

Seventeenth-Century Prayer Guides and the Practice of Prayer in Paradise Lost

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Abstract/Description: Because Milton wanted his readers to recognize the theological ideas depicted in Paradise Lost as opportunities to meditate and pray, I will focus on the dramatization, definition, and descriptions of prayer in Paradise Lost. The body of my thesis will align four episodes of prayer with contemporary prayer manuals and meditation guides. The episodes I will discuss are: the angelic hymn in Book III, Adam and Eve's morning prayers before the fall in Book V, Adam and Eve's prayers after the fall in Book X, and the answers to prayer that they receive in Book XI. Throughout the discussion of these episodes, I will identify signs of human fallenness that appear in Adam and Eve's prayers. Spontaneity, unselfconsciousness, and a large portion of praise characterize prelapsarian and angelic prayers. Postlapsarian prayer occurs only because of prevenient grace. After the fall, when God gives grace to Adam and Eve so that they can pray, they are self-conscious, extremely concerned with where to pray, what words to use, and how to convince God to listen. The Introduction will identify specific authors of

contemporary prayer manuals and sermons that I will cite and analyze throughout my thesis so that readers will be familiar with them before approaching the in-depth discussion of their writings in connection with Paradise Lost. Chapter 1 will outline the main conflict between Anglicans and Puritans over set forms of prayer. Anglicans embraced and promoted the use of set forms while Puritans looked suspiciously at the practice. I will identify the reasons Anglicans and Puritans held these beliefs about prayer and how this conflict relates to reading Paradise Lost. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 will include a detailed analysis of the prayers in Paradise Lost and their relation to the advice presented in contemporary prayer guides. Chapter 2 will focus on the aspect of praise (as a major component of prayer) in angelic and human hymns. Chapter 3 will develop the stages of prayer found in Adam and Eve's prayers of repentance: praise, thanksgiving, confession, and petition. Chapter 4 will explore God's answers to Adam and Eve's prayers and how manualists instructed devotees to decipher divine replies to their petitions. In the conclusion, I want to offer some ideas about Milton's contribution to the religious literature of his day and highlight what he offered readers in a dramatic poem that the prayer manualists could not.

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