

# 'Holy Place': A Reading of *Paradise Lost*

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## I

The Zohar speaks of "a place" that is "concealed and hidden, eluding all inquiry, a place which is the height of heights, the most high Temple, withdrawn from all cognition."<sup>1</sup> There, God's presence dwells in utmost sanctity. Similarly, in *Christian Doctrine* (I.7), Milton refers to "the invisible and highest heaven" as "the supreme citadel and habitation of God" ("*Coelum enim supremum veluti summa arx et habitaculum Dei*").<sup>2</sup> As envisioned in *Paradise Lost*, that habitation is one in which God and the Son, "Amidst as from a flaming Mount, whose top/Brightness had made invisible," are enclosed "Orb within Orb" of "circuit inexpressible" (V.594-599).<sup>3</sup> For Milton, the concept of a divine presence enclosed within sanctified boundaries was very much alive.

At the same time, however, we recall from *Paradise Lost* that "God attributes to place/ No sanctitie" per se (XI.836-837): "surmise not then/ His presence to these narrow bounds confin'd/ Of Paradise or Eden" (XI.339-341), admonishes Michael. In his tracts against the prelates, of course, Milton speaks with disdain of what he calls "the railing in of a repugnant and contradictive Mount Sinai" in the form of a "woodden table" with a "perimeter of holy ground about it" (*Works*, III, 261-262). Yet, in the *Logic* (I.10), he acknowledges that "place" may be considered an attribute of "divine beings" ("*divinis entibus*") (*Works*, XI, 80, 81). Clearly, a discussion of holy place in Milton's thought must take into account a frame of reference that is exceedingly complex. To do that, we must explore more fully what precisely is meant by holy place and how Milton draws upon its

<sup>1</sup>Trans. Maurice Simon and Paul T. Levertoff (London, 1933), IV, 202-203. I wish to thank the Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery for the grant that allowed me to complete this work.

<sup>2</sup>*The Works of John Milton*, gen. ed. Frank Allen Patterson (New York, 1931-1938), XV, 28-30, hereafter cited parenthetically in my text as *Works*, followed by volume and page.

<sup>3</sup>Parenthetical references to Milton's poetry in my text are to *The Complete Poetry of John Milton*, ed. John T. Shawcross (2nd ed.; Garden City, New York, 1971).

meanings to express his own religious outlook.

According to Mircea Eliade, the concept of a holy place is fundamental to religious thought as a manifestation of the archaic "need to remain in direct communion with a 'centre' producing the sacred."<sup>4</sup> "Every microcosm, every inhabited region," says Professor Eliade, "has what may be called a 'centre'; that is to say, a place that is sacred above all. It is there, in that centre, that the sacred manifests itself in its totality."<sup>5</sup> These "centres" assume so many forms in Western thought that one need only recall Plato's vision in *Critias* of the "sacred island" of Atlantis to recognize their pervasiveness. Surrounded by "zones" that encircle the inmost center, Atlantis is an island enclosed from its outermost "zone" to its innermost. Having carefully detailed the dimensions of each "zone," Plato states: "The entire circuit of the wall, which went round the outermost zone, they covered with a coating of brass, and the circuit of the next wall they coated with tin, and the third, which encompassed the citadel, flashed with the red light of orichalcum. The palaces in the interior of the citadel were constructed in this wise: in the center was a holy temple, dedicated to Cleito and Poseidon, which remained inaccessible, and was surrounded by an enclosure of gold."<sup>6</sup> This example should suggest something of the nature of what Professor Eliade felicitously calls a "sacred, mythic geography."<sup>7</sup>

Among the essential characteristics of this "geography," one finds an enclosure that separates profane space from sacred space within which a divinity dwells and communicates with those who have been able to penetrate the consecrated area. "The sacred," states Professor Eliade, "is always dangerous to anyone who comes in contact with it unprepared, without having gone through the 'gestures of approach' that every religious act demands. 'Draw not nigh hither,' said the Lord to Moses, 'put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground' (Ex. 3:5)."<sup>8</sup> This "holy ground" in the Tantric schools takes the form of a *mandala* or "circle." As a series of "circles" inscribed in a square, the *mandala* contains images of the various Tantric divinities. As such, the *mandala* is both an *imago mundi* and a symbolic pantheon. "The initiation consists in the neophyte's penetration into the various zones or stages of the *mandala*. The rite may be looked on with equal

<sup>4</sup>*Patterns in Comparative Religion*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York, 1958), pp. 368-369.

<sup>5</sup>*Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism* (London, 1961), p. 39.

<sup>6</sup>*The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. B. Jowett (New York, 1937), II, 79-80.

<sup>7</sup>*Images and Symbols*, p. 39.

<sup>8</sup>Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, pp. 368-369.

justice as the equivalent of the *pradaksina*, the well-known ceremonial of going round a temple or sacred monument (*stupa*), or as an initiation by way of ritual entry into a labyrinth."<sup>9</sup> "These," says Carl Gustav Jung, "are among the oldest religious symbols of humanity" and are "distributed all over the world."<sup>10</sup>

Their exact bearing on Milton may be seen from two points of view, the cultural and the biblical. The relationship between the two is striking enough that I shall mention the first as a way of providing background for the second. From the first point of view, Milton describes with obvious fascination and painstaking detail accounts of ceremonial entry into the walled cities of Moscow and Cathay. "*Cathaia* the imperial City," Milton states, is "built of White-stone four-square, in circuit four daies going, corner'd with four White Towers, very high and great, and others very fair along the Wall, white intermingl'd with blew, and Loop-holes furnisht with Ordnance. In midst of this White City stands a Castle built of Magnet, where the King dwels, in a sumptuous Palace, the top whereof is overlaid with Gold" (*Works*, X, 347-348). This description from the *History of Muscovia* is one of many taken up with the nature of enclosed areas accompanied by movements through "Presence-dore[s]" from outer courts to inner courts (*Works*, X, 374-375). Its significance lies in the fact that the so-called archetypal patterns of enclosure that Eliade and Jung find in so many cultures were hardly foreign to Milton. In fact, they engaged him as a historian, and he delighted in recounting them. To see how he assimilated them into his outlook as a poet, we must explore the biblical renderings that gave rise to and thereby legitimated the concepts we are exploring.

Certainly, the most comprehensive and detailed rendering may be found in Ezekiel, chapters 40-48. There, the Old Testament view of the divine sanctuary, expounded in Exodus, Leviticus, and I Kings, among other places,<sup>11</sup> culminates in a vision of monumental proportions. Ezekiel is transported "in the visions of God" to Israel, where he is guided through the divine sanctuary by a man "whose appearance *was* like the appearance of brass, with a line of flax in his hand, and a measuring reed" (Ezek. 40.1-3; compare Rev. 11.1). Although the details of the vision are too elaborate to describe here, we may call attention to its main characteristics.

We notice, first of all, that the sanctuary itself is represented by a series of enclosed squares through which Ezekiel is led, beginning

<sup>9</sup>Eliade, p. 373.

<sup>10</sup>*Psychology and Alchemy*, trans. R. F. C. Hull, Bollingen Series XX of *The Collected Works* (New York, 1953), XII, 92-94.

<sup>11</sup>See esp. Ex. 25-27; Lev. 4; I Kings. 6-8.

with the “outer court” and ending with the “inner court.” Assigned, on the one hand, to the laity and, on the other, to the priests, each court is enclosed in order to admit only those who rightfully belong there. The idea goes back to God’s directions to Moses for constructing the tabernacle to house the “Holy of holies” (Ex. 25-27). The “ark of the testimony” is to be enclosed with a “veil,” which “shall divide unto you between the holy place and the most holy” (Ex. 26.33-34). “For there was a tabernacle made; the first, wherein *was* the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron’s rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant; and over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercyseat” (Heb. 9.1-5). Into the first tabernacle, the lower order of priests was allowed to go, but “into the second *went* the high priest alone once every year” to offer sacrifice (Heb. 9.7). The construction of the entire tabernacle was such that there were actually two veils, the first separating the holy place from the outside world and the second separating the most holy place from the holy place (Ex. 26.30-37).

Similarly, in Ezekiel the purpose of enclosing the temple from the outside world (Ezek. 40.5) and the outer court from the inner court is “to make a separation between the sanctuary and the profane place” (Ezek. 42.20). Emphasizing that separation, we find that in the “holy chambers,” the “priests that approach unto the Lord shall eat the most holy things: there shall they lay the most holy things, and the meat offering and the sin offering, and the trespass offering; for the place *is* holy. When the priests enter therein, then shall they not go out of the holy *place* into the utter court, but there shall they lay their garments wherein they minister; for they *are* holy; and shall put on other garments, and shall approach to *those things* which *are* for the temple” (Ezek. 42.13-14).

The distinction that Ezekiel makes between sacred and profane through the separation of enclosed spaces represents a fundamental propensity in religious thought. In his *Antiquities of the Jews*, Flavius Josephus comments upon the partitioning of the tabernacle by suggesting that the whole matter “correspond[s] to the nature of the universe”: in comparison with the “Most Holy Place,” which is, “as it were, heaven, set apart to God,” the space outside the inmost enclosure is, “as it were, sea and land.” The one is “inaccessible,” the other “accessible and common.”<sup>12</sup> As the seventeenth-century expositor Matthew Poole states: “We must remember here, that the *Jewes* accounted the whole Earth profane, i.e., common or unclean, compar’d with *Canaan*, and *Canaan* common, or less holy then

<sup>12</sup>*The Works of Flavius Josephus*, ed. Rev. A. R. Shilleto (London, 1885-1889), I, 202-203, 210.

*Jerusalem*, and every part nearer the Temple, the more Holy, and so here the outward Court was inclosed to distinguish it by its comparative Holiness, 'twas more holy then all without it."<sup>13</sup> In its turn, the inward court is enclosed from the outward, and within the inward court, there are still further enclosures (Ezek. 44.2). Thus, we encounter a whole series of enclosures, each enclosure holier than and insulated from that which surrounds it.<sup>14</sup>

Within this divine topography, we may trace Ezekiel's movement as one that is essentially *inward*, a traversing of one "threshold" after the next until the "most holy place" (Ezek. 41.4), the "secret place of the most High" (Ps. 91.1), is attained.<sup>15</sup> In that "secret place," Ezekiel experiences the glory of God: "And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east: and his voice *was* like a noise of many waters: and the earth shined with his glory . . . and I fell upon my face," but "the spirit took me up, and brought me into the inner court, and, behold, the glory of the Lord filled the house" (Ezek. 43.2-6). There, Ezekiel is shown the "place" of God's "throne" and the "place" of the "soles" of His "feet," where He "will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel for ever" (Ezek. 43.7). In this confrontation, we are given full cognizance of what it means to have penetrated to the center of the holy. The experience is that of having appeared in the presence of God (see Heb. 9.24) in order to know that *Jehovah-shammah*, "The Lord is there" (Ezek. 48.35).<sup>16</sup>

Whether conceived as a sanctuary with outer and inner courts, divided by encompassing walls, or as a tabernacle with a holy place and a most holy place, divided by veils, the residence of the holy is one that draws us further and further into itself, threshold after threshold to a sanctified center beyond which all becomes profane. That is why, in his movement inward, Ezekiel learns to distinguish between inner and outer, "holy" and "profane," "clean" and "unclean" (Ezek. 44.23). That is why St. John the Divine, patterning his own vision after Ezekiel (see esp. Rev. 21.12-27),<sup>17</sup> is commanded in Revelation: "Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein. But the court which is without the temple leave out,

<sup>13</sup>*Annotations upon the Holy Bible* (London, 1688), I, sig. Pp 3<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>14</sup>See Wilhelm Julius Schröder, *The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, trans. Patrick Fairbairn (New York, n. d.), pp. 384-385, for the significance of "enclosing walls" in Ezekiel.

<sup>15</sup>Compare Josephus' description of the Jerusalem temple in *The Jewish War, The Works*, V, 23-29.

<sup>16</sup>For a discussion of God's presence, see Albert Barnes, *Notes . . . on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (London, 1854), pp. 196-198.

<sup>17</sup>For Ezekiel's influence on St. John the Divine, see Austin Ferrar, *A Rebirth of Images: The Making of St. John's Apocalypse* (Boston, 1963), pp. 130-131.

and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city they shall tread under foot forty and two months" (Rev. 11.1-2).

## II

The bearing of this tendency in *Paradise Lost* will become clear once we realize that both Ezekiel and St. John the Divine are careful to associate their vision of a holy place with the idea of a paradise itself. Thus, Ezekiel syncretizes his temple vision with a paradisaical vision by which waters issuing from the temple create a veritable paradise. Measuring that paradise with the same care that he had measured the temple, Ezekiel's guide points out the "many trees" that line "the bank of the river" bordering a paradise that shall endure: "And by the river upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, shall grow all trees for meat, whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed: it shall bring forth new fruit according to his months, because their waters they issued out of the sanctuary" (Ezek. 47.6-12). Similarly, St. John the Divine is shown "a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal proceeding out of the throne of God and the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, *was there* the tree of life" (Rev. 22.1-2). As Walter Eichrodt states in his commentary upon Ezekiel, "the river of paradise and the marvelous effect brought by it signify the transformation of this world into the garden of paradise."<sup>18</sup> Biblically, temple and paradise become different forms of the same concept. Their topography is fused in one harmonious vision. That is precisely the way centuries of exegetes saw the association, so much so, in fact, that Martin Luther, in his *Lectures on Genesis*, suggested the vision of the sanctuary in Ezekiel as a fitting gloss of the Genesis garden.<sup>19</sup> In doing so, he was merely echoing rabbinic and patristic commentary.<sup>20</sup>

From this point of view, we may better understand the way in which Milton draws upon the biblical associations we have been exploring. Recalling the spatial relationships envisioned by Ezekiel and, later, by St. John the Divine, we think of Milton's spatial strategies, both in a holy and in a profane context. From the first point of view, we have the enclosures of Heaven and Eden, each surrounded in its outer limits and partitioned in its interior regions.

<sup>18</sup>*Ezekiel: A Commentary*, trans. Cosslett Quin, The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia, 1970), p. 585.

<sup>19</sup>In *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis, 1958), I, 230. See Joseph Duncan's account of the tradition in *Milton's Earthly Paradise* (Minneapolis, 1972), pp. 163-165.

<sup>20</sup>I refer to works ranging from the *Pirkê de Rabbi Eliezer*, trans. Gerald Friedlander (New York, 1965), p. 84, to St. Augustine's *City of God* (XIII.21), trans. Gerald G. Walsh, S. J., et al. (Garden City, New York, 1958), p. 287. See also *Paradise Lost* IV.193.

Thus Milton's Heaven, in its own way a "city" that "lieth foursquare," "equal in length," "breadth," and "height" (Rev. 21.16),<sup>21</sup> is depicted as a divine enclosure, surrounded in its outer limits by "living dores" (VII.566), partitioned in its interior regions by blissful "Courts" that lead to the "Temple" of God (VI.889-890). As an "enclosure green" (IV.133), Eden is surrounded in its outer limits by a "verdurous wall" (IV.133) and an eastern "Gate" (IV.178), partitioned in its interior regions by Adam and Eve's sacred "inmost bowr" of "connubial Love," "Fenc'd up" from the outside by a "verdant wall" (IV.689-738). As such, Milton's Heaven and Eden reenact the Renaissance understanding of the word "paradise" itself—*pairidaeza*, formed on *pairi* ("around") and *diz* ("to mould," "to form")—not only as a "park" or "pleasure ground" but also, significantly, as an "enclosure" or a "place walled in."<sup>22</sup> If this fact brings to mind the tradition of the *hortus conclusus*, it should also recall the intimate association Stanley Stewart, in his analysis of that tradition, establishes between the enclosed garden and the enclosed temple, an association that is made abundantly clear in works so diverse as Herbert's *The Temple*, which conflates the enclosures of "temple" and "paradise," and [Henry Hawkins'] *Partheneia Sacra*, which celebrates "the Temple of GOD, the *holie House*, where al glorie hath entred in, as to a chast Bower."<sup>23</sup>

From this perspective, Milton's Heaven and Eden take on the characteristics of what Professor Eliade calls a "hierophany," that which, in its own unique way, manifests the sacred.<sup>24</sup> "Avoid, Profanenesse," admonishes Herbert at the entrance to his Temple; "come not here:/ Nothing but holy, pure and cleare/ Or that which groneth to be so,/ May at his perill further go."<sup>25</sup> In that sense, Milton is careful to refer to the celestial and terrestrial paradises in such a way that we cannot mistake their hierophantic significance. Responding

<sup>21</sup>See Harry F. Robins, "Satan's Journey: Direction in *Paradise Lost*," *Milton Studies in Honor of Harris Francis Fletcher*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans et al. (Urbana, 1961), pp. 91-93.

<sup>22</sup>See the discussion of the word "paradise" and the detailed bibliography accompanying that reference in A. Bartlett Giamatti's *The Earthly Paradise and the Renaissance Epic* (Princeton, 1966), pp. 11-15.

<sup>23</sup>See *The Enclosed Garden* (Madison, 1966), esp. the section entitled "The Garden and the Temple," pp. 45-49. In his analysis of Herbert's "Paradise," which includes the line "While the inclosure is thine ARM" (l. 6), Professor Stewart states, "God's 'ARM' provides the Church with walls, just as it encloses Paradise from nature" (p. 53). The *Partheneia Sacra* (London, 1633), attributed to Henry Hawkins, represents one of the many emblem books that conflate "paradise" and "temple"—here, to celebrate the Virgin Mary.

<sup>24</sup>*Patterns in Comparative Religion*, p. xiv.

<sup>25</sup>"Superluminare" (ll. 5-8), in *The Works of George Herbert*, ed. F. E. Hutchinson (London, 1941).

to the biblical prototypes that we have been discussing, he associates Heaven and Eden with the idea of a sanctuary. God's residence in the heavenly enclosure, for example, becomes a "Sanctuarie," where implicitly as a "Holy of holies" above the "Mercie-seat," He is veiled by a "cloud/ Drawn around about [Him] like a radiant Shrine" (VI.672; XI.2; III.378-379).<sup>26</sup> "Nightly before [Him]" "burn" the seven "golden Lamps" of the tabernacle (V.713-714; compare Ex. 25.37; I Kgs. 7.49; and Rev. 4.5). As "Earths great Altar" (IX.195), Eden, in its turn, becomes not only the "pleasant place" that its name suggests (compare IV.246-247) but a "hallowd ground" (XI.106), whose "inmost bowr" is nothing less than a place of worship, a "holiest place" (IV.759) befitting "adoration pure" (IV.737). There, as in Heaven, the faithful residents properly engage in the purest form of "worship," destined, it is hoped, to breed one day "a Race of Worshippers" (V.194; VII.515, 630). In both instances, we find that combination of *locus amoenus* and *locus sanctus* summed up in Tertullian's description of paradise as a "*locum divinae amoenitatis*."<sup>27</sup>

From the profane point of view, on the other hand, Milton presents us with a parody of the true hierophany. In its own blasphemous way, Hell, whose very etymology means to "hide" or "conceal,"<sup>28</sup> reenacts the patterns we have been exploring. Hardly exclusive, the enclosure of Hell (I.60-61) is surrounded in its outer limits by "gates of burning Adamant/ Barr'd over" to "prohibit all egress" (II.436-437), partitioned in its interior regions by Pandaemonium (I.713), the "high Capitol" where "Satan and his Peers" (I.755-756) meet "in close recess and secret conclave" (I.795). As such, Hell likewise is an enclosure that contains within its confines further enclosures. Significantly, Pandaemonium, as an inmost enclosure, is likened to a "Temple" (I.713), where, of course, Satan's followers worship their own "Holy of holies," while he sits enthroned in their midst (II.1-5). Both from a holy and from a profane point of view, then, we encounter a spatial reenactment of the fundamental religious ideas conceived as early as Ezekiel and as late as St. John the Divine.

Reinforcing those ideas, we would do well to consider further the

<sup>26</sup>See Milton's translation of Psalm 80: God "sitt'st between the Cherubs *bright/ Between their wings outspread*" (II. 5-6). Elaborating upon the original, Milton emphasizes the idea of God as "Holy of holies." See also *Samson*, I. 1674.

<sup>27</sup>Cited by Giamatti, p. 69. For the *topos* of the *locus amoenus*, see Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature in the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask, Bollingen Series XXXVI (New York, 1953). Although Curtius does not explicitly discuss the *locus sanctus* as a *topos*, "holy place" is implicit in "pleasant place." See esp. p. 92 for the distinction.

<sup>28</sup>Walter Skeat, *A Concise Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* (New York, 1963).



opposition represented by the enthroned figures of God and Satan.<sup>29</sup> To do that, we must address ourselves more closely to what we have seen as the concept of the “divine center” in religious thought.<sup>30</sup> From the divine point of view, God Himself becomes a “Center” (IX.107-108) as He resides in His “holy Mount” (V.712; see Ezek. 42.2), “Amidst the glorious brightness where [He] sit’st/ Thron’d inaccessible” (III. 376-377). (Compare Milton’s tribute to the Countess Dowager of Derby in *Arcades*: “Mark what radiant state she spreads/ In circle round her shining throne,/ . . . This this is she alone,/ Sitting like a Goddess bright/ In the center of her light” [ll. 14-18].)<sup>31</sup> The center, then, becomes the source of all which revolves about it, the source of its own circumference.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, we find that in *Paradise Lost* even the “Terrestrial Heav’n” as “Center” both “extends to all” and is, in turn, “danc’t round by other Heav’ns” “concentring” in it “all thir beams/ Of sacred influence” (IX.103-109). Correspondingly, within the “Heav’n of Heav’ns,” God’s “brightest Seraphim” “Day without Night,/ Circle his Throne rejoycing” (V.162-163). Enthroned “Orb within Orb” of those angels that enclose Him, God, in turn, is sanctified by their circular motion.<sup>33</sup>

The profane counterpart of that concept is appropriately discernible in the figure of Satan. “Affecting all equality with God,” Satan not only enthrones himself in his own “Mount” (see I.670; II.1-10; V.756-771) but has himself “inclos’d” “Round” by “A Globe of fierie Seraphim” “With bright imblazonrie, and horrent Arms” (II.511-513; compare I.615-618).<sup>34</sup> In that posture, he anticipates those who

durst fix  
Thir Seats long after next the Seat of God,  
Thir Altars by his Altar, Gods ador’d  
Among the Nations round . . .

<sup>29</sup>For studies of the emblematic placement of seated figures in Milton, see John Demaray, “The Thrones of Satan and God: Backgrounds to Divine Opposition in *Paradise Lost*,” *HLQ*, 31 (1967), 21-33; and Roger B. Wilkenfeld, “The Seat at the Center: An Interpretation of *Comus*,” *Critical Essays on Milton from ELH* (Baltimore, 1969), pp. 123-150.

<sup>30</sup>See George Poulet, *Metamorphoses of the Circle*, trans. Carley Dawson and Elliott Coleman (Baltimore, 1961), *passim*.

<sup>31</sup>Compare *Comus* (ll. 381-382): “He that has light within his own cleer brest/ May sit i’t center, and enjoy bright day.”

<sup>32</sup>See Plotinus’ *Ennead* VI.8, in *Plotinus*, trans. Stephen MacKenna and B. S. Page (London, 1930).

<sup>33</sup>A commonplace idea. the act of deifying a figure by encircling it may be found, among other places, in VI.x.11-2 of *The Faerie Queene, The Poetical Works of Edmund Spenser*, ed. J. C. Smith and E. De Selincourt (London, 1912).

<sup>34</sup>The fate of attempting to enclose oneself as an expression of pride may be seen in

. . . yea, often plac'd  
 Within his Sanctuary it self thir Shrines,  
 Abominations; and with cursed things  
 His holy Rites, and solemn Feasts profan'd.  
 (I.382-389; see also I.338-405)

The idea returns us to God's statement in Ezekiel 43.7-8 that the house of Israel shall "no more defile" His "holy name" by placing "their threshold by [His] thresholds, and their posts by [His] posts," thereby committing "abominations," "wherefore [God] has consumed them in [His] anger." By doing so, He has separated the sacred from the profane.

In *Paradise Lost*, this separation occurs first in Heaven and then on earth. In Heaven, God separates the "pure," represented by the faithful angels, from the "impure," represented by Satan and his followers (VI.742-743). On earth, He separates the purity of Eden from the "grossness" of man (XI.50-53) by "driv[ing] out the sinful Pair,/ From hallowd ground th'unholie" (XI.105-106). In both instances, the divine enclosure cannot admit within its confines that which will defile it. Heaven's "Chrystal wall" opens "wide" (VI.860-861) to disburden itself of Satan and his followers, thereafter repairing its "mural breach, returning whence it rowl'd" (VI.878-879). Eden's "eastern Gate" opens to eject man, who, once outside, can only behold "th'Eastern side" of "Paradise" "Wav'd over by that flaming Brand, the Gate/ With dreadful Faces throng'd and fierie Armes" (XII.638-644).

If that pattern suggests the exclusive nature of the divine enclosure as derived from biblical sources, the inclusive nature of the divine enclosure will become clear if we further examine the action of *Paradise Lost*. From the latter perspective, we should recall the idea of penetration represented by Ezekiel: the traversing of a threshold into an enclosed area in order to attain the center of the holy. In *Paradise Lost*, such an idea assumes complex associations.

From the divine point of view, we think of the Son, who, as agent of the Father, departs from his Father's presence and returns to it after the completion of various acts. Having expelled the rebel angels from the confines of Heaven, the Son victoriously rides "through mid Heav'n, into the Courts/ And Temple of his mightie Father," who receives him "into Glorie" "Where now he sits at the right hand of bliss" (VI.887-892). That movement is repeated in the Son's return to

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Sin, who, "in perpetual agonie and pain," is "compasst round" with "terrors" and the "clamors" of her "own brood" (II.861-863).

the Father after having created the world (VII.565-588), after having pronounced God's sentence on fallen man (X.224-225), and after having risen as Christ to the heights of exaltation (XII.451-458). In the first two instances, the Filial Power, passing through the wide opening of Heaven's "blazing Portals," moves inward toward "Gods Eternal house," where he reassumes his place within his Father's "blissful bosom." In the third instance, the Messiah "ascend[s]" to "the Heav'n of Heav'ns," where he "enter[s] into glory" in order to "resume/ His Seat at Gods right hand." Such an entrance Milton associates in *Christian Doctrine* (I.5) with the penetration of a divine enclosure (*Works*, XV, 336-337).

From the human point of view, the pattern is equally as compelling. We may use as a point of reference the traversing of a threshold that Adam experiences after he has been created. Finding himself outside the threshold of Eden, Adam is guided by God to "the Garden of Bliss":

by the hand he took me rais'd,  
And over Fields and Waters, as in Air  
Smooth sliding without step, last led me up  
A woodie Mountain, whose high top was plain,  
A Circuit wide, enclos'd, with goodliest Trees  
Planted, with Walks, and Bowers, that what I saw  
Of Earth before scarce pleasant seemd.

(VIII, 295-306)

Through God, Adam moves from the world outside the enclosure to the world inside (compare Gen. 2.8, 15). If, in this context, Milton associates such a movement with the *locus amoenus* by distinguishing between less "pleasant" (outside) and more "pleasant" (inside), he does not hesitate, in another context (IV.153), to associate that movement with the *locus sanctus* by distinguishing between less "pure" (outside) and more "pure" (inside).<sup>35</sup> We are reminded once again of the distinction Ezekiel draws in his traversing of thresholds, between the outer court and the inner court. In Adam's movement toward the center, we are likewise asked to distinguish between the virtues of what lies within as opposed to what lies without.

But Eden, even with its "inmost bowr," is not the ultimate enclosure. The traversing of thresholds into a sanctified center has still further repercussions, if we consider God's statement that man, "by degrees of merit rais'd," may "open to [himself] at length the

<sup>35</sup>The reference is ironically to Satan's penetration of Eden, a pattern we shall explore later.

way/ Up hither, under long obedience tri'd" (VII.157-159). In the heavenly paradise, he may enter permanently into the presence of God. In the words of the *Mundorum Explicatio* (1661), attributed to Samuel Pordage, that will be the "time" when man will be "admitted" into "the *Sanctum Sanctorum*," "the *holiest* now of *holiest*," "the secret sacred *Place*," where "the *Deity*" "dwels" in "*Light* immortal." Having entered through "th'Aeternal *Gate* of Blisse," he will behold God "without Vails" "face to face."<sup>36</sup>

As fallen man, the narrator of *Paradise Lost* enjoys something of that experience when, "Up led" by the Muse, he is permitted "Into the Heav'n of Heav'ns," there, as an "Earthlie Guest," to breathe the "Empyrean Air" (VII.12-14). "Look[ing] in" at "Heav'ns dore," he is able to traverse thresholds into the most sacrosanct of areas, where he sees "each blissful Deitie/ How he before the thunderous throne doth lie" ("Vacation Exercise," 11. 34-35). This experience accounts in part for Milton's vision of the poet as priest (*sacerdos*), who, "shining with sacred vestment and lustral waters," penetrates the "secret temples of the gods" ("*Et mihi fana patent interiorum Deum*") (Elegies VI, 1. 65, and V, 1. 18). Entering into their presence, he approaches them with due reverence, as he extols their glory.

Such is the posture that characterizes the apostrophe to "Light" opening Book III of *Paradise Lost*. In that apostrophe, the narrator celebrates the Deity by indicating what it means to approach that which is unapproachable:

Hail holy Light, ofspring of Heav'n first-born,  
Or of th'Eternal Coeternal beam  
May I express thee unblam'd? since God is light,  
And never but in unapproach'd light  
Dwelt from Eternitie, dwelt then in thee,  
Bright effluence of bright essence increate.

(III.1-6)

We are made to recall in the narrator's apostrophe the image of God "Thron'd inaccessible" "Amidst [His] glorious brightness," "a cloud/ Drawn round about [Him] like a radiant Shrine," and his very "skirts" "Dark with excessive bright" (III.376-380). In response to God's radiance, the "brightest Seraphim/ Approach not, but with both wings veil thir eyes" (III.380-381). Appropriately, then, the narrator's apostrophe to this "Fountain of Light" (III, 8, 375) suggests his own utmost reverence for what cannot be approached. Once again, we are with Moses, who must "put off [his] shoes from off [his]

<sup>36</sup>Pp. 327-330.

feet” before God’s presence, the radiance of which is unbearable (compare Ex. 19.21; 20.19). Or we are reminded of Ezekiel: having penetrated to the center of the holy, the prophet falls upon his face before an overwhelming radiance that “fill[s] the house” (Ezek. 43.2-6). Such behavior upon finding oneself in the presence of the divine is a distinct characteristic of what Professor Eliade calls the “gestures of approach.”

The precise bearing of those “gestures” upon Milton will become discernible if we recall Ezekiel’s emphasis upon due reverence in his vision of how the priests are to behave upon entering the sanctuary: those who “approach unto the Lord” shall eat only the most holy things, handle only the most holy things, dress only in the most holy garments (Ezek. 42.13-14). Although there is nothing in Milton to justify such elaborate procedures, we do find a similar emphasis upon how one must go about approaching a divine figure.<sup>37</sup> For that purpose, we might once again briefly consider *Arcades*, a poem devoted in part to the gestures of approach. Those who desire to approach the enthroned Countess Dowager of Derby are instructed by the Genius of the Wood:

as we go . . .  
I will assay, her worth to celebrate,  
And so attend ye toward her glittering state;  
Where ye may all that are of noble stemm  
Approach, and kiss her sacred vestures hemm.

(11. 78-83)

In *Paradise Lost*, Adam approaches Raphael with a reverence that is both natural and stately: walking forth, “without more train/  
Accompani’d then with his own compleat/  
Perfections” but “with  
submiss approach and reverence meek,” Adam “bow[s] low” (V.350-360; compare XI.249-250). This is what Milton, in another context, calls “adoration pure/  
Which God likes best” (IV.737-738).<sup>38</sup> Adam’s response to finding himself for the first time in God’s presence, however, is entirely different: he falls “In adoration at his [God’s] feet . . . /  
Submiss” (VIII.314-316).<sup>39</sup> The perverted form of that behavior is aptly found in Satan. We think, for example, of Satan’s plea in

<sup>37</sup>For an analysis of Milton’s complex views regarding ceremony, see Thomas B. Stroup, *Religious Rite and Ceremony in Milton’s Poetry* (Lexington, Kentucky, 1968).

<sup>38</sup>The reference is to the manner in which Adam and Eve enter their “inmost bowr”: “other Rites/ Observing none, but adoration pure/ Which God likes best, into thir inmost bowr/ Handed they went” (IV.736-739).

<sup>39</sup>After Adam and Eve fall, they react to God’s presence by hiding themselves “among/ The thickest Trees” as God approaches them (X.98-102).

*Paradise Regain'd* to gain "access" into the presence of Jesus. The language is replete with the associations we have been exploring. Even "Thy Father," says Satan,

Suffers the Hypocrite or Atheous Priest  
 To tread his Sacred Courts, and minister  
 About his Altar, handling holy things,  
 Praying or vowing. . . .  
 . . . disdain not such access to me.

(I.486-492)

Satan's true posture, on the other hand, appears in *Paradise Lost* as that which disdains to "bow and sue for grace/ With suppliant knee, and deify his [God's] power" (I.111-112). This defiance generates in Satan not only a disregard for the gestures of approach but an all-consuming need to penetrate, and thereby defile, enclosed, sacrosanct areas.

Thus, having escaped the confines of Hell, Satan traverses Chaos until he alights upon "the firm opacious Globe/ Of this round World, whose first convex divides/ The luminous inferior Orbs, enclos'd/ From *Chaos* and th'inroad of Darkness old" (III.418-421). Within this "expos'd" area (II.425), he walks "up and down alone bent on his prey" (III.441), only to be mocked by the "Stairs" leading to "the Gate of Heav'n" (III.515). Reminded of "His sad exclusion from the dores of Bliss" (III.525), he turns to an "op'ning" "from beneath,/ Just o're the blissful seat of Paradise,/ A passage down to th'Earth, a passage wide" (III.526-539). "Without longer pause," he penetrates that enclosure, "throw[ing]/ His flight precipitant" "Down right into the Worlds first Region" (III.561-563), and, in order to compensate for his inability to re-enter Heaven, he enters the world of man. Disdaining proper entrance through Eden's gate once he has reached the borders of the earthly paradise, he is contemptuous of enclosing walls: "At one slight bound," he overleaps "all bound" and "sheer within/ Lights on his feet" (IV.180-183). Thereafter, from the prospect of "the Tree of Life,/ The middle Tree" (IV.194-195),<sup>40</sup> he comments upon how poorly "fenc't" Adam and Eve's enclosure is "to keep out such a foe/ As now is enterd" and promises ironically that "Hell shall unfold,/ To entertain you two, her widest Gates" (IV.372,

<sup>40</sup>From the point of view of the "divine center," the placement of the Tree of Life in the "middle" of the earthly paradise (IV.195, 216-217; see Gen. 2.9 and Rev. 2.7) is significant in its centrality. In leading Eve to the Tree of Knowledge, situated beside the Tree of Life (IV.220-221), Satan is, in his own way, leading her to the "center."

381-382). In line with this pattern, he goes still further to penetrate Adam and Eve's "inmost bowr," where we find him "Squat like a Toad, close at the ear of *Eve*" (IV.800). Through a series of penetrations that lead ultimately to the "inmost" enclosure, Satan disregards what we have seen to be the proper form of reverence due a divine enclosure: "And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither *whatsoever* worketh abomination, or *maketh* a lie" (Rev. 21.7). It is precisely these things that Satan does, with the result that Eden is penetrated, its interior "exposed" (IV.206), and its sanctity vitiated. The forced penetration of Eden makes possible the temptation and fall of man.

Accordingly, Eve is duped by the argument, "Shall that be shut to Man, which to the Beast/ Is open?" (IX.691-692). The thrust of this argument is that, because Eve is entitled to the kind of "Knowledge" shared by the "Gods" (IX.686), the "Trespass" of eating the "Fruit" will be "petty" (IX.693). Milton makes clear, however, that such a trespass is to be viewed as a blasphemy, that which *Christian Doctrine* (I.11) brands a "violation of things sacred" ("*rem sacram violasset*") (*Works*, XV, 182-184). For our purposes, this violation is none other than the penetration of a divine enclosure, a "trespass" or *transgressus* in the true sense of the word. For, having fallen, Eve ironically praises "Experience" as a "guide" that "op'nst Wisdoms way,/ And giv'st access, though secret she retire" (IX.807-810). Milton, we recall, depicts Wisdom as one who, along with the Muse her "Sister," is privileged to "play/ In presence of th'Almighty Father" (VII.9-10; see Prov. 8.30). By opening "Wisdoms way," then, Eve would presume to have gained access to the presence of god, a "way" she feels that has heretofore been closed to her because of her "Ignorance." She need only remember, however, that had she remained "lowly wise" (VIII.173) entrance into the divine presence would have been assured. Already manifested in Eden, it was to have been experienced ultimately in Heaven, as man opened to himself the way into transcendent bliss (VII.158-159). In effect, then, by transgressing God's command, Eve attempts unwittingly to "open" that which has been open to her all the time. In so doing, she commits a transgression indeed, one which becomes an infringement of the profane upon the holy, a perversion of the true act of penetration.<sup>41</sup>

For man, that perversion involves his unwillingness to remain

<sup>41</sup>In keeping with that idea, Eve transfers her allegiance from God's presence to the Tree's presence and worships that which she has just violated by bowing in "low Reverence . . . as to the power/ That dwelt within whose presence had infus'd/ Into the plant sciential sap" (IX.834-836).

content within the confines of his natural enclosure. Dissatisfied with prescribed boundaries (man's "just circumference" [VII.231]), Adam and Eve violate God's act of "circumscribing" the universe and "all created things" (VII.226-227).<sup>42</sup> In their desire to become "uncircumscrib'd" like God (VII.170), they become like Satan, presumably restrained by "no bounds/ Prescrib'd" (III.81-82) but, in fact, trapped by a threatening enclosure that "opens wide" only to reveal more horrible enclosures within (IV.75-77). Thus, after Satan falls, "Hell at last/ Yawning receav'd [him] whole, and on [him] clos'd" (VII.874-875). Within Hell's enclosure, Satan must abandon all hope: "*Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch'entrate.*"

Unlike Satan, Adam and Eve are provided with the possibility of reopening to themselves the way into God's presence. ("Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" [Matt. 7.13-14].) The "way, which leadeth unto life" is, of course, manifested in the Son of God, through whom Death becomes "the Gate of Life" (XIII.571). (Compare John 14.6: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me"; and John 10.9: "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out.") Ultimately, as God promises in *Paradise Lost*,

at one fling  
 Of thy victorious Arm, well-pleasing Son,  
 Both *Sin*, and *Death*, and yawning *Grave* at last  
 Through *Chaos* hurl'd, obstruct the mouth of Hell  
 For ever, and seal up his ravenous Jaws.  
 Then Heav'n and Earth renewd shall be made pure  
 To sanctitie that shall receive no stain.

(X.633-639)

Before that time, however, Adam and Eve must be expelled from paradise and the Son must sacrifice himself to atone for man's sins, fulfilling "the rigid satisfaction, death for death" (III.212).

<sup>42</sup>Milton would have been in essential agreement with Joseph Hall's statement in *Contemplations upon the Principall Passages of the Holy Storie, The Works of Joseph Hall* (London, 1634), p. 832: "We have all our limits set us: The Gentiles might come into some outer courts, not into the inmost. The Jewes might come into the inner Court, not into the Temple: the Priests and Levites into the Temple, not into the Holy of Holies: *Moses* to the Hill, not to the Bush. The waves of the Sea had not more need of bounds then mans presumption."



## III

It is the promise of that sacrifice that causes Eden as a divine enclosure to lose its importance. If Adam and Eve's fall necessitates their expulsion from Eden, it also necessitates a readjustment in our understanding of what holy place means. For we all know the ultimate fate of Eden: removed from its "place" by the Flood, it takes root "an Iland salt and bare,/ The haunt of Seals and Orcs, and Seamews clang" (XI.829-835). As an external entity, place itself is deprived of its sanctity (XI.836-837). Interiorized, it takes the form of a "Paradise within" man, far happier than the one without (XII.587). Anticipating such a reorientation, Milton, at the very outset of his epic, invokes the aid of that Spirit which "dost prefer/ Before all Temples th'upright heart and pure" (I.18). This preference, of course, is one that Milton expressed as early as *Comus*, where we find the Elder Brother extolling the "unpolluted temple of the mind" (l. 461). From the perspective of the divine enclosure, we think of St. John the Divine's statement about the heavenly city in Revelation 21.21: "And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it" (compare Ps. 15.1-2; I Cor. 3.16).

In accord with that idea, it is not surprising to find Milton in *The Reason of Church-Government* commenting upon Ezekiel's vision of the temple in this manner: "God by his Prophet seeking to weane the hearts of the Jewes from their old law to expect a new and more perfect reformation under Christ, sets out before their eyes the stately fabrick & constitution of his Church, with al the ecclesiasticall functions appertaining; indeed the description is as sorted best to the apprehension of those times, typicall and shadowie, but in such manner as never yet came to passe, nor never must literally, unlesse we mean to annihilat the Gospel" (*Works*, III, 190). Through the Gospel, God "cast[s] his line and levell upon the soule of man which is his rationall temple, and by the divine square and compasse thereof forme[s] and regenerate[s] in us the lovely shapes of vertues and graces, the sooner to edifie and accomplish that immortal stature of Christs body which is his Church in all her glorious lineaments and proportions" (*Works*, III, 191). Such a statement clearly indicates how the pattern we have been exploring assumes a decidedly Christocentric bearing in Milton's thought.

The relocation of the holy place is accompanied by a corresponding emphasis upon the importance of the Savior to the overall scheme. His importance in this respect may best be appreciated if we refer to Milton's discourse in *Christian Doctrine* (I.15) on the offices of Christ. Our immediate concern is "CHRIST'S SACERDOTAL FUNCTION": "that whereby HE ONCE OFFERED HIMSELF TO GOD THE

FATHER AS A SACRIFICE [*HOSTIAM*] FOR SINNERS, AND HAS ALWAYS MADE, AND STILL CONTINUES TO MAKE INTERCESSION [*INTERCESSIT*] FOR US" (*Works*, XV, 291). A basic tenet of Christianity, Milton's definition of the sacerdotal office significantly relates to Christ as "sacrifice" and Christ as "intercessor." In the New Testament, the two functions are combined to offer a Christocentric interpretation of what it means to enter a divine enclosure.

Distinguishing between the Old Dispensation and the New, the author of Hebrews says that whereas under the "first *covenant*" the high priest sacrificed yearly in a man-made tabernacle, under the "better covenant" the tabernacle is "pitched" by God and the high priest is Christ himself (Heb. 8 and 9). "But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption *for us*" (Heb. 9.11-12). And again, "For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, *which are* the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us" (Heb. 9:24). Accordingly, Milton states in *The Reason of Church-Government* that the act of "entring yearly into the Holy of holies . . . rested upon the High Priest only as more immediately personating our Saviour" (*Works*, III, 205).

From this perspective, we can better understand the prefigurative significance of entering a divine enclosure in *Paradise Lost*. Thus Milton invokes Moses, whose mediatorial office to appear before God in the sanctuary causes him to become a "figure" "to introduce/ One greater, of whose day he shall foretell" (XII.239-257). In line with this view, we may refer once again to the Son, who anticipates his sacerdotal office by entering God's sanctuary as high priest to offer up the prayers of a repentant Adam and Eve. The language describing the Son's act is replete with the associations we have been exploring. After Adam and Eve's prayers have "pass'd/ Dimensionless through Heav'nly dores," the Son presents them "clad/ With incense, where the Gold Altar fum'd" (XI.16-18). In so doing, he becomes the "great Intercessor" who supplicates for man before the divine presence of "the Fathers Throne" (XI.19-21): "See Father, what first fruits on Earth are sprung/ From thy implanted Grace in Man, these Sighs/ And Prayers, which in this Golden Censer, mixt/ With Incense, I thy Priest before thee bring" (XI.22-25). His "sacrifice" is not "by the blood of goats and calves" but by the promise of "his own blood": "all his works on mee/ Good or not good ingraft, my Merit those/ Shall perfer, and for these my Death shall pay" (XI.33-35; compare XII.291-299).

The Son's willingness to die for man brings to mind the statement in Hebrews 9.24 that because of his sacrifice, Christ has "entered" not into man-made "holy places" "but into heaven itself," where, as high priest, he is "set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty" (Heb. 8.1). Moreover, the act of entering once only, rather than many times, into the Holy of holies suggests the fundamental importance of this particular entrance: "Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place with blood of others . . . but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Heb. 9.25-26). Under those circumstances, all other acts of entering a divine enclosure prefigure this ultimate act. That is why Milton in *Paradise Lost* does not hesitate to celebrate in apocalyptic terms the triumphant effect of Christ's sacrifice: "with the multitude of [his] redeemd/ [He] shall enter Heav'n long absent, and return" to see God's face (III.260-261). As the result of such an event, the "Paradise within" that has sustained man in spirit throughout history will finally be realized in fact throughout eternity.

With this Christocentric emphasis, *Paradise Lost* becomes a work in which the penetration of a divine enclosure may be viewed from a number of perspectives. We have seen how Milton's spatial strategies accord with the patterns established by Ezekiel and reinterpreted by St. John the Divine. Both these biblical sources provide graphic representations of the exclusive and inclusive nature of the divine enclosure. Drawing upon those representations, Milton envisions holy place both within a divine and within a profane context. As exclusive entity, the divine enclosure becomes a fitting means of portraying the sanctity of Heaven and Eden, on the one hand, and the blasphemy of Hell, on the other. As inclusive entity, the divine enclosure becomes a fitting means of portraying the proper form of penetration, on the one hand, and the perverted form, on the other.

But the matter does not rest there. Holy place is ultimately interiorized as Milton stresses the importance of understanding the Son's role in *Paradise Lost*. From this point of view, the penetration of a divine enclosure in Milton's epic assumes a prefigurative significance. Subscribing to the doctrine made evident in Hebrews, Milton suggests how the role of the Son in *Paradise Lost* anticipates Christ's sacerdotal role, one which involves the view of the savior both as "sacrifice" and as "intercessor." In that way, Milton successfully accommodates Old and New Testament renderings of holy place to the Christian vision that permeates his epic.