

## ABSTRACT

BROWN, SHERRI LYNNE. *Digesting Devotion: Food as Sustenance and Sacrament in Milton's Paradise Lost*. (Under the direction of Robert V. Young.)

Milton's story of the original sin of Adam and Eve and the resulting fall of mankind is a story that is bound up in food imagery and the language of consumption. A meal for Adam and Eve holds significance far beyond its value as sustenance. Milton embeds his epic with seventeenth-century beliefs on diet and health that help to emphasize the physical and spiritual innocence of the prelapsarian pair and the fallen state of the England of Milton's time. Moreover, the couple's meals in Paradise become not only dietary indications of man's pre-fallen perfection, but also precursors to the Eucharistic meal that will be instrumental to man's redemption once he is fallen. In his writing, Milton exemplifies his ability to merge scientific beliefs of the time with his own religious views, thus bringing the secular and the sacred together in an epic where food and eating become indicative of one's relationship with God.

**DIGESTING DEVOTION: FOOD AS SUSTENANCE  
AND SACRAMENT IN MILTON'S *PARADISE LOST***

by

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## **DEDICATION**

Lovingly dedicated to Mom, Dad, Henry, and Kimberly, the “Thesis-Nazi,”  
without whom this never would have been written.

## **BIOGRAPHY**

Sherrri Brown lived in New Jersey and upstate New York before moving to North Carolina in 1992. She earned her Bachelor's degree in English from Duke University in 1999, and after completing her Master's degree in English from North Carolina State University, she plans to enroll in a Master's program in Library Science. She currently works in D. H. Hill Library at NC State and lives in Holly Springs with her sister and three cats.

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## Introduction

John Milton's explicit purpose in writing *Paradise Lost* was to "assert Eternal Providence, / And justify the ways of God to men" (I. 25-26).<sup>1</sup> However, his story of Adam and Eve in Paradise can be seen to have an additional, and perhaps more important, lesson for his seventeenth-century readers. Rather than simply a "justification," which a reader would passively accept or disregard, Milton's work also suggests a way of living and worshiping God that seventeenth-century man could emulate. In view of the religious turmoil in England during the years of Milton's conception, writing, and publication of *Paradise Lost*, the faith of prelapsarian Adam and Eve, and their close connection with God, may have seemed unattainable, at least initially, to the reader. However, a thorough reading of the poem would show that not only was such a religious relationship possible, at least in part, for seventeenth-century man, but that its realization was much easier to achieve than suggested by the Church of England at the time.

One avenue through which the contemporary reader could relate to the poem was via the prevalent seventeenth-century views on diet and health that can be found in its lines. Milton's story of the original sin of Adam and Eve and the resulting fall of mankind is a story that is bound up in food imagery and the language of consumption. In the most literal reading of the story, man's downfall is the direct consequence of Adam and Eve having eaten the fruit of the forbidden Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. God's one command that he sets forth for Adam and Eve to obey is directly embedded in

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, quotations of Milton's works are from: Merrit Y. Hughes, ed. , *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose* (New York: Macmillan, 1957).

the abstinence from the consumption of a particular food. The seventeenth-century reader, who was also bound by a culture that emphasized the importance of food not only as the center of social life, but also personally in the regulation of health and temperament, readily would have been able to identify with the food-centered account.

In Milton's prelapsarian Eden, Adam and Eve's enjoyment of the literal fruits of their labor comes to exemplify both the perfection of their state and the close relationship that they share with God and His angels. In his descriptions of Eden and the daily endeavors of Adam and Eve, Milton's use of the language and imagery of food, its consumption, and the effects of its consumption, helps to highlight the vast distance between Adam and seventeenth-century man, Eden and England. Milton's depiction of the near-perfection of the prelapsarian physiological state works to emphasize the fallen state of the England of his time. At the same time as he is bemoaning his own imperfection, however, the contemporary reader would also be viewing ways in which he could change his attitude toward food, and from there, toward life in general, to try to achieve a connection similar to that which Adam and Eve experience with God.

A look at seventeenth-century beliefs about diet and health and how Milton utilizes these beliefs in *Paradise Lost*, will show the perfection of Adam and Eve's world before the fall, emphasizing the religious and moral aspects of diet that underlie the daily meal. In order to understand the full religious importance of meals in Eden, it also will be helpful to understand Milton's displeasure with the practices of the seventeenth-century Church of England, and his movement toward a radical view of the sacrament. Finally, a look at the Edenic meal as a sacramental meal will show how Milton's view of Eden helped to collapse the boundary between science and religion.

By combining views on diet and health that were still widely believed throughout the seventeenth century with religious beliefs of the time, Milton is able to blur the lines between the secular and the sacred. Since many popular beliefs of Milton's time focused on how the body and the substances consumed by the body affected the mind and the soul, food and its effects could become the perfect point at which the secular and the sacred could become one. A look at *Paradise Lost* will show that for Adam and Eve an everyday meal and the Eucharistic feast would have been treated equally – in essence, each meal that Adam and Eve partake of can be seen as a sacrament, and thus the secular becomes sacralized, and the fruits of their labor become their means of bringing themselves closer to God.

## Chapter One – On Diet and Health

The first thing to realize when speaking of seventeenth-century views on diet and health is that the concept of the body and its inner functions drastically differed from our modern view. Humoral theory, first developed in ancient Greece, remained influential in Western medicine until the nineteenth century. Based on the works of Empedocles (504-443 B.C.) and Hippocrates (c.460-c.377 B.C.), and further developed by Galen in the second century A.D., humoral theory centered on the belief that a person's health and disposition were determined by the balance of four bodily fluids or humors – blood, phlegm, choler, and melancholy (Narins 560). According to Michael Worboys in "The Spread of Western Medicine," "[I]t was not until the end of the eighteenth century that humoral ideas were abandoned and replaced by a view of the body as made up of parts – organs, tissues, and cells – where disease is due to structural abnormalities or physiological malfunctions" (249). Others who have studied the history of Western medicine have extended Galen's influence even further, noting that "Around 1800 clinical judgment was still drawing upon the threads and patches of humoralism" (Porter 412). Although other medical theories already had begun developing by the period in which Milton began his epic poem (the circulation of the blood, and chemical treatments for ailments, for instance),<sup>2</sup> the influence of Galen and his humoral theory could still be found in the writings and beliefs of Englishmen throughout the seventeenth century.

Thomas Walkington's *The Optick Glasse of Humors*, for example, considers the four humors and their prevalence in daily life and health. First printed in 1607, the work

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<sup>2</sup> See Andrew Wear, "Medicine in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1700," *The Western Medical Tradition 800 BC to AD 1800*, Lawrence I. Conrad et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995) 215-361, esp. 330-360.

was reprinted in London in c. 1631, 1639, and 1663. Although the authors of the modern introduction to the 1631 reprinted edition admit that as “the printings were repeated, the work became progressively more obsolete” (Popplestone and McPherson xiii), the fact that such reprintings even occurred suggests that there must have been an anticipated market for such “traditional” ideas.

A look at Walkington’s work provides insight into the significance humoral theory placed on food in affecting not only one’s physical health, but also the state of one’s mind and soul. Agapetus is the principal spokesman Walkington uses in stating the purpose of *The Optick Glasse*. As Walkington writes: “But we, O men, (saith hee) [Agapetus] let vs so disciple our selues, that each one may throughly know himselfe: for he that perfectly knowes himselfe, knowes God, & he that knowes him, shall be made like vnto him, and he that is this shal be made worthy of him [. . .]” (5). Following from here the thought process in Walkington’s reading of humoral theory, then, it seems that in order to begin his journey to spiritual worthiness, a person must first learn which “complexion” he is: “Sanguine, Cholericke, Phligmaticke, [or] Melancholicke.” Knowing oneself (through one’s complexion) is not enough, however. Walkington encourages regulation of one’s diet according to one’s complexion, in order to avoid destroying the physical and mental gift that God has bestowed upon each man:

[F]or those who distemper & misdiet themselues with vntimely and vnwonted surfeting, who make their bodies the noysome sepulchers of their soules . . . [who not foreseeing what will] infect the conduit pipes of their limpid spirits, what will dull & stupefie their quicker intelligence, nay, disable all the faculties both of soule and body [. . .]. (8)

Temperance in diet, then, becomes a key element in one’s religious life in addition to the secular. This is due to the connection between the body and soul that we see developed

in humoral theory. Eating a piece of fruit, for example, does not just appease hunger or perhaps cause indigestion; it can also be the cause of one's spiritual or mental anguish, distancing one from the self-knowledge and worthiness that allows him to achieve a connection with God.

According to Andrew Wear, the link between health and religion was one that crossed Christian denominational boundaries. Illness as a "punishment for sin" (240) was another way in which diet, health, and religion were intertwined. Stemming from Genesis, and found in works including Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*, was the belief that from the first alimentary transgression came the influx of disease and discomfort into the world.

The populace of England in the seventeenth century suffered through many hardships that surely strengthened their belief that God's wrath must be upon them. In early modern England, infant mortality was around 150-200 per 1000 born, as compared with 9 per 1000 in current times (Wear 215). Plague was also prevalent throughout the century. Approximately one-fifth of London's population died in each visitation of plague in 1603, 1625 and 1665, and, "The village of Eyam in Derbyshire, England, suffered a 40 per cent mortality in 1666 when, in a famous incident, it agreed to quarantine itself and not allow any inhabitant out of the village" (Wear 220-1). The extent of this particular mid-century plague is noted in Mary Dobson's "Epidemics and the Geography of Disease" as well, when she mentions that "During the Great Plague of 1665-6 over 100,000 Londoners died, and, at the height of the epidemic, there were as many as 6,000 deaths per week" (176). According to Dobson, "Between the fourteenth and the eighteenth centuries, some 50 million Europeans are believed to have died as a

direct result of plague [. . .]” (176). Plague was not the only problem that Englishmen had to worry about, however. As the population rose in the seventeenth century, the number of those “living at or below the subsistence level was rising” as well (Rabb 83). Margaret Healy notes in *Fictions of Disease in Early Modern England* that, “[D]uring both the major export slumps of the 1620s – 1621-2 and 1629-31 – the harvests were disastrous, accentuating the problems of unemployment and poverty” (197). As people fought poverty and widespread disease, many of their thoughts may have turned to seemingly separate but actually irrevocably intertwined subjects – religion and diet – the soul and the body.

Current unhappiness would cause men to look back to the “golden age” of their forebears, to dream of a time and place where there was an abundance of healthful food. Compared to their fallen state, a bygone time of ease in consumption would indeed seem like paradise, causing many to lament their own state and the sins that must be keeping God from relieving them of their sufferings. Colin Spencer writes in *British Food: An Extraordinary Thousand Years*: “Food reflects everything, it is a microcosm of what is shaping the world at the time. What you eat and how you eat it are the product of what you are doing there and then” (Introduction 9). In such a time as the mid-seventeenth century, it would seem likely that some, like Milton, might look to temperance in diet as a source of both self-control and power in a seemingly uncontrollable world. Food and how it was approached became a means to please God through showing Him one’s ability to stave off the evils of excess and greed. Food became the crosspoint between science and religion. On the one hand, scientifically, it was thought that the soul was affected by the food put into the body:

[S]o fareth it with the bodies and by sequele with the soules of men, if we poure in with the vndiscreete hand of appetite, they will both reele too and fro, and scarce can wee breath, at least, wee cannot vtter the least thing that relisheth of wisdom, our mindes must needs follow the tempers or rather the distemperatures of our earthly bodies. (Walkington 20)

But, on the other, this rupture of the body-soul equilibrium would not occur without God's wrath. As Margaret Healy writes, "Pestilence, for Bullein and his fellow Protestants, was always a consequence of sin – predominantly the collective sin of a sector of the community, although those lacking moral and religious fortitude (who did not practise proper regimen of body and soul) were particularly susceptible to infection of the physical and moral kinds" (86). So, while science could purportedly explain how the soul was negatively affected by the body's nutrition, the omnipotence of God was still believed to be the underlying but formidable "cause" of such disturbances.

General temperance in eating and drinking in combination with a carefully selected diet that worked with one's temperament or complexion, could then be seen as a means for pleasing God. Alinda Summers notes in her article on *Paradise Regained* that "[t]he older accounts [biographies of Puritan saints] often commented upon the saint's taste for simple fare as a preparation to the sumptuous delicacies he would enjoy in heaven" (278). Milton himself has been described as very fastidious in his meals. A.N. Wilson writes in his biography of Milton, that "[t]he accounts of friends recall a temperate man who did not eat or drink much [. . .]" (218), and William Riley Parker's biography agrees: "Milton learned to take pride in keeping low and obedient the demands of the flesh; he found that 'frugal diet', 'strict life and labour', 'mutual and easy curbs which are in the power of any temperate man', were proof against 'a sublunary and bestial burning'" (227).

Milton's belief in temperance is also apparent in many of his works. His sixth elegy, written to his close friend Charles Diodati in 1629, for instance, discusses his need for temperance in order to prepare himself for the writing of a great epic poem. In *Comus*, although the focus appears to be on chastity, the trickster title character is linked with intemperance, as are the purported victims of his treachery:

[He] Excels his Mother [Circe] at her mighty Art,  
Off'ring to every weary Traveller  
His orient liquor in a Crystal Glass,  
To quench the drought of *Phæbus*, which as they taste,  
(For most do taste through fond intemperate thirst)  
Soon as the Potion works, their human count'nance,  
Th' express resemblance of the gods is chang'd [. . .]. (63-9)

The punishment for the travelers' intemperance is to be turned, at least in appearance, into an animal – thus losing their God-given human form. The victims of *Comus* have, in fact, given in to the “bestial burning.” Milton's fiction was not his only outlet for his belief in self-restraint (although there are numerous other works in which examples can be found). In his essays, as well, he speaks of eating both as part of his instruction, and as proof of waywardness in those who have led his England astray. In *Of Education*, Milton's presumption of what is best in a proper school of learning would be a diet that is “plain, healthful, and moderate” (639). Milton's pamphlet *The Reason of Church Government Urged Against Prelaty* discusses discipline, and decries those preachers and “counsellors of state and judges” who cannot control their own habits, including eating, and are thus unable truly to lead the people:

[F]or all their single knowledge and uprightness, how deficient they are in the regulating of their own family; not only in what may concern the virtuous and decent composure of their minds in their several places, but, that which is of a lower and easier performance, the right possessing of the outward vessel, their body, in health or sickness, rest or labor, diet or

abstinence, whereby to render it more pliant to the soul and useful to the commonwealth: which if men were but as good to discipline themselves as some are to tutor their horses and hawks, it could not be so gross in most households. (643)

Without God's assistance, Milton suggests, man cannot take care of the Church's people, which is exemplified in how little he can manage to care for himself.

One other important essay that clearly delineates Milton's beliefs about food as tightly bound by the natural laws of the humoral system as created by God, is *Areopagitica*. In his argument for freedom of the press, Milton at one point likens books to food, and he shows that God has bestowed upon man the knowledge to be able to discern what should be eaten or adhered to and what should be cast aside or dismissed.

As Milton explains:

For books are as meats and viands are – some of good, some of evil substance, and yet God in that unapocryphal vision said without exception, “Rise, Peter, kill and eat,” leaving the choice to each man's discretion. Wholesome meats to a vitiated stomach differ little or nothing from unwholesome, and best books to a naughty mind are not unapplicable to occasions of evil. Bad meats will scarce breed good nourishment in the healthiest concoction [. . .]. (727)

Though his focus of the argument is on the worth of all books, we can also see Milton's view of food, and his overall faith in the worth of temperance in both maintaining health and keeping God's grace: “How great a virtue is temperance, how much of moment through the whole life of man!” (*Areopagitica* 727).

Finally, the clearest examples of Milton's belief that food both tempts and tests man, can be seen in his great epic and ensuing sequel, *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*. In the first, man, in the second, the Son of God, are tempted with food. Their reactions to this temptation, and the eating that does (and does not) take place in these

poems, reveals the fallibility of man, and infallibility of the Son, and depicts how food should be approached and consumed in order to bring oneself closer to God.

## Chapter Two – On Diet and Health as seen in *Paradise Lost*

In Milton's prelapsarian Eden, Adam and Eve's enjoyment of the literal fruits of their labor comes to exemplify the perfection of their prelapsarian state. In Book V of *Paradise Lost*, Milton ventures into considerable detail in his depiction of the meal and conversation shared by Adam and the Archangel Raphael in the Garden. This meal has become a point of contention among Milton scholars, who disagree on Milton's purpose for including the elaborate description of the meal and on the source material after which Milton's scene might have been fashioned. While several critics have pointed to possible Biblical and classical sources such as the stories of Abraham and Tobit or the works of Ovid, Homer, and Virgil, only a few scholars have mentioned the influence of seventeenth-century ideas about diet and health on Milton's portrayal of the meal. However, a closer look at the text will show that the various aspects of humoral theory can be seen in Milton's depiction of Raphael's ability to digest earthly food, on his portrayal of the prelapsarian universe, on Adam's inability to digest foods perfectly after the fall, and, in a larger sense, on his ideas about the inseparability of the body and soul.

When Raphael sits down to eat with Adam in Book V, Adam questions the archangel's ability to eat earthly food – “unsavory food perhaps / To spiritual Natures” (401-2) – to which Raphael responds by explaining in detail how the angelic digestive process occurs:

and food alike those pure  
Intelligential substances require  
As doth your Rational; and both contain  
Within them every lower faculty  
Of sense whereby they hear, see, smell, touch, taste,  
Tasting concoct, digest, assimilate,  
And corporeal to incorporeal turn. (V. 407-13)

And the narrator adds to Raphael's comments:

So down they sat,  
And to their viands fell, nor seemingly  
The Angel, nor in mist, the common gloss  
Of Theologians, but with keen dispatch  
Of real hunger [. . .]. (V. 433-7)

Unlike others before and during his time, Milton has Raphael actually eating the food that Adam sets before him. What is more important than Milton's deviation from the notions of leading contemporary angelologists, however, is that he follows popular seventeenth-century beliefs about digestion to make this distinction. Raphael does not just eat the food, but describes how he is able to "Tasting concoct, digest, assimilate" (412), words echoed in the explanation of early modern English ideas on digestion by Michael

Schoenfeldt in "Fables of the Belly in Early Modern England":

The process of digestion was imagined to occur in three stages. The first, occurring in the stomach proper, is termed concoction, and converts food into chyle, a fluid that the body can begin to absorb. The next stage of digestion occurs in the liver, and converts the chyle into blood [. . .]. The third and final stage of digestion takes place in the various parts of the body that attract what nourishment they need from the blood. Digestion thus is something that does not happen exclusively in the stomach but occurs throughout the organism. The human body is from this perspective a giant stomach. Digestion, moreover, is a very literal assimilation of something that is not part of one to the essence of one's being [. . .]. (244-5)

Besides specifically noting the terms concoction, digestion, and assimilation, as Milton does, Schoenfeldt suggests in this passage that in early modern England digestion involved the idea of turning something other than self into part of oneself, just as Milton depicts Raphael as able to turn corporeal substance into incorporeal essence, the makeup of his own being.

What does this mean for Milton's Paradise? In depicting Raphael as able to digest foods following seventeenth-century beliefs on digestion, Milton highlights how closely man and angel were once related, and thus how far man has now fallen from that point. While Raphael's digestive processes may appear the same as fallen man's, the effects of these processes indicate the large expanse that separates them. Raphael is able to eat whatever he wishes and is able to turn it into something his body can use for sustenance. He is also able to eat without the fear of overeating. In contrast, as earlier discussed, in the seventeenth century certain foods were thought to cause illness, and the overabundant consumption of any particular food was thought to produce negative effects on both body and soul. In Book V, Adam is told by Raphael that if he obeys God, he, too, may one day be able to "turn all into spirit" and enjoy the benefits of never being overfull and having all foods in heaven and earth from which to choose. Instead, Adam falls, and men in Milton's time found themselves bound by the size of their stomachs and the ability of their bodies to digest foods without falling ill.

During his conversation with Adam, Raphael draws man into an even larger circle of existence as he explains that the universe God has created also depends on nourishment:

For know, whatever was created, needs  
To be sustain'd and fed; of Elements  
The grosser feeds the purer, Earth the Sea,  
Earth and Sea feed Air, the Air those Fires  
Ethereal, and as the lowest first the Moon [. . .]. (V. 414-18)

In his further description of the "moist Continent" of the moon, the "unpurg'd / Vapors," and the "humid exhalations" of the universe's digestive process, Milton seems to refer to the commonplace view of the universe as made of fire, air, earth and water. From this

connection he suggests that the universe participates in a digestive process complete with the resulting humors and vapors that such a process was thought to create. This idea is posited by Leonard Barkan, who believes Milton in *Paradise Lost* “images forth the cosmos as a vast anthropomorphic digestive system” (qtd. in Schoenfeldt 256), and by Regina M. Schwartz, who describes Milton’s universe as “a body that is engaged in ceaseless transformation, feeding and excreting, a material, digesting, concocting, assimilating body that perpetually and naturally turns matter into spirit” (9). An important point to notice, though, is that although Milton’s universe may process its nourishment by excreting humors in a process similar to man’s, it also works each part in perfect harmony with the others so that the sun, moon, earth, and sea complement one another in what they need and what they receive. Again, this contrasts with fallen man’s continual need for food that may cause illness and changes in attitude.

The most telling comment Milton makes on postlapsarian man’s digestive capabilities can be seen in the change that occurs in Adam when he eats the forbidden fruit. In the very beginning of Book V we see Adam awaken from a perfect state of sleep, untroubled by indigestion, which did not exist in prelapsarian Eden. His sleep is described as “Aery light, from pure digestion bred, / And temperate vapors bland [. . .]” (4-5). In contrast, Schoenfeldt points to Book IX lines 1046-52 as the “first terrestrial case of insomnia caused by indigestion” (256):

Soon as the force of that fallacious Fruit,  
That with exhilarating vapor bland  
About thir spirits had play’d, and inmost powers  
Made err, was now exhal’d, and grosser sleep  
Bred of unkindly fumes, with conscious dreams  
Encumber’d, now had left them, up they rose  
As from unrest [. . .]. (IX. 1046-52)

Schoenfeldt finds Milton's comment on the negative physical effects of eating the forbidden fruit a "bitter joke" on Milton's part, but perhaps such a change in the digestive capabilities of man would be exactly what Milton would have wanted to depict as a serious implication of the fall. Prior to the fall, Adam can eat from any tree but one in the garden and does not have to worry about the effects on his health. Once he has disobeyed God's commands by eating the forbidden fruit, however, foods will now have an impact on his health. Again, this shows the difference between man in prelapsarian Eden and fallen man of the seventeenth century whose every bite could lead to tortures of the body and mind. As Adam realizes in Book X, now that he has fallen, "All that I eat or drink, or shall beget, / Is propagated curse" (728-9).

In Book XI, Michael expounds on this curse that Adam mentioned:

Some, as thou saw'st, by violent stroke shall die,  
By Fire, Flood, Famine, by Intemperance more  
In Meats and Drinks, which on Earth shall bring  
Diseases dire [. . .]. (XI. 471-4)

He then proceeds to list diseases ranging from Epilepsy to Melancholy, and Ulcer to Asthma as resulting from intemperance in eating (XI. 479-90). Even those who are saved from cruel death "by temperance taught, / In what thou eat'st and drink'st, seeking from thence / Due nourishment, not gluttonous delight," Adam is told, will have to contend in old age with "A melancholy damp of cold and dry" that will "weigh thy Spirits down, and last consume / The Balm of Life" (XI. 531-3, 544-6). In the course of his argument that *Paradise Lost* is more of a "Christian-humanist epic rather than a strictly Biblical poem," David Shelley Berkeley indicates that Michael's emphasis on causes of death consistent with humoral theory suggests that "Milton on this subject prefers Hippocratic

and Galenic notions to the Bible [. . .]” (141). That Milton does so shows the influence that ideas on diet and health popular during the seventeenth century might have played in his depiction of the fall of man. Before the fall, Adam can sleep peacefully without the disturbance of digestive complications. After the fall, even with temperance, he is still doomed to a death related to diet and old age.

Based on the ideas of Galen’s humoral theory, the early modern English concept that linked body and soul makes an interesting connection with Milton’s depiction of the inseparability of body and spirit in *Paradise Lost*. Schoenfeldt writes, “Whereas our post-Cartesian ontology imagines inwardness and materialism, soul and stomach, as necessarily separate realms of existence, the Galenic regime of the humoral self demanded the invasion of social and psychological realms by biological and environmental processes” (244). An example of this philosophy of the interconnection between body and soul can be seen in Robert Burton’s *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, first published in 1621:

as the Body workes upon the minde, by his bad humours, troubling the Spirits, sending grosse fumes into the Braine, and so *per consequens* disturbing the Soule, and all the faculties of it . . . so on the other side, the minde most effectually workes upon the Body, producing by his passions and perturbations, miraculous alterations; as Melancholy, despaire, cruell diseases, and sometimes death it selfe. Insomuch that it is most true which *Plato* saith [that] . . . all the mischiefes of the Body, proceed from the Soule. (qtd. in Schoenfeldt 253)

What one did to one’s body, specifically by eating, was thought to affect directly one’s spirit, and in the reverse of this process, as Schoenfeldt notes, many people of the time believed that divine grace was necessary to aid in the process of digestion. This might explain “why the spiritual autobiographies of the period pay such close attention to

digestion” (254). *Paradise Lost*, which arguably contains the spiritual biography of Adam and Eve in that we are able to trace their close relationship with God before the fall and their distancing from him after, also spends a significant amount of time speaking of digestion, as in the aforementioned instances, and in the very concept of their fall being caused by consumption. Literally, the physical eating of the forbidden fruit in Milton’s *Paradise* brings about the corruption of man’s soul.

Further evidence of the connection between body and soul can be seen by returning to the conversation that Raphael holds with Adam as they eat. During this scene, Raphael explains that while all things are made from God, some have more physical and some more spiritual substance (V. 472-9). He continues, telling Adam that if he obeys God, the time may come when men’s “bodies may at last turn all to spirit” (V. 497) through his consumption of the food of Eden, as noted earlier. According to Raphael, “flow’rs and thir fruit / Man’s nourishment” provide man with the ability to reason as the body turns the food for the physical self into food for the mind and thus the spirit. Once Adam and Eve have betrayed God’s command, they lose the ability to rise to a state of angelic spirituality. Whereas prelapsarian Adam and Eve appeared to turn food into spiritual sustenance that brought them closer to God, postlapsarian man in the seventeenth century appears to be left with food that plagues both body and mind, and indicates the fallen state of man’s soul.

Another angle from which to view Milton’s use of seventeenth-century ideas on diet and health in his writing of *Paradise Lost* is to look at the type of food that Milton has Adam and Eve eating. His choice of foods can be seen as an indication of their state of ease before the fall as compared with the foods that were both available and

considered healthy for a seventeenth-century Englishman of Milton's class. Anthony Low has suggested that Milton's use of fruit – and possibly vegetables – as the complete makeup of Adam and Eve's daily sustenance is not just important because it is based on biblical accounts, but also because it contrasts so greatly to the food available to people of Milton's time. He explains that as "Attractive as Eve's menu sounds, fruits in such profusion and variety would have seemed as unavailable to fallen man as the Paradise from which he had been driven" (139). Low uses this argument as support for his larger claim that the simplicity of Adam's meal with Raphael, down to the very foods that he provides his guest, suggests that their meal stands as a communion symbolizing the closeness shared by man, angel, and God that is lost after Book IX: "Adam's simple feast is not the Communion of the Church Militant, but its forerunner, which after the fall cannot be repeated by Man" (Low 142). Low's view of the meal as eucharistic is one that I share, and that will be discussed in length later in this paper. However, in terms of the diet and health issues of Milton's time, Low's statements suggesting the fruit Adam offers contrasts with the fare of Milton's contemporaries, are worth looking into.

Support for Low's argument can be found in Drummond and Wilbraham's discussion of the lack of availability of certain foods in seventeenth-century England. "For the greater part of the year," they explain, "the price of fruit placed it beyond the reach of the ordinary purse, but it is surprising to find how expensive it sometimes was even at the season when one would have expected to find a glut in the markets" (111). Besides the scarcity and high prices of fruit, Galen had believed that eating fruit might cause fever, a common belief in early modern England as well. In *The Castel of Helth*, written in 1539, Sir Thomas Elyot contrasts Eden with the sixteenth century:

Forasmuche as before that tyllage of corne was inuented, and that deuoryng of flesh and fyshe was of mankynde vsed, men undoubtedly lyued by fruites, & Nature was therwith contented & satisfied: but by change of the diete of our progenitours, there is caused to be in our bodies such alteration from the nature, which was in men at the begynnyng, that nowe all fruites generally are noyfulle to man, and do ingender ylle humours, and be oftetymes the cause of putrified feuers, yf they be moche and contynually eaten. (qtd. in Drummond and Wilbraham 68)

It is unknown whether Milton was familiar with Elyot's work, but the concept he sets forth in *Paradise Lost* appears to be consistent with Elyot's in suggesting the difference between man's dietary capabilities before and after the fall.

Not all critics agree with Low's reading of the text as showing Adam and Eve, when dining with Raphael, as serving only fruits and vegetables. Jack Goldman, in his article "Perspectives of Raphael's Meal in *Paradise Lost*, Book V," suggests that Low's assertion about the components of the meal in Book V is unsubstantiated. Goldman makes the claim that meat was served at Adam and Eve's table, which would render false the idea that Milton knowingly detailed the meal so as to highlight the ease and simplicity with which Adam and Eve nourished themselves in prelapsarian Eden on foods that would seem unattainable to a man of Milton's time.

Goldman points to Milton's inclusion of the terms "meat" and "drinks" as possible indications of more than just fruits and vegetables at the table in Book V. He writes:

As for the presence of meat on Adam's table, Milton tell [sic] us,  
    . . . So down they sat,  
    And to their viands fell, nor seemingly  
    The Angel, nor in mist, the common gloss  
    Of Theologians, but with keen dispatch  
    Of real hunger, . . . (433-437)  
Finally, when they had finished their meal, Milton summarizes,

Thus, when with meats and drinks they had suffic't,  
Not burd'n'd Nature, sudden mind arose  
In Adam, . . . (451-453)

It seems strange, then, that Huntley and Low should conclude, with such ease, that the meal served Adam and the Archangel was devoid of wine and meat and consisted of only fruits and vegetables. (33)

Goldman's other defense of Milton's Adam and Eve as carnivores is made by looking at possible sources Milton used for the Raphael meal – Genesis 18 and other Jewish sources that describe when Abraham feasts with Angels:

In describing the meal that Abraham sets before the angels, the Talmud (Babba Meziah 87a) tells us, "Abraham slew three young bulls in order to feed them three tongues pickled in mustard." How suggestive this is of Milton's reference to "viands" (l. 434) and "meats" (l. 451), which, while they both have generic meanings, also bear the specific connotation of "flesh." (34-5)

Goldman's suggestion of "viands" and "meats" as indications of carnivorousness, mentions, but tosses aside the idea that both terms can also mean food in general. In fact, one connotation of the word "meat" that was in use during the seventeenth century, works nicely with Low's reading of these passages, reading meat as "The edible parts of fruits, nuts, eggs, etc: the pulp, kernel, yolk" ("Meat"). Although the origin of the word "meat" is unclear, the Latin word *maedre*, 'be wet,' "would build up a picture of *meat* – 'food, nourishment' – as something that flows from the mother's breast" (Ayoto 180). In Milton's Paradise, this meat would be the fruit that mother nature puts forth. Even the connotation of "flesh" can suggest the juicy pulp of the fruit that Adam and Eve rely on for nourishment.

Let us consider this matter a bit further. The first time that Satan sees Adam and Eve in Book IV they are eating, and their meal is described as follows:

to thir Supper Fruits they fell,

Nectarine Fruits which the compliant boughs  
Yielded them, side-long as they sat recline  
On the soft downy Bank damask't with flow'rs:  
The savory pulp they chew, and in the rind  
Still as they thirsted scoop the brimming stream [. . .]. (IV. 331-6)

It appears clear that Adam and Eve did not eat meat at this above-described meal, so if they were to change their meal to include meat for Raphael's sake, it would seem likely that Milton would want to highlight this difference, especially considering the amount of lines he spends describing its preparation and consumption. Instead, we see Eve beginning to prepare "For dinner savoury fruits, of taste to please / True appetite [. . .]" (V. 304-5). When Adam suddenly sees Raphael approaching, he calls to Eve, telling her to prepare a meal worthy of their guest, to which she replies, "But I will haste and from each bough and brake, / Each Plant and juiciest Gourd will pluck such choice / To entertain our Angel guest [. . .]" (326-8). Eve commences to gather "fruit of all kinds" (341).

Another reason to support the idea that Milton would want Adam and Eve shown as eating only fruits and vegetables, and not meat, would be that then they can remain innocent – not until after the Fall can blood ever be said to be shed by their hands. In fact, Milton makes it explicit that not until after the fall did animals begin to kill one another. It is not until Book X that we are told "Beast now with Beast gan war, and Fowl with Fowl, / And Fish with Fish; to graze the Herb all leaving, / Devour'd each other [. . .]" (710-12). Although Adam was appointed ruler over the animals, it stands to reason that it was not until after the fall that he, too, began to slay them for food.

In depicting Adam and Eve as vegetarians, Milton is able to preserve their innocence and highlight their superior status over seventeenth-century man. Michael

Schoenfeldt writes that the Englishmen of the early modern period believed that, “Like the humors they nourish, foods are predominantly either hot or cold, moist or dry, and bestow that disposition on the consumer. To choose one’s diet is an act of self-fashioning in the most literal sense” (251). In being able to consume a diet completely made up of fruits and vegetables, Milton’s Adam and Eve would be seen as a couple far removed from seventeenth-century man, right down to the food they were able to eat.

### Chapter Three – On Milton and the Restoration Church of England

Prelapsarian Adam and Eve were fashioned by Milton as the antitheses of the seventeenth-century “fallen” man. At the time Milton was writing, he had become disillusioned with his once bright hopes for the future of England. As an old, blind man suffering from gout, which literally means “a drop” and was originally thought to result from “a discharge of drops of humors” (“Gout”), Milton was no doubt troubled not only by the failings of his own body, but also by what he would have considered the fallen state of Restoration England. Over time, as Milton became frustrated with the practices of the Church of England, he turned away from customary organized beliefs, relying more heavily on the Bible as the sole source for his own views. In doing so, he would eventually collapse the distinction between the secular and the sacred, thus bringing two seemingly distanced ideas such as science and religion together in the meals of Adam and Eve in Paradise.

From a young age, Milton, a Puritan believer in emphasis on Scripture and simplicity of the Church service, had to live in a land where those in power disregarded the Puritans’ ideas of a purified Church. With the succession of Charles I after James’ death, and, to a greater extent, with the appointment of William Laud as the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1628, there was a fear among the Puritans that the Anglican Church was being pushed farther toward Catholicism. J. Sears McGee notes the disagreement the Puritans had with the Laudian power in the Church:

Laud’s program clashed with puritan convictions in three utterly crucial ways [ . . . ] (1) Laud ordered the use of all the ceremonial observances in the Prayer Book and in the Canons of 1604 [ . . . ]. (2) The archbishop’s reissue of the king’s *Book of Sports* in 1633 was another serious affront to puritan sensibilities on the subject of how the Sabbath ought to be

honored. Puritans saw in this royal and episcopal licensing of Sunday recreations a direct breach of the Fourth Commandment. [. . .] (3) Laud's enforcement of his program led to the suspension, silencing, and ejection of puritan preachers and to the blocking of puritan attempts to install 'godly preachers' in as many pulpits and lectureships as possible. (77)

Although the Canons of 1604 and earlier Church leaders may have directed the clergy to add certain High Church elements to their services, Laud and his followers actually enforced the decrees, even adding stipulations "such as bowing at the name of Jesus and treating the communion table as an altar, railed about and placed at the east end of the chancel" (McGee 77). For Milton and his fellow Puritans, such ceremonial elements were unacceptable and foreshadowed the possible fall of England to the popery that engulfed some of its nearest neighbors.

While the rise of the Laudian party caused some to flee England for America in hopes of a respite from the persecution that threatened nonconformity, others stayed in the homeland, hoping for a change. That change appeared to be on its way by the mid- to late 1640s, as the Laudian party lost its power, and Laud and Charles lost their heads. Suddenly, the use of the *Book of Common Prayer*, which had been a requirement under Laud, became a crime (although one that would, at least for a while, go unpunished) (Arnott li; Spurr 15). In 1640 the House of Commons had received a petition signed by 15,000 Londoners "calling for the extirpation of episcopacy 'root and branch'" (Kenyon 152). The petition against the prelates listed grievances such as:

6. The great increase of idle, lewd and dissolute, ignorant and erroneous men in the ministry, which swarm like locusts of Egypt over the whole kingdom, and will they but wear a canonical cap, a surplice, a hood, bow at the name of Jesus, and be zealous of superstitious ceremonies [. . .]  
14. The great conformity and likeness both continued and increased of our Church to the Church of Rome, in vestures, postures, ceremonies and administrations [. . .]

15. The standing up at *Gloria Patri*, and at the reading of the Gospel, praying towards the east, bowing at the name of Jesus, the bowing to the altar towards the east, cross in baptism, the kneeling at Communion [ . . . ]
16. The turning of the Communion Table altar-wise, setting images, crucifixes and conceits over them, and tapers and books upon them, and bowing or adoring to, or before them [ . . . ]. (Kenyon 172-3)

Once Laud and Charles I were displaced, Milton saw hope of a further reformation of the English Church, ridding it of such ceremonies and “superstitions” as the Puritans had been subjected to in the previous decades. The rise in power of the Parliament in the early 1640s led to the enactment of policies approved of by the Puritans. In 1642 and 1644 Parliament forbid the performance of plays, travelling on the Sabbath, and the observance of Christmas (Kenyon 256). They abolished the use of many of the ceremonial elements that had been ushered in and enforced under Laud.

Early in 1642, Milton added his own voice to the rise against episcopacy in his pamphlet *The Reason of Church Government Urged Against Prelaty*. Milton’s argument against the prelates includes his belief that they wielded too much power in both Church and government affairs. He even goes so far as to equate the prelates with Satan, writing: “[. . .] Lucifer, before Adam, was the first prelate angel, and both he, as is commonly thought, and our forefather Adam, as we all know, for aspiring above their orders were miserably degraded” (648). He accuses the prelaty of merging with the Papists: “Be ashamed at last to tell the parliament ye curb schismatics, whenas they know ye cherish and side with papists and are now as it were one party with them [ . . . ],” and of not following Christ’s example of teaching through servitude: “[I]f to do the work of the gospel Christ our Lord took upon him the form of a servant, how can his servant in this ministry take upon him the form of a lord?” (657, 672). While his words against the

prelates echo the voice of the Puritans of the time, Milton's tract goes further, including ideas that seem to admonish the Parliament of the 1640s as well. In his argument, Milton decries too much involvement of the government in the affairs of Christianity: "For the imperfect and obscure institution of the law," he writes, "which the apostles themselves doubt not oftentimes to vilify, cannot give rules to the complete and glorious ministration of the gospel, which looks on the law as on a child, not as on a tutor" (647).

Scripture versus the law is a theme that Milton took up again over a decade later in 1659, in *A Treatise of Civil Power in Ecclesiastical Causes*. As England lay on the brink of a return to rule under a king, Milton argued again for a basis of belief on Scripture rather than law, venturing even further in his push for Christian liberty. He writes to Parliament, "[H]e who holds in religion that belief or those opinions which to his conscience and utmost understanding appear with most evidence or probability in the scripture, though to others he seem erroneous, can no more be justly censured for a heretic than his censurers, who do but the same thing themselves, while they censure him for so doing" (843). By this point in his life, Milton appears to be moving even further from the idea of one, organized, institutional Church to an emphasis on one's own beliefs as based on Scripture. As A.N. Wilson explains:

The Reformation leaders all saw the same truth [. . .] if the Scriptures were at variance with the teachings of the Church, then the Church must be wrong. Yet, of course, as Milton had observed in pamphlet after pamphlet, none of the 'Churches' of the Reformation had had the courage of their convictions. They had all sought to establish mini-orthodoxies of their own, to become their own popes. They were all frightened of the Gospel liberty. (193)

During the time of the long Parliament, the *Book of Common Prayer* was replaced by the *Westminster Directory*, which brought back some of the simple elements of the

Reformed service, such as the change in how Communion was received. Rather than kneeling while Communion was prepared at what appeared to many to be an altar, the *Directory* had the communicants sitting about the Communion Table which was meant to “underlin[e] the sonship and equality of all believers under Christ’s rule” (Breward 6).

However, even in this time of change to a more Puritan-like Reformed service, there were likely still precepts on religion by the government with which Milton did not agree. For example, Milton believed, along with other Christian mortalists, that when the body died, the soul died with it, until Judgement Day,<sup>3</sup> yet in 1648, Parliament passed an ordinance that proclaimed those who believed in mortalism to be blasphemers, and thus subject to imprisonment (Burns 16). Moreover, Milton’s hopes for reform, like the hopes of others, were not met to the degree with which he had hoped. In his famous line in “On the Forcers of Conscience Under the Long Parliament,” Milton warns “*New Presbyter* is but *Old Priest* writ Large” (20), yet in 1648 Presbyterianism was established as the new form of government in the Church. As G. E. Aylmer explains, “At first simply anti-episcopalian as an extension of his being naturally anti-Catholic and so anti-Laudian, he [Milton] was soon to see, more clearly than most, the potential threat to freedom of worship, expression and conscience posed by a Presbyterian State Church” (20). As noted earlier, Milton valued Christian liberty, and the presbyterian system of government could prove just as restrictive to that liberty as the prelaty had been, pushing him farther toward his own radical views on Protestantism.

After the heavy persecution of non-conformists by the Laudians, and the

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<sup>3</sup> See Milton’s *Christian Doctrine* Bk 1, Ch 13, as noted in Norman T. Burns, *Christian Mortalism from Tyndale to Milton* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP) 18.

uncertainty during the time of the Long Parliament, Milton no doubt had been optimistic when Oliver Cromwell took control of the Commonwealth in 1653. Cromwell's statement in 1650 that "We look at ministers as helpers of, not lords over, the faith of God's people" (qtd. in Cross 175), seems to coincide with the ideas Milton cherished. In fact, Milton wrote a heroic sonnet addressed to Cromwell in 1652, in it referring to his belief that Cromwell "Hast rear'd God's Trophies and his work pursu'd" ("To the Lord General Cromwell" 6). However, Cromwell's leadership of the Protectorate only lasted five years, and in that time, Milton became disillusioned with his hero. He was still unhappy with the religious state of England, although changes had been made. According to A. N. Wilson, "Clearly, for all his piety, Milton found the Protestant sectaries who flourished in their multitude swarms during the Protectorate quite as contemptible as, before that, he had found the Presbyterians and the Laudian Anglicans" (186). With Cromwell's death in September of 1658, the hope of further reformation in the Church died as well. As Claire Cross notes, "Attempts to limit religious liberty came quickly after Cromwell's death" (195). Cromwell's son, Richard, took his father's position, but not without opposition, and by 1660 the monarchy and episcopacy were restored without a single shot having been fired.

The Restoration of Charles II was a hard blow for Milton and his Puritan contemporaries. In his 1644 tract *Areopagitica*, Milton proclaimed he saw "a noble and puissant nation rousing herself like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks" (745). By 1660 he must have viewed her more as the de-tressed Samson that had fallen as a result of her own pride. As Austin Woolrych writes, "His [Milton's] optimism in *Areopagitica* about the capacity of the people of England to order their own destinies

declined by degrees into the contempt for the judgement of the public at large that crackles from the pages of *The Readie and Easie Way* [. . .]” (66), the document that railed against the restoration of the king of England. Both in political and ecclesiastical matters, Milton saw the possibility of reform slipping away. In Milton’s mind, the ascension of the great military leader, Cromwell, to the forefront should have changed everything. Instead, by 1660, he had realized Cromwell was not as he imagined, and with his death, instead of further reform, much appeared to be returning to its pre-Cromwellian state. In the Prayer Book of 1662, for example, “The kneeling at Communion, the use of vestments, the Cross at Baptism, the Ring at Marriage, Absolution for the Sick, – all these things to which the Puritans had objected were not only retained in the new Book, but also enforced by Parliament [. . .]” (Arnott lii), thus leading some historians to term the ensuing period as “the great period of the Puritan persecution” (Cross 196).

The evidence from Milton’s pamphlets and the known events of the time clearly portrays the religious upheaval of the Church of England surrounding the time period in which Milton was writing *Paradise Lost*. The frustration Milton must have felt toward his fellow Englishmen could only work as fuel to urge his writing of a work that showed Man in his prelapsarian glory, perhaps leading some to open their eyes more readily to how far they had fallen since that time. *Paradise Lost* would also become a canvas where Milton could illustrate some of his own ideas about what constituted a sacramental meal, and how one could best feel a connection to God. That Milton had moved farther and farther from the ideas of the established Church is clear:

Milton's mind [. . .] had moved very far from some of the traditional Christian ways of looking at God, and the world. Some of his quest had begun, as we have suggested, because he found his contemporary clergymen so inescapably absurd that he knew he could not believe as they did. Some of his views developed for less negative reasons, because he found himself in agreement with such serene intelligences as Cudworth. But at every stage it was his own, supremely independent vision of things which guided him. Even before his blindness he existed in his own world, belonged strictly to no sect, party, or group. (Wilson 197)

As Milton's radical ideas alienated him from the customs of the Church of England, he turned to his epic poem as a place where he could show his contemporaries that there was more to religion than the customs set forth by politically minded ecclesiastics.

#### **Chapter Four – On Religion in *Paradise Lost* vs. Religion of Seventeenth-Century England**

Looking closely at some of the intricacies of the religious beliefs and practices of the English in Milton's time period, and comparing them with the religious ideals upheld in *Paradise Lost*, reveals the vast difference that Milton is emphasizing between the prelapsarian life of Adam and Eve, and the choices being made by the fallen men of seventeenth-century England. The religious complications of Milton's time, and the beliefs manifested amongst those complications, would surely lead one of Milton's contemporaries to view the ease of prelapsarian religion with wonder. A look at the ease with which Adam and Eve related to God would raise the question in the seventeenth-century mind as to what was different then, and how one might try to get closer to such an ideal relationship. Milton's work reveals possible answers to these questions, thereby acting as a guide for the return toward a simpler (and "purer") form of worship. One important religious element shown in *Paradise Lost*, perhaps arguably the most important in terms of revealing the pronounced differences of the two time periods, is in the approach to the Eucharistic sacrament. A look at the dietary and alimentary habits of Adam and Eve highlights their personal relationships with God, and one can view in their daily meals a sacramental quality that has been lost in the seventeenth-century. I argue that it is this approach to Communion that the Englishmen of Milton's time are meant to be inspired to emulate after reading the poem.

According to R. V. Young, "along with the issue of grace and free will, the number and form of the sacraments, especially the nature and effects of the Eucharist, were the most important points of contention during the Reformation" (82). The seventeenth-century ecclesiastical issues of table vs. altar, sitting vs. kneeling, simplicity

vs. ceremony, were due in large part to the differing beliefs of what actually occurred during the Eucharistic sacrament. Catholics believed that during the Mass the bread and wine underwent a process termed transubstantiation, in which they became the real body and blood of Christ. Protestants, on the other hand, were divided on the issue. Luther believed in a process that has been labeled consubstantiation, whereby “Christ is truly present in the elements of bread and wine because He is already present everywhere in the universe [. . .].” Calvin, however moved further away from the Catholics’ belief in the real presence of Christ, positing the idea that “the Body and Blood of Christ are really present *in the faith of the elect communicant*; hence communion is a sign that one already has grace rather than a means of obtaining it.” And lastly, the third major view of the Eucharist, and the one to which Milton’s beliefs most closely aligned, came from Zwingli, who viewed the Eucharistic service as a form of memorialism in which the bread and wine involve “no *real presence* at all” but that their consumption is “merely a ‘memorial’ of the Last Supper and the sacrifice on Calvary” (Young 83). For Protestants, then, what they believed happened (or did not happen) to the bread and wine, influenced their ideas on how the consumption of them should be treated. If the body and blood of the Son were thought to be present, then much more reverence to the actual physical objects would be expected. If, on the other hand, they were simply used as elements to symbolize the sacrifice of Christ, without actually becoming his flesh and blood at any point, then the emphasis of the Eucharistic meal became something more internal, more spiritual, perhaps, than the corporeality tied up in the idea of the real presence would suggest.

It is in the idea of the Eucharist as memorial, that Milton believed. For him the railing in of the Communion Table and the kneeling and bowing during the Eucharistic sacrament must have seemed absurd, for he saw the Lord's Supper not as a moment of Christ's sacrifice, but, according to chapter 28 of his *Christian Doctrine*, as merely a "solemnity in which the death of Christ is commemorated by the breaking of bread and pouring out of wine, both of which elements are tasted by each individual communicant, and the benefits of his death thereby sealed to believers" (*The Works* 191). I suggest that it is this type of worship, specifically this type of sacrament, that Milton shows Adam and Eve performing in *Paradise Lost*. While we do not see the Edenic pair partaking in any sort of ceremony customarily thought to be suggestive of the Communion, it is, in fact, the very lack of ceremony that Milton would want his seventeenth-century readers to see as essential to a true connection with God in the sacrament. What we see in Adam and Eve's prelapsarian meals correlates with what Milton believed was necessary for a sacramental meal. Thus their meals in Paradise become not only dietary indications of man's pre-fallen perfection, but also precursors to the Eucharistic meal that will be instrumental to man once he is fallen. Milton then is able to use these meals to suggest ways in which his contemporaries can change their own lives to live healthier in body and mind and also regain a little bit of paradisiacal communion with God.

Several Milton scholars have discussed the sacramental qualities of the meal Adam and Eve share with Raphael in Book V of the poem. Some, such as John N. King, focus mainly on the satire created in the language describing the meal. Others concentrate on the elements meant to remind one of the unadorned Puritan-form of the sacrament. Anthony Low, for example, writes, "The stress on simplicity in the description of the

meal in the Garden [. . .] reflects the Protestant or Puritan Communion Service, as opposed to the Mass. The simple meal in the Garden prefigures the Communion Service, and both celebrate in appropriate ways the connection between Heaven and Earth, or the Communion of Saints” (141). It is this second idea that I would like to expand upon in looking not just at the Book V meal with Raphael, but at all of Adam and Eve’s eating in Eden leading up to the time of the Fall.

In order to show Milton’s emphasis on the sacramental qualities of the meals of Adam and Eve, it will first be useful to define sacrament in terms of Milton’s beliefs. In chapter 28 of his *Christian Doctrine*, Milton defines a sacrament as “a visible sign ordained by God, whereby he sets his seal on believers in token of his saving grace, or of the satisfaction of Christ, and whereby we on our part testify our faith and obedience to God with a sincere heart and a grateful remembrance” (*The Works* 165). Later, in his further discussion of the sacraments, Milton notes that in order to be able to partake efficaciously in a sacrament, one needs “proper place and season, purity of heart and life, and a regular communion of believers” (211). Applying this definition to the meals eaten by Adam and Eve in Milton’s prelapsarian Eden will show that, for them before the fall, every meal was a sacramental one.

In Book IV, Satan first sees Adam and Eve in the Garden sitting down to their Supper. Seen from afar through the eyes of Satan disguised as a Cormorant sitting high on the Tree of Life, Adam and Eve’s meal appears at first to be not unusual, and hardly sacramental. They sit, they eat, they converse – though at this point, we cannot hear what they are saying. It is only after the description of the pair is interrupted by Satan’s soliloquy of woe and he changes shape among the animals to approach the couple, that

we can hear their discussion, and the sacramental qualities of the meal become clearer. For it is in Adam's words that we learn of their recognition of God's grace and hear them "testify [their] faith and obedience to God with a sincere heart and a grateful remembrance." Adam speaks to Eve of Him to whom they owe their lives:

needs must the Power  
That made us, and for us this ample World  
Be infinitely good, and of his good  
As liberal and free as infinite,  
That rais'd us from the dust and plac't us here  
In all this happiness, who at his hand  
Have nothing merited, nor can perform  
Aught whereof hee hath need [. . .]. (IV. 412-9)

Adam makes clear in these lines that he realizes that without God's grace – a gift that is unmerited and can never be repaid – he and Eve would still be nothing, literally the dust of the Earth. Adam also professes their obedience to God's command in this conversation as they eat, as it is in these lines that Satan learns of the one tree in the Garden from which Adam and Eve cannot eat:

This one, this easy charge, of all the Trees  
In Paradise that bear delicious fruit  
So various, not to taste that only Tree  
Of Knowledge, planted by the Tree of Life,  
[ . . . . . ]  
The only sign of our obedience left  
Among so many signs of power and rule [. . .]. (IV. 421-4, 428-9)

And although Milton's readers would have known that at some point God's command would be broken by the couple, they had already heard God's saving grace proclaimed in Book III, as the Son commits himself to die for the couple's future sin, and all the sins of the world that will follow.<sup>4</sup> And while Adam testifies his love for God – "But let us ever

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<sup>4</sup> See Book III.80-343.

praise him, and extol / His bounty [. . .]” (IV. 436-7), Eve echoes his sentiment, “For wee to him indeed all praises owe [. . .]” (IV. 444).

So we see Adam and Eve eating their meal, the “visible sign” of his “saving grace,” and we hear them “testify [their] faith and obedience to God with a sincere heart and a grateful remembrance” – Milton’s definition of a sacrament. They also meet Milton’s further qualifications for what is needed for a proper Communion to take place – “proper place and season, purity of heart and life, and a regular communion of believers.” Being in Paradise, Adam and Eve have the perfect setting of place and season, as the only humans born sinless, they are as pure of heart and life as is possible, and their coming together to eat at mealtime binds them in fellowship as they express their love for each other and for their Creator.

This last component necessary for a sacramental meal, the “regular communion of believers,” has been pointed out as particularly important to Puritans in the seventeenth century. In 1651, Thomas Goodwin, a Puritan, emphasized that one of the key purposes of the Lord’s Supper was as “a communion, the highest outward pledge, ratification, and testimony of love and amity among his members themselves, . . . a love-feast, in that they eat and drink together at one and the same table” (qtd. in McGee 202-3). This aspect of the Communion meal is highlighted in Book V of *Paradise Lost* when Adam and Eve invite Raphael to their table to dine with them. As many critics have indicated in the past, Milton is careful to point out that their meal is served from a table: “Rais’d of grassy turf / Thir Table was, and mossy seats had round [. . .]” (391-2), thus emphasizing its difference from a Catholic-style altar where a fleshly sacrifice is thought to take place. Milton also controversially has Raphael “nor in mist, the common gloss / Of

Theologians, but with keen dispatch / Of real hunger” eating the meal with the earthly couple (435-7). Highlighting Raphael’s ability and willingness to partake of the paradisiacal meal again helps Milton portray its sacramental qualities, for Raphael is drawn into the “communion of believers” who pronounce their faith in God and his grace through their meal. By eating with Adam and Eve, Raphael shows his love for them, along with his love for God, which seals his commitment to the sacramental meal that is being enjoyed.

Similar to the conversation that takes place during and after the meal in Book IV, we also hear Adam and Eve voicing their acknowledgement of God’s goodness as they prepare for and partake in the meal with Raphael in Book V. First, as Eve prepares the dinner meal before Raphael’s arrival, we are told, “And *Eve* within, due at her hour prepar’d / For dinner savoury fruits, of taste to please / True appetite [. . .]” (303-5). While it is easy to read “True appetite” to be talking merely about the hunger caused by hard work in the Garden, in the context of the sacramental meal that is about to take place, “True appetite” may also be suggestive of the hunger for God that the sacramental meal helps to quell. Adam recognizes their provider as they all sit down to eat, noting, “These bounties which our Nourisher, from whom / All perfet good unmeasur’d out, descends, / [. . .] That one Celestial Father gives to all” (V. 398-400, 403). Raphael later shares a similar sentiment, saying “O *Adam*, one Almighty is, from whom / All things proceed, and up to him return [. . .]” (V. 469-70). And when Raphael reveals to Adam the possibility of his one day gaining access to heaven, the sacramental quality of the meals can be read in his words: “And from these corporal nutriments perhaps / Your bodies may at last turn all to spirit [. . .]” (V. 496-7). If Adam and Eve’s meals are

indeed sacramental, then as they eat they bring themselves closer to God, and reveal his spirit within them. The hope is that one day that heavenly spirit will prove strong enough to overcome their earthly bodies as they become one with God.

When *Paradise Lost* was presented to seventeenth-century England, readers would have noticed the religious quality of the meals in prelapsarian Eden. In emphasizing the simplicity of the meals, the closeness of the participants to one another, and the sincerity of their words and actions, Milton may have been attempting to persuade readers to rethink their own sacramental experiences. In comparison with the railed-in altar where a priest or church official led the subservient congregation, Milton's Edenic Communion table where all sat down to feast together, would have made a distinct impression. And while readers would know they could never get back to the relationship that Adam and Eve are able to share with Raphael and with God, they could still be prompted to bring back simplicity to the Communion service and to see God in themselves and in every part of their lives, free from the need for ceremonies and adornments.

The sacramental quality of the early meals of Adam and Eve is highlighted further by the elements missing when Eve eats the forbidden fruit in the Garden, bringing about the Fall of mankind. First of all, Eve is alone, separated from Adam, so the necessary "communion of believers" is missing (the snake should not be considered a worthy believer, being an animal, and not a believer, at that). Then she makes the Tree of Knowledge and its fruits her focus rather than focusing on God as their creator and the benefits of eating it (obviously, in this case, there would not be any benefits, but still, in juxtaposition with the other meals, this is important). As Marshall Grossman writes,

“Eve, when she Falls, misses the word and invests the sign with magic powers; she takes the sign literally, thinking knowledge is invested in the fruit rather than the practice of disobedience entailed in eating” (45). The Fruit, rather than God, becomes the beloved object, and she eats it in hopes of gain rather than with remembrance of Him to whom she owes her life and happiness. So, too, with Adam. He eats the Fruit thinking only of Eve and what his life would be like without her, and he too is alone, for Eve has at this point already lost her faith and obedience.

When Adam and Eve eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, their actions are selfish. Rather than a sacrament, eating becomes a means for gain. Seventeenth-century readers could compare eating in Eden with eating in their own culture, where food had become a sign of social status, separating the haves from the have-nots, and where embellishments in feasting and ceremony in Communion services had clouded the meaning of a meal, whether a family supper, or the Lord’s Supper. For many, as for Adam and Eve in their moments just before the Fall, “True appetite” had been lost. Looking back to the earlier meals of Adam and Eve might help some to remember the original intent of the Christian meal, and seeing the Fall would highlight their own sins as seen in the actions of the wayward Adam and Eve.

## Chapter Five – On the Secular and the Sacred

In his book *British Food: An Extraordinary Thousand Years of History*, Colin Spencer discusses the importance of food throughout British history. Food was not only a sign of social status in itself, but the ceremony surrounding its consumption also often indicated the excessiveness of the wealthy. In discussing Anglo-Norman traditions of the years spanning approximately the twelfth through the fourteenth centuries, Spencer describes the importance of the meal for those in power:

The royal feast was a theatrical display communicating a ritual of undreamt wealth and eminence, the source of myth and fairy tale. Rank and hierarchy were precisely indicated by where each person sat at the table, as were the ornateness of the seat, the tableware and decorations that surrounded him and the delicacy of the dishes that were presented to that part of the table. (66-67)

Milton is writing against the idea of the need for such ornament and embellishment in the Christian meal – both daily and Eucharistic – in *Paradise Lost*. When Adam and Eve eat in Paradise, they dine on Nature’s fare at an earthen table. While I have argued that their prelapsarian meals can be viewed as sacramental, none of the adornments of the seventeenth-century Anglican Eucharistic ceremony can be seen at their table. For Milton, simplicity was the key to both religion and diet. In fact, much like his depiction of the meals of Adam and Eve, for Milton diet and religion need not necessarily be separated.

If we take the meaning of diet as stemming from “the Greek term *diaita* implying a way of life” (Porter 418), then for Milton, religion was a necessary part of diet, because religion underscored every part of one’s way of life. Milton, however, seemed to see that many of his fellow men had forgotten, or perhaps never quite understood, that even the

daily supper should be approached with one's religious beliefs in mind. Rather than a time for feasting and gluttony, the daily meal was a time for temperance, because what went into the body directly affected the soul. In *Paradise Lost*, Milton was able to use both scientific beliefs on diet and health and religious views associated with the Eucharistic meal to emphasize this idea of the body-soul continuum that made the physical and the spiritual irrevocably one. In the process, Milton helps to bridge the ideas of secular and sacred so that in many cases they become one and the same thing simply viewed from different angles.

When we view the meals of Adam and Eve in prelapsarian Eden, we can see the secular – Adam and Eve, hungry from a long morning of working in the Garden, sitting down to appease their appetite – and the sacred, the meal as sacrament, bringing the partakers of the meal closer to God and acknowledging his divine grace. In some ways Milton takes what the reader would view as sacred, and secularizes it. For instance, when Raphael uses heat to “transubstantiate” the food he eats in Eden (V. 438). John C. Ulreich describes Milton's use of this religious term to describe a digestive process:

By relegating transubstantiation to one of the “ordinary physical processes,” Milton does, in fact, secularize the sacred mystery of the Mass; at the same time, however, he exalts the ordinary physical process of digestion into a sacramental act: “whatever was created” is “sustain'd and fed,” so that every higher degree of life and substance contains within itself “every lower faculty” (5. 414, 415, 410). (43-44)

For Milton, however, true transubstantiation of bread into Christ, did not exist. However, we can see his blending of secular and sacred in many of his own beliefs posited in the work, particularly in the blending of the scientific, secular ideas of digestion into meals that he portrays as sacramental. On the one hand, Adam, Eve, and Raphael are praising

God for his bestowal of unmerited favor, while on the other they are speaking of how angels are able to digest a meal. When man falls, it is an egregious blow to his relationship with God, but Milton takes time to note the physical alterations that have taken place in Adam as well.

By combining seventeenth-century ideas on diet and health with religious views in the writing of his epic, Milton is able to both highlight the differences between prelapsarian and postlapsarian man and subtly suggest ways fallen man can be more like his prelapsarian forebears. Milton himself was very temperate when it came to meals, and his emphasis on simplicity in worship is clear from many of his writings, not the least of which is his *Christian Doctrine*, where these beliefs are set forth in detail. That he should want to portray Adam and Eve as the paragons of such practices, then, appears to make sense, especially when they could stand before seventeenth-century man as exemplars of both the virtues of enjoying the temperate, sacramental meal, and of what happens when the rules God sets forth are not obeyed.

In the process of blending the secular and the sacred, the physical and the spiritual, Milton is actually furthering what Protestantism was said to be doing to religion at the time. Amos Funkenstein noted the following:

To various degrees, [Protestantism] encouraged the sacralization of the world, even of 'everyday life.' Human labor *in hoc seculo* was not perceived anymore as a mere preparation for the future life; it acquired its own religious value in that, if well done, it increases God's honor. So also does the study of this world, by exposing the ingenuity of its creator . . . The world turned into God's temple, and the layman [sic] into its priests. (qtd. in Furman and Tufte 142)

Adam and Eve in Milton's *Paradise* enact these very ideas that Funkenstein notes. They honor God by working in the Garden and praising him as they partake of its fruits. And

as Adam and Raphael speak in Book V, their discussion about various aspects of how things came to be in Eden helps to uncover the awe-inspiring power and wisdom of God.

The meals Adam and Eve enjoy together in Eden are sacramental. Thus in Eden the layman truly has become the priest, or, better yet, has replaced him. If we are to believe that Adam's and Eve's meals are sacramental, then we must believe, as Milton did, that no priest is necessary in order to carry out the Lord's Supper, for there is no need in Milton's service to transform bread into flesh, or even for Christ's body to be present. All that is required is a communion of believers who honor God by remembering his unmerited favor for them and accept the grace that he has bestowed upon them as his children.

When Adam eats in Eden, he is bringing the secular and the sacred together. The food he eats nourishes both body and soul. Religion in Paradise is internalized. We learn of Adam and Eve's beliefs through what they say, but they need no organized Church to help them profess their faith. This idea is what Milton wished to impress upon the seventeenth-century reader. What was important was how one lived his life, from what one put into his body, to how one recognized his Savior. The ceremonies and the embellishments should be cast aside, and what man should focus on was the Scripture, the Word of God, to tell him how to best honor He who created all things. At the end of Book XII, Adam and Eve take "thir solitary way" out of Eden, presumably devoid of the bond that they once had with God. What Milton wants his readers to see, however, is that God did not leave man totally bereft of His love and aid. With his Word man could follow his teachings, and learn that communion with God could begin with something as simple as a meal among believers.

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