

# Milton's Christian Humanism and His Attitude toward Woman

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## I

John Milton (1608-74) can be said to be the last and greatest English poet in the tradition of Christian humanism, which is based upon the synthesis of classical and Christian ideas. In his works as well as in his life, he combines the spirit of both the Renaissance and the Reformation. Superficially, the Renaissance and the Reformation seem to be contrasting modes, but it should be noted that they had a common denominator in their spirit: both movements were rebellion, the Reformation against the established Catholic authority and the Renaissance against the God-centered medieval culture. Milton's Christian humanism, a product of the combined spirit of the Renaissance and the Reformation, however, seems somewhat ambiguous and even self-contradictory especially in his poetry, since his Christian creed more often than not contradicts his humanist spirit. Just like his Christian humanism, Milton's attitude toward woman seems sometimes contradictory, and for this very reason it has been illuminated from two extremely different angles: some of the radical feminist critics have attacked Milton as an advocate of the traditional Christian patriarchy, whereas pro-Miltonists including some feminist critics have regarded him as a liberator of women from the patriarchal system. In either case, however, as modern scholarship shows, "the writings of Christian humanists" agree in showing "the spiritual equality and didactic responsibilities of women in the family" (Todd 97).<sup>1)</sup> This

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1) In this paper, parenthetical documentation is adopted for quotations from critics, and footnotes for my own explanatory comments.

essay starts from an assumption that Milton's attitude toward woman is closely related to his Christian humanism, which in turn derives from his conception of Christian liberty. As Douglas Bush observes, Milton's "various ideas and principles start from a passionate belief in the freedom of the will" (114). For this freedom of the will to be realized in each individual's practical life, political freedom should be allowed to him, and it can be extended to his household life. Though it clings to the Biblical patriarchy, Milton's Christian creed is surely mingled and interfused with his paradoxical concept of Christian humanism especially in his poetry. In this view, Milton's attitude toward woman need to be reconsidered in the light of his Christian humanism. This essay examines Milton's attitude toward woman in the light of his Christian humanism.

Like most of the other themes in his longer poems, Milton's attitude toward woman should be examined from an epic point of view, I mean, a sublime perspective on the whole body of human affairs. To put it another way, we need to take into account the whole context of Milton's thought which governs his attitude toward woman. Though, of course, any literary writer or poet cannot completely overcome his background which confines him, what matters here is how he responds to it or transforms it. It is a widely known fact that Milton was a revolutionary poet almost obsessed by the idea of human freedom. If we accept that Milton is a Christian humanist who believes in the freedom of the will, we can easily assume that he cannot be a mere advocate for the traditional patriarchal system. While we cannot say that Milton could completely escape from the patriarchal tradition, we should pay attention to his attempt to revise the very tradition in his works.

## II

Before I begin my main argument on Milton's attitude toward woman in his poetry, I would like to mention briefly his general idea of marriage reflected in his divorce tracts.<sup>2)</sup> Though some critics argue that Milton's divorce tracts are derived from his unhappy marriage, his major argument is that ideal marriage is based upon the spiritual compatibility of man and woman.<sup>3)</sup> We can easily get an impression that Milton's divorce tracts are under the Biblical

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2) Milton's four divorce tracts are as follows: "The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce" (1643, revised & expanded 1644), "The Judgment of Martin Bucer" (1644), "Tetrachordon" (1645), and "Colasterion" (1645).

tradition of patriarchy, but his struggle to escape from the tradition exhibits well his prophetic spirit of Christian humanism. If God's creation of Eve aimed at their mutual happiness rather than Adam's happiness alone, any form of unhappy marriage, which leads their soul into destruction, would not have been meant by God. According to the theology of Caritas or charity<sup>4</sup>), Milton argues, God's very promise to give a helpmeet to Adam is the only source to allow divorce. Since God gives "a helpmeet" to Adam, "she who naturally & Perpetually is no meet help, can be no wife."<sup>5</sup>) If we take into account Milton's contemporary theology, both Catholic and Protestant, which regards reproduction as the primary purpose of marriage and fornication as the only reason for divorce, his defense of divorce on the basis of spiritual incompatibility must be a revolutionary idea. In our modern view, of course, his defense of divorce does not deal with the mutual compatibility between man and woman, but it puts into question woman's compatibility with man. Nevertheless, in "Tetrachordon," Milton puts great emphasis on the "mutual help to piety" as the primary purpose of marriage. He merely uses and depends on the language of his contemporary patriarchal society in order to explain the purpose of marriage. The original cover of "The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce," published in 1643, reads like this: "THE DOCTRINE AND DISCIPLINE OF DIVORCE: RESTOR'S TO THE GOOD OF BOTH SEXES, From the bondage of Cannon Law, and other mistakes, to Christian freedom, guided by the rule of Charity." In "Tetrachordon," Milton even argues that "the wiser should govern the lesse wise, whether male or female" (CPW II: 589). Thus, Milton's divorce tracts should be understood as his attempt to enhance the mutual happiness of both sexes in marriage. Though Milton does not agree to the equality between man and woman, as Stevie Davies points out, his concept of marriage goes beyond the political meaning of equality (182). If marriage is truly based upon the spiritual harmony between man and woman, Milton observes, it can restore the

3) John Halkett argues that these tracts are not based upon Milton's personal experience, because any sect of the contemporary Protestant church did not allow divorce on the basis of spiritual incompatibility (3). From a similar view, Gladys J. Willis contends that in his divorce tracts Milton attempts to inculcate on the English people the higher purpose of marriage and the morality of divorce (30-31). Even Arthur Barker, who admits that Milton's tracts originate from his personal experience, regards his defense of divorce as a step toward his pursuit of Christian liberty (63-64, 72).

4) St. Augustine defines *caritas* as "the motion of the soul toward the enjoyment of God for His own sake, and the enjoyment of one's self and of one's neighbor for the sake of God" (88).

5) John Milton, "Doctrine and Discipline," *Complete Prose Works*, 8 vols. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1953-82), II: 309. All quotations from Milton's prose works are from this edition, and the edition is abbreviated as *CPW*.

unfallen relationship between Adam and Eve.

Though we admit that Milton's divorce tracts are impersonal, we cannot deny that they are focused upon the negative aspect of marriage, since they deal with how to solve the incompatibility between husband and wife. On the contrary, *Paradise Lost* exhibits two different cases of marriage, the unfallen ideal state of marriage and the fallen negative case of unhappy marriage. In the unfallen state, what matters to Adam and Eve is not so much the problem of equality between them as their harmonious relationship. The problem of political equality is a concept introduced after man's Fall. Despite their different roles and faculties in their unfallen state, Adam and Eve enjoy their harmonious relationship, heightening their mutual happiness by helping each other.<sup>6)</sup> To understand Milton's idea of woman, we need to examine the ideal relationship between Adam and Eve in Eden, which is to be lost by their Fall but restored later after their spiritual regeneration. To have "A paradise within thee, happier far,"<sup>7)</sup> fallen Adam and Eve need their mutual help and consolation much more than in their unfallen Edenic life. In other words, the ideal relationship between man and woman in our fallen history can only be fulfilled by regaining the postlapsarian spiritual relationship between Adam and Eve. Thus, understanding the harmonious relationship between Adam and Eve before their Fall is a clue by which to evaluate Milton's attitude toward woman.

### III

Now, I want to begin with the creation episode in *Paradise Lost* that reveals the relationship between Adam and Eve, the first man and woman. Unlike in the Biblical myth of human creation, Milton's Eve in the epic is created in response to Adam's request. In the Bible, God creates Adam first, and then He creates Eve as his partner. But in the epic, Milton's Adam complains about his loneliness to God before His decision to create Eve: "In solitude / What happiness, who can enjoy alone, / Or all enjoying, what contentment find?" (VIII: 364-66). As

6) In her two books, *Milton's Eve* (1983) and *A Gust for Paradise* (1993), Diane Kelsey McColley develops her argument on the unfallen harmonious relationship between man and woman. In her second book, McColley explains the harmony between two sexes in relation to the greater cosmic harmony.

7) *Paradise Lost*, XII: 587. All quotations from Milton's poems are from Merritt Y. Hughes, ed. *John Milton: Complete Poems and Prose* (Indianapolis: Odyssey Press, 1980).

if to test Adam's reasoning ability, God advises Adam to make friends with animals. In response to God's playful advice, Adam argues for the necessity of an equal human partner:

Among unequals what society  
 Can sort, what harmony or true delight?  
 Which must be mutual, in proportion due  
 Giv'n and receiv'd; but in disparity  
 The one intense, the other still remiss  
 Cannot well suit with either, but soon prove  
 Tedious alike: of fellowship I speak  
 Such as I seek, fit to participate  
 All rational delight, wherein the brute  
 Cannot be human consort . . . . (VIII: 383-92)

As seen in Adam's argument, the relationship between man and woman should be based upon their mutual reciprocity. So, what Adam means by mutual harmony is ontological rather than political: in their purpose and dignity as human beings, Adam and Eve are equal to each other. As Susanne Woods remarks, Milton does not base the hierarchy of creation upon the system of value or freedom (27). Though it seems contradictory that in *De Doctrina Christina* Milton regards the mutual consent as the most important component of marriage and at the same time gives more authority to man,<sup>8</sup> this shows the conflict or tension between Milton's concept of Christian liberty and that of the Biblical hierarchy of creation. In Milton's great epic, this conflict goes through a series of poetic tuning or reconciliation. As a Christian humanist, Milton always reconciles his Renaissance humanism to his Christian theology. Such a reconciliation begins with Adam's request to God for an equal partner. In His reply to Adam's request, God refers to His happiness without any equal partner, but Adam points out man's imperfect nature as a reason for his pursuit of mutual help: ". . . not so is Man, / but in degree, the cause of his desire / By Conversation with his like to help, Or solace his defects" (VIII: 416-19).

After God reaffirms Adam's argument for man's need of mutual help, He creates Eve out of Adam's rib as "Thy likeness, thy fit help, thy other self" (VIII: 450). In his dreamlike

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8. See *CPW* VI: 355, 368.

ecstasy, Adam's first impression of Eve as "Manlike, but different sex (VIII: 471). Here, the word "Manlike" has a double meaning, since Adam exists alone before Eve's creation; Adam is both the only human being and the only male man. As a human being, Eve is equal to Adam, but as a different sex she is distinguished from him. As a matter of fact, there are always some conditions for human equality. In other words, we can only contend that men are equal, for instance, before God, the law, or death. But even this is not completely right, because men's inborn gifts are different, their life spans are different, and no law in this whole world is fair to all men. In this sense, the very concept of equality is not so much ontological as political. As political tyranny is one of the effects of the Fall, the concept of equality has no bearing upon Adam and Eve before the Fall. In the Edenic world the natural harmony of creation is a sufficient condition for human happiness. In their ideal harmony, Eve, "Manlike, but different sex," is equal to but at the same time different from Adam. Their difference in equality defines not only their common place in the order of beings but also their human brotherhood. According to McColley, therefore, Milton's concept of equality between man and woman is not "sameness" but "mutual completion" (*Milton's Eve* 22). In Milton's view, man and woman are equal before God because of their respective incompleteness.

Satan's first impression about Adam and Eve reflects well their equality as human beings and their difference in sex. In Satan's first view, Adam and Eve are "two of far nobler shape erect and tall, / Godlike erect, with native Honor clad / In naked Majesty seem'd Lords of all" (IV: 288-90) and "the Image of thir glorious Maker" (292). But the poet comments on their difference:

. . . both  
 Not equal, as thir sex not equal seem'd;  
 For contemplation hee and valor form'd,  
 For softness shee and sweet attractive Grace,  
 Hee for God only, shee for God in him. (IV: 295-99)

Not a few critics have argued about these lines. From a deconstructionist point of view, Hillis Miller maintains that the poet's intention here is opposite to what seems to mean: the obedient Eve is also the independent Eve whose dishevelled hair symbolizes her free spirit (20). But the eighteenth-century female readers could find their female dignity in this very depiction of Eve (Wittreich 86-7). Especially the last line of the quoted lines draws our close attention,

because superficially it seems to degrade woman in general. Here, we need to take into account the Biblical episode of human creation which is the background of Milton's epic. According to the Biblical episode upon which Milton builds up his epic, Adam was created for God and Eve for Adam. We have no reason Milton disbelieved this Biblical episode, so he might well follow it word by word. Adam was created "for God only," since Eve did not exist then. On the contrary, Eve was created for Adam as well as God, since she was created to be a helpmeet for Adam. Paying attention only to its superficial meaning, however, Maurice Quilligan, a feminist critic, finds not only "a sexual hierarchy" but its implied negation of the direct relation between God and woman (224). From a different view, Kathleen Swaim finds here a contrast between Adam's God-centered way of living and Eve's inclination toward practical affairs (127-29). Trying to find out a hidden message here, McColley goes further to generalize its meaning by arguing that "Hee for God only" means man's love for God and "shee for God in him" man's (Christian) love for his neighbor (*A Gust for Paradise* 206). Another quotable line from *Paradise Lost*, which sounds disgusting to the radical feminist readers, is Eve's seemingly self-degrading definition of her relation to Adam: "God is thy Law, thou mine" (IV: 637). This line does not really mean that Adam is Eve's law but that God is both Adam's and Eve's law. In her deep love of God and Adam, Eve expresses in this way her voluntary obedience to her husband, whose law is God. To the final analysis, her voluntary obedience is nothing but an expression of her love. Their collateral love for God completes their *caritas*. The lines quoted above are Satan's depiction of Adam and Eve, which includes the two lovers' harmonious relation: "So hand in hand they pass'd, the loveliest pair / That ever since in love's embraces met" (321-2). Being depicted together, they make a harmonious couple in whom the problem of equality does not impede or lessen their enjoyment of sexual difference. In a sense, the equality between Adam and Eve comes basically from their respective imperfection and mutual difference.

Adam's depiction of his first impression about Eve includes a praise of her female beauty, which goes beyond that of any love poem in the English Renaissance. Adam's praise of Eve may reflect the poet's own concept of an ideal woman: "Grace was in all her steps, Heav'n in her Eye, / In every gesture dignity and love" (VIII: 488-89). Praising God for His gift, Adam comes to realize their "one Flesh, one Heart, one Soul" (499).<sup>9</sup> If we take into account the

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9) The Bible only describes Adam's physical unity with Eve: Commenting on their relation, Adam says, "This at last is bone of my bones / and flesh of my flesh; / she shall be called Woman, / because she was taken out of / Man" (Genesis, 2: 23). All quotations from the Bible are from Herbert G. May & Bruce M. Metzger, eds., *The New*

medieval dichotomy between the soul and the body, Milton's idea of the harmonious unity between man and woman must be a revolutionary concept. Milton's Adam does not hesitate to accept Eve as his other half, which shows the poet's break with his misogynistic tradition.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, Adam's first impression about Eve is not limited to her physical appearance but expanded to include her "Greatness of mind and nobleness" (557).

In response to Adam's praise of Eve's beauty, Raphael reminds him that her beauty is an object of love but not of his obedience or idolatry. The angel, therefore, goes on to advise Adam to govern his love of Eve:

For what admir'st thou, what transports thee so,  
An outside? fair no doubt, and worthy well  
Thy cherishing, thy honoring, and thy love,  
Not thy subjection: weigh with her thyself;  
Then value. (VIII: 567-71)

Eve's physical beauty cannot be an object of subjection or worship but that of love. True love between man and woman not only accomplishes their physical and spiritual harmony but also may ascend toward "heavenly Love":

. . . Love refines  
The thoughts, and heart enlarges, hath his seat  
In Reason, and is judicious, is the scale  
By which to heavenly Love thou may'st ascend,  
Not sunk in carnal pleasure . . . . (589-93)

Stemming not from carnal desire but from reason, love refines one's thoughts and heart, thereby accomplishing "heavenly Love," that is, *caritas*. In this harmonious love is there no room for the political conflict of equality, since mutual difference only works to compensate for each other's imperfection. In this love the relationship between man and woman is based upon their

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*Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha* (1965; New York: Oxford UP, 1977).

10) See McColley, *Milton's Eve* 1-17.



mutual help and compensation, not upon any form of competition. In this sense, even if there had been a hierarchy between Adam and Eve in their prelapsarian state, their hierarchy would be by no means a political strata but a differentiation for mutual completion or harmony. Herein also lies one of the Christian paradoxes that the last may become the first. Just as, according to Christian faith, Christ lowers himself to be crucified in order to achieve God's love toward man, so true love between man and woman transcends their hierarchy, transforming it into an equal relationship. Such a human love can be compared to divine love revealed in Plato's Symposium.

What most strikes feminist critics would be the passage (VIII: 540-59) in which Adam defies Eve, struggling to control himself. But, this passage reflects at once his awareness of his own superiority to Eve and his sense of inferiority to her. In a broader context, it implies that love between man and woman needs self-control and that man's spiritual virtue is more important than his outward appearance. Now that Adam has overturned his God-given value system by succumbing to Eve's outward female beauty, he realizes he needs to refresh his relation to Eve. Just as Eve would fail later to penetrate the disguised Satan's intention, so Adam fails to distinguish reality from appearance. Human inability to penetrate reality beyond appearance is not limited to Adam only but extends to all human beings generation after generation. So, Adam's speech should be assessed in its own prelapsarian terms, not in our postlapsarian political logic. Though Adam's regard of Eve as "the inferior, in the mind / And inward Faculties" (541-42) is ascribed to Milton's contemporary patriarchal society, this is by no means related to our modern concept of political equality: Milton's idea of liberty does never accept political patriarchy, even though the Bible endorses it (Wittreich 66-8).

#### IV

Except some nominal passages in the poem, *Paradise Lost* contains virtually no passage or scene in which the prelapsarian Adam shows his sovereignty over Eve. Adam respects Eve's freedom even in the crucial separation scene in which, ironically, Eve's freedom leads to her fall. Eve lays her argument for her separation from Adam to enhance the efficiency of their work, while Adam advocates their co-work for their safety. According to the Bible, labor is given to Adam as a punishment on his Fall. So, the very fact that Eve, not Adam, suggests an idea for the efficiency of work speaks eloquently for the independent spirit of Milton's Eve. In this sense,

MacColley argues that Milton is the first advocator of woman, who supplies proper work to Eve, along with her mental and physical talent, and who glorifies her status as a helpmeet (*Milton's Eve* 123). In the Bible, Adam and Eve were together when they ate of the prohibited tree: "she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate" (Genesis 3: 6). In *Paradise Lost*, however, Adam and Eve are not together; their separation is primarily for the efficiency of work, but it also intended for their moral autonomy. While agreeing to Eve's proposal for their separation, Adam places great emphasis upon their cooperation and common destiny. It is Adam who emphasizes their mutual help, saying "each / To other speedy aid might lend at need" (IX: 259-60). Nevertheless, Adam does not compel Eve to stay with him; he only argues for their mutual care, because "Not then mistrust, but tender love enjoins, / That I should mind thee oft, and mind thou me" (357-58).

As for the first couple's separation controversy, some critics contend that it shows Eve's weakness. A. J. A. Waldock finds out Eve's pride and Adam's weakness in this scene, while Balachandra Rajan ascribes Adam's fall to his uxoriousness exhibited here, well before his actual sinful behavior (Waldock 34; Rajan 66). E. M. W. Tillyard also observes their Fall prior to Satan's temptation (13). Bredson Bowers even complains about Adam's agreement to Eve's separation from him, saying that Adam overturns the hierarchy of God's creation by allowing freedom to his wife (237). William Riley Parker divides the Fall into three kinds: Adam's surrender to Eve's whim, Eve's original sin, and Adam's sin (512). These are all more or less a patriarchal interpretation which ascribes the Fall of man to Adam who does not hold up to his patriarchal authority.

On the contrary, some other critics show a favorable attitude toward Adam's behavior. Joseph H. Summers endorses Adam's respect for Eve's freedom, arguing that his mistake can be recovered (150). Louis L. Martz finds here the poet's idea of free will intended for Adam and the readers, and Adam's respect for human reason (134). The first couple's separation controversy is not just about the relationship between man and woman, but about each individual's freedom to choose and his responsibility for his own choice. Thus, though Eve's proposal for separation turns out a mistake, it reflects her innocent free spirit. The separation scene is the poet's unique invention to apply his idea of liberty to the case of Eve, the first woman. While following the Biblical patriarchal tradition, the poet tries to describe the ideal relationship between man and woman in the light of their harmonious love and freedom. In other words, the poet's Christian humanism rewrites his Biblical patriarchalism in the language of love and freedom.

Unlike most of his humanist contemporaries, Milton does accept some overlapping area between prelapsarian and postlapsarian human life, for example, labor and sex. According to the Biblical tradition, labor is God's punishment upon Adam's sin. Sex could only be allowed for reproduction, while any other form of sex was prohibited. Like Adam's labor, Eve's labor or child-birth was destined as God's punishment upon her original sin. Against this tradition, Milton's Adam and Eve enjoy their labor before the fall and their sex as well, in itself. For Milton, woman exists neither for reproduction nor for man's physical desire. As a monist, he regards sex as an expression of love which leads man and woman to a harmonious relationship, spiritual as well as physical. In this sense, we can take it for granted that Milton's Adam and Eve enjoy their sex well before the Fall. Besides, their love is by no means mere physical sex without spiritual love. As I have already mentioned above, Milton ranks spiritual love as the first prerequisite condition for marriage. While most of his contemporary church denominations did not allow divorce except for adultery, Milton did allow it, because he thought that marriage without spiritual love is utterly meaningless. Milton's Adam and Eve only enjoy their spiritual love through pure physical sex, pure because spiritual love and physical sex are completely unified to be one. After the Fall, their physical sex tends to pursue a mere fulfillment of their egoistic physical desire.

Milton is remarkably different from his contemporary *carpe diem* poets in their attitudes toward woman. In a sense, *carpe diem* poets devalued women in their exaggerated praise for them, since their praise was too much devoted to women's physical appearance rather than their spiritual worth. Superficially *carpe diem* poets seem to praise women for their beauty, but their main concern is not to raise them up but to seduce them, so that they can enjoy their physical beauty. On the contrary, Milton seems to follow the Biblical patriarchal tradition, but his Christian humanism led him to revise that tradition. To Milton, woman is not a mere object of man's physical enjoyment, but his helpmeet who provides him with harmonious love and mutual solace. Love cannot and should not be written in the language of erotic seduction but rather in the language of spiritual love and harmony. Love is not a possession but a mutual harmony. For this mutual help, freedom is important to woman not less than to man. According to Lucy Hutton, Milton's imagination made a history necessary to women's education through restoring the prelapsarian state in which man and woman were equal. (Wittreich 66). In the morning Adam gives a love song to Eve, and in the evening Eve does the same to Adam. In their love becomes Eve equal to Adam. Their love plays a mediator's role between them through which

Adam and Eve becomes equal regardless of their different and apparently hierarchical functions. In short, their love makes them equal in difference. In her first acceptance of Adam, she "Yielded with coy submission, modest pride, / And sweet reluctant amorous delay" (IV: 310-11). Walter Savage Landor wished to have written these two lines rather than all the poems written in the whole world since Milton.<sup>11)</sup> These lines exhibit an exquisite expression of Eve's modest character along with her proud awareness of her own beauty. In their morning dialogue in Book V, Adam calls Eve "Heav'n's last best gift" (29) or the "Best Image of myself and dearer half" (95), and Eve calls Adam "Sole in whom my thoughts find all repose" (28), or "My glory, my Perfection" (29). In their harmonious love, Adam and Eve do not have any postlapsarian conception of political inequality between man and woman.

## V

Also significant is Eve's initiative in the Fall of man when we talk about Milton's attitude toward woman. First of all, Eve's initiative in the fall of man is not the poet's own convention; it is just his acceptance of the biblical tradition. Moreover, we need to take into account Satan's hypocrisy which Eve cannot penetrate: "For neither Man nor angel can discern / Hypocrisy, the only evil that walks / Invisible, except to God alone, / By his permissive will, through Heav'n and Earth" (III: 682-85). So, it is not proper to find in Eve's gullible nature the poet's allegedly negative idea of woman. Her inability to discern Satan's hypocrisy is merely human beings' inescapable limitation or inability to distinguish between appearance and reality. Like Eve, Adam falls due to his infatuation with appearance: he falls, "fondly overcome with Female charm" (999).

Adam's and Eve's mutual diatribes after their fall have been criticized by some critics who argue that their diatribes reflect the poet's misogynistic attitude toward woman. But it would be more convincing to argue that these diatribes result from their fall, reflecting a perverted postlapsarian relationship between man and woman. After the fall, Adam and Eve attribute the cause of their fall to each other's fault, not their own. Their harmonious prelapsarian love is transformed into their mutual hatred and disharmony. Now, Adam begins to attribute their fall to

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11) Recited from Le Comte, *Milton and Sex* 91.

Eve's stubborn suggestion for their separated work (IX: 1134-42), and moves on to call her "a Rib / Crooked by nature" (X: 884-5) or "fair defect of / Nature" (891-2). Though Eve is "a Rib / Crooked by nature," in the final analysis, the rib must be Adam's own. So, Adam's diatribe is nothing less than his "first incenst" (IX: 1162) self-condemnation, which cannot be found in the prelapsarian Adam. In a sense, Adam's diatribe works as a bridge between his fall and restoration.

Here, Adam's diatribe need to be compared with Samson's against Dalila, which exhibits his willingness to escape from his former mistake and deep regret. Some critics have found Milton's misogyny in Samson's diatribe against Eve, which seems to extend into all women. Closer reading, though, reveals that his diatribe extends to false women only, not to women in general: Samson rejects Dalila's gesture for reconciliation, saying, "Out, out Hyaena; these are thy wonted arts / And arts of every woman false like thee" (748-49). It is Dalila herself who admits that "it was a weakness / In me, but incident to all our sex, / Curiosity, inquisitive, importune / Of secrets, then with like infirmity / to publish them, both common female faults" (773-77). The relationship between Samson and Dalila comes from their lack of "spiritual compatibility" which Milton considers as a prerequisite condition for marriage. Samson's sober decision to separate himself from Dalila is his spiritual awakening that he and Dalila have no "spiritual compatibility." Accordingly, we have no reason to regard his present rejection of Dalila as his misogyny, not to speak of the poet's own. In other words, Samson's rejection of Dalila is his escape from the repetitive cycle of his past experience. Philip J. Gallagher argues that *Samson Agonistes* need to be examined from a double vision of the fall and restoration, as is the case with *Paradise Lost*. Samson's restoration is achieved by his break with the cycle of his repetitive fall, which began with his former relation with the woman of Timna and moved on to his experience with Dalila. Most of the 18th century female readers of this tragedy could tell the poet from the hero or the choir in the drama. As Hill points out, Milton gives Dalila enough reason for her betrayal, thereby preventing her from being an object of misogyny.<sup>12</sup> For all her self-vindication, Dalila does not deserve to share spiritual regeneration with Samson, whom she destroyed for her own sake. This makes her case completely different from Eve's case. Given that Samson's relationship with Dalila was based upon her physical attraction rather than their spiritual compatibility, it is no wonder that Samson's spiritual regeneration is only possible through his separation from Dalila.

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12) Christopher Hill 443. John C. Ulreich, Jr. also views her as a tragic character.

Though Dalila is not an object of misogyny, she must be a temptress who destroys her husband. On the contrary, Eve plays a leading role in the process of spiritual regeneration that she goes through along with Adam. Woman also plays a very important part in the history of human salvation: It is "the Seed of woman"(XII: 378) that unites God and man in the salvation history, which is prophetically shown to Adam through vision and to Eve through dream in the last two books of the epic. In the final analysis, Adam and Eve share their fall and regeneration. Though Eve alone falls deceived, the Father says, "Man falls deceiv'd" (III: 133), and Satan says, "Man I deceiv'd" (X: 496). In other words, Adam and Eve are one flesh and one soul sharing common human destiny, which in turn leads them to mutual companionship. Their physical and spiritual interdependency is well exhibited in the last scene in which they "hand in hand with wand'ring steps and slow, /Through Eden took thir solitary way" (XII: 645-49). Though salvation can be acquired only through individual (solitary) choice, they seek "thir place of rest" (647) "hand in hand," as helpmeets, not as a leader and a follower. The egalitarian significance of this line can be easily understood, if we take into account our old patriarchal custom. Only fifty years ago, women always had to follow a few steps behind men, even though they are man and wife. Both dropping "some natural tears" (645), Adam and Eve need mutual solace and help, which is symbolized by their steps "hand in hand." Though God's sentence for her sin is that "hee [Adam] over thee shall rule" (X: 196), as postlapsarian history proves, this is a counter-example of their prelapsarian egalitarian relationship which excludes one party's rule over the other. In the last scene, Adam and Eve show their harmonious equal relationship, since they have regained their original meta-political relationship.

## VI

As examined so far, Milton's attitude toward woman is deeply related to his Christian humanism both in his prose works and poetry. Even under the inescapable influence of the traditional patriarchal system, Milton's traditional Christian belief is counter-balanced and controlled by his Renaissance humanism. This is why Milton's attitude toward woman has been interpreted in two extremely different ways, one feminist and the other misogynist. In a superficial or nominal level, Milton's text contains a patriarchal language similar to that of the Christian Bible, but his attitude toward woman, especially in his poetry, is reconstructed by his Renaissance humanism, which is more often than not characterized by his idea of freedom. Thus,

we may reason it out that Milton's Christian humanism, paradoxical in itself, leads to his ambivalent attitude toward woman. In this respect, we readers may well need a balanced perspective upon his attitude toward woman.

In *Paradise Lost*, the poet's attitude toward woman is poetically harmonized by his Christian humanism, but it is divided into two contrasting modes, before and after the Fall. Before the Fall, Eve, one and the only prelapsarian woman, is depicted as a free spirit in harmony with and equal to Adam, her prelapsarian man. Though being confined within the traditional Christian hierarchy, their prelapsarian relationship seems complementary rather than hierarchical, since they are both satisfied with their sincere love and freedom based upon their harmonious relationship. In addition, their prelapsarian hierarchy, if any, seems functional rather than political. Our modern concept of equality is tintured by our political ideology which was necessitated by and resulted from the Fall of man, an ideology which is in a sense indispensable in our postlapsarian society. On the contrary, Milton's Delila, a fallen woman in a fallen society, is a political victim to her patriarchal Philistine society. Controlled by her patriarchal society, she comes to lose both her love and spiritual freedom, two virtues of Christian humanism. Dalila's betrayal of Samson's love for her own benefit, however, is a fallen woman's archetypal response to love.

According to Milton, a tyrant king's dictatorship in a country, a man's despotic attitude toward his wife, or a party's betrayal to the other reflects fallen humanity. Though a complete recovery of the prelapsarian human relationship between man and woman is merely an idealism in our fallen society, Milton's poetry encourages his readers to pursue that relationship. Such a harmonious relationship between man and woman comes from true Christian liberty and love, which is strongly defended by the poet's Christian humanism in the whole body of his poetry. Therefore, Milton's meta-political concept of the ideal prelapsarian relationship between man and woman does nullify or transcend the traditional Biblical hierarchy between them, and his Christian humanism is a motive force to revive Adam and Eve's companionship and harmony even in his or his readers' fallen society. In a sense, Eve as well as Adam does embody an archetypal career of a Christian humanist, and also defend freedom and love, two major concepts of Milton's Christian humanism. While freedom is the core of humanism, love is that of Christianity. Through the harmonization of freedom and love, Milton's Christian humanism reconciliates man to God, and saves humanity out of its fallen state. Milton's woman, therefore, could be best illuminated in the light of his Christian humanism which pursues the ideal relationship of *caritas* not only between man and woman (or man and man) but also between God and man.

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## 국문초록

## 밀턴의 크리스천 휴머니즘과 여성에 대한 태도

송 홍 한

르네상스와 종교개혁의 양대 정신을 계승한 존 밀턴(John Milton)은 크리스천 휴머니즘(Christian Humanism)을 그의 사상과 시정신의 근간으로 삼고 있다. 크리스천 휴머니즘은 그의 산문과 시에서 자유평등과 사랑의 정신으로 표현되었고, 그로 하여금 주어진 시대상황 속에서 정치적 자유를 옹호하고 투쟁하게 하는 원동력이 되었다. 오늘날 상당수의 페미니스트 비평가들이 그를 가부장제적 반여성주의자로 치부하는 것은 그의 크리스천 휴머니즘 사상과 근본적으로 상치하는 주장이다. 실제로, 밀턴의 비평사적 관점에서 보더라도, 그를 여권옹호자로 보는 시각이 존재해 왔으며, 현재도 그의 작품 속에서 그의 여성관과 자유사상의 관계를 찾거나 음양적 조화에 주목하는 비평가들이 있다. 따라서 본 논문은 여성에 대한 밀턴의 태도가 그의 크리스천 휴머니즘과 밀접하게 연관되리라는 가정 아래 그의 산문과 시에 나타난 여성관을 조명한다.

이혼론을 다룬 밀턴의 산문을 살펴보면, 그의 결혼관이 “영적 양립성”(spiritual compatibility)에 근거하고 있음을 알 수 있는데, 이는 종족번식을 결혼의 제일 가는 조건으로 보았던 당시의 종교적 결혼관에 비추어 볼 때 진일보한 사상이다. 기독교적 전통이 가부장제적 남성우월 사상에 바탕을 둔 것 같지만, 기독교 윤리의 근간인 사랑의 메시지에 비추어 본다면, 진정한 의미의 기독교 남녀관은 남녀의 상하관계가 아니라 조화의 관계일 것이다. 또한 기독교 정신과 더불어 밀턴의 양대 사상적 축을 형성하는 르네상스 휴머니즘 정신은 신구교를 막론하고 여성의 지위를 향상시킨 사상이었다. 이러한 사상이 시인의 크리스천 휴머니즘으로 융화되고 조화를 이루어 그의 산문에서 논리적으로 주창되었고, 시작품 속에서는 시적 상상력을 통해 시화된다. 밀턴의 사상이 시적으로 승화 집대성된 『실락원』(Paradise Lost)에서는, 시인이 가부장제적으로 보이는 기독교 전통을 따르는 듯 하지만, 이브(Eve)의 창조과정을 시화하면서 남녀의 상호보완적인 동반자적 관계를 묘사한다. 성서적 남녀창조의 선후에서 귀결되는 남녀의 역할상의 구분은 있지만, 결코 여성 위에 남성이 군림하는 관계는 아니다. 불평등으로 비치는 역할상의 구분을 남녀의 조화로운 사랑의 관계로 승화시키고 있다. 그리고, 일의 능률을 위한 역할 분담을 이브 자신이 제외하는 것은 시인

이 여성에게 부여하는 독립적 정신을 보여준다. 그러나 분업제외가 타락으로 이어지는 것은 이상적 남녀관계가 독자성보다 협력과 조화에 있음을 시후하는 것이다. 또한 타락이전의 남녀의 평등한 관계를 묘사함으로써, 타락으로 인해 형벌로서 주어진 남성의 억압적 여성지배는 극복되어야 할 남녀관계임을 보여주는 것이다. 아담(Adam)과 이브의 이같은 남녀의 조화로운 관계는 타락으로 인해 와해되지만, 영적 회개와 사랑으로 회복된다. 타락직후 아담이 이브에게 퍼붓는 독설은 타락의 징후를 시화한 것이지 여성에 대한 시인의 태도와 무관하다고 본다. 이는 『투사 삼손』(*Samson Agonistes*)에서 데릴라(Dalila)에게 배신당해 영어의 몸이 된 삼손(Samson)이 그녀에게 보여주는 냉혹한 태도와도 비교되지만, 사랑에 의한 관계 회복에 있어서는 대조적이다. 또한 아담과 이브의 영적 소생과정에서 이브가 주도적 역할을 하는 데서도 여성에 대한 시인의 새로운 시각을 엿볼 수 있다. 『실락원』이 “손에 손을 잡고” 에덴을 떠나는 아담과 이브의 모습으로 끝나는 것은 시인이 평등과 사랑을 통한 남녀의 동반자적 관계를 인간역사의 나아갈 방향으로 제시한다고 할 수 있다.

밀턴의 시적 상상력과 신학사상에 따르면, 사실상 평등은 타락이후 형성된 정치적 개념이며, 밀턴이 제시하는 이상적(혹은 타락이전의) 남녀관계는 초정치적 개념으로써 상이함과 대등함을 동시에 지니는 관계이다. 피상적으로는 밀턴이 가부장적 전통을 따르는 것처럼 보이지만, 타락이전의 조화로운 남녀관계를 시적 상상력을 통해 복원함으로써 남녀관계의 재정립을 제시했다고 하겠다. 밀턴은 이같은 이상적 남녀관계를 독자들에게 권고하고 있고 그의 크리스천 휴머니즘은 문학적 상상력의 원동력이 되고 있다. 자유가 휴머니즘의 핵심이라면, 사랑은 기독교의 핵심이다. 사랑과 자유를 조화시킴으로써 밀턴의 크리스천 휴머니즘은 인간을 하나님과 화해시킬 뿐 아니라 남녀의 조화로운 관계를 모색한다. 따라서, 여성에 대한 그의 태도는 그의 사상과 시정신의 근간인 크리스천 휴머니즘의 맥락에서 가장 잘 조명될 수 있다고 하겠다.