Milton Part 2

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[0:00] A taste of the state of Milton criticism.

That was the heart of it. And I think you'll agree. I hope I convinced you. It didn't take much convincing, I would think. It's really a furious state of criticism.
And we looked, you'll recall, at two, we call them paradigm critics, to focus our thinking about Milton and criticism of Milton in the gospel.
And the critics, C.S. Lewis, you'll recall, and the great Yale scholar, Harold Bloom. Two gentlemen, scholarly gentlemen, who love Paradise Lost very much.
Milton and C.S. Lewis certainly loved past tense. Hopefully Lewis and Milton are in heaven together now enjoying the poetry. A higher poetry. But you'll recall, they read him, but as in different worlds.
[1:02] Lewis very much reads Milton as an Orthodox Christian would read Milton. And I think that's the true way to read Milton. And Bloom, you'll recall, again, read Milton.

Reads Milton as a really kind of proto, a kind of Gnostic in disguise, really. An aesthetic listening to Milton is the proper approach, full stop.
In Milton, you'll, if you've read much Milton, especially Paradise Lost, you'll know that sooner or later you find everything in this poem.
And with it in mind that Milton criticism is furious, here are these words. These words close book nine of the twelve book work of Paradise Lost.
And here Milton summarizes Adam and Eve's relationship after the fall, after they've fallen into sin.
[2:01] And he summarizes their relationship before he moves on with the drama into book ten. He says, Thus they, thus they in mutual accusation spent the fruitless hours, but neither self-accusing, and of their vain contest appeared no end.

A lovely description of a relationship. It doesn't happen to anybody in this room. I hope that's not a Mother's Day quotation either. Their mutual accusation, fruitless hours, neither self-accusing, but of their vain contest appeared no end.
There it is. After sin enters the world, a beautiful relationship becomes filled with trouble. So today we move on to part two and look just a little bit at a touch of Milton's poetry.
And I trust it will not be for us a fruitless hour. And to that end, let's say a word of prayer. Lord, be in our inquiries today, as you should be, and we ask you to be in all that we think and do.
And bless us in patient, humble inquiry, as we seek to know more of your beauty and more of the lovely God who calls us to obedience in Christ.
[3:24] And this we pray in his name. Amen. There is a, fairly safe to say, isn't it, a John Milton, we'll call him accessible, and a John Milton less accessible.

At one level, the reason for this will humble us, as readers, a bit, I suppose. This poet is one set apart for most, I think we can safely say.
He is a, in a 17th century sort of way, for sure, he is a most learned poet. Not all the poets are learned, but he is a learned poet. In his pre-teens and into his early teens, his early teen years, John Milton was becoming the master of Greek and Latin, classical Greek and Latin, and in the literature therein, some antiquity.
His father, a London businessman, formerly called a scrivener, a dealer in legal documents of some kind. I don't quite know what a scrivener is. He was a man of some meaning, and he was ambitious for his son.
And his son's capacity for learning and his genius were early recommended. Spent many years, and about seven years at Cambridge, did John, and many years of private study.
[4:38] Shaped this Protestant man in every way, but in a somewhat monkish manner, in a sense. And then to Greek and Latin were added, the order here isn't important.

He mastered Hebrew and Italian along the way. A number of Milton's early poems he mentioned last week are in Latin and Italian. He used these languages. One scholar summarizes Mr. Milton's opinion, like he was saying, he was more or less thoroughly familiar with six or seven different cultures and in many languages.
He is a man. It is interesting to contrast this portrait with that of Shakespeare. The Bard, famously, was much more a proverbial man of the people and just bothersome, as you know.
Not Milton. He simply adored Shakespeare. Dear son of memory, great heir of fame, he calls him. He likens Shakespeare's work to an inscription that is so powerful that writes on us and turns us into marble monuments of Shakespeare.
And he ends his poem on Shakespeare, Kings for such a tomb would wish to die. Only Milton writes like that. That is simply a gorgeous little monument of Shakespeare.
[5:56] Kings for such a tomb would wish to die. I talked, mentioned, Harold Bloom last week and he wrote a piece just recently about Freud on his 150th century, whatever that is, 150th year of Freud's birth.

Bloom recalls that Freud apparently exalted personal status and prestige so much that he, Freud, bought the theory that the Bard, the Bard's works, were really written by the Earl of Oxford.
If you can imagine that a man like Freud would have believed that nonsense, how could a commoner, a nobody, be the supreme mid-ray artist of the English-speaking world if not the world's period?
Such different stories are between Milton and Shakespeare, it seems to me. What a pair they are.
You see here that genius and learnedness may go together, but they may not.
Again, Milton is a mighty learned poet. But Mr. Milton, the less accessible may be that or another.
[7:04] That's more important, more meaning, a reason with more explanatory power, as they say.
Great Harvard scholar, Douglas Bush, describes the 17th century like this.

I think this is helpful. He says, if you were an Englishman, he wrote in the 60s, talked like that, you were an Englishman in 1600, your mind, he says, was more than half medieval. If you were an Englishman in 1660, your mind was probably more than half modern.
These dates, of course, largely bracket the life of John Milton. Milton thinks like a modern in many ways, but his habitual imagination is what?
It's what? At least not modern. And this may account for his difficulty, do you think it does? Maybe it does. But much more important by far, like all learned people in the 17th century, and like all of the great learned puritans, and there were many of them, amazing men and women, for them, the great metanarrative of life, as Jim Patrick, or what's going on that we've been talking about.
Of course, as it is for us, is the Bible. It is not an overstatement to say that in the 17th century, Christians thought that the oracles of God, the Bible, as it calls itself, were at war.
[8:33] They were at spiritual war with all other worries. This is the way people in that day thought between Psalm and this day felt that way.

These words feel, they reject, they destroy, they build up, they tear down, they baptize, they do everything. The Bible is for a man like Mr. Melton not an overstatement at all.
It's everything for him. The Bible is God speaking. one of, think of a way to describe this. One of Melton's favorite words is, or he uses it sometimes at least, is thick.
Thick in the sense of just filled and richly, richly, like a cake, like your grandmother's Christmas cake, filled with everything. You don't know what's in there, so thick with that.
His mind was thick with the Bible. And there you have it. It's a book that's at war with the words.
These words proclaim from heaven is the last book of the Bible.
[9:40] These words order history. The Bible is the great book of the world and it comes from heaven and it's ordering the world and it will order the world to its finish.

They are powerful. You might say of them dead things with inbreed sense, able to hear, as he says in the poems we're going to look at today.
It has the power to, to our high ways, fantasy present things. These are things that we could never know otherwise.
Nothing, if he was here today, would say, yes, and being in front of the kind of crowd I'm in front of, I'll say it's not in liturgies, it's not in pre-toditions, it's not in frees, it's not in councils, it's just in the Bible, isn't it, my fellow believers?

Just the Bible. Only the Bible. That's the supreme treasure. And a 17th century person would say, as all the Puritans would say, certainly if Jonathan Edwards might tell very much in the Puritan tradition, that like all great treasure, it inevitably produces counterfeit.
[11:02] Only great and good things produce counterfeit. Milton would say all the other great holy books of the world are counterfeits. They're evil works counterfeiting God's book.

This, to be a hear of these words, means, of course, everything. And to obey them is a human calling.
To obey these words is what life is all about. Therefore, that property there, there you have that in front of you, and you have it in front of you on your laps, the first famous words of Paradise Law.
Again, therefore, we are not surprised, are we, when in Milton's great epic, we hear, if you will, first off, the famous words of man's first disobedience.
Here's the way this mammoth epic started. Of man's first disobedience. Funny, Milton, funny, I could hear that. Milton, start with the bad news.
[12:20] We're in bad news right now. This is his view of the world, the Bible view of the world. You can't do anything about it.

We're in the midst of very bad news, of man's first disobedience. You don't have to turn to it now, but we're going to look at it here in a moment in another of Milton's poems, one of my favorites, out of Solemn Music.
At line 24, you see his words in first obedience. Mankind, humankind is called to get to a first obedience.
We began there, we're not there now, but we've got to get there again, the first obedience. Great theme of Milton. So this is, to echo some of our themes from last week, is this is Milton and this is mere Christianity, we can safely say.
In obedience, we are what the creator wants us to be. In disobedience, we are at war with, we are not what the creator wants us to be.
[13:33] So, you can see how scholarship deals with these things, some of it, is this medieval, no longer relevant, need of rethinking? well, the Christian certainly doesn't think so.

Does all the fury of Milton criticism really turn on this first issue, this simple first issue? Well, it's not necessarily so.
I would think, and the traditional Christian reading of Milton largely thinks, that it is indeed just that. Criticism is ultimately a big spirit for battle.
how to read Milton. It's all a spirit for that. Just look at man's first disobedience, it's in front of you, it's in front of us up here, and the fruit of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste brought death into the world and all our woe, with loss of Eden, so one greater man restore us and regain the blissful seat, sing heavenly news, that on the secret top of Oreb or of Sinai disconspired that shepherd who first taught the chosen seed in the beginning how the heavens and earth rose out of chaos, or of Zion hill delight be more, and Siloah's brook, that flowed fast by the oracle of God, I thence invoked thy aid to my adventurous song, that with no middle flight intends to soar above the onion mount, while it pursues been tempted yet in clothes or rime, and see flee thou, O spirit, that dost prefer before all temples the upright heart and cure, instruct me, for thou know, thou from the first was present, and with mighty wings out spread, dove like that brooding, on the vast abyss, and made fit technique, what in me is dark illumined, what is low raisin support, that to the heights of this great argument I may assert eternal providence and justify the ways of God's man.
love. I think those are some of the most famous words ever written in our language. Some of the Shakespeare's great soliloquies, to be or not to be, et cetera, more things that probably deserve to be.
[15:47] These are some of the most famous words in our tongue, aren't they? Of man's great disobedience. I've read that so often, it reads to me like a song.

It almost begs to start to sing to you if you do it. There's cadence, there's weight given here. Milton is just a master of language, a supreme master of it, of man's first disobedience and the third of that forbidden tree.
Just a few little points here. At line six, I think my lines are a quick count, so roughly, I won't say it again, but when I mention a line number, I hope it's accurate, but it's close.
Line six, heavenly muse, of course, echoes this sense of the famous muses of pagan antiquity, echoes that whole world.

It specifically means God, the Holy Spirit, the heavenly muse, who speaks to the believers. Line seven, or Abra Sinai, this is, echoes, this evokes the great desert drama of Israel.
[16:58] Spirit led the chosen people. That shepherd at line eight, of course, is Moses. And then at line nine, he just quotes Genesis, doesn't he? In the beginning, he just evokes Genesis there.

At line ten, we hear Zion, or Shalom, but this is topography around Jerusalem. This is all the kind of stuff that you get used to when you read Milton the first few times when you're looking things up in the apparatus.
Line 15, they only amount roughly, it evokes the whole world of Greek miniature, Greek poetry. Specifically, he begins to bring to the mind Homer, and probably Virgil there too, the great epic poet of antiquity, Homer and Virgil.
Homer, the Greek, Virgil, the Roman. He then talks around line 15 about things unattempted yet, and throws a rhyme. He's almost saying there, if you read him suspiciously, it's almost as if the great poet is saying, well, I'll probably overcome them, won't I?
I'll do a better job at epic than Homer and Virgil. He loved Homer and Virgil, of course. Then at line 17, roughly, numbers are up here, that far down, oh, spirit, he invokes, chiefly thou will spirit that dost prefer before all temples the upright heart and pure.
[18:28] This evokes, this echoes beneath the surface, but not far beneath the surface, is it? This is the spirit of the new covenant. Jeremiah is almost there. It's the heart, the new covenant, which will make the heart pure and upright.

He's evoking Jeremiah here, the new covenant. And then at line 20, we begin to hear more specifically about creation's story. The spirit was present and with mighty wings outspread, dove-like steps, brooding on the vast tradition.
This obviously evokes Genesis again, the creation story, and again, just there is probably an echo of the greater man we've heard of in line four, at our Lord's baptism, the dove came down upon our Lord's baptism.
Jesus' baptism is evoked there. So, you run through notes like this and it just highlights for you that this is, of course, typical of the whole poem.
It is redolent of Greece and Rome, redolent of the Bible, redolent of many, many, many, many things. It is a thick poem, if you will.
[19:46] It's filled with lots of stuff. I read, I think this overture is, in fact, an extended rhetorical question. That's what it is.

This overture says, does a good creator have the right to forbid anything? And the obedient answer in Milton's whole Christian tradition says that a good creator does have the right to forbid.
It is the obedient answer taught by Scripture. You may not like it, Milton might say, do you? The Greeks and the Romans, but I'm going to overcome their poet, mainly didn't.
A lot of people in Milton's own time were beginning to doubt the Christian story in some way, here and there. But he would say the obedient answer taught by Scripture to this rhetorical question is yes.
After the fall, again, we quoted Adam and Eve, how Milton sees them after the fall. Right after she falls, almost right after she falls, in book 9, line 815, Eve actually refers to the traitor as our great forbidder, safe with all his spies about him.
[21:10] Sin has made Eve call God the great forbidder. How dare you challenge me not to do that?

Milton tells us in this great overture, reader, here we go, it's this thing, old issue, this is what life's all about. What are you going to do about obedience to God?
What are you going to do about it? Of man's first disobedience. I don't know, this is just the fun of poetry for a moment. That disc of disobedience, I don't know, is it meant to echo the serpent?
He's right in the first line, the evil one. The serpent is in your life, right off the bat, his disobedience. I think he does that on purpose.
In the next one we're going to look at, there's a moment where he talks about in heaven, there's an undistorting voice. When the evil one has been bracketed by salvation and overcome, an undistorting voice is what you need.
[22:26] Man's first disobedience. Again, these lines, these first lines are an overture which announces the whole story. A primal catastrophe, that's Cardinal Newman's famous phrase for the fall, stands behind us.

And the work of a greater man in line four is announced. Jesus Christ is the greater man who has restored us. While we're quoting Newman one more time, a second Adam to the fight and to the rescue came.
This is standard orthodox mere Christianity that meant the Nazis right after that. That the Catholic like Newman would recognize it.
And the Catholic like C.S. Lewis, like Milton Rice, that evil mystic would recognize it as their story, the church father would recognize it. 19th century evangelical evangelist would recognize it.
The creeds recognize it. The hymnody of the church recognizes it. The prayers of the church, the liturgies of the church, this is standard orthodox Christianity that we keep together.
[23:39] Milton, you notice the poet, is also the narrator of course, and he wants us at some level at least to suspend our knowledge of salvation, if that's possible, as accomplished fact, and live into the story with him.

That's what this amazing poem wants us to do. The best way to appreciate a story is to step into it and enjoy it, so that American literary scholar, common sense truth.
To put it mildly, therefore, I think we can see that this is going to be an adventurous song. He calls it an adventurous song.
He invokes the spirit's help in his adventurous song. You'll know that Milton contemplated writing an epic poem about Britain, an epic about his own people.
That's what he may have gone for, he thought about that. If he had so decided, he would have quite a different poem, wouldn't he? It would be an epic poem in 12 part, I don't know, what would he call it, from King Arthur's to Tony Belair.
[24:45] It would be a pathetic poem. His models were, it's nice to note these things, Milton is not in a vacuum again. His models were Homer, Virgil, the book of Job, he deeply admired as a high, beautiful poem, an Italian epic or two that only chap should professional scholars know much about.

He looked at them all and decided he would write, he wanted to write about, in sustained, beautiful cadence, which he knew he was quite capable of, Milton knew his powers, he wanted to write a poem about, well, everything.
That was his goal, an adventurous song. He's going to justify the ways of God to know him. Samuel Johnson, one of my favorite critics, rejected the politics of Milton with, he couldn't reject them more, a great Tory, in light with Congregationalist Puritan Whig.
He was, Johnson, quite critical of much in Milton's poetry, but in the presence of Paradise Lost, he, Johnson, was an honest critic, an honest man.
he bent the knee, if you will. He acknowledged here, Paradise Lost, a real work, a rare dream. But he did say, no one ever wished it longer.
[26:07] It is a big, big, long effort. I'm going to talk about everything, Milton tells you here.

Not yet, he says. Is it long 13? I know that this time, not yet attempted and so is a rhyme. He knows he's doing something quite new here.
Does he attempt, you can always ask this question, I don't know how to answer it, does he attempt too much? Maybe so, but this is his project. It's amazing, that last line which disappears here, you have it in front of you, to justify the ways of God to me.
I may assert eternal poverty. This great argument, to the height of it, I will go. And I will assert eternal poverty, and I'll justify the ways of God to them.
To justify the ways of God, what is he really taking on here? Well, it is this.
[27:17] He's going to prove to the reader, if you will, that the creation is good, and therefore was a good idea. The presence of evil does not defeat these assertions.

Many in our culture since Milton have said, oh yes, they do. It does defeat the first assertions. As I see, and Freud recorded earlier, he thought so. What God has done about evil glorifies him, we'll prove in this poem, and last but not least, he will show you that God is not responsible for evil, but that God has taken responsibility for evil.
That's what he'll show you. That's amazing. Well, that shouldn't be too hard, eh, in a poem? Or more, to put it in the subjective mode, if you will, to be an obedient creature, how we started this look at his poem, to be an obedient creature in the presence of this God is good and glorious and endlessly beautiful.
You should be, if you are human, fully human, obedient to this God. And when we read Paradise Lost, we are meant to know, and in a measure, feel the truth of these things.

Otherwise, why do it in poetry? Poetry is a healing art, is it anything? You're meant to know the truth of these assertions and to feel them.
[28:48] The line, adventurous song, seems lovely, it is lovely, but it's not to be forgotten. If you forget that, you will misread the poem. It's just an adventurous song that's going to accomplish the law.

Therefore, you have to read big chunks of nothing. what you really need when you read Paradise Lost is some sort of pill that will keep you awake for 12 hours so you can read it all.
But no one, I don't know if anybody's done it. Some student did an idea last poem I ever read there.
In fact, you can see that what Milton really wants to do is he wants to put in front of you strong emotions.
Definitely, the poem is filled with amazing stories of deceit, war, recovery from war, human life, unfaithfulness, horrifying events about everything, strong emotions, but the strong emotions will be ordered by the poetry and ordered into ordered affection.
This is an amazing thing that Milton wants to do here. You'll recall, after the fall, one of the sweetest moments in Paradise Lost, when Adam is in his sinfulness that he's fallen into with Eve, he confers with a mighty angel.
[30:17] The angels play a big role in this formula. The last three books describe the whole story of salvation from the fall, what you've done, Adam, and Eve. The whole mystery of what God came to do about it is unfolded.

In a very low-key, beautiful rhetorical poetry, it begins to sound a lot like a Puritan preacher. A Puritan preacher was suspicious of ornesty, suspicious of galluying with you, preached the gospel plainly.
Milton begins to cool down in order of preaching at the end of the poem. You'll recall that the angel says to Milton, you may know a paradise within our death.
That's your hope. The angel offers out that hope to Adam. As you await salvation, the gospel will begin this hearing of you, and the ordered poem echoes this story of salvation.
This poem is a great ordered work of poetry that orders your emotions into the mystery of salvation. It's almost a help to understanding salvation. It's an adventurous song.
[31:35] So again, obedience, the issue of obedience is the ever-present issue, the decisive decision, if that's not redundant, awaiting the readers of Paradise Law.

Do you want to be a part of salvation's story as it unfolds? by the Bible, and as I will put it into a lovely, gorgeous poetry for you. Do you want to be part of this story, do you?
It's all up to you. The issue remains obedience. Obedire, I hope there's no Latin scholars here, because they'll tell me that my pronunciation is all wrong, but Obedire, O-B-E-D-E-I-R-E, is the Latin verb, and it means, how significant, namely, or merely house and being this verb means to listen.
What kind of listening, what kind of listening obedience is Christian listening obedience? Well, in a few words, it is meant to be, it is, free and happy and delighted listening, like listening to a great person.
Not a slavish obedience, not a slavish listening, it is born of happy relationship. Milton's happy hymn, based on Psalm 116, says it all so beautifully, and it's another part of Milton that we probably are all familiar with.
[33:03] Let us with a gladsome mind praise the Lord, for he is kind, for his mercies they endure, ever safe, for ever sure. To this God, one may listen and obey with a gladsome mind, because it's a healing story.

When you listen to this story, you become a participant in it, and it begins to heal you. Milton wants to echo the whole mystery of the gospel, and paradise law.
It has to produce serious criticism. People hate the gospel. They study this poem, they start to show that they hate it, big time. With Milton, we will hear this story again.
I think you can also call paradise law again announced here, as a kind of discipline of obedience in the truth. That's one of the reasons it's so law.
It can't be a lyric. Milton knows that. He wrote glorious lyrics, some of the most splendid lyrics in any language, I'm sure. But this has to be long, because it teaches you about long obedience, long obedience in the same direction as someone said.

[34:17] There's the opening, an opening look at the opening line of paradise laws. Let's get tighter that now, so we'll take this away and put a, I hope you have in front of you, add a solemn music.

One of my, one of my favorites. blessed pair of siren, pledges of heaven's joy, spear-born harmonious sister's voice and verse.
When your divine sounds in mixed power and joy, dead things with angry scent, able to hear, subcloth, high-waste fantasy, present, that undisturbed song of pure consent, I sung before the sapphire-colored throne, to him that sits thereon, with saintly shouted, solemn gibaloo, where the bright seraphim and burning road are loud, uplifted angel trumpets blow, and the cherubic host and thousand choirs touch their immortal parts of golden wire.
With those just spirits that wear victorious palms, things devout in holy psalms seem everlasting, but we on earth with undiscording voice may rightly answer that melodious noise, as once we did, till disproportionate sin, jarred against nature's chime, and with heart's din, broke the fair music that all creatures made to their great Lord, whose love their motions sprayed in perfect aposine, whilst they stood in first obedience and their state of good.
Oh, may we soon again renew that song, and keep in tune with heaven, till God ere long to celestial concert, us unite, to live with him, and sing in endless morn of light.
[36:02] the first period in the poem starts to end as there, and their state of good. Unless when you read it, you want to say, thank you, thank you, we gave you a semicolon along the way, two semicolons, I think, but mostly it just says, keep going, there's a reason for this, he wants to keep you going.

I definitely put that in the Milton accessible column, though there's obviously some old-fashioned stuff there.
Again, just a quick run-through, again, like you find in the notes. Sphere-born harmonious sisters, right at the top, voice and verse, these are, in a sense, in general terms, the ultimate image of heaven's music.
Someone, sometimes distinguished by scholars from other understandings or numberings of celestial, celestial sirens and the crystal spheres, visions that medieval persons and people in antiquity had of the heavens.
Perhaps these, this song is capable of reconciling men through the imagination. You should always remember that in this kind of literature, fantasy, say it, verse 5, isn't fantasy as we understand it, you know, it's imagination.
[37:34] imagination. Of course, the whole, more to the point, the opening words, um, I don't need to talk about that now, blessed care of silence, pledges of heaven's joy, sphere born, harmonious, sisters, voice and verse, this is just redolent of the whole platonic view of reality, which Milton loves.

Roman Catholic scholar, I've never heard it better put than this, Paul Ford, there is a platonic, Augustinian, a sense of the soul, in which the human heart, incited by the limited goods and beauties of creation, discovers within itself a restless, piercing desire or the ultimate source of all reality and perfection.
That's the platonic Augustinian tradition. We've all inherited this tradition, all of us, the hardest and restless, the political rest and views, the Augustinian great, the sacred, and the sacred, evangelists, so come to Jesus, we will meet you.
You've looked at all the created goods and looked for satisfaction in them, there was one who gave all those created goods and he will order them as they should be ordered. This is the platonic, Augustinian story of the world.
It's purely Christian. Christians loved Plato for a good reason. They thought he was at most an early total Christian waiting to be converted. He believed there was an infinite good somewhere and he wanted to find it.
[39:17] He thought if Plato had been a biblical author, he would have said there's a heavenly reason. Echo is the true source of this earthly view. It's like the letter to the Hebrew.

Those, again, that is by way of saying those opening lines are all from that tradition. Again, a tradition that means it, that, that, that, the music of the notes and love, blessed pair of sirens, ledges of heaven's joy, spear-born harmonious sisters, voice and verse, red your divine powers and mixed power and flow.

then that next line, I don't know about you, but I adore it. Dead things with inbreed sense able to fear. The power of God's grace is worthy.
You are dead in trespasses and sins, Paul says, when you hear the gospel, it makes you alive. That's Calvinism in one line.
That's the prayer book in one line. Dead things with inbreed sense able to fear this. Voice and verse, again, are offspring of and anticipations of heavenly harmony.
[40:30] Voice and verse. Milton spent his whole life, you might say, loving voice and verse. From a very early age, he knew he was going to be a poet, a rare poet, Milton knew it was to.

He was obsessed, you know, in his life, for that parable of our Lord, about the gift which is horrible to hide. He's always thought, I've got to do something for my Lord, with this gift he's given me.
He takes a good use of it. Sphere born, here, is carried by or conveyed by the divine order, up to which we look. And again, fantasy in this kind of poetry, line 5, always needs imagination.
Line 7 here, sapphire, colored stone, of course, you know, this echo springs into Ezekiel, chapter 1. Sapphire colored tones are there, and a lot of other strange things in Ezekiel.
Victorious Palms is almost directly from the book of Revelation, chapter 7. Diatheson, at line 23, of course, is obscure. Apparently it means perfect consort.
[41:36] It has something to do with an octave, but since I don't know what an octave is, I won't even remember it. A consort, of course, at line 27, a consort are musicians, here they're angelic musicians, doing their musical harmony.

A consort was also often referred to as your marriage partner with consort. This is an image in a lot of English poetry, George Herbert's famous line from the temple, Lord, place me in thy consort, give one strain to my poor need.
This is an image which 17th century, 16th century poets loved. We could say, I think, that if paradise loss is a high phrase of obedience, then add a solemn music, this one in front of us, is, I would call it, an enchantment.
That's what Milton needs it to be. He commends your divine listening. He wants to show you what it might sound like, what it might feel like to be a divine listener.
again, line for me is the heart of the enchantment, dead things with ingrained sense able to cure. Listening obedience yields a participation in the divine harmony.
[43:01] This is what Milton is saying in a poem like this. This is usually put in this funny, by the way. He wrote this earlier. The mind is saturated here with the Bible.

You see Ezekiel's here, the Apocalypse. And that's no accident that he quotes Ezekiel and the Apocalypse, or at least echoes him. Visionary books, these are.
And here we see the divine order unfolded. I think in reading books like Ezekiel, by the Bible, that strange opening itself, Ezekiel, the wheels, the wheels, and the last book of the Bible, truly reading poetry, helps us read poetry.
I love the little anecdote where Eugene Pearson was once doing a pastor's conference. And he surprised them by saying, took them by surprise to them. I wasn't there, someone told him, but he said, oh, by the way, in the last couple of months, how many of you have read a book of poetry? Hands up. Maybe one, maybe two, in a room filled with 80, 90, 100 people. And he stopped and said, well, how are you going to read the prophets and don't love poetry?
[44:17] Do you believe that God, the Holy Spirit, wrote scriptures? He likes poetry. He loves it. His imagination obviously is in antiquity and the medieval reception of antiquity, but he just loves it and uses it throughout his poetry all the time.

Way down at line 20, we can't miss this gizzle. the seeds of the need, we shouldn't disproportion sin jarred against nature's charm. The universe understood as one mighty sweet-toned instrument, active and guided by one spirit, is a commonplace in 17th century theology.
It's a commonplace amongst the puritan people. That's a quote from a book called Some Gospel Treasures Open. 1653. One mighty sweet-toned instrument.
That's how they understand the universe. Active and guided by one spirit. There's John Milton sounding like Dr. Slayman, trying to make us feel that again.
How are we to imagine the creation? This is how they imagine the creation. Sin has jarred it all, put us out of conscience. I think it is the loss of a Christian sensibility, a biblical sensibility, shown for instance here, that it's one of the great contributing factors to the environmental thing.

[45:54] We don't think of the universe as a sweet-tone instrument with the Holy Spirit that's constantly nurturing, guiding, cherishing. No. It's a place to make money.

The modern. Except that in this spirit, the French Enlightenment, the great philosophy encyclopedia, one of the contributors to that book proudly says it's the new science.
Now, Lewis called the Renaissance, things that came out of the Renaissance, his great ordering principle for understanding that time, in his book, about 16th century literature, he calls it the title of the great opening introduction, 60 pages, it is new learning to read.
The French encyclopedia guy says when you hear an animal screeching out in pain, don't be superstitious, think of it as like an improperly oiled machine. The universe is becoming a machine at the enlightenment.
Not so in this poem, it's the Holy Spirit's place, these treasures, it's the, Calvin called it the feeder of God's grace, the feeder, the man is called to live.
[47:12] There you go, I just, Dr. Slayman, if he's not here, I thought of him when that line came to my attention when reading this poem again. Milton, I think, is in a kind of transition, that transition that Professor Doug quite accurately speaks of.

His imagination is moving towards modernity. Galileo is the only contemporary of Milton mentioning paradise life. He admired the new science, he saw its possibilities, he loved it, but his imagination, I think, more loved than the time of his vision of reality.
Milton is one of these guys who can battle, I think. I think I'm in battle about that. That's why I find it interesting. It's not just, there's not interesting back there, I think it's going on in our own sensibility of Christians in our own time.
Despite everything, I would call, do you think that's an acceptable Milton? I think just off the top, moving through that Milton, you get locked out of it. Even if you don't have an apparatus attached to it that tells you about obscure words or something, that's a nice, straightforward Milton.
That's a beautiful, beautiful piece of work. I love it. There's a lot of straightforward things, to be understood there, which seems to me just quite, quite lovely.
[48:39] I guess, as we head towards the conclusion here, does it work, this kind of poetry? Do you feel it? Just, here we have a heavenly music, a heavenly setting.

This poem, it shows us thrones, it shows us seraphim, and it shows us an earthly music which is called to echo the heavenly. And there's a challenge to recognize that our own sin has challenged our hearing and our singing as it's supposed to be.
And there is a hope right at the end of the song that we will soon again renew that song, isn't there? There's a hope there.
This is almost song that is solemn music all the time. St. Louis says, reason is the organ of truth. The imagination is the organ of meaning. You have to know that the gospel addresses our imagination. If not, I guess poetry, most poetry, is a form of inconsequential entertainment.
[49:48] Surely it's not that. Or, on the other side of the coin, if we do not intend a something to form our imaginations, what happens?

Is it the case that the fantasy, the imagination, remains a kind of blank? Well, maybe. But this is almost certainly in the street sense in our time, a fantasy.
No, no. Your imagination will be worked on by something. One more time, I'll make reference to Harold Bloom. I learned lots from this guy. I think I did.
He did write that piece about Freud recently. He deeply, Bloom, admires Freud as he calls him a mythologist. He notes that Freud called himself, I did know this, I found this very interesting. Freud, according to Bloom, called himself a conquistador, a conqueror, you know, that Spanish thing. A conqueror of what? Well, Bloom argues with glee a conqueror of the imagination.
[50:53] That's what Freud has done to the western world. He's conquered our imaginations. We Christians have been largely conquered, I think, by Freud. I used to, Christians, we used to be accused, I think, naively, and it was corny, polemic against us, our tradition, that we believed in the three-decker universe.

And that was all overthrown. But what we replaced it with is a three-decker psyche, a super-ego, an ego, and an id. That's obviously the father, the son, and the spirit. I think, maybe our conquistadors are still doing battle with Freud, but not many people point it out anymore because we're not even in the battle often.

It's Bloom writing about Freud. We Christians are talked about in this literature. It's always fun. There's always a battle going on for the imagination.
And it's a battle that we have to take part in, it seems to me. We should, as Christians intend, is this true, and habitual imagination.
If we don't, something, someone will do it for us. Since we are dealing with poetry, I love the way this point is stated from another context obviously by Robert Frost.
[52:00] You love his line, provide, provide, or someone will provide for you. That is so true. Who is providing you with the images that your imagination is going to live by?

Might be the Bible, might be Augustine, might be Plato, bless him. Might be a guy like Milton, or it might be Freud. And the consequences are eternal, literally, Milton would say.
Who owns your imagination? Decide what you're going to do with it. We're running out of time. A couple of little points. At Easter, we're in the waning days of the happy Easter season.
At Easter, we intensify, don't we? We think about resurrection. We think about that man, Jesus of Nazareth, the one who has been raised. Well, how do we do this?
Well, James here today, music, beautiful singing. There are paintings of this particular man outside the tomb. The only one that comes to my mind is Rembrandt.
[52:59] I'm sure there are many more. My favorite Easter moment is, amongst others, but I love John's Gospel, chapter 20, verse 20. It doesn't exactly sound like Milton, I admit, but the Gospel writer says, the disciples surrounding the resurrected Jesus, and he says, then were the disciples glad.

Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord. Indeed. Milton, T.S. Eliot, called Milton the supreme master of a form within freedom.
And I think he could say it the other way, too. You know, at Easter, we begin to think the unthinkable. And because it's unthinkable, we need low-key statements about it, and sometimes I think we need ecstasy.
We need to hear the singers. We need to look at paintings that shock us with their beauty. But we need things like, then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord. The freedom in the form.
Easter, I think, demands that we do this kind of task. Perhaps an exalted language like Milton begins to help us with some of that task. I don't know. It's a real question.
[54:09] I want an exalted language. I think we're going to have an exalted language in eternity. Maybe Milton is an early example of it, but that's getting, indeed, fanciful.

Maybe we learn something about language and the language of the faith. Again, in Milton we learn to obey and listen and to put them together, a listening obedience.
and it's a great task he's taken on and I think he does it largely well. In the Milton overture, as we conclude, the Milton prologue we called it, we learn and throughout Paradise Lost we learn that we are in the wrong and that we should not become furious about this but listen to how God addresses us as ones in the wrong.
And in Adesolum music we are enchanted as we listen to the kind of thing that God wants to say to us. There's a kind of listening that will create in us the right kind of desire, this voice and verse, the Holy Spirit singing to us high and beautiful songs.
And between these two powerful presences, I'll call them, Paradise Lost and Adesolum Music, somewhat arbitrarily decided, at least the second part, between these two presences we live, between repentance and the revealed salvation that makes even repentance an event of joy.
[55:41] I think Milton would tell you that. Learn to repent of your sin, it's a good thing. God gives you the gift, he'll teach you how to listen and obey again and get caught up in salvation's story.

Milton's soul read is undoubtedly a joy. I have found it so. You can go through life and never read a word of Milton in a rich, fulfilled, wonderful, good Christian life.
You don't have to read Milton or Jim Packer to be saved, I'm told. That other name has been contested, many of you do. There it is, Milton. Read him, he is a joy.
He teaches me, I find Milton teaches me patience. I can't read Milton quickly, unless you're a blooming genius. I can't. He slows me down and I begin to hear his rhythms and I begin to appreciate how important it is to hear correctly, to obey and to listen.
Milton did it and he said, I'm on my way to salvation, join me. It's a great adventurous song. There are other great adventurous songs we're going to hear about shortly at Leonard's James, but this is a great adventurous song.

[56:46] I love it. Let me pray. Lord, we thank you for the gifts that you give some people. And we thank you that they, sometimes so imperfectly, but they attempt to give you back these gifts.

And when they do, what glories come before us. And we thank you for your servant, John Milton, and help us to learn to obey and to listen as we should, perhaps with the help of poets.
And we thank you for the gifts you've given them. And we pray in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Absolutely. The world's waiting for this. But John would have said. The handout was, of course, the two, the Paradise Lost, the Adesala music, and then just a gift.
Upon the Circumcision apparently was written about the same time as Adesala music. And it has little glories in it. He talks about our Lord at the fourth to last line, how he seals our obedience first.
[57:53] Milton loves this obedience theme, seals it first. And if you've ever heard scripture turned into poetry, isn't it, he's a glory when he talks about high-throned in secret bliss for us frail dust emptied his glory even to nakedness.

And that great covenant which we still transgress entirely satisfied, that's just Philippians chapter two, that's the poetry. truth. Yeah, I'm glad, I jotted down a few notes.
There's a hard to get a hold of book, well first off, go to the library, there are biographies, a lot of them, about Milton. But a lot of them are probably unsound. I don't do blurbs to books.
This book is unsound, I wouldn't buy it. I'll ask your question, but before I forget, yes, let me mention a few books. The other day I was in a bookshop in Oak Ridge Mall, and I thought, well, I'll just go look at the poetry section, since I'm doing some talk.
There was one nice penguin paperback, a handsomely produced, 30 buck kind of thing, produced by solid scholars, Paradise Lost. There it is. Turn it over on the back.
[59:13] What does it tell you? This poem is a great poem, and some people read it as a great Christian work. Other people tell you it shows you how cruel Christianity really is.

You know, it exists. Be careful. The contents here may be hazardous to your spiritual health. So when you read about Milton, you are in that curious dispute.
Don't believe everything that some scholars tell you, Milton can't have anything to do with disobedience. That's much too simple. Lewis talks about this. Oh, it must be some metaphor for something else.
It must really mean that Eve is searching for her real identity in that apple. They will. They can't stand what it says. Disobedience is the issue facing my life?
No way. Because Milton knows you're in this story. You've got to decide if you're going to continue or start to think, undo this stuff. Anyway, C.S. Lewis, his book, Who Else Would I?
[60:13] Preface the Paradise Law. No one should go to their graves without having read this book. No one should go anywhere near their grave without having read the chapter called Hierarchy in that book.

That is a poem in itself in prose. Lewis just shows you how ancient people, people through the 17th century, thought about the universe as a great chain of being.
And it pervades everything Milton ever thought of with. And there's a guy named, I like Douglas Bush, a great Harvard scholar. I taught there for 30 years. I think he was a Canadian. And if you can find a book called Introduction to Early 17th Century Literature, he has a mammoth, a big, big chapter on Milton, which is to die for.
And there's a book on Puritan by Mr. Professor Haller, H-A-L-L-E-R, it's called Puritanism, and he has a chapter on Milton, which is extremely good too.
And when you buy just any good copy of Milton's Paradise Lost, it usually comes helpfully with notes galore. Notes galore, like you'll get tired of the notes. Preface, preface to Paradise Lost.
[61:28] Puritanism. H-A-L-L-E-R. That's a classic. That's a recognized classic on Puritanism. George Santiana calls it a piece of poetry itself.

Yeah, sure. Oh, on the morning of Christ's nativity. Yeah. Yes, it is. That's all. That's, yeah.
Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.
Well, I, I, can you, do you want me to, go ahead, are you going to quote it for us?
Oh, is it, sorry, should we go? I can't.
[63:10] Milton would just say to you, well, what's wrong with that?

Milton knows he's talking sex. Paradise Lost is filled with sex. I was going to start my introduction with this. At one point, a rather awkward moment in Paradise Lost, Milton has his Adam ask

Raphael about the sex life of angels.
They talk about sex all the time, the Puritan. Yeah, exactly. Well, he gets an answer. You get an answer in Paradise Lost. Everything's there. Milton describes in Paradise Lost beautiful pre-fallen sex and revels in it.
And then he describes a sex scene right after the fall and it gets a bit rough. And it's mean sex. And they exploit one another. Puritans thought about sex all the time.
It's the conquistador who seduced us, if I may say so, into thinking that the Puritans are hung about sex. No, he's not. No, they're not. They love sex. They're not bad.
[64:11] He's saying in a fallen world... He's saying that in a fallen world, we cover up. Nature covers up for the arrival of the Puritan.

But, so, no, the Puritans... It's becoming more and more recognized that the Puritans were getting over all the... Whatever was bad about medieval Catholicism, the Puritans were throwing...
And regarding sex, the Puritans were throwing it off. The American at Columbia University, not a Christian, written a big book... Not a big book, five years ago. And he goes through the journals of Puritan women.
And they're always talking about their husbands' bodies and how much they liked sex. It's just a great thing. The Puritans are the ones who are getting over whatever was wrong about... In the medieval Christian. Puritans were really healthy about sex.
Very healthy. Milton was... Milton, he never divorced. He ran through three wives. At least the first two of them. He was... Puritans thought you should get out of the monastery and make babies.
[65:13] Sorry, you've got me going here. If you want to... If you want to know about the... More questions, please. If you want to know about the sex life of angels, go to Paradise Lost.

I think it's about book... Book 8 will tell you about it. When they start to talk about sex, when Raphael starts to talk about sex to Adam, he turns a rosy at you. And I thought, oh no, he's blushing.
The angel's blushing. But Milton really tells you that when angels talk about love, they turn the appropriate color. I wish I'd known that before.
I know, yeah. Warm in here. Well, Sarah's like that. Sorry, somebody had a hand up? Please, please. Can you hear a hat? Yeah.
Yeah. Well, the classic Christian answer, as so often is the case in the Latin West is Augustine.
[66:27] And Augustine looks at the Bible for the answer. And he says, what does Israel do with Egyptians? Uses it. Doesn't hate it. Uses it. What the pagans have done, which is recognize what's good about it and use it.

That's their answer. Puritans in the 17th century were reading Ovid all the time. Raucous pornography. The world is in Ovid. They just said, well, you put aside what's wrong with it.
A benefit from what the pagan has created in God's image. The pagans have no some wisdom. And we want to hear what it is. I know.
You're not responding. I know that a doctor is about to say Ovid's rock is an old and old father. He says, yeah. Other folks, I mean, I do think that's the church that's the Bible and the faith.
Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. They just say, best like they say, read it, enjoy it, but read it critically.
[67:32] Read it critically because there's big errors here. They haven't been baptized by the gospel, these people. But that's the best answer I can give you. There may be, Milton is a conflicted person, I think.

He was very much open to the new astronomy. But I don't think he ever did the big task of integrating it into his imagination. But I don't think he cared that much about it.
He just would have said, that's okay. God will give the world his new knowledge. We'll absorb it.
Okay. But that's the best answer I can give, at least. Christian tradition goes from Tertullian, who says, we want nothing to do with the pagan.
What has Rome got to do with Athens, famously? But Augustine, no, what has Jerusalem got to do with Athens? Augustine takes the middle view.
Receive it, read it critically, but, you know, be careful. He tells his congregants in Hippo about it. All of these guys, it's remarkable, isn't it? All of these guys read Virgil as if he's scripture.
[68:37] He just did. Great Roman poet. Augustine thinks if you can find a truth that's stated in Virgil's language, he just probably thinks it's probably true. A poet has authority in these cultures.

Just do. It's foreign to us, isn't it? We're not like that. It has the authority that science has in our culture. Science said. We just say, oh, bow down.
Yeah, that's true, isn't it? I guess when the church feels threatened, it tends to turn in upon itself. And then when it's freer, it's more open to hearing other traditions.
So, yeah, I hear what you're saying. It's just, the weaker brethren perhaps are defended. The proverbial weaker brethren are defended by the Catholic Church right now is out defending the weaker brethren like crazy about the Da Vinci Code.
To think that some Christians have a faith so unformed, so ill-instructed, that they might read that book or go to that movie and be shaken. It's pathetic.
[69:41] But it's a warning to us but we better keep doing things like learners' exchanges. That's what Bill told me to say. But, I mean, we're going to hear about another, I mean, Dante was a learned poet, I think.

Dante will give you the whole universe in his poem too. I'm waiting for, is it out there yet, a nihilist, a really smart, learned nihilist to give us the equivalent of Paradise Lost in a great poem.
The story of reality which says comes from nowhere, ends up nowhere. Probably already there in something, a houseman or something who's tried it. Yes, but that's a Christian sort of as a warning, isn't it?
It's not an epic though, does it? But I think, yeah, there are poems of tragedy and meaninglessness. I'd like to see a big one like the size of, and you can't do it. Yeah, I think he didn't write a poem though, did he? But his, the equivalent of. Yeah.
[70:56] I think Leonard Cohen cheats though because he uses all sorts of religious language. I always think that's cheating. You're living off of our stuff, Leonard. Well, if I may coin a technical phrase.

I felt a little bit sheepish about on Mother's Day quoting, you know, thus they in mutual accusations spent the fruitless hour. I hope if you take out a mother for lunch today you don't end up like this. Although, it's been known to happen. Take Milton with you. It's not new. There you go. Thanks very much and it's been lovely. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.
Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.
Thank you.