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## Review: The Devotional Experience in the Poetry of John Milton

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religious right. There is a cutting criticism by Rosenberg with regard to the notion of Biblical inerrancy: For some Southern Baptists the Bible "has become a talisman" (p. 134). Questions pertaining to the creation/evolution debate are taken into consideration, as is the issue of the role of women in the ministry. In terms of social involvement there has been some progress in the Southern Baptist Convention in areas such as hunger, AIDS, war and peace. But Rosenberg concludes that the new religious right would still like to gain full control in these issues in order to further their conservative agenda.

For the most part this work is a precise analysis of the social structure and development of the Southern Baptist subculture. Rosenberg demonstrates her keen perception in her description of Southern Baptist practices and culture. One may find her wanting, however, in terms of her understanding of theology and in her lack of understanding of why many Southern Baptists often behave the way they do. For instance, while addressing the issue of immersion baptism she argues that because there have been "folk beliefs" surrounding the practice it may be that for some the idea of being immersed "added the sort of thrill that handling snakes or walking on live coals may give today" (p. 21). This particular notion is not documented and thus fails to make an objective point.

The fact that the author is an anthropologist and not a theologian must be kept in mind. But it would be intellectually dishonest to dismiss her out of hand for such a reason. There is much insight to be gained from this work in terms of just how much our cultural biases play a role in the development of many of our theological opinions. Those interested in the future of evangelicalism in America will especially appreciate this latest addition to the many other insightful works in this area of study.

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*The Devotional Experience in the Poetry of John Milton.* By Michael Ernest Travers. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1988, 163 pp., n.p.

John Milton, Protestant and Puritan, poet of the greatness of God and one of the greatest poets ever to write in English, was a man who could be reckoned from numerous sides. His desire, though, was to bring forth from his inward promptings the raising of his mother dialect for the glory of God. Travers, therefore, attempts to study Milton's poetical concerns in devotional experience in a way in keeping with the heart of Milton.

This work, originally a doctoral dissertation, seeks to understand Milton's own view of what in fact is true devotion to God. It does so primarily by means of careful analyses of the poet's development of his characters in their relation to God. The work also follows a kind of chronology whereby we see Milton's own developing thought from the young poet of "Nativity Ode" and "Lycidas" (where the devotional consideration is established) to the aged Milton of *Samson Agonistes*. Very important throughout, as Travers effectively shows, is Milton's Protestant perception of devotion as truly active. This perception provides a consistent linkage to Milton's *The Christian Doctrine* (his own systematic theology). For Milton, says Travers, "devotion is an individual's inner attitude toward God which he expresses in the 'cultivation' or active development of certain 'devout affections' for Him" (p. 7). This prose proposition is developed and exemplified in different circumstances by Milton's characters, especially in the late epic poems.

While Travers carefully uncovers how Milton was able in his earlier poems to establish a way to devotional expression, he shows that it is Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost*, Jesus Christ the Son of God in *Paradise Regained*, and very importantly Milton's "every man," Samson in *Samson Agonistes*, who best disclose the life of devotion to God. Travers points out that in Milton's characterization of Adam and Eve the purity of their prelapsarian devotion ought to be contrasted with their postlapsarian devotion, which because of sin has enlarged their view of God and matured their piety. In Jesus Christ, Milton finds one who must be both Savior and Son of God and yet true exemplar for all true devotion. (The question of Milton's "Arianism" will be mentioned below.) Therefore, says Travers, Milton focuses his attention on the real humanity of Christ and on the deep reality of his testings. It is in a special way with Samson, however, that Milton can develop the entire movement of devotion from despair to doubt, to hope, and finally to the active piety that carries out God's purposes. In Samson most concretely Milton's reader finds himself. He thus learns the wisdom of what Milton said in *The Christian Doctrine*: "Acquiesce in the promises of God, through a confident reliance on his divine providence, power and goodness, and bear inevitable evils with equanimity, as the dispensation of the Father, and sent for good." The slow arrival of Samson's "patience" is found in his active, conscious undertaking of God's glory and cause.

In reading Travers' effective analysis of Milton's poetic disclosure of true devotional experience, particularly in his character development, I slowly discovered his own "movement": from analysis to self-knowledge in the knowledge of God. Thus Travers' scholarly and readable interpretation of Milton actually is an aid toward that which Milton himself desired to progress. Further, while Travers broaches the question of Milton's Arianism (cf. *The Christian Doctrine*, book 1, chap. 5, on the Son of God as creature) he consciously sets that aside as a somewhat extraneous issue for the purposes of this book. Travers' decision to do so was initially a problem for me. But the methodological purpose became clearer later, especially in light of *Paradise Regained* and Milton's emphasis on Christ's humanity. Milton's problem Christology is surely an issue (however consistent Milton is on this point) but not, apparently, for the focus of this book.

As has already been mentioned, Travers' writing is clear and his use of the texts of the particular poems is helpful. The argumentation on the points and emphases of Milton is convincing.

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*T. S. Eliot: The Philosopher Poet.* By Alzina Stone Dale. Wheaton: Harold Shaw, 1988, 209 pp., n.p.

For more than two generations evangelical students have looked to T. S. Eliot and C. S. Lewis as proofs that it is possible to be both intelligent (indeed, intellectual) and Christian at the same time. Of the two giants, Eliot has been less read, less admired, less emulated. The fact that his writing is more obscure than Lewis' and the fact that, unlike Lewis, he had attained to literary fame before his conversion have combined to make him something of an enigma to Christians and non-Christians alike. Believers cannot get over the standard view of Eliot as the supreme prophet of modern lostness and despair, while nonbelievers have equal difficulty assimilating his conversion, feeling compelled either to explain it away or condemn it



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