calvin” (333). In other words, Hamlin reads the absence of God from this play as a critique of Christian providence rather than a reflection of its pre-Christian context. As Sean Lawrence has demonstrated, however, such a conclusion is counterintuitive, because if the Christian God is truly absent from this play, then the failure of providentialism would point to a critique of pagan religion rather than Christianity (146, 150). Critics like Elton, Hamlin, and Greenblatt rely on a homology between pagan and Christian religion, but the pattern of scriptural allusions in the play reinforces the difference between those who have access to scripture and those who do not.
the other characters approach an almost Christian worldview, they do not understand the many scriptural allusions to grace that are encoded in their speeches. The problem is that grace makes all the difference for the Protestant perspective on patience. Insofar as they seek comfort from themselves, Gloucester and Lear resemble Werdmueller’s Socrates, who in “his manly sufferance and patience, neither desireth nor looketh for any help, comfort, or mitigation of his afflictions from God” (178). For Werdmueller, David provides a better alternative: “in his patience and obedience [David] calleth upon God for help and deliverance and is certain and sure that the Almighty Lord doth assist him for the holy and blessed Seed’s sake” (178-9). God “assist[s]” David; his patience is a politically advantageous expression of cooperative grace. Because of this divine aid, David transcends Socrates’s virtue and rallies the “blessed Seed” with a new sense of religious and providential purpose. David’s patience is the crucial missing element in King Lear, and the multiple allusions to scripture make this absence conspicuous. Because Lear and Gloucester have no understanding of grace, their patience amounts at best to isolated efforts at Stoic endurance. They cannot reproduce David’s success as a sufferer or as a monarch because they are unable to use Christian theology to their advantage. At the same time, Shakespeare’s scriptural allusions suggest that the situation may be different in Protestant England. As we shall see, Shakespeare returns to this possibility in The Tempest.

2.3 Christian Patience Politicized in The Tempest

The Tempest has attracted a wealth of criticism on its representation of authority. Critics have understood the play as a metatheatrical exploration of poetic power, an allegory of New World colonialism, and a commentary on James I’s dynastic ambitions. The critical consensus today

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46 For the view that Lear’s empathy for the poor resembles Christian charity, see Mack (289).
47 See Frye for a parallel argument (166-8).
48 Alvin Kernan reads the play as a “metatheatrical” exercise which presents the fictions of the theatre as the healing “magic” (or “art,” in the play’s language) that reconciles the disorders of the body politic (136-45). The postcolonial and New Historicist readings of the play challenge Caliban’s elision from this “metatheatrical” reading. For the view that Caliban represents the subaltern condition in the 20th century, see Aimé Césaire’s A Tempest, Roberto Fernández Retamar’s Caliban and Other Essays, and Franz Fanon’s Black Skin, White Masks. New Historicist versions of this argument analyze Caliban’s place in 17th-century colonial discourse; see Stephen Greenblatt’s Learning to Curse (16-39); Stephen Orgel, “Shakespeare and the Cannibals” (50-66). However, beginning in the late 1980s and the 1990s, critics have increasingly insisted that the political context most suitable to The Tempest is not the New World but rather the sphere of European absolutism, including contemporary dynastic politics and classical representations of empire-building such as the Aeneid. For the view that James’s absolutism is a more appropriate
is that the play entertains multiple conflicting perspectives on the plot, some of which are supportive of Prospero and others intensely critical of him. From Prospero’s own point of view, the play revolves around his plan to temper the passions and ambitions of the Italian nobles in order to regain Milan through a dynastic alliance with Naples. This plan depends upon Prospero’s education of Miranda and his suppression of rebellious characters such as Antonio and Caliban. As David Scott Kastan has argued, the royal marriage is supposed to justify Prospero by staging the “Jacobean fantasy” of “European peace and coherence” through dynastic alliances (175). From Caliban’s point of view, on the other hand, Prospero is a usurping “tyrant” (2.2.159) because he suppresses Caliban’s claim to native sovereignty: “This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother, / Which thou tak’st from me” (1.2.332-3). Critics who are sympathetic to Caliban tend to question Prospero’s sovereignty on the island and the motives behind his attempted education of Caliban (1.2.364-5).

The Christian conception of patience as gloria passionis informs how characters in this play experience their agency under Prospero. Miranda and Ferdinand obey Prospero’s rules on the island, but they also express themselves creatively and assertively within those bounds. In fact, Prospero pretends to disapprove of their union because he wishes to give them an active role in the courtship: “this swift business / I must uneasy make, lest too light winning / Make the prize light” (1.2.451-3). Prospero needs the lovers to act semi-independently because the political future of Naples and Milan would be more secure if they were to commit voluntarily to one another. Prospero pursues this goal by framing the love affair in terms of the paradoxical agency-in-submission that characterizes gloria passionis. Using his magical art, he creates a historical context for the play than New World colonialism, see Skura, “Discourse and Colonialism in The Tempest,” (42-69); David Scott Kastan, Shakespeare After Theory (169-82). In “Virgilian Models of Colonization in Shakespeare’s The Tempest,” David Scott Wilson-Okamura argues that the play engages both the Mediterranean setting and colonial themes thanks to Virgil’s own complicity in colonial narrative. These critical trends, and their implication for historicism as a methodology, are summarized in Stevens’s “The New Presentism and its Discontents” (141-2). Moreover, Stevens relates the discourse of colonialism to the Protestant understanding of grace, which he sees as the model for dramatic regeneration in The Tempest (150-3).

49 Stephen Greenblatt’s “Learning to Curse” argues that Prospero’s rule on the island and his education of Caliban are parallel modes of colonial domination. See also Paul Brown, “‘This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine’: The Tempest and the Discourse of Colonialism”; Jonathan Bate, “The Humanist Tempest”; and Cathy Curtis, “The Active and Contemplative Lives in Shakespeare’s Plays” (58).

50 Cf. Ewan Fernie for a parallel reading (22-3).
series of theatrical displays which are designed to teach Miranda and the survivors of the shipwreck that apparent loss and humiliation can be redemptive when viewed from a different perspective. In response, Ferdinand and Miranda adopt the rhetoric of Christian patience, thus reimagining their obedience to Prospero not as a complete loss of agency but rather as an ennobling form of “suffering.” This suffering is in fact no more than a courtly metaphor, but it nevertheless facilitates Ferdinand’s and Miranda’s courtship and, by extension, the success of Prospero’s political ambitions.

Some critics have argued that Stoic patience is central to The Tempest because it captures Prospero’s ordering power over the island. As Kasey Evans has noted, the titular “tempest” shares an etymology with “temperance” because both words derive from *tempus*, which means “time” in Latin (86-7). For Roman and early modern Stoicism, temperance denotes the capacity to “delay gratification of desire over time—i.e., patience or temporization” (20). The word “tempest,” on the other hand, denotes not only the meteorological phenomenon but also, and especially in Shakespeare, the unpredictable time of “the *occasio/kairos:* the appropriate time for action, to be seized and exploited” (86-7). If temperance is closely related to Stoic patience, the tempest is its antithesis—a catastrophe or sudden change which upends the status quo and makes possible new forms of political action. Evans concludes that the nominal tempest of the first act disrupts social hierarchies so that Prospero may gradually reintroduce his “temperate” control (98). From this perspective, the play revolves around the conflict between Prospero’s ordering power and the resistance of characters such as Caliban, who remain committed to the disruptive potential unleashed by the tempest (98).

By focusing primarily on Prospero and his opponents, Evans does not pay sufficient attention to the ways in which Ferdinand and Miranda challenge Prospero without subverting him. This tendency is common in the critical tradition that reads Prospero as the vehicle of order in the play, and the other characters (aside from rebels such as Caliban and Antonio) as passively obedient to Prospero’s temperate control. I will return to Caliban later in this chapter, but first I want to suggest that Ferdinand and Miranda draw upon the rhetoric of *gloria passionis* because it

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51 This tendency is particularly prevalent in New Historicist readings, which tend to see Prospero as the bearer of Foucauldian power on the island. For a summary and critique of these poststructural themes, see David Norbrook’s “‘What Cares These Roarers for the Name of King’: Language and Utopia in The Tempest” (24-6).
allows them to retain their agency while obeying Prospero. Miranda’s first statement in the play is an assertive command to her father: “If by your art, my dearest father, you have / Put the wild waters in this roar, allay them” (1.1.1-2). This command seems almost arrogant, but Miranda mollifies it by appealing to her sympathetic suffering for the victims of the shipwreck: “I have suffered / With those that I saw suffer” (1.1.5-6). Miranda’s speech balances patient suffering with an assertive demand for clemency. As a result, her behaviour belies the all-or-nothing binary implicit in Evans’s understanding of patience. Miranda is neither a passive subject of Prospero’s ordering power nor a rebel committed to tempestuous change, but an advocate for clemency and companionate marriage who nevertheless operates within the bounds of filial duty.

Shakespeare frames Miranda’s attitude in this initial speech and Prospero’s response to her in terms of scriptural depictions of patience. As we have seen, gloria passionis implied a mixture of passive suffering and noble resistance. Reformed theology framed this concept in terms of cooperative grace, thus suggesting that patience allows agency within submission. Prospero alludes to this context to guide his daughter:

The direful spectacle of the wreck which touched
The very virtue of compassion in thee,
I have with such provision in mine art
So safely ordered, that there is no soul—
No, not so much perdition as an hair,
Betid to any creature in the vessel
Which thou heard’st cry, which thou sawst sink. (1.2.26-32)

The phrase “not so much perdition as an hair” alludes to Luke 21: 18, which appears in the middle of Jesus’s description of patience: “And ye shall be hated of all men for my Name’s sake. Yet there shall not one hair of your heads perish. By your patience possess your souls” (Luke

For a parallel reading, see Jessica Slights (364-7). Slights captures Miranda’s mixture of assertiveness and submission by describing her as a “both independent and embedded self” (364).

Compare my reading of Miranda to Tom Lindsay’s view that Renaissance English pedagogy in general aimed to cultivate the student’s autonomy within limits (404-5). According to Lindsay, the student’s “willing subordination became the mechanism through which they moved toward adult independence” (405). As Lindsay points out, this pedagogical method structures Prospero’s education of Miranda (423).
Luke 21:19 treats patience as the means through which Christians may “possess [their] souls” and contribute to their salvation. By alluding to this passage, therefore, Prospero situates Miranda’s response to the shipwreck in terms of biblical descriptions of patience.

Prospero’s allusion to Luke 21 also evokes the broader context of Protestant martyrology, which made use of the same scriptural passage to assert the agency of the Protestant martyrs suffering under hostile monarchs. In the preface to his Institutes, for example, Calvin alludes to Luke 21:19 in order to explain to King Francis I of France the costs of persecuting Protestants. Calvin argues that, if Francis chooses to persecute Protestants, they will be reduced to the last extremity even as sheep destined for the slaughter [Isa. 53:7-8; Acts 8:33]. Yet this will so happen that “in our patience we may possess our souls” [Luke 21:19 p.]; and may await the strong hand of the Lord, which will surely appear in due season, coming forth armed to deliver the poor from their affliction and also punish their despisers, who now exult with such great assurance. (“Prefatory Address” 31)

The implication is that, if Francis decides to be intolerant, Protestantism will spread even more quickly as the people witness the conviction of the martyrs. Calvin’s argument illustrates the paradoxical agency implicit in his view of patience as cooperative grace. The Protestant martyrs will die submissively, but in so doing they will participate actively in salvation and thus acquire the highest imaginable honour. By evoking Luke 21 in his conversation with Miranda, Prospero alludes to this martyrological discourse. However, his aim is not to inspire religious zeal in Miranda but rather to encourage her active cooperation with his “provision.” In other words, Prospero adapts the martyrological view of patience in order to suggest that Miranda’s “compassion,” by which he means her “suffering together” with the victims, is a “virtue,” an assertive form of self-expression—so long as she expresses this virtue in an obedient way. Even though Miranda is not a martyr, therefore, Prospero draws upon the rhetoric of gloria passionis to teach her how to have agency in submission.

Shaheen makes this connection in Biblical References, 740.
The Christian context of this opening scene is clearest in light of the negative connotations that suffering had in Stoicism and early modern neostoicism. In a key moment in Justus Lipsius’s *Two Bookes on Constancy*, the neostoic teacher Langius imagines someone who, like Miranda, observes a shipwreck from a safe distance: “Suppose a man be on the shore beholding a shipwrecke, it will mooue him somewhat, yet truelie not without an inward tickling of his mind, because he seeth other mens danger, himself being in security” (91). Although I am not aware of any critical comparisons between this part of Lipsius’s treatise to *The Tempest*, such an omission seems surprising, because Langius imagines a hypothetical man who is in almost the same situation as Miranda. Langius’s point is that most people take pleasure when they observe the pain of others because such spectacles confirm their own position of safety (91). Langius attacks the perversity of this response, but the lesson he draws from it is simply that suffering should be endured calmly. In other words, if human beings may derive pleasure from another’s pain, they should endure their own pain with the same indifference, as though it were a distant calamity. On the other hand, Miranda and Prospero adopt a very different approach to the shipwreck. Far from remaining calm or indifferent, Miranda suffers with the victims of the shipwreck and makes an assertive call for clemency (1.2.1-2). In so doing, she demonstrates that compassionate suffering can transcend the gap between personal safety and the other’s pain. In turn, Prospero replies not by encouraging indifference—if anything, he amplifies her pain by drawing attention to the sailors’ cries (1.2.32)—but rather by redefining suffering itself as an empowering experience when viewed from the right perspective. Even though this scene does not promote religious zeal, therefore, the rhetoric of gloria passionis helps these characters find something positive in suffering and obedience beyond the terms of Stoic and neostoic discourse.

55 Neostoicism was a Renaissance movement that sought to integrate Christian ideas about providence with Stoic moral philosophy. Justus Lipsius was a major figure in the movement, and his *De Constantia* was very influential. Throughout the dialogue, Langius adopts a predominantly Stoic perspective on suffering, but he also insists on a Christian understanding of providence (103). See also Miles (63-70).

56 Leah Whittington has noted in a recent essay that Lipsius may have influenced Shakespeare to distinguish between Christian mercy and negative forms of pity (101-2). Although she acknowledges the importance of Lipsius and the neo-Stoic tradition more generally as possible sources for the education of Miranda, Whittington does not explicitly compare Miranda’s response to the tempest and the shipwreck imagined by Langius.

57 Whittington argues that Miranda’s pity for the victims of the shipwreck is misguided, because it leads her to empathize with aristocrats whose shortcomings are made clear in the first scene of the play (111-2). By contrasting Miranda’s response to the tempest and Langius’s hypothetical observer, I am suggesting that Miranda’s patience is
The patient assertiveness that Miranda learns in this opening scene characterizes her courtship with Ferdinand. As Jessica Slights has argued, Miranda obeys some of the norms of patriarchal obedience in the middle acts, but she is not entirely passive in the courtship.\textsuperscript{58} She flouts expected conventions when she offers to move Ferdinand’s logs (3.1.22-4)\textsuperscript{59} and when she proposes to Ferdinand: “I am your wife, if you will marry me; / If not, I’ll die your maid” (3.1.83-4). The first half of this statement is an assertive marriage proposal, but the second half gives Ferdinand the power to decide if she will remain a “maid.” She continues to balance assertiveness and submission: “to be your fellow you may deny me; but I’ll be your servant / Whether you will or no” (3.1.85-6). Again, she submits to Ferdinand as a “servant,” but this submission allows her to assert her desire independently of Ferdinand’s response. This interplay of agency and submission is of course a stock convention in courtly love narratives, but it is also part of the lesson that Prospero teaches her when he frames her suffering in the first scene in terms of the discourse of \textit{gloria passionis}.\textsuperscript{60} Miranda’s role as a courtly lover depends upon the forms of expression that she learns while observing the shipwreck.

Like Miranda, Ferdinand embraces the discourse of \textit{gloria passionis} during their courtship. As critics have long recognized, Ferdinand’s labours are conventionally playful, and his experience is a far cry from Caliban’s genuine suffering as he moves the logs.\textsuperscript{61} However, the playfulness of the scene does not prevent Ferdinand from drawing upon the rhetoric of \textit{gloria passionis} and cooperative grace in order to suit his purposes. Although he initially attempts to

\textsuperscript{58} Slights argues that Miranda’s approach pushes Ferdinand’s “generic flirtation toward a more personal commitment to love and marriage by adopting herself the role of courtly lover” (369). However, Slights does not see Miranda’s patient balance between assertiveness and obedience in terms of \textit{gloria passionis}.

\textsuperscript{59} Slights argues that Miranda’s offer to move logs is not suitable to her traditional role in courtship, and so it represents her increasingly independent voice within the bounds of obedience (368-9).

\textsuperscript{60} Cf. Esolen for a parallel reading of Ferdinand’s patience (240-1).

\textsuperscript{61} Meader outlines Ferdinand’s courtly conventions (160-1), and Sebek distinguishes Ferdinand’s labour from Caliban’s enslavement (469). See Sanchez for the absolutism implicit in the sexual politics of this scene and the play as a whole (50-82). I am indebted to two lectures delivered by Nyquist at the University of Toronto on February 1\textsuperscript{st} and 3\textsuperscript{rd}, 2016, for my understanding of courtly love in \textit{The Tempest}. 
resist Prospero by force (1.2.465-6), he eventually begins to think that “some kinds of baseness / Are nobly undergone” (3.1.2-3). This reinterpretation of humiliation as nobility signals Ferdinand’s first engagement with the shift in perspective that characterizes gloria passionis. As he goes on to explain, his change is due to Miranda: “The mistress which I serve quickens what’s dead” (3.1.4-6). By describing Miranda in this way, Ferdinand imagines his love for her as a secularized and courtly analogue to the spiritual quickening of Rom. 8:11: “he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit.” Although Ferdinand does not mean that Miranda is a religious agent, she resembles the Spirit in the sense that she facilitates his shift from open hostility to Prospero towards a more positive valuation of obedience.

Ferdinand goes on to represent his patience in the rhetoric of gloria passio in order to make himself more attractive to Miranda. When he confesses his love to her, Ferdinand calls himself a “patient log-man”:

I am, in my condition,
A prince, Miranda; I do think a king
(I would not so!) and would no more endure
This wooden slavery than to suffer
The flesh-fly blow my mouth! Hear my soul speak:
The very instant that I saw you did
My heart fly to your service, there resides
To make me slave to it, and for your sake
Am I this patient log-man […] (3.1.59-67)

Ferdinand’s speech demonstrates his inner nobility, which complements his high social status and makes him a fitting match for Miranda. To present himself in this way, Ferdinand adapts scriptural language for secular and courtly purposes. Ferdinand’s imagery of death and rebirth evokes the sinusoid pattern of Jesus’s kenosis, Passion, and resurrection. The passage begins with the high-point of Ferdinand’s royal titles, it descends into the nadir of his humiliating “slavery”—a situation compared to death by the “flesh-fly,” which is a carrion insect—and it rises again into a new form of nobility with the phrase “patient log-man.” Understood in this way, Ferdinand represents his patience not as calm indifference but rather as a gradual
development through humiliation into the loving service of *gloria passionis*. While the speech tells us nothing at all about Ferdinand’s religious beliefs, it does demonstrate how he draws upon Christian rhetoric to woo Miranda.

Ferdinand’s patience is politically significant because it provides an alternative to the impatient Machiavellianism of characters such as Antonio and Sebastian. When Antonio persuades Sebastian to conspire against Alonso, he emphasizes the need to act quickly: “the occasion speaks thee, and / My strong imagination sees a crown / Dropping upon thy head” (2.1.207-9). Later, Antonio describes inactivity as tantamount to political death: “Thou let'st thy fortune sleep—die, rather” (2.1.216). Antonio’s approach evokes Machiavelli’s view that the best way to control one’s political fortune is to seize the *occasione* or political opportunity as soon as it presents itself. 62 This political outlook is incompatible with temperance and patience because, as Evans has demonstrated, the *occasione* implies decisive and opportunistic action rather than temperate order (86-7). As a result, Antonio and Sebastian evoke the play’s overarching concern with the tempest as a time for political change (Evans 100). Since this scene rehearses Antonio’s attempted murder of Prospero, Shakespeare implies that Antonio’s impatient version of Machiavellian theory is at the heart of the aristocratic infighting in the play. 63 Ferdinand provides an alternative to Antonio’s approach to politics, but he does not obey Prospero unquestioningly. He is initially hostile to Prospero, but Miranda teaches him to reimagine servitude as a form of loving service rather than a debilitating condition to be overcome at the earliest opportunity. By reinterpreting his work as an opportunity for courtly love, Ferdinand finds room for subjective agency in his patient obedience to Prospero. 64 This deployment of *gloria passionis* signals a path beyond Antonio’s Machiavellianism and towards a more cohesive ruling class.

62 See Machiavelli (361-72). David Norbrook applies the concept of *occasione* to republican literature in “Republican Occasions” (122-48). As Norbrook explains, Machiavelli does not defend rash action. As a result, Antonio’s and Sebastian’s impatience may be a parody or misreading of Machiavellian *occasione*.

63 Critics have long argued that Machiavelli’s ideas influenced Shakespeare. See for example Anne Barton (115-29) and Hugh Grady (26-49).

64 As Esolen has demonstrated, Ferdinand too “seizes the time” by transforming humiliation into loving service, but this version of the *occasione* does not lead to open rebellion (241-2). In other words, this play foregrounds different means of seizing the *occasione*, some of which are more compatible with political obedience than others.
The political significance of patience, most importantly its capacity to foster political unity and voluntary obedience, is clearest in the final act of the play, when Prospero attempts to justify his magic. Although Prospero abjures his magic (5.1.51), he also implicitly justifies his magic as a necessary measure for teaching patience to the Italian nobles. He begins to address this justification when he consoles Alonso, who believes his son to be dead:

Alonso. Irreparable is the loss, and patience
  Says it is past her cure.
Prospero. I rather think
  You have not sought her help, of whose soft grace
  For the like loss I have her sovereign aid
  And rest myself content. (5.1.140-5)

By describing patience as a “soft grace” that provides “sovereign aid,” Prospero alludes to the Christian understanding of patience. This religious context is ironic because the “loss” of Ferdinand and Miranda is their parents’ gain. Unlike Prospero and the theatrical audience, however, Alonso does not know what happened to Ferdinand in the middle acts, and Prospero delays revealing his betrothal to Miranda. This delay demonstrates the central point in gloria passionis: the meaning of suffering and loss depend on one’s perspective. What worldly wisdom sees as humiliating, base, and painful, the suffering martyr perceives (thanks to the aid of grace) as noble, assertive, and joyful. Prospero secularizes this approach to patience through his magical art. What initially appears as a shipwreck to Ferdinand and Miranda becomes, thanks to Prospero’s art, an opportunity for love and marriage. What appears as an irreparable loss to Alonso becomes the “miracle” (5.1.177) of the couple’s sudden appearance at a game of chess (5.1.172). In each case, Prospero’s art reproduces the effect of grace by teaching his pupils to reimagine suffering and loss with the “sovereign aid” of patience. Instead of cultivating religious zeal, Prospero aims to regenerate the polis by persuading the Italian nobles to endorse the marriage of Ferdinand and Miranda. The ending of The Tempest implies that Prospero’s magical art is politically necessary because it makes possible the teaching of gloria passionis.
As a final step in his self-justification, Prospero suggests that he too needs patience, and in doing so indicates his own acceptance of personal vulnerability. Although Prospero speaks ironically when he describes the “loss” of Miranda, he has also lost her in earnest because she has begun to act semi-independently. This result was Prospero’s plan all along. His aim was to set aside power once the next generation of rulers have learned to cooperate with him as stipulated in the paradoxical agency-in-submission of *gloria passionis*. His final appeal to a “soft grace” above his control signals his willingness to demote himself to an ordinary duke now that this process is complete.

This gradual transition of power distinguishes Prospero’s plan from Lear’s failed abdication. Although Lear hopes to “[u]nburdened crawl toward death” (1.1.40), he cannot teach his daughters patience and voluntary obedience, because he has no access to the rhetoric of *gloria passionis*. As a result, one of the reasons why characters in *King Lear* often oscillate between servile flattery and Machiavellian power-mongering is that there is no middle way, no agency-in-submission through which they might express their agency without threatening the bonds of political obligation. Prospero’s success suggests, therefore, that Lear fails in his dynastic ambitions in part because he cannot manipulate Christian rhetoric to inspire voluntary obedience in his subjects.

Moreover, by deploying the language of *gloria passionis* for dynastic ends, Prospero reveals the political stakes in the metatheatrical reading of *The Tempest*. In a recent articulation of this reading, Richard McCoy has argued that the tempest in the first scene is a metaphor for theatrical art: “Within the plot, that art is magical, but within the theater, that art is stagecraft, a product of ‘tempestuous’ sound effects, stage directions, and speech” (149). Critics have long read *The Tempest* in this way, but McCoy adds, following Coleridge, that “our own willing suspension of disbelief” (149) amounts to a “poetic faith” that demystifies religion: “in watching a stage play, we can simultaneously see through its performances while remaining intensely

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65 Critics generally agree that Prospero’s shift towards forgiveness and vulnerability occurs when Ariel encourages him to sympathize with the Neapolitan courtiers (5.1.19). Cf. Beckwith (165).

66 Cf. Paul Cantor’s view that the ending of *The Tempest* is so improbable that it evokes the possibility of Lear’s tragic ending (253). Cantor thus implies that *The Tempest* is close enough to *Lear* to imply a revision of the earlier play.

67 See Kernan for a representative reading (136).
absorbed” (17). In other words, by asking the audience to suspend its disbelief and accept the fiction of the stage, Shakespeare defamiliarizes religious faith.\(^{68}\) While McCoy’s reading is compelling as far as it goes, it does not recognize the extent to which Christian martyrologists, preachers, and theologians acknowledge the theatricality of religious experience.\(^{69}\) I have argued that *gloria passionis* presumes at least two perspectives on suffering—one worldly, and the other inspired by grace. This double perspective on reality creates opportunities for dramatic irony in both *King Lear* and *The Tempest*. The persistent scriptural allusions in *King Lear* juxtapose the Christian view of suffering with the Stoic alternative, thus highlighting the absence of grace from the play’s universe. Although grace does not intervene in *The Tempest* either, Prospero’s theatrical art imitates the work of grace by shifting the perspective of his pupils from apparent loss to a more positive outlook that is based on noble suffering and voluntary obedience. However, Prospero’s aim is not to expose faith and grace as theatrical fictions, but rather to make these fictions work for his own political and dynastic ambitions. His art stages Christian concepts not simply to demystify them, but also to re-mystify political struggle in a way that suits Prospero’s ends. As a result, if we want to find a sustained resistance to Christian political theology in this play, we must look not to Prospero but rather to Caliban, who refuses to see himself in terms of *gloria passionis*.

2.4 Caliban and the Shape of Impatience

Caliban challenges Prospero’s view of patience, and the play’s insistent focus on his experience means that Caliban qualifies Prospero’s broader self-justification in Act V. Throughout the play, Caliban asserts his native sovereignty on the island (1.2.332-3) and insists that his education was unprofitable: “You taught me language; and my profit on't / Is, I know how to curse” (1.2.364-5). These statements foreground what some critics describe as the colonial aspects of Prospero’s humanist pedagogy.\(^{70}\) What critics do not always emphasize is that Caliban also poses a

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68 Cf. McCoy’s extended reading of drama as a humanized and secular alternative to religious faith (17-27). McCoy frames his discussion as a reaction to the “turn to religion” in Shakespeare studies. See Jackson and Marotti, “Turn to Religion,” for an overview of this movement.

69 Cf. Jean-Christophe Mayer’s view that Christian theology and Shakespeare’s theatre have a shared concern with the gap between signs and their interpretation (21).

70 Building on Greenblatt’s seminal “Learning to Curse,” a number of influential essays have argued that humanism facilitates colonial domination. See Jonathan Bate, “The Humanist Tempest”; Goran Stanivukovic, “The Tempest
formidable problem for Prospero’s approach to patience. The play’s staging insists on a parallel between Caliban and Ferdinand—they move the same logs, in the same place, and within a few scenes of each other—but Caliban foregoes Ferdinand’s appropriation of *gloria passionis*. Instead, he remains a deliberately impatient log-man, and he mentions patience by name only in the middle of a rebellion (4.1.205). Prospero tries to explain Caliban’s behaviour as a function of his unteachable nature, but this argument undermines the whole basis of his pedagogy, which is precisely that dramatic illusion may teach subjects to find meaning through suffering. Since Caliban’s experience cannot be assimilated into Prospero’s argument, the play ironizes the mystified idea of patience that Prospero inherits from scripture and Christian preaching.

Prospero absolves himself of any responsibility for Caliban by equivocating about the rationale behind Caliban’s enslavement. At first, he justifies Caliban’s enslavement as the punishment for his free decision to rape Miranda:

> I have used thee,
> Filth as thou art, with human care, and lodged thee
> In mine own cell, till thou didst seek to violate
> The honour of my child. (1.2.345-8)

According to this account, Caliban could have become a foster son rather than a slave, but he voluntarily refused Prospero’s “human care.” If Caliban was free to make his own choices, however, this refusal to cooperate might signal that the education was not as attractive as Prospero claims. Miranda seems unable to countenance this possibility when she accuses Caliban of being a slave by nature: “Abhorred slave, / Which any print of goodness wilt not take” (1.2.352-3). According to this alternate account, Caliban’s monstrosity is to blame for his failure
to take the “print” of education. Although he learns to speak, the education does not change his nature: “thy vile race, / Though thou didst learn, had that in't which good natures / Could not abide to be with” (1.2.359-61). Miranda’s implication—and by extension Prospero’s—is that Caliban was never capable of voluntary obedience because he inherited evil from the “vile race” of Sycorax. As literary critics have long recognized, Prospero equivocates in these scenes—sometimes he blames Caliban’s choices, and at other times Caliban’s nature—because he cannot accept the possibility that his own educational practices engendered Caliban’s less appealing traits. As Jonathan Bate has demonstrated, however, Prospero’s pedagogical methods most likely pushed the initially welcoming Caliban towards aggression (12-3).\(^\text{72}\) Instead of taking responsibility, Prospero blames Caliban’s choices when he wants to emphasize the fairness of the enslavement, and Caliban’s nature when he wants to make sense of his recalcitrance.

Prospero’s equivocal treatment of Caliban extends to his representation of Caliban’s impatience. Although Prospero demands patience from his servant as much as from Miranda and Ariel, he also suggests that Caliban is incapable of true patience. This approach ensures that Caliban is always expected to obey, yet also perpetually suspect. In the opening scenes, for example, Prospero appears to demand the same kind of voluntary obedience from Caliban that he also asks from Miranda, but his tone is much harsher: “If thou neglect'st or dost unwillingly / What I command, I'll rack thee with old cramps” (1.2.369-70). Prospero thus approaches Caliban with threats and cramps rather than the scriptural promises of Luke 21. While Prospero makes painfully clear what will happen if Caliban works unwillingly, he offers no reward for voluntary service. The implication is that Prospero does not consider voluntary obedience to be a real possibility for Caliban, despite his many commands to obey. After Caliban’s attempt at rebellion, Prospero doubles down on these claims for Caliban’s unteachability and corrupted nature: “A devil, a born devil, on whose nature / Nurture can never stick” (4.1.188-9). After the nobles close ranks around their mutual need for the “soft grace” of patience, Prospero once again excludes Caliban as a “demi-devil” (5.1.272) whose moral disproportions are reflected in his body: “He is as disproportion'd in his manners / As in his shape” (5.1.291-2). In these passages, Prospero essentializes Caliban’s servitude by describing his manners and his tendency for rebellion as a

\(^{72}\) Tom Lindsay suggests that Prospero’s humanist education is a “politicizing” force because it introduces a social hierarchy to Caliban’s life (415). Prospero may have taught Caliban “how to see Miranda as a politically advantageous tool” by denying him any other avenues for advancement (421).
result of his “shape” and “nature” rather than a history of inequality and exploitation on the island. This contradictory treatment of Caliban—sometimes Prospero demands voluntary obedience, and at other times he suggests that voluntary obedience is impossible for Caliban—reveals the exclusionary element in patience. Prospero does not give Caliban the same chances as Miranda or Ariel, even though he demands patience from everyone on the island.

Critics usually approach Prospero’s equivocations in these scenes through the rubric of postcolonial theory, but the tensions foregrounded by the play’s representation of patience are already implicit in the theological genealogy of gloria passionis. As we have seen, Protestant interpreters of Augustine write as if all Christians may cooperate freely with grace even though, in practice, they restrict grace to the elect. Using the logic of non poena sed causa, Protestant theologians and martyrologists insisted that only the orthodox have access to true patience. Similarly, Prospero sometimes presents patience as a function of free will, but in his dealings with Caliban, he retroactively demonstrates that true patience depends on the sufferer’s “shape.” In both the play and the martyrological literature, the sovereign decision—in one case regarding orthodoxy, in the other regarding “shape”—precedes the behaviour of the person being judged, but the decision is justified as a reflection of the victim’s choice to display patience or impatience. Christian patience thus presupposes exclusion, as well as an authority who decides on that exclusion. In The Tempest, this excluded party is Caliban, and his judge is Prospero. By reserving the right to judge Caliban’s impatience a priori as a reflection of a corrupt nature, Prospero retains coercive authority even as he gives up his magic. By foregrounding these issues, Caliban undermines his teacher’s self-justification and reveals the colonial politics that underlie all of Prospero’s teaching, including his teachings on patience.

Caliban demonstrates that Prospero’s adaptation of gloria passionis for his political purposes does not and cannot empower everyone because the religious ideas upon which Prospero based himself were already exclusionary. Privileged, humanist-educated individuals such as Ferdinand and Miranda might experience a sense of agency by reimagining themselves as patient servants for one another. Others, however, are condemned like Caliban to perpetually “seek for grace” (5.1.296) from an audience that has already decided that they are of the wrong

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73 See Gary Schmidgall (196-202) for an analysis of Caliban’s representation as “salvage” and “deformed” as a reflection of humanist moral philosophy and courtly discourse in the Renaissance.
shape. By foregrounding these issues, *The Tempest* suggests that political power grows out of the authority to decide who may access grace.

In terms of the broader claims of this dissertation, *The Tempest* and *King Lear* demonstrate that Paul’s language of grace did not always translate into a call for universal emancipation. Although Paul’s universalism survives in the figurative language of theologians such as Augustine and Calvin, in practice it was only the orthodox who could claim to cooperate with God in the right way. Shakespeare’s plays foreground the affective and political issues implicit in this theological logic of inclusion and exclusion. By contrasting Ferdinand and Caliban, and by drawing attention to the distinction between Christian England and pagan Britain, Shakespeare demonstrates that Protestant grace presupposes an outside, an excluded other against whom the godly or the orthodox must define themselves. In *The Tempest* in particular, this theological logic maps onto a history of colonial exploitation that privileges the Italian characters while effacing Caliban’s claims of native sovereignty. As we shall see in the next chapter, this link between social privilege and grace continued to influence early modern religion well after the rise of Arminianism in England.
Chapter 3
Arminian Theology, Machiavellian Republicanism, and Cooperative Grace in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*

At the end of Book 10 of *Paradise Lost*, Adam and Eve approach the place of their judgment with “hearts contrite, in sign / Of sorrow unfeigned, and humiliation meek” (10.1101-4). This prayer is the first good work human beings perform after the Fall, and it is the product of a cooperation between prevenient grace, which inspires Adam and Eve to be contrite, and the couple’s own free will, which voluntarily confesses “sorrow unfeigned.” In this chapter, I argue that Milton grounds his republican political ideals on the kind of cooperation that he depicts in Adam and Eve’s prayer. In *Paradise Lost*, in *Christian Doctrine*, and in his political prose, Milton suggests that by cooperating with God in the performance of good works, human beings participate in God’s sovereignty and regain some measure of the agency that they possessed before the Fall.¹

There is an ongoing debate within Milton criticism regarding the precise relationship between Milton’s political ideas and his religious thought. In the 1990s and early 2000s, critics such as David Norbrook established Milton within the tradition of Machiavellian republicanism that flourished in 17th century England.² According to this tradition, a well-administered republic requires a gifted legislator to reduce his sovereignty so as to enable virtuous, civically engaged, and rhetorically adept citizens to participate in political life.³ More recently, however, some critics have argued that Milton’s assumptions about human agency and political life are too religious for this Machiavellian rubric. These revisionist readings describe Milton’s

¹ Cf. Stevens’s argument in “The Pre-Secular Politics of *Paradise Lost*.”

² Norbrook’s *Writing the English Republic* (433-91) provides the definitive reading of *Paradise Lost* as a Machiavellian and republican text. See also the essays in the collection *Milton and Republicanism* and Barbara Riebling’s “Milton on Machiavelli” (573-97).

republicanism in different ways—some call it “biblical,”⁴ others “godly,”⁵ and still others describe his work in general as “post-secular”⁶—but the consensus among them is that Milton emphasizes the piety, spiritual freedom, and divine election of citizens more than their secular virtue.⁷ While the Machiavellian reading grounds Milton’s republicanism in humanist virtue, the revisionist readings emphasize the agency of Milton’s God and his elect.

One problem with this debate is that both sides represent humanity as competing with God. If Milton’s republicanism is Machiavellian, the human will may assert itself without regard for a transcendent authority. Conversely, if Milton’s republicanism is godly, then God dominates the human will completely in political affairs by limiting political participation to an arbitrarily chosen elect. In his *Christian Doctrine*, however, Milton argues that grace and the human will support one another: “We are justified, then, by faith, but a living faith, not a dead one, and the only living faith is a faith which acts” (*CPW* 6:490).⁸ Instead of overpowering believers, grace gradually regenerates them until they are again capable of voluntarily performing acts of faith, which for Milton include the virtues idealized in republican discourse. Milton believed that God

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⁵ In “Milton, Sir Henry Vane, and the Brief but Significant Life of Godly Republicanism,” Feisal Mohamed locates Milton, together with Henry Vane and Henry Stubbe, in a tradition of “godly” republicanism that promotes rule by a minority of elect Saints (84-7). Martin Dzelzainis argues a similar point in “Harrington and the Oligarchs,” though he describes Milton as “oligarchical” rather than “godly” (25-8). See also Dirk Vanderbeke’s “‘None can love freedom heartily, but good men’: Milton’s Religious Republicanism” for the view that Milton turned to republicanism primarily as a means of securing religious freedom for individuals (134-7). James Hankins compares godly to Machiavellian republics in “Exclusivist Republicanism and the Non-Monarchical Republic” (452-82).

⁶ See Feisal Mohamed’s *Milton and the Post-Secular Present* for a reading of Milton’s work in terms of the “post-secular” critical theories of Alain Badiou and Jacques Derrida (5-13). See also Lee Morrissey’s “Literature and the Postsecular: *Paradise Lost?”*(100-3). While these texts do not respond specifically to Milton’s republicanism, Mohamed’s argument that Areopagitica “desires… to replace the hegemony of one elite with the hegemony of another” anticipates his more recent emphasis on a godly elite in Milton’s republican tracts (53).

⁷ Theologically-inclined readings of Milton’s republicanism draw on a broader critical tradition that links Milton’s politics to religious radicalism. Key texts in this discussion include David Loewenstein’s *Representing Revolution in Milton and His Contemporaries*, and Sharon Achinstein’s *Literature and Dissent in Milton’s England*.

⁸ Cf. Stevens’s commentary on the same passage: “While never seeking to undermine the Pauline simplicity of sola fide, Milton is consistent throughout his writings in insisting on faith’s need to manifest itself in action” (*Imagination* 96). This chapter explores Milton’s faith-in-action further by situating it in the discourse of cooperative grace.
and human agency must coexist, and any consistent analysis of his political thought must account for this belief.

This chapter argues that Milton reconciles human agency and the sovereignty of God through a cooperative understanding of grace. As we have seen in the last chapter, Christian theologians from Augustine to the Reformation used cooperative grace to express the precarious balance between human and divine agency in Christian theology. By the mid-17th century, Arminianism had emerged throughout Reformed Europe as a powerful alternative to Calvinism in part because it challenged established approaches to grace. In particular, Arminius argued that grace restores genuine free will to believers, thus making them capable of freely cooperating with God in the performance of good works. Milton incorporates this Arminian view of grace in his defenses of republicanism. He insists that grace invites all Christians to cooperate with God, thus restoring to them some of the freedom and native sovereignty possessed by Adam and Eve. This argument in turn supports his view of republicanism as the most fitting form of government for a Christian commonwealth. At the same time, Milton also privileges highly educated individuals like himself by arguing that cooperative grace manifests primarily in academic activities such as reading scripture critically and debating its meaning publicly. At the heart of Milton’s political vision, therefore, is an idealized citizenry of academically-minded Protestants who cooperate with grace by deploying their humanist skills for the public good. This ideal of the citizen, and the concept of cooperative grace that supports it, are the means by which Milton attempts to reconstitute the longstanding tension in Christian theology between the sovereignty of God on the one hand and the agency of the individual believer on the other.

Milton’s conception of cooperative grace influences the representation of human agency in *Paradise Lost*. The exemplar of this cooperation is the Son of God. When he and God the Father discuss the meaning of grace in Book 3, the Son obeys the letter of the Father’s text even as he contributes creatively to the meaning of grace. In so doing, the Son shares in the Father’s sovereignty while at the same time remaining his subject, thus embodying in his responses the ideal balance implicit in cooperative grace. I read the Son’s behaviour as an example that informs the whole poem, and particularly the efforts of the fallen Adam and Eve to reclaim the agency they possessed before the Fall. As we shall see, Adam and Eve imitate the Son’s approach to the Father when they interpret God’s judgment in Book 10, thus demonstrating that even fallen human beings may cooperate with God as the Son does. In so doing, Adam and Eve
set the pattern for all subsequent good works, including the republican works that Milton discussed in his prose.

3.1 Cooperative Grace in Milton’s Arminian Theology

Milton based some of his most important republican arguments on the claim that human beings have a native propensity to rule. In *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, he argues: “No man who knows ought, can be so stupid to deny that all men naturally were borne free, being the image and resemblance of God himself, and were by privilege above all the creatures, born to command and not to obey” (8). In this passage, Milton grounds English republican efforts in God’s original donation of sovereignty to Adam and Eve in Gen.1:26. His argument is vulnerable, however, to the accusation that Adam and Eve’s sin effaced their native dominion. In fact, Milton’s royalist opponents often interpreted scriptural commonplaces such as 1 Sam. 8 to mean that God created kingship precisely as a punishment for human sin. In order to resolve this problem, Milton argued that human beings may overcome sin and regain some measure of their native agency. He attempted to prove his point by turning to Arminianism, which interpreted the Christian Gospel as a renovation of Adam and Eve’s prelapsarian agency.

When Arminianism first emerged in the Netherlands, it immediately divided the Reformed establishment. Historians such as Nicholas Tyacke have demonstrated that the roots of Arminianism are in the mid-to-late-16th century, when continental theologians such as Philip Melanchthon and Niels Hemmingsen, and relatively minor figures such as Peter Baro in England, promoted views that were not entirely compatible with Calvin’s ideas about grace and the bondage of the will (*Aspects* 181). However, Arminianism proper began in the Netherlands in the late 16th century under the guidance of Jacobus Arminius and his followers, who were known as the Dutch Remonstrants. The Remonstrants disagreed with the then-dominant Calvinists on a

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9 See Johann Sommerville’s “English and European Ideas in the Early Seventeenth Century: Revisionism and the Case for Absolutism” for an overview of absolutist interpretations of 1 Samuel 8 (177-9). See also Nyquist’s *Arbitrary Rule* (132-7).
number of theological issues, including the relationship between grace and free will. The Calvinists in turn painted the Remonstrants as traitors to the Reformed cause, and these accusations proved especially damning in a country that was in the middle of an unpopular and precarious truce with Spain. Eventually, the disagreement erupted into open political hostility when the Dutch politician Johan van Oldenbarnevelt backed the Remonstrants, while his political opponent, Maurice of Nassau, supported opposing Calvinist camp. The gambit proved disastrous for Oldenbarnevelt and his supporters. Oldenbarnevelt himself was executed in 1619 as a traitor in a trial that was widely considered to be of questionable legality, and the Calvinists took this opportunity to drive Arminianism underground by declaring it heretical at the Synod of Dort.

These events directly influenced the growth of Arminianism in England. Hugo Grotius, who was an important Arminian at this time and one of Oldenbarnevelt’s most important supporters, went to England in 1613 to secure the support of James I. Although the mission failed in this primary aim, Grotius influenced the bishops John Overall and Richard Lovelace to explore Arminian views. Together with Archbishop Laud, these bishops orchestrated an about-face in the English church in the 1620s and 1630s by changing its theology from a predominantly Calvinist to an Arminian foundation. This kind of Laudian Arminianism angered Puritans by emphasizing sacramental theology and a standardized liturgy. Although

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10 For a recent introduction to the historical context and the theological opinions of the Remonstrants, see Freya Sierhuis’s *The Literature of the Arminian Controversy* (27-47).

11 William Van Doodeward provides a historical overview of the Remonstrant and Counter-Remonstrant debates in “Remonstrants, Contra-Remonstrants and the Synod of Dort.”

12 For the history of this phase of the Arminian controversy, including an analysis of Oldenbarnevelt’s trial and its reception in the Dutch Republic, see Sierhuis (145-90). Sierhuis argues that the trial of Oldenbarnevelt induced some Dutch Arminians to adopt the language of antityrannicism and classical republicanism against Maurice of Nassau and his Calvinist allies (176). These sentiments manifested in a growth of interest in republican texts such as Lucan’s *Pharsalia* (176). These Dutch precedents demonstrate that Arminianism was not always a royalist movement. Milton’s integration of republicanism and Arminianism, which I discuss below, is part of this broader tradition, which had already flourished on the continent.

13 My summary of English Arminianism is based on Tyacke’s *Anti-Calvinists*. See also his *Aspects of English Protestantism* (132-59).

14 The mission ostensibly concerned trade, but Tyacke has demonstrated that Grotius’s true motive was to seek James’s support (Aspects 223). The effort failed, and James’s delegation backed the Calvinist party at Dort.

15 Tyacke summarizes the distinction between English and Dutch Arminianism as follows: “Arminianism in England emerged with an additional, sacramental dimension to that in the United Provinces. Arminius was read with approval by anti-Calvinists in England but adapted to the local situation. English Arminians came to balance their
Arminianism became almost synonymous with Laudianism and royalism in England, it was in fact more theologically complex than such local allegiances might suggest. As Sarah Mortimer has shown, the growth of Arminianism enabled new intellectual networks throughout Europe between theologians and lay persons who were dissatisfied with Calvinist orthodoxy for a variety of reasons that often had nothing to do with Laud. The growth of Arminianism changed the Reformed religion not only by introducing reform but also, and more importantly, by introducing new debates in England and elsewhere concerning major concepts such as grace.

Milton was no Laudian, but he incorporated key Arminian ideas into his thinking primarily because he wished to defend free will within a broadly Reformed framework. In fact, Arminius did not see his own theology as being far removed from Calvin’s, and he did not emphasize the ritualism and sacramental theology that attracted Laud. In one of his public disputations on free will, Arminius follows Calvin by giving a threefold account of regeneration: he argues that human beings once had “Primitive Innocence” in Eden, that they descended into “Subsequent Corruption” as a result of sin, and that they will acquire “Renewed Righteousness” through grace (*Works* 2:191). While Calvinists argued, however, that renewed righteousness comes after the Final Judgment, Arminius argued that it begins in the present, between Creation and apocalypse. As a result, Christians may freely cooperate with grace:

rejection of the arbitrary grace of predestination with a new found source of grace freely available in the sacraments, which Calvinists had belittled. Hence the preoccupation under Archbishop Laud with altars and private confession before receiving communion, as well as a belief in the absolute necessity of baptism” (*Aspects* 141). In the analysis of Milton below, my argument is that Milton borrowed the rejection of arbitrary grace from Arminius, but not the focus on sacramentalism that was common in specifically Laudian forms of Arminianism.

16 Mortimer explains that after the Remonstrants went underground in Holland, they found common ground with other persecuted sects such as the Socinians thanks to the mediation of figures such as Grotius. *See Reason and Religion* (25-30). See also Tyacke’s *Aspects* for more on the link between Grotius, Arminianism, and Socinianism (279, 290-1). I return to the Socinians and their influence on Milton in chapter 4.

17 Cf. Sierhuis’s view that Arminianism’s lasting influence on the Dutch republic was not simply to win converts but rather to change the nature of the Dutch public sphere: “The Dutch Republic, a society known for its culture of open discussion and debate, now became a place where predestination, free will, justification, and perseverance were debated in churches, streets, taverns, and canal boats” (57-8).

18 When I use “Arminian” to describe Milton’s ideas, I mean the views that Milton held in common with Arminius and the Remonstrants. For more on the different strands of Arminianism in the period, see Sarah Mortimer’s *Reason and Religion* (42-5) and Jason Kerr and John Hale’s “The Origins and Development of Milton’s Theology in *De doctrina Christiana*, 1.17–18” (189-91).
For when a new light and knowledge of God and Christ, and of the Divine Will, have been kindled in his mind; and when new affections, inclinations and motions agreeing with the law of God, have been excited in his heart, and new powers have been [\textit{ingeneratae}] produced in him; it comes to pass,—that… he loves and embraces that which is good, just, and holy;—and that, being made [\textit{potens}] capable in Christ, co-operating now with God he prosecutes the Good which he knows and loves, and he begins himself to perform it in deed\textsuperscript{19} [...]. (\textit{Works 2}: 194-5)

Arminius understands “renewed righteousness” not as the perfect state of the elect after the final judgment, but rather as a capacity for free will that begins in the present. Without denying the Calvinist view that sin introduced total depravity, Arminius argues that grace has already rehabilitated the will of believers.\textsuperscript{20} In another treatise, Arminius adds that although this regeneration is still only partial—he describes human agency as a \textit{modulo}, or an infinitesimally small amount—it is still sufficient to ensure free will: “A regenerate man… actually [\textit{declinat}] desists from evil and does good,—not indeed perfectly, but according to the… [\textit{modulo}] the small degree of regeneration, which, begun in the present life, must be gradually improved or increased, till at length it is perfected after this short life is ended” (\textit{Works 2}: 497). Grace rehabilitates the will so that it may cooperate with grace over a lifetime, gradually becoming “improved or increased” until it culminates in “perfected [regeneration] after this short life is ended.”\textsuperscript{21} In other words, “perfect” regeneration is not sudden or independent of the will; rather, this regeneration crowns a lifelong cooperation between free will and grace. Although he agrees with the Calvinists that grace is wholly responsible for salvation, Arminius’s point is, nevertheless, that grace rehabilitates the will rather than taking away its freedom entirely.

\textsuperscript{19} The original Latin text for this passage is: “Quum enim in mente illius nova lux & agnitio Dei Christique & voluntatis divine accensa sit, in corde novi affectus, inclinations & motus cum lege Dei congruentes excitati & novae vires ipsi ingeneratae sint, fit, ut liberates e regno tenebrarum & jam lux factus in domino verum & salutare bonum intelligat: ut lapidei cordis duritie in carneam mollitiem mutate; id quod bonum, justum & sanctum est, amet & amplectatur, & ut potens in Christo factus, bonum cognitum & amatum Deo jam cooperans prosequatur, & ipse opere praestare incipiatur: hoc autem quicquid est, cognitionis, sanctitatis & virium a Spiritu Sanctu ipsi ingeneratur” (Arminius \textit{Opera Theologica} 265).

\textsuperscript{20} For the definitive analysis of Arminius’s universal “sufficient grace” and its effects on Milton’s \textit{Christian Doctrine}, see Danielson (76-87).

\textsuperscript{21} Cf. R.C. Sproul’s view that Arminius’s description of gradual regeneration in this passage as a departure from what might otherwise appear to be, earlier in the same tract, as a restatement of Calvinist consensus (128-9).
In order to parry the accusations of Pelagianism and semi-Pelagianism that the Reformers had used to discredit earlier defenders of free will, Arminius insists that Christian agency in the time of renewed righteousness does not challenge, but rather reinforces, God’s absolute sovereignty. The key term in this argument is the verb “co-operating,” which is a translation of the verb “cooperans” in Arminius’s original Latin. His phrase “co-operating now with God [man] prosecutes the Good” suggests that human beings may pursue the virtues and “the Good” only as God’s co-operators and subordinates, not as independent agents. He clarifies this point further when he argues that “knowledge, holiness and power, is all begotten within [the regenerate man] by the Holy Spirit” (Works 2:195). He also attributes the success of good works to divine assistance: “the willing are assisted that they may work and may co-operate with God” (Works 2:196). By placing God front and centre in every good work, Arminius rejects the Pelagian understanding of free will as complete autonomy. The freedom Arminius has in mind is rather that of a voluntarily obedient, but still clearly subordinate, coworker. In other words, Christians are free only in the sense that God works with them rather than through them. These qualifications did not in the end protect Arminius and his followers from accusations of Pelagianism, but his efforts attracted later thinkers, including Milton, who wished to maintain the majesty and freedom of Calvin’s God without sacrificing free will.

While the general influence of Arminian theology on Milton’s *Christian Doctrine* is well-known, criticism often emphasizes Milton’s borrowings from Arminian theories of predestination and free will rather than his specific thoughts on regeneration. In fact,
regeneration in particular was central for Milton’s understanding of moral agency.  

24 He follows Arminius in arguing that Christians resemble unfallen Adam: “To order us to do right but decree that we shall do wrong!—this is not the way God dealt with our forefather, Adam, nor is it the way he deals with those he calls and invites to grace” (CPW 6:177). In this passage, Milton rejects the mainstream Protestant view that God commands human beings in scripture only to mock the bondage of their will.  

25 Instead, Milton argues that “those [God] calls and invites to grace” are free to accept or reject the Gospel’s call in the same way that “our forefather, Adam” was free to obey or disobey God’s prohibition of the Forbidden Fruit. By linking the Christian situation in the Gospel to Adam’s prelapsarian freedom, Milton paraphrases Arminius’s link between “renewed righteousness” and “primitive innocence.”

Milton also follows Arminius in arguing that Christians may exercise this freedom only by cooperating with God. He interprets St. Paul as follows: “Phillipp. ii. 12, 13: work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who works in you to will and act for his pleasure. What can this mean but that God gives us the power to act freely, which we have not been able to do since the fall unless called and restored?” (CPW 6:457). For Milton, salvation involves both God, who “call[s] and restore[s]” human beings through the Gospel, and the human will, which responds to God’s call freely. As a result, we “work out [our] own salvation” by cooperating with “God who works in [us].” Because free will has been impossible “since the fall,” this very capacity to cooperate with God renovates our prelapsarian agency.

In order to emphasize the sovereignty of God in this process, Milton argues that free will does not mean independence from grace—this view would be true Pelagianism, and anathema to


24 See Benjamin Myers’s “Prevenient Grace and Conversion in Paradise Lost” for a recent argument that does emphasize the link between Milton’s Arminianism and his theory of regeneration (25-7).

25 For example, Martin Luther argues that God “says: “Do, hear, keep,” or, “If thou shalt hear, if thou wilt, if thou shald do”… so as to lead us by means of law to a knowledge of our impotence if we are his friends or truly and deservedly to trample on and mock us if we are his proud enemies” (Bondage of the Will 185).
both Milton and Arminius—but rather that Christians serve God voluntarily. Milton explains voluntary service when he defines Christian liberty:


Far from implying any independence from grace at all, Christian liberty is a form of service to God. It is more honourable than the service provided under the Law—it is fit for sons and men, as opposed to slaves and boys—because it is voluntary and cooperative. At the same time, voluntary service is still service, and God is still responsible for human agency. Thus on the one hand Milton presents agency as a gift that flows down to human beings from God, enabling them to pursue virtue and good works as voluntarily as Adam once did, but on the other hand he also insists that God loses none of his sovereignty in this process because, precisely by pursuing virtue and good works freely, we are at the same time serving God. Far from diminishing God’s sovereignty, therefore, human free will amplifies it, for it proves that God is powerful enough to rule sons and men rather than slaves and boys.

Milton’s understanding of virtue as a cooperative effort between God and human beings links his theology to his political prose. The concluding phrase in his definition of liberty, “WE MAY SERVE GOD IN CHARITY THROUGH THE GUIDANCE OF THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH,” mentions two concepts, “charity” and “truth,” that Milton had already presented as cooperative in his early prose. In Areopagitica, Milton argues that Christians must expend considerable effort in the pursuit of truth. They must interpret scripture on their own, debate it publicly, and amend existing legislation accordingly; if they fail to do so and “believe things

26 See Stephen Fallon’s “Milton’s Arminianism” for more on the difference between Arminianism and Pelagianism, and the influence of this distinction on Milton (103-27).
27 Cf. Kerr and Hale, “Origins and Development” for the view that Milton’s theology encourages a non-Pelagian cooperation between God and the human will (204).
only because [their] Pastor says so,” they become “heretick[s] in the truth” (CPW 5:543). At the same time, Milton also argues that human effort is insufficient and that Truth will fully emerge only at her “Masters second coming” (CPW 5:459). Truth cannot emerge without a cooperation between careful intellectual effort and divine aid.  

*The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* presents charity as a similarly cooperative virtue. Milton argues that it is uncharitable to interpret Jesus’s words in Matt. 19:8 as a blanket condemnation of divorce because Jesus was responding only to a specific Pharisaical audience: “the occasion, which induced our Saviour to speak of divorce, was either to convince the extravagance of the Pharisees in that point, or to give a sharp and vehement answer to a tempting question” (CPW 2:596). Since the meaning of Jesus’s speech depends on its “occasion” or *kairos*, it is up to a humanist, rhetorically trained interpreter such as Milton to determine what Jesus would say in the very different “occasion” of English national reform. As a result, finding the charitable position on divorce requires both the authority of Jesus’s words in scripture and the agency of the interpreter who adapts scripture to a given political struggle. Although Milton did not necessarily hold Arminian views in his early prose, when he returns to truth and charity in *Christian Doctrine* he finds the Arminian framework particularly suitable because he had already imagined these virtues as cooperative.  

His Arminian emphasis on cooperation explains how individual acts of interpretation fit in the divinely guided process of universal reform.

Milton’s cooperative understanding of virtue also underpins his later, republican prose. Renewing the central argument of *The Tenure*, Milton argues in *A Defense of the People of England* that Christians participate in Adam’s prelapsarian agency: “Our liberty is not Caesar’s, but is a birthday gift to us from God himself” (107-8). In order to possess this gift, however, Christians must return voluntary service back to God, as Milton himself does by writing the tract:

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28 For a related reading of *Areopagitica* as involving a cooperation between the virtuous individual and the “overarching biblical story,” see Phillip Donnelly’s *Milton’s Scriptural Reasoning* (37-47).

29 For more on the relationship between charity in the divorce tracts and the interpretive practice of *Christian Doctrine*, see Jason Kerr’s “De Doctrina Christiana and Milton’s Theology of Liberation” (351-4).

30 See Janel Mueller’s “Milton on Heresy” for the counterargument that Milton prioritizes sectarianism at the expense of universality (17).
I resort to divine aid: and I invoke God, best and greatest, giver of all gifts; that as successfully and as piously as our most distinguished leaders to freedom broke the king’s haughtiness and uncontrolled tyranny in battle, then extinguished them at last by a memorable punishment; and with as little trouble as I recently took as one of many to refute and dispose of the king himself when he rose again, so to speak, from the dead, and, in that book which was published after his death, tried to sell himself to the people with new subtleties and artificial verbal devices—now may I as successfully and truly disprove and dispel the impudence and lies of this foreign disclaimer [...]. (53)

By comparing his efforts in A Defense and Eikonoklastes to the successes of the Cromwellian army, Milton presents himself to his reader as the ideal, heroic republican subject. Milton’s learning, eloquence, and commitment to the republican cause are supposed to prove that the English nation can produce autonomous citizens who do not need the paternalistic guidance of a king. Milton’s invocations to divine aid also suggest, however, that his republican virtue is a cooperative achievement that involves both his own free will and God. In order to regain the “birthday gift” of liberty that God gave Adam, Milton cooperates with God, “the giver of all gifts,” in the pursuit of the republican virtue exemplified by the Defense. In such passages, Milton develops his Arminian theory of regeneration into the argument that republicanism is the best means of reconciling human agency and divine sovereignty. For Milton, republicanism is godliness, and godliness is republicanism.

By drawing these connections between Christian Doctrine and Milton’s political prose, I am not suggesting that all of these tracts are the same kind of speech-act, but only that Milton’s philosophical commitments about free will and grace remain similar. Throughout his work, he tends to illustrate cooperative grace in moments of active interpretation, when academically-minded citizens like himself—citizens who are privileged, well-educated, and typically male—debate the meaning of scripture and so demonstrate themselves to be working together with grace. Of course, Milton no longer thinks of himself in The Christian Doctrine as a revolutionary...

31 See David Ainsworth’s “Spiritual Reading in Milton’s Eikonoklastes” for a recent examination of Milton’s active reading in the republican period of his career (157-89).
fighting an ideological battle in support of republican armies, but he does continue to argue that Christians cooperate with God:

I implore all friends of truth not to start shouting that the church is being thrown into confusion by free discussion and inquiry. These are allowed in academic circles, and should certainly be denied to no believer. For we are ordered to find out the truth about all things, and the daily increase of the light of truth fills the church much rather with brightness and strength than with confusion […]. (CPW 6:121)

The very fact that Christians may freely judge, debate, and revise what they “are ordered to find out” shows that they cooperate with God in the gradual unveiling of “the truth about all things.” As in Areopagitica and in the republican tracts, Milton continues to imagine his readership here as a virtuous, academically-minded community that pursues truth by cooperating with grace. Moreover, the increase of brightness and strength in the church implies a return to the prelapsarian dignity that Milton associates with republican virtue. Needless to say, this vision of republican agency implicitly excludes those who do not have the training to interpret scripture in this way. This exclusionary element should not be surprising because, as Nyquist has demonstrated, all forms of early modern republicanism tend to exclude some persons from political participation. Thus Milton’s conception of agency does not emancipate everyone, but still promises genuine agency for his imagined community of humanist Protestants. As we shall see, Milton’s link between cooperative virtue and republican agency informs not only Christian Doctrine and the political prose but also Paradise Lost.

3.2 The Son’s Mediation in Paradise Lost

Milton’s republicanism does not appear to sit very well with the absolute sovereignty of God in Paradise Lost. More than five decades ago, William Empson attempted to resolve this problem

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32 See Stevens’s “Milton and National Identity” for an explanation of the relationship between humanist pedagogical practices and Milton’s republican prose (354-9).

33 More specifically, Nyquist demonstrates that the republican view of liberty as natural for some nations presupposes that slavery is natural for others (20-1). For more information on this binary, see Nyquist’s discussion of natural slavery in Arbitrary Rule (34-49).
by speculating that Milton’s God will eventually abdicate to a non-authoritarian form of divinity. \(^{34}\) This reading continues to be influential. \(^{35}\) Norbrook suggests that God speaks as if he wishes to abdicate in solidarity with his people, even though he does not actually plan to do so. \(^{36}\) The implication is that even though Milton was too Protestant to allow it, *Paradise Lost* would be more straightforwardly republican if God really were to abdicate. \(^{37}\)

If we accept Milton’s understanding of virtue as a cooperation between God and his creatures, however, the absolute sovereignty of God is not only compatible with Milton’s republicanism but absolutely necessary for it. The key figure who reconciles creaturely agency and divine sovereignty in *Paradise Lost* is the Son of God. When he interprets the Father’s decrees in Book 3, the Son proves himself an exemplar of cooperative virtue. On the one hand, he obeys the literal text of the Father’s speeches, but on the other hand he interprets the meaning of divine decrees so creatively that he effectively co-authors them with the Father. Milton explains the Son’s behaviour as part of his mediatorial office, but his overall point is that by cooperating with the Father in the work of interpretation, the Son participates in divine sovereignty while at the same time remaining the Father’s subject. The Son shows that God cooperates with his subjects, cultivates their virtue, promotes their autonomy—briefly put, he educates them as republican citizens—precisely because God, unlike any human king, is so secure in his absolute sovereignty that he can give agency to his people without losing any authority in the process. \(^{38}\)

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\(^{34}\) Empson describes God’s abdication as follows: “at present [the Father is still the very disagreeable God of the Old Testament, but eventually he will dissolve into the landscape and become immanent only” (132-3).

\(^{35}\) The influence of Empson’s opposition between God and immanence is visible for example in arguments that oppose the matter of Milton’s cosmos to its creator. See John Rogers’s discussion of animist materialism in *The Matter of Revolution* (5-13) and John P. Rumrich’s “The Matter of Chaos” (1035-46). Rumrich politicizes Chaos in Empsonian terms by arguing that it is a “part of the deity… over which the eternal father does not exercise control” (1043).

\(^{36}\) Norbrook reads the elevation of the Son in Book 3 of *Paradise Lost* as “closely parallel to a king’s abdicating and showing solidarity with his people” (475). Unlike Empson, Norbrook is careful to emphasize that the abdication will not really take place because Milton’s Reformed commitments virtually required a kingly God (477).

\(^{37}\) Norbrook summarizes tension between Milton’s republicanism and his respect for divine kingship as follows: “His God is not a tyrant, but he is certainly not a modern democrat. Nonetheless, republican unease about traditional hierarchies deeply informs Milton’s presentation of the heavenly kingdom” (480).

\(^{38}\) For Milton’s God as a humanist pedagogue, see Stevens’s reading of *Paradise Lost* 3.188-93 in his “Milton and National Identity” (361). See Thomas Festa’s *The End of Learning: Milton and Education* for a reading of Milton’s theory of education and his view of republican heroism more generally (66-90). In *John Milton at St. Paul’s School*, Donald Lemen Clark links Milton’s experiences as a schoolboy to his mature theory of education (250-252).
As soon as the Son appears on the scene in Book 3, he transforms the Father’s harsh tone into a more cooperative expression of authority. The Father’s first speech in 3.80-134 flaunts divine sovereignty and omnipotence by predicting and condemning humanity’s Fall. The Son’s appearance, however, tempers the Father’s speech:

Thus while God spake, ambrosial fragrance filled
All heaven, and in the blessed spirits elect
Sense of new joy ineffable diffused:
Beyond compare the Son of God was seen
Most glorious, in him all his Father shone
Substantially expressed, and in his face
Divine compassion visibly appeared,
Love without end, and without measure grace,
Which uttering thus he to his Father spake. (3.135-43)

The compassion, love, and grace on the Son’s face suggest additional levels of meaning beyond the literal sense of the Father’s words. In the same way that the “ambrosial fragrance” communicates “joy ineffable” to the angels through their olfactory sense,\(^{39}\) the Son’s face acts as a visual supplement to the Father’s speech.\(^{40}\) Unlike the angels, however, Milton’s reader experiences Father and Son sequentially: first, we hear the Father condemn humanity harshly, and only then do we imagine the Son visibly expressing “without measure Grace.” This sequential presentation of a synchronous event provokes the reader to be, as it were, surprised by the Son.\(^{41}\) What initially appeared to be an authoritarian dictation from the sovereign to his subjects turns out to have been a synaesthetic, cooperative performance between Father and Son all along. This method of presentation teaches the reader that no matter how authoritarian God’s sovereignty might appear, it also cooperates with the Son. This lesson structures the rest of Book 3.


\(^{40}\) For a recent analysis of visual element in the Book 3 dialogue, see David Quint’s *Inside Paradise Lost* (95-113).

\(^{41}\) See Stanley Fish’s *Surprised by Sin*, 1-56, for the view that the reader’s experience is part of the text of *Paradise Lost* and that Milton surprises his readers in order to educate them. By adapting Fish’s phrase I am suggesting that Milton reorients the reader’s imagination towards the Son rather than towards sin in this speech.
The Son reflects the cooperative understanding of grace in his responses, which always emphasize grace: “O Father, gracious was that word which closed / Thy sovereign sentence, that man should find grace” (3.144-5). Since the Father also promised many ungracious things, including eternal torture for all fallen angels and many human beings, the Son does not simply state the obvious when he chooses “grace” as the defining word of the whole speech. Far from a passive exposition of the Father’s meaning, the Son’s interpretation of the speech is a creative and imaginative act in its own right. The Father in turn encourages this kind of freethinking: “All hast thou spoken as my thoughts are, all / As my eternal purpose hath decreed” (3.171-2). The Father’s response demonstrates that instead of revealing his “eternal purpose” directly, he prefers to rely on the creative, imaginative, and free response of the Son. The overall implication in the exchange is that the Father and the Son share interpretive authority, and that the Father’s speech is incomplete until the Son reimagines it in light of grace. In other words, the Son’s interpretive paradigm reproduces and exemplifies cooperative grace because his words are at once obedient and creatively independent from the Father.

When Milton calls the Son’s offer of self-sacrifice his “dearest mediation” (3.226), he draws on the traditional role of the Son as a mediator to explain his interpretation of the Father’s decrees. Christ is called a “mediator” only in St. Paul’s letters and in the Epistle to the Hebrews. While Paul uses this word to describe Christ’s intercession for sin, in Hebrews the word “mediator” refers specifically to his reconciliation of the Old and New dispensations: “But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises” (Heb. 8:6). The Epistle later adds: “For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance” (Heb. 9:15). Echoing Matt. 5:17,

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42 See Stevens’s Imagination for the view that the Son’s “imagination serves as the instrument of grace” in this scene (146).

43 Dayton Haskin argues that “Milton did not conceive the work of interpretation as simply conforming one’s views to an already given meaning, nor as constituting an addition to the Scriptures[...] The canonical texts became for him the Scriptures when they were interpreted with disciplined reserve as well as ‘experimentally’” (146). I am suggesting that the Father’s words in Book 3 are similarly incomplete until the Son responds to them, and that this response is not an addition to the Father’s speech as much as the speech’s fulfilment.
the Epistle to the Hebrews defines Christ as a mediator because his “new” covenant is both an interruption and a fulfilment of the “first covenant” of Moses. These passages shape the Son’s interpretive mediation in *Paradise Lost*.

In the speeches leading up to the Son’s offer of self-sacrifice, the Father and the Son reproduce the Pauline conflict between Law and grace in their dialogue. The Father’s insistence that someone must “pay / The rigid satisfaction, death for death” (3.211-2) associates him with the Mosaic “law of Sin and death” as described in Romans 8:2, whereas the Son’s emphasis on grace links him to the life-giving Gospel that makes up the other half of the Pauline binary. As in the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Son’s “mediation” resolves this crisis between Law and grace:

> And now without redemption all mankind
> Must have been lost, adjudged to death and hell
> By doom severe, had not the Son of God,
> In whom the fulness dwells of love divine,
> His dearest mediation thus renewed. (3.222-6)

The Son’s ensuing speech is a “mediation” because he brings out the imaginative possibility of grace within the foreboding words of the Father in the same way that the messiah in Hebrews finds the Gospel within the Law. The interpretive practice of the Son—his tendency to obey the Father’s words while at the same time adding to their meaning in pursuit of grace—is a literary correlative for the “mediation” that reconciles Old and New dispensations in Hebrews. As a result, the word “mediation” foregrounds the tensions in this dramatic scene between law and grace, Father and Son, Old and New, while at the same time insisting that the Son bridges these binaries through his creative, imaginative interpretations of the Father.44

Since God’s words in this case also carry the legal and political weight of a “sovereign sentence” (3.142), the Son’s mediation has political undertones. Although he plays a decisive role in sentencing humanity when he interprets the judgment in light of grace, the Son also defers to the Father’s legal and political authority by refusing to stray from the text of the Father’s speech. As a result, he is neither strictly a sovereign nor a subject but rather a unique political

44 See Thomas Corns’s *Regaining “Paradise Lost”* for a reading of mediation as a synthesis of mercy and justice (18).
agent who participates in sovereignty while remaining the Father’s subject. The Son’s active interpretation of the Father’s legal sentence mediates not only between the Old and New dispensations but also between sovereignty and subjection.

Milton’s anti-Trinitarianism underscores the highly political dimension of the Son’s mediation. According to Trinitarian orthodoxy, the Son is a mediator for humanity because he has the same divine essence as the Father and because he sacrifices that essence to atone for sin. Orthodoxy thus represents the relationship between Father and Son as metaphysical rather than political. In anti-Trinitarian thought, by contrast, the Son is a creature and subordinate of the Father, so his mediation implies a subject-sovereign relationship. Milton emphasizes that “[the Son] could not have been a mediator, nor could he have been sent by or obedient to God, unless he was by nature less than God and the Father” (CPW 6:243). The key word here is “obedient”: since Milton’s anti-Trinitarian Son is by “nature” or essence less than the Father, his mediation depends not on the sacrifice itself but rather on the Son’s obedience. At the same time, obedience elevates the Son. Milton clarifies this point when he glosses John 10:30, in which Jesus claims to be “one” with the Father: “they are one in that they speak and act as one… he and the Father are one in the same way as we are one with him: that is, not in essence but in love, in communion, in agreement, in charity, in spirit, and finally in glory” (CPW 6:220). The Son’s obedience allows him to “speak and act as one” with God, thus sharing in divine sovereignty even though he is still a subject. Like Moses and Abraham before him, the Son is a mediator not because of his nature or essence but rather because he interprets the Law favourably for humanity. This interpretive effort is what allows the Son to wield his Father’s sovereignty.

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45 For a survey of Milton’s anti-Trinitarianism, see Rumrich’s “Milton’s Arianism: Why it Matters” (75-92).
46 Cf. John Rogers’s argument in “The Political Theology of Milton’s Heaven” that Milton establishes a “political relation” between Father and Son in Milton’s heaven (81).
47 See Gregory Chaplin’s “Beyond Sacrifice” for the view that Milton’s Arianism shifts the emphasis in the atonement from the Son’s sacrifice to his interpretation of the Father (361).
48 Chaplin claims that “by making the redeemer a creature, Arianism elevates the status and exalts the potential of all created beings” (360). For a more extended discussion of this view, see Robert Gregg’s and Dennis Groh’s Early Arianism (50-70).
49 Anti-Trinitarian thought compared Jesus to Moses and Abraham so as to prove that Jesus did not have to be coessential with God in order to be a mediator. For example, Michael Servetus compares Christ’s mediation to that of “the man Moses [who] was called an earthly mediator between the people and God” (18). Milton reinforces the similarity of the Son and Abraham by having the Son cite Gen. 18:25 in Paradise Lost (3.153-4).
The political vision disclosed by this anti-Trinitarian mediation is ultimately republican in character. In the *Discourses on Livy*, Niccolo Machiavelli argues that republics acquire liberty through the wise laws of a founding legislator and that they maintain liberty through periodic renewals of these legal principles.\(^5\) In order to renew itself, the republic must rely on exceptional citizens who have the sufficient *virtu* to innovate political life in response to fortune.\(^5\) Since Machiavelli places great importance on the adaptability of these innovators,\(^5\) it is no surprise that the most influential republican readings of *Paradise Lost* represent the Son as a Machiavellian innovator.\(^5\) Keeping Milton’s thoughts on mediation in mind, I want to qualify this republican reading of the Son. The paradox in Machiavellian innovation is that it fulfils two seemingly contradictory tasks: on the one hand, it reduces the republic to its foundational premises, but on the other it also updates political life to meet the unforeseeable circumstances of fortune. The Son’s mediation straddles a similar paradox. He both obeys the Old dispensation of the Father and, at the same time, he innovates by emphasizing grace. The main similarity between Milton’s Son and Machiavelli’s republican innovator, therefore, is that both figures reconcile their creative *virtu* with obedience to the community. The main difference, on the other hand, is that Machiavelli’s innovator responds to the indifferent force of fortune,\(^5\) whereas the Son responds directly to a sovereign God who creates the opportunity for both innovation and obedience by phrasing his Law in a way that encourages the Son’s discovery of grace within it. Unlike Machiavellian fortune, which has no pedagogical aim, God actively cultivates in the Son a form of republican virtue that allows creatures to cooperate with their sovereign Father.

My point is that the Son possesses republican virtue *because* God is an absolute sovereign, not despite this fact. In Machiavelli’s political system, *virtu* and liberty are necessary

\(^{50}\) For Machiavelli’s discussion of the founding legislator, see the first chapter of Book I (7-9). His discussion of periodic renewals of the republic appears in the first chapter of Book (209-12).

\(^{51}\) See the ninth chapter of Book I for Machiavelli’s discussion of the innovators of the republic (239-40).

\(^{52}\) Machiavelli argues that one of the main reasons to prefer a republican government over other types is that they allow more of these innovators to participate in politics (240).

\(^{53}\) For the Son as a figure who reduces the republic to God’s original laws, see Norbrook’s *Writing the English Republic* (474-7). More recently, Angus Fletcher emphasizes the Son’s innovation, as opposed to his reduction, in “The Innovation of Milton’s Machiavellian Son” (97-113).

\(^{54}\) For more on Machiavellian fortune and its relationship to free will, see Marcia Colish’s “The Idea of Liberty in Machiavelli” (326-7).
simply to ensure survival in the harsh political realities of the Italian Renaissance. By contrast, there is no prudential motive for the Son’s virtu because, despite Satan’s best efforts, God’s omniscience makes him impervious to the kind of political crisis that would make virtu politically necessary. As a result, the Son has virtu only because God loves him and bestows agency on him. Milton’s anti-Trinitarian theology and his republican politics point to the same conclusion: the agency of the Son does not compete with, but actually amplifies and depends upon, the absolute sovereignty of God. Precisely because God is an absolute sovereign—indeed, the only rightfully absolute sovereign in all of Creation—God can afford to bestow agency and autonomy on his Son without losing anything in the process. The hierarchy between Father and Son is genuinely unequal, but it also tends perpetually towards the enfranchisement of the Son.

This vision of the Son as both a subject and a participant in sovereignty explains why his tone during the actual mediation is so peculiarly divided between assertiveness and submission. Shortly before offering himself as a sacrifice, the Son puns on the word “grace”:

Father, thy word is past, man shall find grace;
And shall grace not find means, that finds her way,
The speediest of thy winged messengers,
To visit all thy creatures, and to all
Comes un prevented, unimplored, unsought,
Happy for man, so coming […]. (3.227-32)

“Grace” is “thy”—the Father’s—word because the Father mentioned it first. Grace is also the Son’s word, however, because his earlier speech shaped the meaning of grace in this passage. As a result, the Son praises not only the Father’s grace but also his own interpretations of what grace means. Moreover, the phrase “speediest of thy winged messengers” seems to describe grace as a gift that proceeds preveniently (“unimplored, unsought”) from God. On the other hand, “winged messengers” evokes the angels—angelos means “messenger” in Greek—and, since the Son is already the head of the angels by this point in the poem’s chronology, the phrase “speediest of

55 Skinner defines the prudential motives of Machiavellian liberty and virtu in “Machiavelli on Virtu and the Maintenance of Liberty” (160-85).

56 God rejects contingency in Book 7: “necessity and chance / Approach not me, and what I will is fate” (7.172-3)
thy winged messengers” is also an epithet for the Son himself. The Son thus praises the Father’s grace in a way that could also suggest self-aggrandizement. This delicate balance between assertiveness and submission parallels his role as a bridge between sovereignty and subjection.

The tension between Father and Son reaches its climax when the Son assumes for himself the authority to bestow paternal grace. After explaining that man will become “dead in sins and lost” (3.233) and incapable of bringing “atonement for himself or offering meet” (3.234), the Son offers himself as a sacrifice: “Behold me then, me for him, life for life / I offer, on me let thine anger fall; / Account me man” (3.236-8). This declaration displays the Son’s exemplary obedience and his appeasement of the Father’s righteous anger. Read differently, however, the speech also represents the Son’s assertiveness. In the context of the dialogue, “behold me then” is an unexpected shift in conversation—a shift as “unsought” and “unimplor ed” as grace. If we read “behold me then” as a speech-act, therefore, this phrase is itself the first act of grace: by offering himself in this unexpected way, the Son begins to bestow on human beings the very prevenient grace for which he has been pleading from the Father. As a result, the Son’s “dearest mediation” is both his most submissive statement and, at the same time, an almost impudently bold innovation that lays claim to the Father’s sovereignty.

The Son balances assertiveness and obedience in this way to demonstrate that republican virtue is a cooperation between God and his creatures. The Son is an ideal republican citizen, a citizen capable of virtue and political innovation, because he both obeys his Father and responds assertively to him. If the Father were to abdicate, there would be no omnipotent source of agency from which the Son could derive his virtue in the first place. If on the other hand the Father were to inspire in his creatures a “godly” or antinomian saintliness that bypasses their will completely, then the Son’s interpretive efforts would be invalidated, and he would be a version of the “meer artificiall Adam” that Milton mocks in Areopagitica (CPW 2:527). Milton avoids both extremes.

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57 For a parallel reading, see Fletcher’s “Innovation” (104-5).

58 Cf. Stevens’s reading of these passages: “What the Father and Son offer are not alternatives but incremental repetitions in the movement of God’s progressive self-revelation” (Imagination 158). What I am suggesting is that the dialogue reveals a cooperation between two distinct and unequal beings. This reading is compatible with Stevens’s, but “self-revelation” seems to me to underestimate the difference between Father and Son, which is amplified by Milton’s anti-Trinitarian theology. Stevens has revised his earlier reading in “National Identity” (360).

59 See Hugh MacCallum’s Milton and the Sons of God for the view that the Son’s mediation relies on his capacity for choice (240).
by presenting the Son’s mediation as a cooperative effort between his own agency and God’s absolute sovereignty. In so doing, Milton sets the pattern for all other creatures, including fallen human beings.

3.3 Regeneration in Adam and Eve’s Prayer

According to a well-known anecdote, Thomas Ellwood asked Milton after reading Paradise Lost: “Thou hast said much here of Paradise lost, but what hast thou to say of Paradise found?” Milton supposedly “sat some time in a muse” and, months later, presented him with the manuscript of Paradise Regained. Critics appreciate this anecdote in part because it reinforces a neat separation between the longer epic’s emphasis on the Fall and the shorter epic’s concern with redemption. One reason Milton might have sat musing before answering Ellwood, however, may have been puzzlement at his friend’s failure to acknowledge how prominent human regeneration already is in Paradise Lost. Even though Adam and Eve do in fact lose Paradise, in Book 10 they find renewed hope through an active and creative interpretation of their judgment, and this interpretive method mirrors that of the Son in Book 3. Like their saviour, the human couple cooperate with God in order to interpret their judgment and situation in light of grace. In so doing, they regain some measure of the prelapsarian dominion that Milton links to republican virtue throughout his prose.

The Son’s judgment of humankind in Book 10 evokes once more his role as a mediator between the Law and the Gospel. The Father sends him with the explicit purpose of mediating his commands: “Easy it might be seen that I intend / Mercy colleague with justice, sending thee / Man’s friend his mediator” (10.58-60). During the judgment, the Son mediates by introducing them to the Gospel through a citation of Genesis 3:15:

Between thee and the woman I will put
Enmity, and between thine and her seed;

The anecdote is repeated in John Carey’s introduction to Paradise Regained in the Complete Shorter Poems (417).

E. M. W. Tillyard gives due weight to Adam and Eve’s regeneration in his Studies in Milton (3-14, 39-40). He reads Adam and Eve’s reconciliation as the “crisis” that repairs the Fall in Book 9.
Her seed shall bruise thy head, thou bruise his heel.
So spake this oracle, then verified
When Jesus son of Mary second Eve
Saw Satan fall like lightning down from Heaven […] (10.179-84)

The scriptural source of these words in Gen. 3:15 was known to Christian theologians as the protoevangelium, or “first Gospel,” because it was thought to contain the first prefiguration of Christ in Genesis. Milton’s rendition emphasizes its typological meaning with a proleptic account of Mary and Jesus. As a result, in this passage the Son is quite literally the mediator of the Old and New Testaments because he speaks about the Gospel using the very text of the Old Testament curse.

While those who have the benefit of historical hindsight are expected to know that the crushing of the Serpent’s head prefigures Jesus’s victory over Satan, this point is not obvious to Adam and Eve. Milton acknowledges with some unease that the protoevangelium is obscure to the human couple: “God at last / To Satan first in sin his doom applied / Though in mysterious terms, judged as then best” (10.171-3). The Son’s terms are not only “mysterious” but deliberately so: they were “judged as then best.” What is the purpose of this mystery? The answer lies in Book 3. The Father couches his grace in Book 3 in wrathful language so as to invite the Son to find grace through his own effort, thus allowing him to participate in God’s sovereignty. Similarly, the mysterious terms of the protoevangelium have a pedagogical purpose: they teach Adam and Eve to interpret their judgment actively and, through this interpretive effort, to cooperate with God in bringing about their own regeneration.62

In their ensuing dialogue, Adam and Eve eventually rise to the challenge of the protoevangelium by re-enacting the Son’s interpretive practice in Book 3. Swayed by Eve’s persistent tears, Adam eventually leaves off shifting the blame to her and comes to realize that the crushing of the Serpent’s head signifies the defeat “of our grand foe / Satan, who in the serpent hath contrived / Against us this deceit” (10.1033-5). He achieves this insight by focusing

63 For Eve’s persistent tears as the first step to regeneration and the correct interpretation of the punishment, see Tillyard (39-42). See also Christopher Bond’s Spenser, Milton, and the Redemption of the Epic Hero (109) and Mandy Green’s Milton’s Ovidian Eve for more recent assessments of Eve’s role in the redemption.
on the Son’s gracious appearance: “Remember with what mild / And gracious temper he both
heard and judged / Without wrath or reviling” (10.1047-9). By calling the Son gracious, Adam
does not simply state the obvious, because his initial despair demonstrates that it is entirely
possible to interpret the judgment without any sense of the Son’s grace. In order to believe that
the Son is gracious, therefore, Adam must make a free interpretive decision to prioritize grace
over divine anger. In the same way that the Son’s interpretations of the Father in Book 3 required
both the Son’s imaginative constructions of grace and the text of the Father’s decree, Adam and
Eve’s interpretation of the curse in Book 10 requires both the Son’s gentle behaviour towards
them and the effort of their human will. 64

The prayer of Adam and Eve underscores their resemblance to the Son even further by
foregrounding their doubts. Before praying, Adam and Eve attempt to predict God’s response:

Undoubtedly he will relent and turn
From his displeasure; in whose look serene,
When angry most he seemed and most severe,
What else but favour, grace, and mercy shone? (10.1093-6)

“Undoubtedly he will relent” seems at first to suggest that Adam really has no doubts in God’s
mercy, but the uncertainty of his ensuing rhetorical question undercuts this confidence. Since
Adam’s tone balances assertion and uncertainty, the illocutionary force of “undoubtedly” is to
suggest precisely that Adam and Eve do have doubts, but are freely choosing to ignore them and
to believe in divine mercy anyway. Their statement is rhetorically very similar, therefore, to the
Son’s appeals to the Father in Book 3: “that be from thee far, / That far be from thee, Father, who
art judge / Of all things made, and judgest only right” (3.153-155). Adam and Eve’s prayer, like
the Son’s words in Book 3, are a challenge to the Father—they tell the Father that he must accept
their prayer to be consistent in his “grace” and “mercy”—but they frame this challenge as a
submissive confession of faith in God. 65

64 Cf. Christopher’s Milton and the Science and Saints (166-9). Christopher reads Adam’s conversion as a sudden
flash of insight modelled on Luther’s experience while reading Romans 1:17. I am suggesting instead that Adam and
Eve’s conversion is Arminian in the sense that they accept grace voluntarily by cooperating with God.

65 The similarity between the Son and the human couple is stronger if we read the Son’s offer of self-sacrifice in
Book 3 as including a fear of death, because the Son does not know with certainty that he will be resurrected. Quint
provides an example of this argument (104-105).
Although Adam and Eve resemble the Son’s interpretive practice, the crucial difference is that they must contend with the formidable barrier of sin. In terms of the Pauline metaphor for interpretation in 1 Cor. 13:12, the Son sees God face to face, whereas Adam and Eve see him through a glass darkly. While the Son understands his Father with ease, the meandering dialogue of Adam and Eve throughout Book 10 demonstrates that their fallen intellect cannot grasp God so easily. Even when they strike upon the beginnings of the correct reading of the protoevangelium, it is still “mysterious” to them until Michael explains it. In the meantime, they must pray without hard evidence of divine mercy—a difficult act of faith that John Tanner usefully compares to the Kierkegaardian leap into absurdity (128). Adam and Eve’s difficulties demonstrate that even though the Son sets the pattern for their regeneration, they still cannot hope to rival the affinity and intimacy that exists between the Father and the Son.

Despite these difficulties, however, Milton suggests in an Arminian key that grace rehabilitates the free will of Adam and Eve. Though they are not aware of it, they have been cooperating with prevenient grace in the dialogue leading up to the prayer:

Thus they in lowliest plight repentant stood
Praying, for from the mercy-seat above
Prevenient grace descending had removed
The stony from their hearts […]. (11.1-4)

The mention of “prevenient grace” emphasizes the majesty and sovereignty of God, but it does not do so at the expense of Adam and Eve’s agency, because in Milton’s Arminian theology, prevenient grace is resistible and therefore compatible with human freedom. Milton’s implication is that Adam and Eve willingly cooperate with grace when they forgive each other and when they choose to interpret the Son as gracious rather than wrathful. As a result, the interpretation of the protoevangelium is the first good work that fallen human beings achieve in cooperation with God. By making them capable of this good work, grace returns to Adam and

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66 Cf. MacCallum (184-5) and Dennis Danielson (90).
68 See Myers’s “Prevenient Grace” for a similar reading of the prayer as an Arminian work of cooperation between grace and human agency (29-31).
Eve some of their prelapsarian agency. Since this Arminian regeneration depends on the Gospel, it is entirely appropriate that the first work performed by regenerated human beings is an interpretation of the protoevangelium. Even in its earliest typological formulation, the Gospel regenerates the human will from its indebtedness to sin.

This Arminian reading of Adam and Eve’s prayer suggests that sin is not an insuperable barrier to human virtue in Paradise Lost. By imagining a merciful God when they have every reason to expect a wrathful judge, Adam and Eve discover the Gospel within Genesis, and in so doing they resemble the Son when he finds grace within the Law in Book 3. This resemblance does not suggest that Adam and Eve are mediators—the Son’s role is unique in that regard—but it does mean that, as the beneficiaries of the Son’s mediation, they may cooperate with God in the pursuit of good works.  

As a result, Adam and Eve’s prayer looks in two directions at once. Looking back at Book 3, the prayer shows that the Son’s exemplary participation in divine sovereignty was not an isolated event but rather a paradigm for other creatures. By assuming his role as head of the angels and of the human church, the Son ensures that angels and human beings may participate in divine sovereignty as the Son does, even though his intimacy with the Father is much closer than theirs. At the same time, Adam and Eve’s prayer looks forward to the ending of Paradise Lost. It shows that no matter how isolated they might feel when they leave Eden, sin does not prevent good works, but only makes them more difficult. They still have the freedom and indeed the duty to regain their native dominion by cooperating with God in pursuit of virtue.

Since Milton believed that the virtu of a republican citizen is the closest approximation to the native dominion that was Adam and Eve’s birthright, they must effectively become republicans in order to regain paradise, and their prayer is accordingly the first republican action in history. Their active interpretation of the protoevangelium is precisely the interpretive attitude that Milton urged on the sad friends of truth in Areopagitica, on the interpreters of charity in The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce, on the mature and strong-minded men of Christian

69 The good angels are beneficiaries too. See Stevie Davies’s argument that Abdiel is a “mediating figure” whose activity parallels that of the Son (161-2).

70 See my discussion of The Tenure earlier in this chapter. Milton insists that republicanism is the best system of government given that “all men naturally were borne free, being the image and resemblance of God himself” (8).
**Doctrine**, and on the whole English nation in *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* and *A Defense of the English People*. For all their differences, these texts idealize those who imitate the Son and cooperate with God in the pursuit of good works, especially in the works of interpretation and republican virtue. Milton consistently argues that virtue is neither a form of antinomian godliness that bypasses free will entirely nor a purely human assertion of the will, but rather a cooperation between God and his creatures aimed at the common good. At every turn, Milton’s republicanism strives to reconcile creaturely agency with the sovereignty of God.

However, by joining grace to republican ideology in this way, Milton also returns to the elitism that was implicit in his prose tracts. Milton makes the regeneration of Adam and Eve depend upon the kind of interpretive work that he once idealized in *Aeropagitica* and *Christian Doctrine*, thus suggesting that the persons best suited to his vision of cooperative grace are academically-minded humanists like himself. 71 This ideal of republican citizenship excludes those who do not have the necessary training, leisure time, and social capital to interpret texts in this rigorous way. Indeed, Milton draws attention to this exclusionary element by foregrounding the interpretive difficulty of scripture in Books 11 and 12, where he also discusses the repeated tendency for nations to fall away from virtue. It is in these books that Milton repeats the curse of Ham in order to insist, as Nyquist has demonstrated, that some nations deserve to be enslaved: “no wrong, / But justice, and some fatal curse annexed / Deprives them of their outward liberty” (12.98-100; Nyquist 139). This statement is compatible with Milton’s representation of Adam and Eve because he always imagined cooperative grace as enabling for intellectually-minded individuals such as himself, but not for everyone. Grace is central to this political vision because this concept captures, as we have seen, a series of paradoxes that balance agency and submission, as well as inclusion and exclusion. Like Spenser and Shakespeare before him, Milton incorporates both inclusive and exclusive aspects of grace into his vision, though he inflects these ideas with his own idiosyncratic mixture of theology and republican politics. As we shall see in the next chapter, Milton continued to support this approach to grace well into his later life in poems such as *Paradise Regained*.

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71 See my discussion above regarding the “academic circles” that Milton imagines as the ideal audience for his *Christian Doctrine*. 
Chapter 4
“A Nation of Prophets”: Christian Prophecy and Political Agency in
Paradise Regained

When Satan boasts about his oracles in Paradise Regained, Jesus rebukes him: “henceforth oracles are ceased” (1.456). As Jesus goes on to explain, the oracles have ceased because God has replaced them with the Holy Spirit, which is now an “inward oracle / To all truth requisite for men to know” (1.462-4). However, Jesus does not clarify the boundary between human effort and divine power in this new dispensation. Although he soundly defeats Satan in each of the temptations, literary critics continue to debate about the extent to which Jesus knows his future or even his own role as the Son of God. In this chapter, I suggest that Milton obscures the source of Jesus’s authority in order to represent prophecy as the result of cooperation between divine power and human skill. Building on his view of cooperative grace, Milton suggests that prophetic utterance requires both divine inspiration and rhetorical training. This conception of prophecy is, in turn, central to Milton’s republican hopes for the English nation.

Most critics now agree that Paradise Regained as a whole promotes the republican politics and religious radicalism that Milton defended throughout his life, but there continues to be significant critical disagreement about the political implications of Milton’s depiction of Jesus. In particular, critics tend to argue that the poem privileges either secular humanism or an antinomian theology centred on grace. For example, Stanley Fish and Feisal Mohamed have argued that Jesus is an antinomian because he obeys the inward inspiration of the “Spirit” at the

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1 For the view that Jesus learns about himself and his mission gradually, see Arnold Stein’s Heroic Knowledge (14-7) and Barabara Lewalski’s Milton’s Brief Epic (135). For the alternative view that Jesus hides his knowledge, see John T. Shawcross’s Worthy T’Have not Remain’d so Long Unsung (39).

2 The earliest challenges to the quietest reading of Paradise Regained were Joad S. Bennett’s Reviving Liberty (161-202) and Laura Lunger Knoppers’s Historicizing Milton (123-41). Other republican readings of Paradise Regained include David Norbrook’s “Republican Occasions in Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes”; John Coffey’s “Pacifist, Quietist, or Patient Militant? John Milton and the Restoration”; and Thomas Corss’s “With Unaltered Brow”: Milton and the Son of God.”

3 For Milton’s engagement with radical religious movements—including Quakerism, antinomianism, and related groups—see David Loewenstein, Representing Revolution (244-55). For a more recent revision of Milton’s supposed connection to the Quakers, and the implications of this link for poetic style in Paradise Regained, see Jeffrey Shoulson’s “Milton and Enthusiasm” (242-53).
expense of rational dialogue. On the other hand, critics such as Victoria Kahn have argued that Jesus treats scripture ironically, thus undercutting all forms of political theology and “religious enthusiasm.” Ultimately, this debate turns on how critics interpret the “inward Oracle” during the temptations. If Jesus derives his insights directly from supernatural illumination, he may represent an antinomian theology that stresses grace and prophetic inspiration above the human will. If on the other hand Jesus relies primarily on irony and rhetoric, he is a secular humanist who anticipates secularist ideas in later centuries.

I challenge this critical binary by demonstrating that Milton sought a middle way between antinomianism and secular humanism. In common with other radicals in this period, he defines prophecy in *The Christian Doctrine* as a form of public preaching about the best way to apply scripture to a particular situation. Based on 1 Cor. 12-14, he argues that grace inspires all Christians to become prophets by interpreting scripture and preaching openly about its meaning. However, Milton avoids the radical and antinomian version of this argument by insisting that prophecy requires human skill as well as grace. Time and time again in his prose, Milton insists that prophetic utterances are subject to debate and critique because they rely, at least in part, on rhetorical invention. For example, he defends his right to publish heretical opinions in *Christian Doctrine* by claiming that both he and his opponents rely on “nothing more than human powers, assisted by that spiritual illumination which is common to all” (CPW 1:104). In other words, the Holy Spirit does not dictate the truth immediately; rather, it “assist[s]” “human powers” of interpretation so that believers may arrive at the truth discursively and semi-independently through the kind of public sphere that Milton once idealized in *Areopagitica*. Needless to say,

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4 See Stanley Fish’s “Inaction and Silence” (41-3) as well as his renewed insistence on Milton’s antinomianism in *Versions of Antihumanism* (90). In “Milton, Sir Henry Vane, and the Brief but Significant Life of Godly Republicanism,” Feisal Mohamed argues that the antinomian Henry Vane influenced Milton’s political views. Cf. Norman Burns, “‘Then Stood Up Phineas’: Milton’s Antinomianism, and Samson’s.”

5 See Victoria Kahn, “Job’s Complaint” for the view that both the Book of Job and *Paradise Regained* critique religious enthusiasm as well as appeals to religious authority (649-50).

6 William Kerrigan anticipates this point when he argues that, according to Milton, “Prophecy was at once the record of the Spirit and the autobiography of His free instrument” (32). In other words, the Spirit is divine and the instrument is merely human, but prophecy captures both. See Gordon Teskey’s *Delirious Milton* for a parallel view on the tension in Milton’s work between human and divine creativity.
Milton’s approach to prophecy privileges highly educated humanists like himself who had the necessary rhetorical training to debate scripture.

In *Paradise Regained*, Jesus’s prophetic activity reflects Milton’s views in the *Christian Doctrine*. Jesus’s prophetic authority is deliberately ambiguous in order to illustrate that prophecy is a co-operation between divine inspiration and human invention. Although Jesus has the Spirit on his side, he also presents his arguments through a series of debates with Satan. In each temptation, he and Satan provide contrasting interpretations of Old Testament prophecies of redemption and messianic salvation. These interpretive contests demonstrate in practice that Christian prophecy requires rhetorical skill as well as grace. In keeping with the *Christian Doctrine* and *Areopagitica*, the Spirit does not dictate the truth directly to Jesus but rather enables him, by strengthening his intellectual faculties, to engage Satan rhetorically. Jesus’s authority is ambiguous, therefore, because it is impossible to untangle the human from the divine in his interpretations of scripture. In fact, it is Satan who attempts to separate grace from human skill in order to shed some light on Jesus’s identity: his temptations are all designed to present Jesus’s teaching as either a direct revelation from God, or alternatively as a private opinion with no religious authority. Jesus, however, refuses any such separation. His prophetic authority remains throughout the poem a mixture of revelation and rhetoric, as stipulated in the Pauline understanding of prophecy as a cooperation with grace. Ultimately, the deliberate ambiguity around Jesus’s identity as a prophet sets him up as a model for the kind of republican nation that Milton once envisioned in *Areopagitica*.

The broader aim of this chapter is to demonstrate that Milton continued, even in his late career, to support a vision of grace that presents members of his own class as the vanguard of a religious and political reformation. I have argued that Shakespeare, Spenser, and Milton sometimes use the apparently universalist language of Paul’s epistles in a way that allows highly educated and socially privileged men to become the vehicles of grace in the political sphere. These writers suggest, sometimes openly and at other times cryptically, that believers must cooperate with grace. The individuals best suited to do so are the imperial magistrates of Book V of *The Faerie Queene*, the courtly princes of the *The Tempest*, and Milton’s imagined community of Protestant republicans modelled after the Son’s interpretive practice in *Paradise Lost*. Jesus’s prophetic role in *Paradise Regained* reveals that Milton continues to see grace as a source of agency and national reform well into his late career. In order to do so, however, he theorizes an
approach to cooperative grace that sidesteps the modern critical binary between radical Protestantism and secular humanism.

4.1 Milton, Pauline Prophecy, and National Edification

Milton’s approach to prophecy developed as a result of his conviction that all Christians should interpret scripture critically and debate its meaning publicly. In the introduction to his *Christian Doctrine*, he claims to have written the tract as a response to God’s demands for diligent interpretation: “the offers of God were all directed, not to an indolent credulity, but to constant diligence, and to an unwearied search after truth” (*CPW* 6:120). Later in the text, Milton argues that this kind of diligent reading and preaching amounts to a form of prophecy:

> [t]he term *prophet* is applied not only to a man able to foretell the future but also to anyone endowed with exceptional piety and wisdom for the purposes of teaching...Thus under the gospel the simple gift of teaching, especially of public teaching, is called prophecy: I Cor. xiv. 1: *particularly that you may prophesy*, and xiv.3: *he who prophesies speaks to men for their edification...* and so on, until the end of the chapter. I Cor. iii. 8, etc.: *he who plants and he who waters are one: but each man will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God’s assistants...* It is not the Universities, then, but God who has given us pastors and teachers: that same God who gave us apostles and prophets. (*CPW* 6:572)

Thus prophecy is a “gift” from God. However, since it is more specifically “the gift of teaching,” it also requires pedagogical skill in addition to grace. The definition is based upon two passages from Paul’s letters. The first is 1 Cor. 14:1, which the King James version translates as an injunction to “desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy,” and the second is 1 Cor. 3:8-9: “every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. For we are labourers together with God.” By pairing these passages, Milton suggests that prophecy is both a divine gift and a form of labouring together with God. He thus situates prophecy in the broader tradition of thinking about co-operative grace. This view of prophecy is central to Milton’s project in the *Christian Doctrine*; if prophecy is a divine gift, then this gift is available to a layman like Milton as much as the ordained “pastors and teachers” of “the Universities.” The
gifted nature of prophecy frees Milton and similar laymen to discuss theology openly. However, since prophecy is also the gift of “public teaching,” the opinions of learned men like Milton have more weight than that of laymen who lack the necessary learning to be good spiritual pedagogues. There is thus a precarious balance in Milton’s definition between the idea of prophecy as a gift and the view of prophecy as intellectual work. This balance works to Milton’s advantage by giving him, and other highly educated lay intellectuals like him, the authority to become public teachers.

By defining prophecy in this way, Milton intervenes in a contemporary debate about the meaning of Christian prophecy in 1 Corinthians 12-14. Paul argues that the Holy Spirit has inspired new spiritual gifts among Christians: “Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit” (1 Cor. 12: 4). He includes prophecy among these gifts: “And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers” (1. Cor. 12: 28). Finally, Paul explains that Christian prophecy is a form of edification: “But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort” (1 Cor. 14: 3). In this Pauline context, “edification” means “to build up” like a building, thus echoing Paul’s earlier injunction in 1 Cor. 3 to labour together with God by building a spiritual temple upon the foundation of grace. While Milton joins these passages in a way that privileges lay intellectuals like himself, his view was in fact a minority position in the Reformed church. The church authorities typically argued that only the clergy had the right to edify the church. Those who held the dissenting opinion, on the other hand, usually argued that anyone moved by the Spirit could become a prophet, regardless of their learning or authorization by recognized ecclesiastical authorities.

The Reformed reception of Pauline prophecy was part of a broader effort to distinguish orthodox Protestantism from radical antinomianism. The term “antinomian” derives from *antinomos*, which means “against law.” All Protestants were in a sense “against law” insofar as they

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7 Paul’s Greek word for “edification” is οἰκοδομή (oikodomē), a word that is etymologically related to *oikos*, or “household.” John Coolidge explains that Paul’s usage of “edification” has its roots in the Jewish ideal of the Temple of Solomon as a fixed “house of God” that replaced the nomadic & metaphorical “house” of a patriarch’s family (27-9). According to Coolidge, Paul innovates on this Jewish concept by describing the church in terms of the body of Jesus, which is universally available (34-5). Edification is part of Paul’s transformation of the “house of God” from the physical Temple to a new sense of the church as “a community constituted, not by its visible institutions or its locality…but by a mysterious life permeating it” (35). For Milton’s usage of Paul’s architectural imagery, see Milton’s reading of 1 Cor. 3 in *Areopagitica*, which I engage below.
opposed Catholicism, which they presented as legalistic and hypocritical. In his *Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans*, for example, Luther explains that “a law is fulfilled by works, even though there is no heart in the doing of them. But God judges according to what is in the depths of the heart” (76). For Luther, therefore, the Reformation is among other things a corrective to legalism and works-righteousness, which exclude grace and its operation on the heart. In addition to this general understanding of law, however, the term “antinomian” also carried a more specific and derogatory meaning: it was a term of disparagement for radicals who believed that Christian liberty was totally incompatible with religious discipline. This negative, popular antinomianism emerged through figures such as Thomas Müntzer and John Agricola, whom Luther accused of abusing the proper definition of Christian liberty. These antinomians posed a danger to orthodox Protestantism because they exaggerated to the point of scandal the Pauline distinction between law and grace, upon which the Reformation built its own rhetorical appeals. Calvin accordingly attacks popular antinomianism in his *Institutes* when he bemoans “certain ignorant persons” who go as far as to “rashly cast out the whole of Moses, and bid farewell to the two Tables of the Law” (II.vii.13). Orthodox Protestantism sharply distinguished itself from these kinds of excesses to the extent that “antinomian” became a byword for impiety. The Pauline understanding of prophecy was central to these debates because the antinomians often described themselves as prophets by drawing upon 1 Corinthians.

Calvin and his followers often sought to control any subversive potential in Pauline prophecy by arguing that prophecy was no longer common in the church. In his explanation of 1 Corinthians, Calvin acknowledges that ordinary Christian “prophets” had the power to preach publicly in the early church:

> He passeth directly from the first degree to Prophets: by which name (in my judgement) he unders tand eth not those which had the gyft of prophesying or

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8 Thomas Müntzer was one of the leaders of the German Peasants’ War in 1525, and John Agricola was the leader of the German Anabaptists. Both used some elements of Luther’s early teachings to support their claims, and Luther sharply rebuked them as extreme antinomians. See Harry Loewen’s *Luther and the Radicals* for Luther’s response to Müntzer and the Peasants’ Rebellion (47-66). For Luther and Agricola, see Loewen (127-30).

9 Coolidge suggests that edification was the key difference between Puritan and conformist forms of English Christianity (49-50). See also Gregory Kneidel’s “Samuel Daniel and Edification” (59-63).
foreshewing what should come to passe many yeres afterward: but those which were endued with a notable grace, not only in interpreting, but also in prudent applying the Scripture to the present use. Why I thus think, this is the cause, namely, bycause he preferreth Prophesie before all other gyftes, because it edifieth more… Prophets are so called, which cunningly and aptly applying predictions, threatnnings, promises, and the whole doctrine of the Scriptures, to the present use of the Church, doo reveale the will of God. (S11124, fol.150v)

Thus the prophecy that Paul describes in 1 Corinthians is not the Old Testament power to foretell the future, which was restricted to a few chosen individuals, but rather a widely disseminated capacity in the early church to interpret scripture and preach about its meaning in an edifying way. However, in order to avoid any subversive implications from his argument, Calvin adds that it is uncommon in the modern church for Christians to have access to this kind of prophecy (S11124, fol. 151r). He is especially sceptical of contemporaries who claimed direct prophetic inspiration: “they are fanaticall heads, and are led with an ill spirit, which hauing no gift rush into the Church: euen as many doo boast of the impulsion of the spirit, and doo glory of the secret calling of God, whereas neuertheles they are unlearned and rude.” (S11124, fol 150r). This passage attacks the antinomians and other radicals who claimed the authority to preach based on the gifts of the Spirit. As a result of Calvin’s statements, English Calvinists typically argued that only learned ministers may preach about the meaning of scripture and in so doing edify the Protestant parish.10

The antinomian perspective, on the other hand, was that the Spirit could inspire anybody to become a leader and a preacher in the church. This perspective became increasingly influential during the English Civil Wars, when the leaders of the Ranters and the Fifth Monarchists claimed direct prophetic power as a gift from God.11 Members from a variety of marginalized social groups, such as women and working class laymen, claimed to hold greater authority than

10 See Patrick Collinson’s Religion of Protestants for an account of Jacobean England’s gradual evolution away from Puritan ideas about prophecy and towards a stronger insistence on the professional clergy (134-5). This shift in tenor went on to influence the Presbyterian party during and between the English Civil Wars.

11 For an overview of radical antinomianism in this period, see Tim Cooper’s Fear and Polemic in Seventeenth-Century England.
the clergy because of the Spirit. For example, the self-declared prophet Mary Cary uses 1 Cor. 14 to support her authority to preach:

Be wise, and be sure you do not stop the mouths of the Prophets of Iesus Christ, commanding them to Preach no more in his name. Let it be far from you to do so, for if you should do so, yet they cannot but speak the things they have seen and heard; that vision of Christ they have seen, and that voice of the Spirit they have heard, that they must speak…. And what this Prophesying is, the Apostle shews in the 1 Cor. 14.3. That is speaking to edification, exhortation, and consolation. And he makes no distinction in the exercise of this gift of the Spirit, between an Officer of the Church and another; for he makes it to appear that any Member of the Church may exercise this gift [...]. (4)

Cary wields 1 Corinthians as a tool against the church establishment by insisting on the direct inspiration of the Spirit.\(^\text{12}\) She envisions prophecy as the “voice of the Spirit,” which seizes control of the individual and speaks through her with divine authority. Because the human will and imagination are completely passive in this process, the Spirit need not speak through an ordained minister or a particularly learned individual. On the contrary, Cary insists that the Spirit may select anyone, including women and working-class laymen, to lead the community. This kind of inspiration can provide a sense of agency to the inspired prophet, but it also requires the utter submission of human reason and imagination to the Spirit. Cary captures this passivity through her double negatives—“they cannot but speak”—which suggest that the prophets do not really do anything as much as allow God to work through them. Nevertheless, Cary’s message was subversive because she links this prophetic office to the concept of edification in 1 Cor. 14:3, thus giving antinomian “prophets” the authority to “build up” the church despite the objections of the ordained clergy.\(^\text{13}\) In contrast with Calvin and the Presbyterian authorities,

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\(^{12}\) Cary’s tract circulated in 1647, so the religious establishment she had in mind was likely Presbyterian. The Westminster Catechism formalized this English Presbyterian theology in the same year.

\(^{13}\) Although I am focusing on antinomianism because this is the approach often linked with Milton, prophecy was not the sole purview of the antinomians. See, for example, Elizabeth Clarke’s “Women’s Theological Writing, 1640-60” for an account of royalist prophets such as Mary Pope (78-81).
therefore, antinomians such as Cary envisioned prophecy as a form of divine inspiration that sets inspired individuals above all other forms of ecclesiastical discipline.¹⁴

Even as orthodox Protestantism and antinomianism provided these diametrically opposed approaches to prophecy, a minority of humanist Protestants theorized an alternative path that used Pauline prophecy as a basis for rational and humanist debate. One such group was the Socinian movement. While the Socinians were primarily infamous for denying the Trinity, they also believed that the church should be a space for intellectual freedom, and this assumption led them to adopt controversial views about prophecy.¹⁵ In their preface to the 1665 edition of the *Racovian Catechism*, Andrew Wissowatius and Joachim Stegman the Younger complain that Protestant efforts to censor Socinian writing amounts to a censorship of prophecy itself:

> And who are you, base mortals, who strive to smother and extinguish the fire of the Holy Spirit in those in whom God has thought fit to kindle it? Who are you that despise or envy in others the gift of Prophecy, which surpasses almost all other divine gifts? Why do you not rather imitate Moses, that great Mediator of the Old Covenant, than whom no man was more meek; and say with him (Numb. xi. 29) “Would God, that all the Lord’s people were prophets?” Who are you that permit not men to prove either your own opinions or the opinions of others, that what is good might be retained, and what is bad rejected;—but would have your sentiments adopted without examination or inquiry, and worshipped with servile submission, and the sentiment of others rejected and condemned without trial?

(xcvi-xcvii)

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¹⁴ In *The English Radical Imagination*, Nicholas McDowell demonstrates that antinomians, Quakers, Fifth Monarchists, Ranters, and other radical groups in the period often drew their membership from diverse strata of society (7). Some radicals came from educated backgrounds, but often-times “enthusiasm and antinomianism… offered immense spiritual power to those who felt themselves to be in a powerless social position” (17). Understood in this way, antinomian prophecy is more socially permeable than Milton’s approach, which privileges learned theological debate. As McDowell goes on to argue, Milton’s approach to learning would have found little purchase with Levellers such as Richard Overton, who “divided society into literate elite and illiterate multitude with the dehumanization, exploitation, and, eventually, the damnation of the common people” (184). See also McDowell’s reading of the class implications in prophetic enthusiasm (12-21).

¹⁵ Cf. Mortimer’s description of the close relationship between Socinianism and Italian humanism (35-6).
According to this perspective, the universal gift of prophecy enables all Christians to think critically about scripture and debate its meaning publicly. Unlike Calvin and similar theologians, Wissowatius and Stegman suggest that prophecy belongs to both clergymen and lay persons, as Moses envisioned in Num. 11:29. At the same time, they do not accept the antinomian view of prophecy as an infallible inspiration. Rather, Wissowatius and Stegman argue that prophecy involves persuasion and rational deliberation, so that “what is good might be retained, and what is bad rejected.” In other words, they imagine Christian prophecy as a process that resembles the humanist ideal of interpretation as an ongoing debate.

In order to distinguish their view of prophecy even further from the inspiration claimed by antinomian groups, Wissowatius and Stegman insist that human interpretations are fallible despite the aid of the Spirit. They contrast modern prophecy with the powers of the Apostles:

> there exists at present such a gift of prophecy, whereby the most hidden meanings of the sacred Scriptures may be penetrated, and the mind of the Holy Spirit, by whose authority they were written, be everywhere happily and correctly discerned: which gift, although it be very important, is nevertheless far inferior in dignity and excellence to the gift of prophecy by which the times of the apostles were distinguished. For to the latter very little of human talent and exertion was added; but the former requires a great deal. They who are endowed with the one cannot mistake, in what they declare in the name of God, those who possess the other are never exempt from the danger of erring. The reason is, that the persons who possess the latter [i.e. the Apostles] are not themselves the principal cause of the things they utter, but the Holy Spirit, which dictates to them the matter, and sometimes even the very words; so that they are nothing but the instruments of the Holy Spirit, and serve for its mouth and tongue: whilst those who possess the former [i.e. ordinary Christians] are the first cause of their declarations, the Holy Spirit being only the second and assisting cause. (xcviii-xcviv; my parentheses)

Wissowatius and Stegman subdivide Christian prophecy into Apostolic and modern varieties. Apostolic prophecy is more authoritative because the Holy Spirit “dictates” directly to the Apostles, and the words immediately become binding for all Christians. However, the Spirit does not dictate modern prophecy in the same way. For modern Christians, human reason is “the first
cause of their declarations, the Holy Spirit being only the second and assisting cause.” Thus instead of dictating prophecy directly, the Holy Spirit “assist[s]” Christians. The end result is a product of the co-operation between grace and human intellectual faculties.

This approach to prophecy supports the Socinians’ humanist vision of the church. The human contribution to Christian prophecy means that no individual prophet possesses infallible authority from God. At the same time, the divine component in this process means that the church cannot censor theological debate without potentially censoring the Spirit as well. As a result, Wissowatius and Stegman articulate a middle way between the antinomians who claimed direct and infallible inspiration from God, and the established church authorities, who dismissed direct prophecy entirely so as to monopolize preaching for the clergy. Socinianism influenced a wide spectrum of thinkers, including Milton and a variety of Arminian theologians on the continent. As Sarah Mortimer has shown, Socinian and Arminian theologians found common ground in the Netherlands in order to make common cause against the predominant Calvinist authorities. Dutch religious groups such as the Rijnsberger drew upon Socinian conceptions of prophecy in order to justify public preaching by laymen. Given this theological cross-pollination on the continent, it is not surprising that Milton’s Christian Doctrine expresses ideas that resemble Socinian opinions. Although Milton was not himself a Socinian, he was familiar with the Racovian Catechism from his time as a censor in Cromwell’s government. Like the Arminians on the continent, Milton qualified or outright rejected a number of Socinian opinions, and his ideas about prophecy may have been a case of parallel development rather than direct influence. Nevertheless, his views on prophecy resemble Wissowatius’s and Stegman’s argument that prophecy is a co-operation between God and human beings. Milton may have

16 See Mortimer (25-36).
17 See Andrew Fix’s Prophecy and Reason for an account of how the Rijnsberger group synthesized Arminian and Socinian influences in order to produce an idiosyncratic understanding of prophecy (163-9). Fix also argues that Dutch theologians such as Laurens Klinkhamer interpreted 1 Cor. 12-14 in a way that joined the gifts of the Spirit to secular reason (173-9).
19 For example, Milton diverges from the Socinians by describing the Holy Spirit as divine (CPW 6:282). According to Nigel Smith, Milton also diverges from the Socinians by characterizing Jesus as the “living Oracle” in Paradise Regained (“Anti-Trinitarian Heresy” 130).
arrived at these conclusions because he, like the Socinians, preferred to imagine the church as a space for toleration and intellectual debate.\textsuperscript{20}

In order to justify his most contentious opinions in the\textit{ Christian Doctrine}, Milton argues that all human interpretations of scripture are subject to public critique. For example, he argues that dogmas such as the Trinity are not scriptural (\textit{CPW} 6:203). All Christians, he argues, have the right to challenge such concepts:

\begin{quote}
If indeed those with whom I have to contend were able to produce direct attestation from heaven to the truth of the doctrine which they espouse, it would be nothing less than impiety to venture to raise, I do not say a clamour, but so much as a murmur against it. But inasmuch as they can lay claim to nothing more than human powers, assisted by that spiritual illumination which is common to all, it is not unreasonable that they should on their part allow the privileges of diligent research and free discussion to another inquirer, who is seeking truth through the same means and in the same way. (\textit{CPW} 6:204)
\end{quote}

Like Wissowatius and Stegman, Milton subdivides divine inspiration into an authoritative variety, the “direct attestation from heaven,” and a less authoritative “spiritual illumination which is common to all.” The early Apostles had access to direct inspiration from above, but this prophetic power is no longer available to most Christians, including Milton and his opponents. Instead, modern Christians have access to the “spiritual illumination” that “assist[s]” their “human powers” of interpretation. Interpretation is thus a co-operation between the human mind, which begins the inquiry, and divine illumination, which assists the mind and makes it equal to the task of interpreting scripture.\textsuperscript{21}

Like the Socinians, Milton deploys this understanding of prophecy and interpretation to defend a humanist vision of the church. The fallibility of “human powers” of interpretation

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\textsuperscript{20} McDowell anticipates this point when he suggests that Milton was attracted to the Socinians primarily because they shared his elite, humanist ideals about prophecy and church discipline, as opposed to the enthusiastic forms of prophecy that were also available to the lower classes (190).

\textsuperscript{21} For a parallel reading of Milton’s co-operative theory of interpretation, see Patricia Taylor, “The Son as Collaborator in \textit{Paradise Regained}.” Taylor argues that “By emphasizing the human element [in scriptural interpretation], Milton seems to move toward a collaborative view of the composition of scripture” (184).
\end{flushleft}
means that any received opinion, including a hallowed dogma such as the Trinity, is subject to revision by others. At the same time, the divine assistance received by every Christian means that no theological opinion may be censored without offending God and the inspiration that he bestows on all good Christians. As a result, every interpretation must be heard for the sake of “research and free discussion,” but no single opinion should be accepted unquestioningly as the direct manifestation of the Spirit. To put the matter another way, Milton believes that God inspires all Christians enough to make them capable of preaching publicly, but not so much that that any given “prophet” may dictate dogma. Like his Socinian contemporaries, therefore, Milton understands divine inspiration in a way that promotes continuous debate rather than doctrinal conformity or antinomian enthusiasm.22

Milton buttresses this approach to interpretation by arguing that Jesus and the Holy Spirit regenerate the human intellect. He argues that the word “Spirit” in scripture can mean “that impulse or voice of God by which the prophets were inspired” (CPW 6:282), but it also means “that light of truth, whether ordinary or extraordinary, wherewith God enlightens and leads his people” (CPW 6:283). Thus even though the Holy Spirit dictated the truth directly to scriptural prophets through “extraordinary means,” it works on most Christians by regenerating their “ordinary” intellectual faculties. The implication is that prophetic preaching includes learning, eloquence, and theological training that Milton uses throughout the Christian Doctrine.23 Moreover, Jesus aids this regeneration of the mind even further: “[Jesus’s] prophetical office consists of two parts; one external, namely, the promulgation of divine truth; the other internal, to wit, the illumination of the understanding” (CPW 6:432). Jesus thus illuminates the understanding so as to enable critical thinking about divine truth. In other words, ordinary Christians participate in Jesus’s prophetic authority when they use the “illumination of the understanding” to preach or debate the meaning of scripture.

Throughout the Christian Doctrine, Milton describes a general regeneration of the human intellect under the Gospel, but he remains deliberately ambiguous about the precise balance

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22 See John Coffey’s “Defining Heresy and Orthodoxy in the Puritan Revolution” for the view that Milton’s argument is part of a broader 17th century tendency (130).

23 In “Prophesying the Bible,” Jason Kerr argues that Milton sees “scripture” as a category that encompasses the written text and the sermons that preachers use in order to teach scriptural truths (28-9). In other words, preaching can be part of scripture. Cf. Jameela Lares’s Milton and the Preaching Arts (16-37).
between grace and the will. He argues that Christian prophecy is a co-operation between divine agents and fallen human beings, but he does not explain how much a given “prophet” owes to God and how much to human invention. This ambiguity is deliberate. Milton’s point is that the authorities should allow all opinions to be heard and discussed rationally out of respect for the general regeneration that God bestows on every Christian. At the same time, his argument also undercuts antinomian claims to the kind of direct spiritual illumination that bypasses reason. Milton’s definition of prophecy as “the gift of teaching, especially public teaching” is meant to promote a public sphere of lay intellectuals who work independently of both the clergy and populist religious leaders.

Understood in this way, Milton’s representation of prophecy in *Christian Doctrine* provides a theological rationale for his vision of the church in *Areopagitica*. In order to defend the free discussion of religious ideas, Milton argues that the search for religious truth edifies the church into a republican as well as godly structure:

I doubt not, if some great and worthy stranger should come among us, wise to discern the mould and temper of a people, and how to govern it, observing the high hopes and aims, the diligent alacrity of our extended thoughts and reasonings in the pursuance of truth and freedom, but that he would cry out as *Pirrhus* did, admiring the Roman docility and courage, if such were my *Epirots*, I would not despair the greatest design that could be attempted to make a Church or Kingdom happy. Yet these are the men cry’d out against for schismatics and sectaries; as if, while the Temple of the Lord was building, some cutting, some squaring the marble, others hewing the cedars, there should be a sort of irrationall men who could not consider there must be many schisms and many dissections made in the quarry and in the timber, ere the house of God can be built. And when every stone is laid artfully together, it cannot be united into a continuity, it can but be contiguous in this world; neither can every piece of the building be of one form; nay rather the perfection consists in this, that out of many moderat varieties and brotherly dissimilitudes that are not vastly disproportionall arises the goodly and

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24 For a reading of *Areopagitica* as a text that participates in millenarian prophecy, see Andrew Escobedo’s *Nationalism and Historical Loss in Renaissance England* (237-43).
Milton presents “the diligent alacrity of our extended thoughts and reasonings in the pursuance of truth and freedom” as the fulfilment of two standards of national excellence: the first is the classical republican virtue exemplified in “Roman docility and courage,” and the second is Moses’s desire, in Num. 11:29, to see Israel grow into a nation of prophets. Interpretive diligence edifies the nation’s republican virtue as well as its religion, thus transforming the “Lords people” into better citizens than those of Rome or the Hebrew republic. 25 To support this national ideal further, Milton turns to St. Paul’s view of prophecy. He literalizes Pauline edification in 1 Cor. 3 by describing the “building up” of an intellectually tolerant church as an attempt to rebuild the Temple of Solomon on better foundations. 26 The builders of this new temple are citizen-prophets like Milton who use their diligent “thoughts and reasonings” to debate theology. By the same token, all Christians are now “prophets” in the sense that they teach doctrine and preach about scripture publicly. These “thoughts and reasonings” require a combination of human effort and grace, the key term in “gracefull symmetry.” 27 As a result, Milton’s main point in this passage is that grace inspires the “nation of prophets” to interpret scripture freely, but the truth must emerge through the ongoing process of discourse and debate rather than as a direct dictation from above. 28 By comparing this imagined community of citizen-prophets favourably to the citizens of

25 Milton implies that the English outdo the Hebrew republic because they are no longer wholly dependent for their religious opinions on the “sev’nty Elders” of the Sanhedrin (CPW 2:555). Cf. Eric Nelson’s reading of Milton in The Hebrew Republic (32-56).

26 For a parallel reading of Milton’s temple imagery in Areopagitica, see David Loewenstein’s “Milton’s Nationalism and the English Revolution.”

27 See Stevens’s “Milton and National Identity” for the view that in Areopagitica education is imagined as both “being facilitated by and facilitating grace” (354).

28 This relationship between grace and nationhood in Milton’s prose suggests that his nationalism includes a universalist, Pauline dimension as well as a local, more specifically English character. Cf. Christopher Kendrick, A Study in Ideology and Form (84-87). Stevens describes the tension between Milton’s universalism and ethnic particularity in “Milton’s Janus-Faced Nationalism” (259-60).
republican Rome, Milton implies that grace cultivates nothing less than political sovereignty in those who co-operate with God.

Milton returns to the ideal of a “nation of prophets” throughout his republican prose. In *Eikonoklastes*, Milton argues that the English have become a “nation of prophets” by resisting the false religious rhetoric of the *Eikon Basilike*: “like to Balac the son of Zippor, against a Nation of Prophets [Charles I] thinks it best to hire other esteemed Prophets, and to undermine and weare out the true Church by a fals Ecclesiastical policy” (*CPW* 3:510, my parenthesis). The passage alludes to Num. 22-24, where Balak hires the mercenary prophet Balaam to curse the Israelites, and God responds by forcing Balaam to bless the Israelites instead. Milton’s analogy suggests that King Charles I resembles Balaam because he hired false “prophets” to compose the *Eikon Basilike*. Conversely, Milton presents himself as the agent of God because his line-by-line deconstruction of *Eikon Basilike* brings out the truth unwillingly from the king’s book, thus metaphorically replicating God’s bringing out of a forced blessing from Balaam’s mouth. Thus Milton’s skill for critical analysis and rhetorical persuasion make him the ideal representative of the imagined “nation of prophets.” The implication is that the English nation as a whole could resemble Milton if citizens chose to interpret scripture critically in co-operation with grace.

I have argued that Milton returns to this view of prophecy as the “gift of teaching” throughout his career. In early tracts such as *On the Reason of Church-Government*, Milton describes his own poetic eloquence as “the inspired guift of God rarely bestow'd,” gifts that are comparable to inspired poetry and which “are of power beside the office of a pulpit, to inbreed and cherish in a great people the seeds of vertu, and publick civility” (*CPW* 1:816). In *Areopagitica* and *Eikonoklastes*, he claims to be a prophetic teacher by arguing against the king. By the time he writes the *Christian Doctrine*, he is no longer certain that he will find an audience receptive to his prophetic instruction, but he nevertheless continues to imagine prophecy in a way that supports public theological debate. In each of these tracts, Milton presents prophecy as a deliberately ambiguous co-operation between God and rhetorical skill, thus steering a middle way between the antinomians and the orthodox Protestant clergy. Milton returns to Balaam in *Paradise Regained* when Satan compares himself to “Balaam reprobate” (1.490), thus suggesting

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29 Cf. Lares’s explanation of Milton’s dual role as a poet and preacher in *The Reason of Church-Government* and beyond (1-15).
that the poem is part of Milton’s lifelong effort to distinguish the true gift of public teaching from its mercenary perversions. As we shall see, Jesus embodies Milton’s academic ideal of prophecy in the temptations that structure most of the poem.

4.2 Jesus as Christian Prophet in *Paradise Regained*

Early in *Paradise Regained*, Milton imagines Jesus as a humanist scholar who wonders how to reform a stubborn nation. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus appears in the Temple “sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions” (Luke 2:46). Milton’s account of the same scene emphasizes Jesus’s collegial mindset: “I went into the temple, there to hear / The teachers of our law, and to propose / What might improve my knowledge or their own” (1.211-3). By focusing on the concept of “knowledge” and its cultivation through contention and debate, Milton gives the narrative an academic dimension that is not as pronounced in the original Gospel story. This tendency is clear throughout *Paradise Regained*. As Satan attempts to coax Jesus into performing miracles that would distance him from ordinary human beings, Jesus insists on responding rationally and rhetorically. As we shall see, Jesus’s academic mindset is part of Milton’s effort ongoing to imagine the messiah as a model for Pauline prophecy in the church.

Jesus’s interpretive attitude in *Paradise Regained* reflects the Pauline form of prophecy that Milton encourages throughout his nationalist prose and his mature theological writing.  

Jesus begins to address prophecy when he explains the process by which he came to understand his messianic role. After Mary reveals his divine parentage, Jesus deduces his vocation through critical thinking and diligent scriptural interpretation:

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30 There is a long critical tradition of seeing the central conflict in *Paradise Regained* as an interpretive battle about the best way to read scripture. Important essays in this tradition include Mary Ann Radzinowicz, “How Milton Read the Bible: the case of *Paradise Regained,*” which describes the poem as a hermeneutic combat about the proper interpretation of the Psalms; C. A. Hutter, “‘Paradise Regained’, the Hermeneutical Circle, and Christian Anticipations of Post-Modern Theory,” which sees the poem as a contrast between two Schleiermachtian “hermeneutic circles”; and James H Sims, “Jesus and Satan as Readers of Scripture in *Paradise Regained,*” which argues that Jesus responds to Satan by insisting on the primacy of scripture as the context for all human behaviour. For a more recent essay that addresses the ethical dimension of reading in *Paradise Regained*, see Ryan Netzley’s “How Reading Works: Hermeneutics and Reading Practice in *Paradise Regained.*”
This having heard, strait I again revolved
The law and prophets, searching what was writ
Concerning the Messiah, to our scribes
Known partly, and soon found of whom they spake
I am [...] (3.259-63)

This passage foregrounds Jesus’s critical thinking. Instead of declaring himself a messiah unilaterally after Mary reveals his parentage, Jesus finds his identity gradually as he reads scriptural prophecies with the same critical attitude that he earlier describes in the Temple as a child. The phrase “I am” strengthens this connotation by alluding to God’s words to Moses in Ex. 3:14: “I am that I am.” Whereas Yahweh simply says “I am” without explaining himself to Moses, Jesus arrives at his self-recognition, his own divine “I am,” through scriptural exegesis. The implication in the allusion is that Christian prophecy is no longer a one-way dictation from God to human beings but rather an open-ended process of textual analysis. The text remains open-ended for Jesus even beyond this point in his development, because despite his remarkable deductions, Jesus does not necessarily have a complete understanding of what “I am” fully entails for his personal relationship to Yahweh. During the temptations, Milton presents this interpretive attitude as the paradigm of a new, Christian form of prophecy that ordinary members of the church are supposed to emulate and embody.  

Satan attempts to redefine the meaning of prophecy according to his preconceived notions about the Fall. When he first approaches Jesus, he presents the desert as the distillation of human suffering:

Sir, what ill chance hath brought thee to this place
So far from path or road of men, who pass
In troop or caravan, for single none
Durst ever, who returned, and dropped not here
His carcase, pined with hunger and with drough? (1.321-5)

31 See Patricia Taylor, “The Son as Collaborator” for a parallel reading of Jesus’s musings here as a co-operation with the Spirit that is supposed to act as a pattern for the education of the English nation (186-94).
Although Satan begins as if to enquire about Jesus’s identity, his imagery betrays an overriding concern with scarcity, suffering, and death. These experiences characterize the desert dwellers and, by implication, the human condition after the Fall. This description invites Jesus to define himself in relation to the curse of Adam’s sin. If Jesus shares in the fallen human condition, he should be hungry. Otherwise, he should demonstrate his exceptional power through miracles:

> But if thou be the Son of God, command
> That out of these hard stones be made thee bread;
> So shalt thou save thyself and us relieve
> With food, whereof we wretched seldom taste. (1.341-5)

The phrase “we wretched” captures Satan’s pessimistic understanding of postlapsarian humanity: it implies that “we” fallen creatures exist only to the extent that we are “wretched,” mortal, and hungry. The implication is that even if Jesus were to possess supernatural power, it would be alien to the misery of fallen humanity. Satan attempts to foreclose the possibility that Jesus might change the effects of sin for all human beings.

Jesus undermines Satan’s binary between fallen humanity and God by insisting on the redemptive power of prophecy. Paraphrasing Deut. 8:3, he answers: “Man lives not by Bread only, but each Word / Proceeding from the mouth of God; who fed / Our fathers here with manna” (1.349-51). Jesus alludes to the miraculous appearance of the manna in Exodus 16. The biblical story is relevant for the dramatic context of the temptation because the stones did seemingly turn into manna for the Israelites, thus paralleling the miracle that Satan asks from Jesus. The difference between the scriptural story and Satan’s request is that Moses relied on God, not his own power, to perform the miracle. By alluding to Moses, therefore, Jesus suggests that the desert and the scarcity it signifies should be understood in terms of a long scriptural history of human-divine interactions which tend, on the whole, towards grace and divine aid. According to this view, humanity is not completely wretched, as Satan implies,

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32 For the idea that Satan’s charity is a “bait” that is meant to define Milton according to power, see Arnold Stein’s “The Kingdoms of This World” (124).

33 Cf. Sims’s reading of Jesus’s redefinition of the miracle in *Paradise Regained* (196).

34 In other words, Jesus (unlike Satan) believes that truth is inseparable from faith in God. See C. A. Huttar’s explanation of the relationship between truth and trust in “Hermeneutic Circle” (22-3).
because God periodically regenerates his people through chosen prophets such as Moses. This response signals that Jesus is a redemptive prophet like Moses, but it also distinguishes Jesus’s ministry as a new form of prophetic teaching that no longer require miracles. If Moses’s prophecies needed to be backed up by the supernatural power of miracles, the instructive “miracles” that will establish the new Christian church will be the nothing more than the rhetorical and analytical skills deployed by Jesus as he interprets and debates scripture.

In the temptation to the kingdoms, Satan continues to limit the scope and power of Christian prophecy by driving an imaginative separation between fallen humanity and God. As before, Satan argues that prophecy requires miracles, and he urges Jesus to rule miraculously:

So shalt thou best fulfil, best verify  
The prophets old, who sung thy endless reign,  
The happier reign the sooner it begins,  
Reign then; what canst thou better do the while? (3.177-80)

By asking Jesus to “verify / The prophets old,” Satan betrays his ongoing effort to understand the nature of Christian prophecy and its relationship to practical power. The urgency of his request suggests that he is attempting to find out whether or not Jesus possesses any supernatural means that might substantiate the eternal monarchy predicted in scripture. When Jesus declines to act, Satan switches tactics and begins to treat the prophesied kingdom of God as an ordinary human kingdom that needs to rely on Satanic means:

thy kingdom though foretold  
By prophet or by angel, unless thou  
Endeavour, as thy father David did,  
Thou never shalt obtain; prediction still  
In all things, and all men, supposes means,  
Without means used, what it predicts revokes […]. (3.350-6)

By “means,” Satan now intends the worldly power that he uses to tempt Jesus throughout the second temptation. These means include riches (2.406-31), the military power of Parthia (3.267-309), the civic majesty of Rome (4. 44-108), and the classical learning of Athens (4.212-84). Satan’s point is that if Jesus refuses to use miraculous means to rule Judaea, the prophecies will
depend on the worldly means in Satan’s control. He accordingly equates “prophecy” with “prediction,” thus reducing prophecy to a mere foretelling of events without any moral or messianic implication. As in the first temptation, therefore, Satan introduces a dichotomy between human means and divine power in order to persuade Jesus that the fallen condition cannot be overcome. This approach elides Milton’s preferred view of prophecy as a form of public teaching that cultivates regenerated moral and intellectual habits in the church without the aid of supernatural miracles.

As in the first temptation, Jesus’s response undermines Satan’s argument by positing the critical view of prophecy that Paul theorizes in 1 Corinthians. Contrary to Satan’s expectations, he refuses to perform any new miracles beyond those already outlined in the Old Testament. He tells Satan that only the Father knows when his kingdom will begin:

If of my reign prophetic writ hath told,
That it shall never end, so when begin
The Father in his purpose hath decreed,
He in whose hand all times and seasons roll. (3.183-7)

Instead of choosing between miracles and Satanic means to power, Jesus leaves the prophesied kingdom entirely up to God the Father. However, the response also alludes deftly to scripture in a way that demonstrates a sustained intellectual rebuttal of Satan. The rolling “times and seasons” allude to Daniel 2:21: “And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings.” Moreover, the description of time in God’s hand alludes to Psalms 31:15: “My times are in thy hand: deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me” (Psalms 31:15). These biblical allusions relate directly to Jesus’s dramatic situation: the passage from Daniel emphasizes the transient nature of earthly kingdoms offered by Satan, while the psalm exposes Satan as a persecuting enemy. The implication is that Jesus rejects worldly kingdoms not because he submits unthinkingly to his fate but rather because he actively and creatively adapts scripture to meet his immediate circumstances. He thus embodies

35 Cf. MacCallum’s view that Satan’s temptations are based on rhetorical “dichotomies” that are designed to trap Jesus (247).
36 See Sims’s “Readers of Scripture” for a parallel reading of the second temptation (201-2).
the Pauline form of prophecy, which Calvin describes as the “notable grace, not only in interpreting, but also in prudent applying the Scripture to the present use” (S11124, fol.150v). By making Daniel and the Psalms meet the needs of the hour, Jesus articulates a new form of prophecy that is still authoritative because of its power to edify the church even though it operates without miracles. This approach ultimately stems from Paul’s description of prophecy as a form of edification in 1 Corinthians. 37

Throughout the second temptation, Jesus embodies this Pauline approach to prophecy because he reads a variety of scriptural prophecies, such as the promised return of the tribes of Israel, by adapting the scriptural text to his present situation. According to 2 Esdras, a book considered apocryphal by most Christians, the messiah will return the ten lost tribes of Israel to their ancestral lands. 38 Perhaps Satan appeals to this prophecy when he tempts Jesus to restore the lost tribes (3.381-5). Jesus answers the temptation by adapting scriptural precedent to his present rhetorical situation. He points out that Satan misled David, so he cannot be relied upon as an ally in acquiring David’s throne (3.412-3). He also summarizes 1 Kings 12, which enumerates the sins of the ten tribes and their deserved punishment (3.414-26). Based on this scriptural evidence, Jesus concludes:

Should I of these the liberty regard,
Who freed, as to their ancient patrimony,
Unhumbled, unrepentant, unreformed,
Headlong would follow; and to their gods perhaps
Of Bethel and of Dan? No, let them serve
Their enemies, who serve idols with God. (3.427-32)

For a Christian reader with the benefit of historical hindsight, Jesus’s interpretation is clearly correct because the lost tribes did not in fact return to the Holy Land during Jesus’s lifetime. 39 However, since Jesus himself shows little sign of any privileged insight from God into the distant future, his judgment on the lost tribes is a product of careful scriptural interpretation rather than

37 Cf. 1 Cor. 14:1-3.
38 Cf. 2 Esdras 13: 40-50.
39 Jesus hints, however, that the ten tribes may return later in the history of the world (3.433-40).
divine inspiration. Moreover, although Jesus’s “let them serve” conveys finality and authority, the rhetorical question leading up to this judgment is more tentative. This mixed tone suggests that Jesus is not the kind of prophet who predicts the future or dictates the truth infallibly, but rather a Pauline prophet who adapts scripture to his situation in order to edify the church and rebut temptation.

At the end of the second temptation, Jesus foregrounds the interpretive practice that he has used throughout the poem. When Satan offers him the philosophical “kingdom” of Athenian learning, Jesus responds by redefining learning altogether:

who reads
Incessantly, and to his reading brings not
A spirit and judgment equal or superior
(And what he brings, what needs he elsewhere seek)
Uncertain and unsettled still remains,
Deep-versed in books and shallow in himself […]. (4.322-7)

Jesus’s argument in this passage is similar to the main argument of Areopagitica: true learning is not a set of memorized propositions but rather a subjective disposition towards critical thinking. It follows that in order to possess “a spirit and a judgment equal or superior” to any text, one must read critically and debate the text’s meaning publicly. Crucially, Milton includes spirit and human judgment in this formula, thus implying that Jesus’s interpretive practice relies on a combination of divine inspiration and human intellectual faculties. As a young man, Jesus deployed this critical attitude to understand his own role as the messiah; during the temptations, he uses the same means to begin his work as a messiah by edifying the Christian church. By describing his “spirit and judgment” in reading, Jesus acknowledges the interpretive habits that he has already been practising throughout the poem. This acknowledgment triggers a new emphasis, in the third temptation, on the precise balance between human judgment and the divine inspiration in Jesus’s prophetic teaching.

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40 For more on the historical context of Jesus’s response, see Lares (182-206). Lares argues that Jesus’s preference for scriptural style is part of a broader trend in the 17th century which emphasized scriptural rhetoric as a better alternative to the classics.

41 Cf. my reading above of Jesus’s approach to the temple (1.211-13).
4.3 Prophetic Authority on the Pinnacle

In the fourth book of Paradise Regained, Satan places Jesus on the pinnacle of the Temple so as to force him to choose between human nature and divine aid. Satan’s attempt fails, and Jesus’s dual nature as a God-man remains somewhat ambiguous even at the end of the poem. This ambiguity is deliberate, however. As in the Christian Doctrine, Milton leaves Jesus’s dual nature ambiguous so as to demonstrate that the distinction between human reasoning and divine inspiration is no longer relevant for assessing the validity of Christian prophecy. Rather, the third temptation suggests that the cultivation of a humanist church, a church that encourages debate and disagreement, is a more important criterion for assessing Jesus’s authority than the precise boundary between his human reason and his divine inspiration.

Jesus’s interpretive authority is not only the main question in the poem itself but also a major point of contention between critics today. Stanley Fish argues that Jesus is an antinomian because he uses the Spirit to valorize the “majestic unaffected style” (4.359) of the Hebrew prophets above Greek learning (4.285-364). For Fish, Milton’s aesthetic judgments are decipherable only to those who are themselves inspired by the Spirit:

[W]hat is the difference between a majestic, unaffected style and a majestic affected style? The answer, Milton would say, cannot be found in a description of their respective formal features, for by that measure they will be exactly alike; one will just be the technically proficient counterfeit of the other. The true measure of the difference is interior. In one case, the words proceed from some calculated intention to deceive or impress; in the other, the words—the very same words in one sense but completely different in another—proceed “from a sincere heart” and “unbidden come into the outward gesture” (YP I, 941). And how can you tell the difference? Only if the difference is already inscribed within you. (85-6)

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42 This scene is one of the most contentious in all of Milton’s poetry. For Jesus’s stand as a miracle, see Stein (Heroic Knowledge 128-9) and MacCallum (257). For Jesus’s stand as a result of purely human skill, see Irene Samuel’s “The Regaining of Paradise” (122-4) and Ashraf Rushdy’s The Empty Garden (267-8). At stake in the critical debate on this scene is Jesus’s “hypostatic union”—i.e. the relationship between his human nature and his divinity—and the related issue of Jesus’s relationship to the Father. See John Rogers, “Paradise Regained and Paradise Lost,” for a recent essay addressing how the pinnacle shapes the poem’s Christology.
According to this reading, the distinction between a true prophet and a false rhetorician is purely “internal.” Nobody will accept a given prophecy unless they too are inspired by the Spirit. For Fish, therefore, the inscrutable inspiration of the Spirit does not allow for persuasion and rational debate, because its inspiration bypasses human reason and dictates truth directly to the inner person.

In contrast to Fish’s reading, critics such as Victoria Kahn have argued that *Paradise Regained* inaugurates a secular approach to literature and politics. Kahn suggests that *Paradise Regained* is based on Job’s complaints in the Book of Job. She argues that Jesus resembles Job because he ironizes religious dogma and questions divine justice (646). However, Kahn also adds that Milton’s poem is more radical than the Book of Job because God does not silence Jesus as he does Job: “In the book of Job, divine omnipotence ultimately trumps the rational demand for justice. In *Paradise Regained*, by contrast, God does not appear out of the whirlwind to put an end to the Son’s activity of interpretation” (643). According to this argument, the relative marginalization of God the Father from the central action of *Paradise Regained* means that Jesus’s ironic activity of interpretation undermines religious authority, including the kind of antinomian “enthusiasm” that silences dialogue and lays claim to direct religious authority (628).

Milton thus cultivates what Kahn sees as the ironic mode of secular poetry:

Milton suggests that poetry is the rhetorical mode most appropriate to the Son’s ambiguous nature, most appropriate to his existence in the saeculum, which is itself constituted by its ironic “relation” to the sacred. At the same time, Milton makes it clear that poetry is also the proper mode for ordinary human beings, among them John Milton, to understand their own ambiguous location in secular life, including their relation to sacred texts. Poetry is privileged in this way because, for Milton, the secular realm is ideally defined not by the absence of faith or religion (as it has often been in modern discussions) but rather by the absence of dogmatism, in the form of detachable pronouncements that bear only “a single sense.” (645-6)

Thus *Paradise Regained* privileges the kind of ambiguous, secular and poetic language that
invites open-ended interpretation. The implication is that *Paradise Regained* inaugurates something like a secular public sphere in which religious dogmatism gives way to the ongoing process of debate. Although this view of the secular is not necessarily “the absence of faith or religion,” there is no room in this community for antinomian prophets who claim religious and political authority on the basis of the Spirit’s inner inspiration. If Fish reads Jesus as a religious zealot, therefore, Kahn sees Milton’s messiah primarily as a secular humanist.

However, Kahn and Fish do not fully capture Milton’s theory of interpretation in *Christian Doctrine*, because Milton strives to balance the Spirit with human rationality and interpretive effort. Fish’s view of Jesus as an antinomian depends on the assumption that Milton has no standards at all for evaluating a given judgment aside from the internal illumination of the Spirit. As we have seen, however, Milton does provide such a criterion: he follows Paul in arguing that a good interpretation of the Bible must “edify” or build up the church. This imperative is not as open-ended as it might seem because Milton tells us exactly how he imagines an edified church. He thinks it should be a community of humanists who tolerate “brotherly dissimilitudes” in matters of doctrine, a community that he envisions

> sitting by their studious lamps, musing, searching, revolving new notions and ideas wherewith to present, as with their homage and their fealty the approaching Reformation: others as fast reading, trying all things, assenting to the force of reason and convincement. (CPW 2:554)

For Milton, edification means cultivating this critical attitude in the Protestant church. Unlike the antinomians, he argues that the validity of a given interpretation depends on “the force of reason and convincement” rather than direct inspiration from the Spirit.

On the other hand, Kahn’s reading understates the importance of divine inspiration in Milton’s view of prophecy. While it is true that Milton favours the process of ongoing interpretation at the expense of dogma, Milton’s iconoclasm has its limits, and he never

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43 For a longer articulation of a similar argument in relation to *Samson Agonistes*, see Kahn’s *Wayward Contracts* (256-64).

44 Kahn’s anti-dogmatic and ironic vision of Milton’s poetry resembles the aesthetic concerns of the so-called “New Milton Criticism,” which similarly foregrounds moments of indeterminacy and uncertainty in Milton’s work. See Peter C. Herman’s *Destabilizing Milton* and the essays in the collection *The New Milton Criticism*. 
undermines God’s authority directly or the belief that God inspires prophecy. Doing so would have created more problems for Milton’s humanist vision of the church than Kahn’s reading implies. After all, the most vocal opposition to inspired prophecy in Milton’s historical moment came not from secular humanists, but from the Calvinist clergy. Their argument was pragmatic: if lay Christians do not have the gift of prophecy, the task of edification falls to ministers who possess the necessary qualifications to combat heresy. As a result, the available options were not dogmatism and secular humanism, but rather two different kinds of dogmatism—one supported by the clergy, and the other by the “enthusiasm” of antinomian prophets. As a result, Milton could not do away with divine inspiration entirely, because this approach would merely confirm the clergymen’s position and do away with any justification for a public sphere. Instead, Milton and his Socinian contemporaries pushed back against this argument by insisting—rather dogmatically, in their own way—that while the Spirit enables all Christians to prophesy, no individual prophet may claim infallible authority through these means.

In what remains of this chapter, I argue that *Paradise Regained* anticipates the impasse that has emerged among these critics of the poem. As we have seen, Satan’s temptations revolve precisely around the question that vexes these modern critics: what is the basis of Jesus’s authority? Is Jesus a mouthpiece of God or a mere human being using secular interpretive tools? I suggest that, for Milton, the correct answer is to reject this binary altogether. Jesus does not claim the direct inspiration possessed by the Old Testament prophets. Instead, he engages in Pauline prophecy, which consists of preaching about scripture in a way that edifies the church. He thus demonstrates that even though the Spirit no longer dictates prophecy directly to human beings, it still assists the human intellect so as to make ordinary Christians capable of the interpretive attitude idealized by Milton in *Areopagitica*. As we shall see, the pinnacle scene leaves the precise origin of Jesus’s prophetic authority deliberately ambiguous so as to support this view of prophetic inspiration. As a result, the third temptation anticipates and to some extent resolves the critical disagreement that has emerged around Jesus’s interpretations of scripture.

While the first and second temptations in *Paradise Regained* concern specific prophecies, in the third temptation Jesus and Satan finally address the cognitive and linguistic processes that enable Christian prophecy in general. After Jesus rejects Athenian learning, Satan begins to respond with a new anxiety about his own ability to read scripture:
Now contrary, if I read aught in heaven,
Or heaven write aught of fate, by what the stars
Voluminous, or single characters,
In their conjunction met, give me to spell,
Sorrows, and labours, opposition, hate,
Attends thee, scorns, reproaches, injuries,
Violence and stripes, and lastly cruel death,
A kingdom they portend thee, but what kingdom,
Real or allegoric I discern not,
Nor when, eternal sure, as without end,
Without beginning; for no date prefixed
Directs me in the starry rubric set […]. (4.382-93)

This speech captures Satan’s concern with his own process of reading and interpretation. Satan sees fate as a text: “if I read aught in heaven, / Or heaven write aught of fate.” He imagines the stars as “voluminous,” a word that puns on a book “volume.” The stars are also “single characters” in the sense of written letters, and their “conjunction” suggests a kind of syntax and grammar. Finally, Satan describes the future in the stars as a message that he hopes to “spell” or decode. Satan’s obsessive focus on his own process of reading betrays a new anxiety about prophecy more generally. He is unsure of his capacities as a reader because by this point in the poem he feels that he lacks the proper interpretive “rubric”—a word that denotes, among other things, a set of instructions for conducting a church service. Thus when Satan admits that “no date prefixed / Directs me in the starry rubric set,” his implied and anxious admission is that he no longer knows whether or not he has the appropriate form of literacy for reading prophecy correctly.  

This response suggests that Satan recognizes how Jesus has shifted the meaning of prophecy from its Old Testament meaning towards a new, unfamiliar direction. As a result, Satan’s primary motive going into the third temptation is to recuperate some degree of interpretive stability by determining Jesus’s identity once and for all.

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45 Sims notes that Satan unwittingly alludes to the New Testament description of Melchizedek, who was the type of Christ (208-9). As a result, there is an element of dramatic irony in Satan’s admission that he cannot read properly because the unwitting allusion demonstrates his failure to read well.
As Satan’s speech goes on, he attempts to control the ambiguities in scriptural prophecy by limiting the interpretive options available to Jesus. The first hint of this strategy is the phrase “real or allegoric”: “Real or allegoric I discern not, / Nor when, eternal sure, as without end, / Without beginning” (4.390-2). Even though Satan “discern[s] not” the meaning of the prophesied kingdom, he attempts to control the ambiguity by giving Jesus only two interpretations from which to choose. He argues that the kingdom must be either “real” in the sense that it will conform to worldly expectations or “allegoric,” “without beginning,” and thus politically irrelevant. He adopts a parallel binary while discussing the phrase “Son of God”:

Thenceforth I thought thee worth my nearer view
And narrower scrutiny, that I might learn
In what degree or meaning thou art called
The Son of God, which bears no single sense;
The Son of God I also am, or was,
And if I was I am; relation stands;
All men are Sons of God; yet thee I thought
In some respect far higher so declared. (4.514-21)

Satan acknowledges his uncertainty about the “degree or meaning” in the term “Son of God,” but he quickly attempts to limit any doubt by giving Jesus no more than two possible readings from which to choose. Jesus will either be a Son of God in the banal sense that “all men are Sons of God,” or he will be a “far higher” agent who transcends human limitations altogether. As a result, Satan divides Jesus’s human and divine natures in order to rectify his own shortcomings as a reader of prophecy. This strategy mirrors his binaries in the first and second temptations, but the difference here is that Satan focuses directly on interpretation and prophecy rather than on the kingdoms themselves. What Satan is beginning to understand, in other words, is that Jesus is attempting to regain paradise by redefining how human beings read scripture. In the third temptation, therefore, Satan responds in kind by attempting to limit Jesus’s interpretive process.

Cf. MacCallum’s reading of this scene: “In his temptations, [Satan] addresses the Son sometimes as man, sometimes as more than man, failing to acknowledge or to understand the unitive nature of the Son’s being. Indeed, his temptations, and the whole drift of his thinking, are concerned to repudiate the Incarnation, with its union of God and man….For Satan, Jesus is now merely man, now divinity in disguise” (257). Whether through ignorance or as part of a deliberate strategy, Satan imaginatively forecloses the possibility of a God-man.
These preliminaries suggest that Satan hopes to restore his interpretive confidence through the identity test of the third temptation. He takes Jesus to the pinnacle of the Temple of Solomon and forces him to choose between human limitations and divine power:

There stand, if thou wilt stand; to stand upright
Will ask thee skill; I to thy Father’s house
Have brought thee, and highest placed, highest is best,
Now show thy progeny; if not to stand,
Cast thyself down; safely if Son of God:
For it is written, he will give command
Concerning thee to his angels, in their hands
They shall uplift thee, lest at any time
Thou chance to dash thy foot against a stone. (4.551-9)

Although this temptation is in some ways a straightforward physical challenge—Jesus is standing precariously, and a wrong step might kill him—Satan also invests the scene with the more abstract questions of interpretive authority that were at the center of the speeches leading up to this moment. He offers Jesus a choice between “command” and “skill,” which act as metonymies for two different interpretive attitudes. “Skill” describes the practiced ability to stand, but the etymology of this word relates to “discretion in relation to special circumstances” (OED). As a result, standing through skill means using human discretion to meet the unforeseen challenge of the pinnacle. Conversely, if Jesus decides to cast himself down, he would effectively “command” the angels to help him, thus obviating any need for human discretion at all. As a result, Satan attempts to force Jesus to choose from two diametrically opposed modes of approaching a problem, one of which is associated with human limits and the other with divine power.47 As in the speeches leading up to this scene, Satan’s test betrays an anxiety about his own ability to read Old Testament prophecies, particularly those that concern the “Son of God.” One prophecy that he clearly has in mind is Psalm 91:11-12, which he cites verbatim in the last four lines of the passage above. Satan leaves out the Psalm’s conclusion, which is ominous for

47 There is a long tradition of seeing this scene as a test of Jesus’s hypostatic union between his humanity and his divinity. For an overview of this approach, see Rumrich’s “Milton’s Theanthropos,” which argues that the standing body of Jesus bridges Satan’s binary between God and human beings.
him: “the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet” (Ps. 91:13). Satan thus attempts to limit his own confusion about these apocalyptic prophecies by forcing Jesus to choose either his human limitations or his divine power, but not both.

The standard critical gesture at this point in the poem is to judge whether Jesus stands through divine command or through human skill. Jesus’s response is a biblical citation of Deut. 6:16: “To whom thus Jesus: also it is written, / Tempt not the Lord thy God; he said and stood” (4.560-1). In order to prove that Jesus is an antinomian, Fish argues that this response is a “linguistic miracle” that allows Jesus’s ego to vanish into the cited scriptural text (43). Conversely, Victoria Kahn argues that since Jesus “ironically parries Satan’s scriptural quotation with another scriptural quotation,” Milton “directs our attention to the creative power of the literary tradition” (648). Thus the pinnacle can support both an antinomian and a secular reading of Jesus, depending on one’s presuppositions about Milton’s theology.

However, if we accept the terms of my analysis thus far, these critical approaches do not stand on neutral interpretive ground. In fact, they threaten to reproduce Satan’s binary between human skill and divine power, which Milton foregrounds as a key part of the temptation. Milton anticipates and frustrates both approaches by refusing his reader any access to Jesus’s interior psychological motivations. As a result, it is impossible to say with certainty whether Jesus inflects his final response with antinomian zeal or with sceptical irony. Moreover, the terse phrase “he said and stood” tells us what happens, not how Jesus stands—a conspicuous omission, considering that Satan’s main aim in the temptation was precisely to determine the means by which Jesus will stand. Instead of settling the ambiguity of Jesus’s identity, therefore, the pinnacle amplifies it. It is only later, when the angels come to celebrate Jesus’s victory, that Milton finally outlines what the victory means for Jesus, Satan, and the predicament of all Christians (3.596-635). During the temptation itself, Milton gives his reader no access to Jesus’s mind and motivations, thus obfuscating the source of Jesus’s authority.

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48 Cf. MacCallum’s reading of the same scene: “the text offers nothing to aid us in further speculation concerning the fine line which distinguishes miraculous from either athletic or normal standing. The point, surely, is that such distinctions are of no importance. The Son’s physical safety has been the responsibility of providence from the moment he entered the desert” (258). I am arguing that the distinctions are of no importance not only to illustrate providence in Jesus’s life, but also to establish parallels between Jesus and Pauline prophets in the church.

49 Nyquist outlines the deliberate “indeterminacy” of Jesus’s action in “The Father’s Word/Satan’s Wrath” (200).
Based on Milton’s theory of prophetic inspiration, I submit that the ambiguity of the pinnacle scene is deliberate, and that its purpose is to promote the Pauline vision of prophecy that Milton defends in his prose. As we have seen, in *Christian Doctrine* Milton imagines prophecy as a co-operation between the Spirit and human reason, but he does not fully clarify the limits of human and divine agency in this process. The point of his argument is to suggest that individual Christians are inspired enough to preach in public, but not quite so inspired as to dictate prophecies that are beyond rational critique. Ultimately, *Christian Doctrine* suggests that what matters is not the precise source of a believer’s inspiration but rather the ongoing process of theological debate, which Milton sees as the best means of edifying the church into a godly and republican community. In *Paradise Regained*, Jesus’s response to Satan is ambiguous for similar reasons. Precisely when Satan and the reader expect Jesus to unveil the source of his authority, Milton refuses to comment on this issue and shifts the attention to Satan’s defeat. The implication is that the source of Jesus’s authority does not matter. Jesus is a prophet not because the Spirit speaks directly through him, but rather because he adapts the passage “Do not tempt the Lord thy God” to resist Satan, thus edifying the nascent Christian church. Trying to determine the precise source of Jesus’s authority is a false start, because the edification provided by Jesus’s response is sufficient to validate his prophetic power.

I am suggesting, in other words, that Jesus adopts the same interpretive predicament as Christians who claim the gift of public teaching. On the pinnacle, Jesus’s authority is somewhat ambiguous because Milton’s theology provides no clear guidelines for assessing the precise balance between rhetoric and the Spirit. Milton himself was quite confident that his readings of scripture were correct, but he insists throughout the *Christian Doctrine* that both he and his opponents rely on fallible “human powers” that are open to critique and revision. In *Paradise Regained*, the pinnacle reproduces for the reader the difficulty in assessing divine inspiration in others. The poem tempts its reader to join Satan in asking Jesus the same question that they might ask of a would-be spiritual teacher in Restoration England: what is the source of your authority? Are you an ordinary man or the mouthpiece of God? Where are the miracles that might justify your preaching? By leaving these questions unanswered, Milton suggests that they represent the wrong approach to Christian prophecy altogether. The true criterion for prophecy is its capacity to edify the church into a humanist community, and Jesus fulfills this criterion by rhetorically outflanking Satan. At the same time, Jesus’s response is not “secular.” The Spirit
really is with Jesus, and it distinguishes him from Moses, whose ministry relied on the miracles of Deutoronomy. By the same token, grace really does provide an exceptional “symmetry” to the nation of prophets in *Areopagitica*, thus distinguishing their intellectual activity from the mere anticipation of this ideal in Numbers 11:29. Milton’s point is not to deny the transformative influence of the Spirit or grace on interpretation, but to argue that divine aid manifests through rational dialogue rather than in a sudden moment of antinomian illumination. The Spirit works with human reason, thus reflecting Milton’s lifelong effort to synthesize humanism with the spiritual regeneration promised in Protestant doctrine.

Milton’s approach to prophecy in *Paradise Regained* reveals his continued engagement with the political project he outlined throughout his life. The goal of prophecy for Milton is not to establish a theocratic oligarchy of saints but rather to cultivate the gift of public teaching in a Protestant citizenry. This argument privileges Milton and his humanist-educated peers who had the training and leisure time to debate about scripture rigorously. Whereas antinomian prophets such as Mary Cary believed that the Spirit could inspire anyone to become a prophet regardless of gender or social class, *Paradise Regained* associates Christian prophecy with the kind of intellectual labour in which Milton excelled. To be sure, Milton was in dialogue with antinomians, Quakers, and other fringe sects, but his religious and political vision ultimately privileges highly educated humanists rather than the common people. This political vision relies on Milton’s conception of co-operative grace, as well as his representation of Jesus as the model for Christian citizens and prophets.

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50 Cf. Dzelzainis (“Oligarchs”) and Mohamed (“Godly Republicanism”), who argue that Milton promotes the same kind of spiritual oligarchy as Henry Vane and Henry Stubbe.
Conclusion

One year before Milton published *Paradise Regained*, Benedict de Spinoza’s *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* appeared in the United Provinces. The text was immediately controversial for a variety of reasons, including its radical defense of religious tolerance.¹ Like many of the unorthodox writers I discussed in the previous chapter, Spinoza turned to key scriptural texts such as 1 Corinthians in order to justify free discussion of religious opinion. In chapter 11, Spinoza asks whether the Apostles “did by express Command and Revelation write their Epistles as Prophets, or else, only as private Men and Teachers” (260).² This distinction between prophecy and private teaching is central for his argument, because it supports his overall view that religious teaching should be based on natural reason rather than revelation. For Spinoza, “Prophetical Authority allows of no rational disputing” (261), because it derives from supernatural revelation: “that the Prophets knowledge was supernatural, chiefly appear’d in their speaking Dogmatically, Imperiously, and Sententiously; so that Moses the chief Prophet, never made use of any Logical Argument” (264). The Apostles, however, follow a different tack. They frequently reason at length to support their teaching: “Apostles are always found reasoning, insomuch that they seem rather to dispute than Prophecie” (261). Paul in particular invites his interlocutors to an open dialogue “in his 1st. Epist. to the Corinth. Chap. 10. v. 15. I speak as to wise men, judge ye what I say” (262). This intellectual openness appears throughout Paul’s epistles, which seek to persuade rather than to command:

*Paul’s long Deductions and Reasonings, which we find in his Epistle to the Romans, were never written by Supernatural Revelation, and the manner of speaking and arguing in the Writings of the Apostles, doth clearly shew, that they were not by Divine Revelation and Command, but were the dictates of their own natural Reason, and contain nothing but brotherly admonitions, full of gentleness and kindness […].* (264)

¹ For more on Spinoza, toleration, and its reception, see Jonathan Israel’s introduction to Spinoza’s works (xi-x).
² All citations are from the 1689 translation of Spinoza, which was the first in the English language.
Thus prophecy is imperious and dogmatic because it empowers only a specific prophet to dictate to others “by Divine Revelation,” while apostolic teaching is brotherly, kind, and gentle because it is based wholly on “natural Reason,” which is available to all human beings. Spinoza’s preference for the latter is clear. He removes any sense of transcendent authority from Paul and the other apostles, thus transforming them into private teachers. In so doing, Spinoza suggests that the churches in the Netherlands and elsewhere should follow Paul’s example and rely on reason rather than revealed authority.

Spinoza’s appropriation of Paul participates in Protestant discourse while at the same time foreshadowing its eventual eclipse by Enlightenment rationalism. As we have seen, Milton and his Socinian contemporaries deployed 1 Corinthians 12-14 to promote a similar intellectual openness in the church. Unlike Spinoza, however, Milton does not approach reason independently of grace. Like other 16th- and 17th-century Protestant humanists, Milton sees reason as a divine gift that enables active cooperation with God. The distinctive feature of his understanding of prophecy is, accordingly, his paradoxical tension between divine inspiration on the one hand and the agency of the rational subject on the other. Spinoza’s argument revolves around a different set of binaries. Instead of juxtaposing grace and the will, Spinoza contrasts natural reason to revelation. The implication is that apostles are no more inspired than secular philosophers. Even Paul’s teaching on grace is subject to challenge:

If we carefully read over the Epistles, we shall find that the Apostles did agree concerning Religion it self, but differ’d about its Foundations. To establish Men in Religion, and to prove that Salvation depended only upon the Grace and Mercy of God, Paul’s Doctrine was, that no man ought to boast of his Works, but only of his Faith; and that no man could be justify’d by Works, but only by Faith, (Rom. chap. 3. V. 27, 28.) By Paul also was preached the whole doctrine of Predestination; but James on the other side, in his Epistle declares, that a Man is justify’d by Works, and not by Faith only, (James chap. 2. v. 24.) and in a few

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3 These similarities should not be surprising given Spinoza’s engagement with the Socinians and other fringe sects that also interested Milton. For more information on Spinoza and his radical contemporaries, see Israel (xix-xx). For Socinianism and its redefinition of reason, see Mortimer’s Reason and Religion in the English Revolution.
words gives a brief account of Religion, not at all concerning himself with any of Paul’s disputations […]. (271-2)

Spinoza presents Paul’s view of grace—the view “that Salvation depended only upon the Grace and Mercy of God”—as merely one opinion among many. Unlike Protestant humanists before him, Spinoza does not see grace as the precondition of right reason. On the contrary, natural reason is what adjudicates between Paul’s teaching on grace and James’s justification by works. Natural reason may judge religious doctrines in this impartial manner because it does not adopt any particular religious doctrine a priori. This perspective is a sharp departure from Protestant humanism, which saw grace as the enabling condition for regenerate thought. Thus even though Spinoza has some common ground with Protestant humanism, he also points towards a new intellectual culture that privileges reason as an independent faculty from grace.

Spinoza’s reading of Paul comes close to articulating what modern theorists such as John Milbank would describe as “secular reason.” For Milbank, secular reason purports to evaluate all claims, religious or otherwise, in a theologically neutral way. This concept was central to the Enlightenment because it enabled the supposedly non-theological, sociological, and “secular” point of view from which later thinkers analyzed religion (52-3). Like Milbank, Charles Taylor sees Spinoza as a key driver behind the 18th century’s turn towards a wholly “immanent” and “exclusive” humanism, which began to see human flourishing independently of transcendent claims. Similarly, Jonathan Israel has demonstrated that Spinoza’s view of reason was the cornerstone of the “radical” Enlightenment, which Israel sees as a major source of modern atheism and secularization. If the future of research in the humanities looks anything like the intellectual trends of the past few decades, these accounts of Spinoza will be continue to be hotly

4 Milbank argues that Spinoza is one of three early modern writers, along with Grotius and Hobbes, who sought to separate politics from theology in a way that ultimately gave rise to secularist ideology: “With the writings of Grotius, Hobbes and Spinoza, political theory achieved a certain highly ambiguous ‘autonomy’ with regard to theology. However, autonomization was not achieved in the sphere of knowledge alone; it was only possible because the new science of politics both assumed and constructed for itself a new autonomous object – the political – defined as a field of pure power” (10). Milbank contends that this secularizing view of politics is in fact an outgrowth of medieval nominalism, and the modern idea of the secular can therefore be critiqued from a Thomist perspective (9-10).

5 For Spinoza’s contribution to secularization and Deism, see A Secular Age (270-295). Taylor argues that Spinoza strengthened the immanent frame by depicting the traditional God of the Judeo-Christian tradition as a mere “pandering to popular fears and illusions, offering an utterly unworthy picture of God” (275).

debated and revised in the coming years. Nevertheless, Spinoza’s enduring importance for critics of secularization demonstrates his role as a transitional figure in the shift from early modern Europe toward something like secular modernity.

What I have attempted to demonstrate in this dissertation is that the early modern tradition from which Spinoza and similar thinkers emerged was deeply engaged in religious thought. One of the key differences between Spinoza and Protestant humanism is that the latter movement was not what modern theorists would call “secular,” because it presented religious grace as the foundation of human agency and intellectual endeavour. For writers like Sidney and Milton, the erected wit is a gift from God. Grace is what enables the rational believer to write instructive poetry, or to spend his time “reasoning, reading, inventing, discoursing” (CPW 2:555) about religious doctrine. These intellectual pursuits are the means by which the citizens of a Protestant republic invest their God-given “talent which is death to hide” (3) in a way that benefits both the polis and spiritual life. Similarly, Spenser and Shakespeare demonstrate how grace can be a source of political agency for sovereign rulers, their magistrates, and their dynastic allies. In the pre-secular and premodern culture that nurtured Shakespeare, Spenser, and Milton, grace was at the heart of an immense range of political and theological discourses—from imperialism to republicanism, from moral virtue to glorious suffering, from prophetic teaching to religious violence.

The centrality of grace for Protestant humanism stems from the recurring paradox in Paul’s epistles: grace is the source of the individual’s agency, yet it is also the sign of God’s absolute control over creation. As we have seen, the Reformed tradition understood this paradox through the concept of cooperative grace, which implied a form of agency-in-submission in response to divine freedom. For theologians such as Melanchthon and Arminius, who emphasized human freedom, cooperative grace became a way to imagine subjective empowerment in a universe dominated by an absolute God. As this conception of grace filtered into English Protestant culture, and from there into the works of Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton, it acquired increasingly political undertones. A major concern among these writers was to imagine religious grace in a way that acknowledged the gravity of sin while at the same time preserving some of the dignity and agency that Renaissance humanism gave individuals. They accordingly reinterpreted concepts such as equity, prophecy, and patience through cooperative grace, thus transforming grace into a source of political as well as spiritual agency. These literary
engagements with grace do not empower everyone equally—indeed, they sometimes justify empire and colonization—but for those who do benefit, the result is an enabling synthesis between grace and human freedom.

In the contemporary critical zeitgeist, a call to revisit the religious origins of modernity is no longer particularly controversial. The explosion of research in the past few decades on political theology and the “turn to religion” has already elucidated the paramount importance of religion in early modern literature and culture. What remains surprising, however, is how much of this research politicizes and critiques early modern religion without dwelling on theologically complex concepts such as grace, which were central to how early modern thinkers understood their own world. Perhaps, this is because literary criticism and intellectual history today share more of their methodology with Spinoza than with Milton, Spenser, or the Protestant reformers. Indeed, it is tempting to see Spinoza as our contemporary. His apparently secular understanding of reason, and his tendency to situate the epistles of Paul and James in their historical context, bears some resemblance to our own critical method. This temptation to read the present into the past should not, however, blind us to the enduring influence of the Reformation on early modern humanism. In order to explain more accurately why so many 17th century writers, including Spinoza, dedicated so much of their time to theological paradoxes deriving from St. Paul, we need to situate their work in terms of the intersections between Protestantism, Renaissance humanism, and the many early modern efforts to imagine human freedom and political agency in terms of these intellectual traditions.
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