Jewish Christianity in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*: The Son as Angel of the Lord

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**Introduction**

One of the most vexing issues in Milton studies involves the begetting of the Son in *Paradise Lost*, an episode that has generated disparate commentary. While commentators tend to focus on the begetting of the Son as either literal or metaphorical, most of them opting for the latter, I contend that they have not broadened their outlook adequately in order to encompass other begettings of the Son. The Son of *Paradise Lost* is thrice begotten literally, not metaphorically: first as divine, second as angelic, and third as human. The first begetting occurs before the action of *Paradise Lost* begins. The second, which happens as part of the action of *Paradise Lost*, is the earliest event in the epic, which is recounted in Book V. And the third begetting, the Son’s voluntary humiliation in becoming incarnate, is prophesied during the celestial dialogue in Book III and included in Adam’s dream-vision in Book XII of the epic.

In the first begetting, the Father endowed the Son with divine nature akin to, but not the same as, his own. The Son when begotten a second time, as an angel in the earliest episode in Milton’s epic (Book V, lines 600 ff.), resembles in nature and form the following: Michael, Raphael, Uriel, Gabriel, Abdiel, and Lucifer (that is, Satan before his downfall). Because the form and nature of the Son are like theirs, other angelic beings can and do discern the lineaments of his countenance more clearly than when he was wholly divine. Moreover, during the celestial dialogue in Book III of *Paradise Lost*, the epic narrator discerns the Son as an angel at the right hand of the Father. Also, as Adam and Eve encounter the Son immediately after each of them is separately created, and when the Son judges them after their transgressions, he is an angel. Finally, begotten a third time, an event foreseen but never enacted in *Paradise Lost*, the Son will assume the form and nature of
humankind throughout his temporal ministry of approximately three
decades.

Since the earliest event in Paradise Lost dramatizes the begetting
of the Son as an angel, that is the originary moment of the epic, whose
significance cannot be overestimated because the Son appears in
Milton’s epic only and always in the form and nature and with the
features of an angel. Indeed, his resemblance to the angelic cohorts
has great significance since it becomes the means by which his
ontological relationship with the Father is clarified. Though at first
glance my proposition of the angelic Son or Christological angel in
Paradise Lost may seem highly unusual, there are numerous analogues
and discussions of the Son as an angel. I will cite only three: the
apocryphal Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah; De Doctrina
Christiana, the theological treatise traditionally attributed to Milton;
and the so-called Junius manuscript with its biblical poems, most notably
Genesis and Christ and Satan, which Milton may have known through
his likely friendship with Francis Junius, the Dutch scholar. In what

1 To my knowledge, few commentators have acknowledged that the Son is begotten
as an angel in Paradise Lost. See The Poems of John Milton, J. Carey and A.
Fowler eds., London 1968, p. 727, for a one-sentence note to Paradise Lost, V,
842-845: ‘Abdiel appears to regard the Messiah’s kingship over the angels as a
kind of incarnation, involving the setting aside of divinity; just as his human
incarnation in Jesus will, at a later state of the divine emanation.’ Three essays
of mine engage the topic of the Son as an angel: ‘Thy Humiliation Shall
Exalt’: The Christology of Paradise Lost’, in: J. D. Simmonds ed., Milton
Studies 15, Pittsburgh 1981, pp. 29-42; ‘The Begetting and Exaltation of the
W. Durham, eds., Milton’s Legacy, Selinsgrove, PA 2005, pp. 22-32; and ‘The
Son as an Angel in Paradise Lost’, in: M. Lieb and A. C. Labriola eds., Milton
in the Age of Fish, Pittsburgh 2006. Though parts of the present essay are
appropriated from the third essay of mine cited above, my present emphasis is
more on the historical contexts that inform Milton’s characterization of the Son
as an angel, whereas my previous essay closely explicates the text of Paradise
Lost to arrive at the same conclusion: that the Son appears only and always as
an angel in Milton’s epic.

2 For commentary on Christ as an angel, see De Doctrina Christiana (the theological
New York 1933, Volume 14, pp. 286-289. For the Caedmonian works in the
Junius Manuscript (Genesis A, Genesis B, and Christ and Satan) that bear on
Milton’s portrayal of the Son as an angel, see The Caedmon Poems, C. W.
Kennedy trans., London 1916. See also my comparative study of the Junius
Manuscript and Milton’s epic (above, n. 1). For a discussion of the Son as the
Angel of the Lord, see J. Daniélou, The Development of Christian Doctrine
Before the Council of Nicaea: The Theology of Jewish Christianity, J. A. Baker
trans., London 1964, Volume 1, especially Chapter 4 (‘The Trinity and

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follows, I will focus only on the first of the three analogues, the Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah, an extra-canonical book composed and redacted from the 2nd century B.C.E. to the 4th century C.E. It recounts Isaiah’s vision during his ascent through the seven heavens, for which an angel is his guide and narrator. More than any other work, the Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah is the most cogent analogue of all three appearances of the Son (divine, angelic, human) relevant to Milton’s epic. As such, this work brings new understanding of the Son in *Paradise Lost* and of his ontological relationship with the Father.3 Informing this extra-canonical work is an earlier Jewish theology that expounds the concept of the angel of the Lord, a concept appropriated by Jewish Christianity to highlight the relationship of the First and Second Divine Persons, respectively the Father and the Son. By Jewish Christianity, I mean the adaptation by Christians of certain Jewish modes of thought concerning the godhead and angels.

**The Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah**

Unlike *Paradise Lost*, whose earliest episode is the begetting of the Son as an angel, the Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah presents the Son in his wholly divine nature and form. With the Father in the highest or seventh heaven, the Son is subordinate to him. Their ontological relationship becomes evident when the Son’s appearance is contrasted with that of the Father. Isaiah notes that from all of the heavens, the praises of the angels ‘were directed to that Glorious One’ or the Father.4 But his ‘glory [Isaiah] could not see’, nor could ‘the angel who (was) with [Isaiah]’, nor could ‘any of the angels’ whether

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3 Though I will examine the ontological relationship of the Father and the Son in *Paradise Lost*, I will do so by reference to The Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah. My argument concerning the Son’s status as a Divine Person is not situated in the context of the ongoing commentary on Milton’s orthodox Trinitarianism or on his subordinationism, including Arianism, which have been used to describe his theology. To become involved in such discussion would divert attention from my focus on the Son and his descensions from divine, through angelic, to human.

they were in the lower six heavens or even in the seventh heaven, where the godhead dwells (p. 172). Ascending to the seventh heaven, Isaiah learns from the angel guiding him that he will ‘see the light where the Lord is and his beloved’ (p. 169), respectively the Father and the Son. Throughout the ascent and during the account that he receives after having entered the seventh heaven, Isaiah learns of the relationship of the Divine Persons by denominations such as the following: ‘the One who is not named … and his Chosen One’, ‘the primal Father and his Beloved, Christ, and the Holy Spirit’, ‘the Father of the one who is greater’, ‘the Most High and his Beloved’, and ‘the Father of the Lord’ (pp. 165-169). These denominations suggest that the Father is the begetter of the Son; and of the Divine Persons only the Father always was. And always residing in the realm of the invisibilia, he is manifested, but paradoxically concealed, by the brightest light. Such paradox and mystery befit his status, for the Father is ineffable and inexpressible, and he transcends apprehension, except by the Son, who mediates between him and all other beings.

As Isaiah ascends from the first to the seventh heaven, he encounters a different choir of angels at each level. Though all angels praise the godhead, Isaiah notes that at each level or in each choir, the praise varies for the godhead enthroned in the seventh heaven. But he neither names the various choirs of angels nor specifies the differences in their angelic praises of the godhead. At each of the first five levels or choirs, Isaiah observes a throne in the midst of the angels; and the angel seated on the throne ‘had more glory than all [the rest]’ (p. 166). At the second level, in fact, Isaiah prostrated himself to ‘worship’ (p. 167) the enthroned angel, but his angelic guide prevented him from doing so.

Upon arriving in the seventh heaven, Isaiah views the Lord Christ: ‘his glory was great and wonderful’ and ‘all the righteous … and the angels came to him’. They ‘worshipped him, and they all praised him with one voice, and [Isaiah] was singing praises with them, and [his] praise was like theirs’ (p. 171). While the Father is invisible because of the brightness surrounding him, the angels can and do approach the Son, whom they ‘worshiped’ and to whom they ‘sang praises’ (p. 171). In the seventh heaven, Isaiah too apprehends the Son: ‘I saw one standing [there] whose glory surpassed that of all, and his glory was
great and wonderful’ (p. 171). Isaiah’s description of the Second Person lacks details, but it nevertheless implies that he has an upright posture. Though the Son’s glory surpasses that of all others, Isaiah stresses that it does not exceed the Father’s. For the Son and the Holy Spirit both ‘worshiped’ the Father (pp. 172-173).

In the seventh heaven, Isaiah acknowledges not only the divine manifestations of the Father and the Son but also ‘the angel of the Holy Spirit’ (p. 172). By his unfolding account, Isaiah is ranking the Divine Persons: the inapprehensible Father is the highest, the apprehensible and angelic Son is second, and the Holy Spirit also in the semblance of an angel is third. This hierarchy of progressive sublimation or, from a different vantage point, of successive subordination, dramatizes the ontological interrelationship of the Divine Persons. Equally important to our understanding of this ontological interrelationship are the two transformations that Isaiah views in the Son, who becomes, first, an angel and, next, a human being. Upon arriving in the seventh heaven, Isaiah learns from his guiding angel that ‘the Beloved’ or the Son ‘will … descend into the world … [, he] who is to be called Christ after he has descended and become like you in form, and they will think that he is flesh and a man’. In ‘his descent’, moreover, the Son ‘will be concealed even from the heavens so that it will not be known who he is’ (pp. 173-174). The significance of the phrase ‘his descent’ cannot be overestimated because it describes the devolution of the Son from wholly deific status to an incarnate condition. In this devolution, the intermediate or transitional stage is angelic. Isaiah observes that the Son ‘was transformed and became like an angel’ (p. 171, emphasis mine). Despite the Son’s appearance as an angel, the guiding angel instructs Isaiah to ‘worship this one’ (p. 171), an affirmation that distinguishes the Christological angel from other angels. The former, because he is deific, elicits worship, which is reserved for the godhead; the other angels elicit praise.

In the Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah, the Father makes a comprehensive announcement soon after the Son is begotten as an angel, an announcement directed to the Son but overheard by Isaiah: ‘Go out and descend through all the heavens … And you shall make your likeness like that of all who (are) in the five heavens, and you shall take care to make your form like that of the angels of the firmament’
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(p. 173, emphasis mine). Viewing the ‘Lord’ who ‘went out from the seventh heaven into the sixth heaven’, Isaiah heeds the voice of his guiding angel: ‘Understand, Isaiah, and look, that you may see the transformation and descent of the Lord’ (pp. 173-174). But in the sixth heaven, the Lord retains his angelic appearance from the seventh heaven, thereby eliciting praise and glorification from the angels in that lower level or choir. Beginning at the fifth heaven, the Son assumes the form and nature of the angels in the respective choir or level through which he is descending (p. 174).

After the Son as an angel descended from the first or lowermost choir of angels ‘into the firmament’ (p. 174), the account shifts abruptly. Isaiah witnesses events in the lives of Mary and Joseph, learning of her mysterious impregnation. He learns, as well, of the next literal begetting of the Son – in the form and nature of humankind. As an infant, Jesus was not recognized as divine. As an adult, while he performed ‘great signs and miracles’, his ‘adversary envied him and roused the children of Israel, who did not know who he was, against him’ (p. 175), after which Jesus was crucified. When Jesus after his Resurrection eventually ascended through the seven heavens, he did so without being progressively transformed into the form and nature of the angelic beings through whose choirs and levels he was passing. Unlike his descent, during which he assumed the respective form and nature of the angels in the five lowermost choirs or levels through which he was passing, the Son ascended as a human being in his post-resurrectional state of glorification and exaltation. Nevertheless, at every level of his ascent, he was recognized, praised, and worshiped as the Lord. Finally, Isaiah saw that the Son ‘sat down at the right hand of that Great Glory, whose glory … I could not behold. And also I saw that the angel of the Holy Spirit sat on the left’ (p. 176). Here, the Divine Persons manifest themselves to Isaiah in three ways: the Father, deific; the Son, glorified and exalted though human in form; and the Holy Spirit, angelic. In fact, in the Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah, the Holy Spirit, from the outset, appears as an angel, never as wholly divine, perhaps to suggest his tertiary status among the Divine Persons.
Jewish Christianity

While the significance of the Apocryphal Ascension of Isaiah cannot be overestimated, the concept that it propounds, the Son as an angel (indeed, the angel of the Lord), elicited considerable commentary among early Christians, including Jewish Christians, of the first and second centuries C.E. In her study of the angel of the Lord, Margaret Barker recounts that the:

... roots of Christian Trinitarian theology lie in pre-Christian Palestinian beliefs about the angels. There were many in first-century Palestine who still retained a world-view from the more ancient religion of Israel in which there was a High God and several Sons of God, one of whom was Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel. Yahweh, the Lord, could be manifested on earth in human form, as an angel or in the Davidic king. It was as a manifestation of Yahweh, Son of God, that Jesus was acknowledged as Son of God, Messiah and Lord (italics in the original).

The pre-Christian Palestinian beliefs to which Barker refers portray the angel of the Lord as one empowered to speak and act in the name of the godhead and to serve as the executor or agency of the divine will. Whether called Metatron, angel of Yahweh, angel of the Lord, or by another appellation, this angelic vicegerent is a recurring figure in Jewish theology. The angel of the Lord has loftier status than other angels, so much so that Margaret Barker in the title of her book refers to this supernatural being as ‘Israel’s Second God’. After surveying multifarious Judaism and its diverse perspectives on the angel of the Lord, Barker extends her research to the writings of Jewish Christians,

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5 The Great Angel: A Study of Israel’s Second God, Louisville, Kentucky 1992, p. 3. In my brief account of ‘Jewish Christianity’, I have derived information from Barker’s research into pre-Christian Palestinian beliefs about the angel of the Lord. This and related topics are systematically investigated in her book. See chapter seven on Philo of Judea, chapter eight on the Targums and Midrashim, chapter nine on the Gnostics, and chapter ten on the Early Christians, and comments on Origen (p. 73 and chapter ten passim). For related commentary, see Daniélou (above, n. 2). Especially important are chapter 2 (‘Heterodox Jewish Christianity’, pp. 55-85), and chapter 3 (‘Jewish-Christian Exegesis’, pp. 87-115). For an account of Origen’s theology of the Divine Persons, see J. Daniélou, Origen, W. Mitchell trans., New York 1955, especially pp. 251-275.
including Paul. The evidence that she amasses does converge to support the following conclusion: that some Jewish Christians contended that Christ participated in the events of the Old Testament as the angel of the Lord and that he assumed the form and nature of humankind in the New Testament.

Nomenclature and nuances aside, the idea of the angel of the Lord, as portrayed in the Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah and as expounded in earlier Jewish theology, entered Christian theology of the first and second centuries C.E. Jewish Christians and some Fathers of the Church identified the angel of the Lord as the Son, an idea that was used, in turn, to explain the ontological relationship of the First and Second Divine Persons, the Son being subordinate to the Father. Such subordination, whether it referred to the essence of the Son or to his function and role as executor of the Father’s will, strove to accommodate early Christian theology to Jewish modes of thought. In doing so, part of the intent was to preserve the Jewish concept of monotheism. The crucial question of the ontological relationship of the Son to the High God or to God the Father bedeviled the early church and ignited the Christological controversies. Proclaiming the Father and the Son to be co-equal, co-eternal, co-essential, and co-substantial, the Council of Nicea in 325 C.E. rejected subordinationist views, the most radical being Arianism, which denies the divinity of Jesus. The council, in effect, disengaged the Christian concept of the Son from Jewish modes of thought; thereafter, heterodoxy was branded as heresy. Because certain ante-Nicene Fathers of the Church, such as Origen (185-254 C.E.), subordinated the Son to the Father and expounded views of the Divine Persons that were eventually deemed heterodox, their theology fell into disrepute in post-Nicene Christianity. Because they themselves lived and died before orthodox Trinitarian doctrine was declared, they are not termed heretical. Conspicuously, however, they were not canonized, whereas some other ante-Nicene Fathers, such as Irenaeus (135/140-200/203 C.E.), whose Trinitarian views were officially approved at Nicea, acquired sainthood.

The Begetting and Exaltation of the Son as the Angel of the Lord in *Paradise Lost*

The contexts that illuminate Milton’s characterization of the Divine Persons in *Paradise Lost* include the portrayal of the Son in the Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah, the earlier Jewish theology of the angel of the Lord underlying that apocryphal book, and the endeavor by early Jewish Christians and some ante-Nicene Fathers to construe the Second Person as lesser than the Father. In light of the foregoing, the Son’s manifestation as an angel in Milton’s epic is an intermediate stage between his wholly divine and incarnate manifestations. Indeed, the Father’s decree to the angels announces this literal begetting of the Son as an angel:

> This day I have begot whom I declare  
> My only Son, and on this holy hill  
> Him have anointed, whom ye now behold  
> At my right hand; your Head I him appoint;  
> And by my Self have sworn to him shall bow  
> All knees in heav’n, and shall confess him Lord:  
> Under his great vicegerent reign abide  
> United as one individual soul … (V, 603-610) \(^7\)

In this decree, the Father’s reference to the Son, ‘whom ye now behold’, indicates that the previous manifestation of the Son as wholly deific prevented the angels from beholding him. Like the Father, he may have been darkened with excessive light. The angelic cohorts, however, can and do now clearly apprehend the Son as an angel, because the godhead has chosen to reveal himself more fully to lesser beings by adopting their very nature and form. Accompanying this transformation of the Son is the Father’s decree that the Second Person, though manifested as an angel, is anointed. By this decree the Father designates this newly begotten manifestation of the Son as the anointed one, or Christ, and as the ‘Head’ (V, 606) of the angels, what *Paradise Lost* continually refers to as the kingship of the Son. At the same time, the Father reaffirms the divinity of the Christological angel whom the

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angels will continue to acknowledge as their ‘Lord’ (V, 608) and whom they will continue to worship on bended knee though they apprehend the Son in a nature and form akin to their own.

Abdiel also emphasizes the divinity of the Son, whom he acknowledges as the creator of the angels, the one who ‘circumscribed their being’ (V, 826). Though brief, this account of the Son as the creator anticipates the use of the word ‘circumscribe’ in Book VII, when the Son uses golden compasses ‘to circumscribe / This universe, and all created things’ (ll. 225-227). In his unfolding argument, Abdiel will develop the view that the Son who created or circumscribed the angels is circumscribed or delimited, in turn, by his recently begotten angelic nature and form, the effect of which is the following: ‘all angelic nature joined in one, / Equal to him begotten Son’ (V, 834-835). That is to say, the Son by his transformation shares the angelic nature as it devolves from the seraphim of the highest rank through the lower choirs or ranks. Indeed, the Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah drives home this very point, that the Son is transformed from a greater to a lesser and lesser angel in his descent. The parodic enactment of this humiliation of the Son is Satan’s devolution from a greater to lesser angel when he ‘casts to change his proper shape’ (III, 634) to that of a ‘stripling Cherub’ (III, 636) in order to deceive Uriel. And if the continuum of the Son’s humiliation is charted to include his incarnate manifestation, the parodic counterpart is the lament, ‘O foul descent!’ (IX, 163), by Satan who, when enclosed within a serpent, is ‘mixt with bestial slime’ (IX, 165) to ‘incarnate and imbrute’ (IX, 166) himself.

Elaborating on the view that the Son is begotten literally as an angel, Abdiel explains the Father’s intent:

How provident he is, how far from thought
To make us less, bent rather to exalt
Our happy state under one head more near
United. (V, 828-831)

In using the word ‘bent’, Abdiel conveys at least dual significance: that the Father is ‘inclined’ to exalt the angelic nature and form by choosing them for the manifestation of the godhead, and that the godhead suffers voluntary humiliation (or is ‘bent’ by stooping or bowing), but
the angelic nature and form undergo corresponding exaltation. Continuing, Abdiel argues that the angels are not by the Son’s

… reign obscured,
But more illustrious made, since he the head
One of our number thus reduced becomes,
His laws our laws, all honor to him done
Returns our own. (V, 841-845, emphasis mine)

If the angels are being exalted and the godhead humiliated, Abdiel further underscores this view by using the crucial word ‘reduced’ and positioning it to describe simultaneously both the Second Person and the angels under his headship. That is, the godhead in the Son is ‘reduced’ or lowered from wholly deific status when he ‘becomes’ an angel; but the angels when ‘reduced’ under the Son are being (re)led by him, who now is ‘circumscribed’ by their own nature and form. As an angel, the Son, in the language of Abdiel, is subject to the ‘laws’ of his lower nature. For instance, he lacks omnipresence and omniscience. In due course, when the Son becomes a man, he will be subject to the laws of humanity, such as the delimitations of time and space, and thereby suffer mutability and mortality.

Consistent with the Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah, Paradise Lost depicts the adverse reaction of some angels to the Son’s appearance in their nature and form. Not praising the Son because his form was like theirs, these angels in the apocryphal book anticipate Satan and his cohorts in Milton’s epic. Furthermore, in the Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah, the envy that the ‘adversary’ on earth (as the apocryphal book calls Satan) incites against the Son as a man becomes integrated into the fallen angels’ adverse reaction to the Son as an angel in Paradise Lost. Since the Son is ‘anointed’ (V, 605) by the Father, who also does ‘appoint’ (V, 606) him as ‘Head’ (V, 606) of the angels, Satan reacts by professing that this most recent angel ‘now hath to himself engrossed / All power, and us eclipsed under the name / Of King anointed’ (V, 775-777). Satan’s real anxiety, to be sure, derives from his view that the Christological angel has supplanted his leadership of the angels. After all, the epic narrator describes Satan in the following way:
... he of the first,
If not the first Archangel, great in power,
In favor and pre-eminence, yet fraught
With envy against the Son of God, that day
Honored by his great Father, and proclaimed
Messiah King, anointed, could not bear
Through pride that sight, and thought himself impaired.

(V, 659-665)8

Elsewhere, while seducing Beelzebub to be his principal confederate, Satan speaks of himself as ‘the chief’ of ‘all those myriads of which we lead’ (V, 684). During his speech that lures one third of the angels ‘into the limits of the north’ (V, 755), Beelzebub refers to Satan as ‘the most High commanding’ (V, 699). From Satan’s perspective, the Father should have proclaimed him, not the most newly begotten angel, as king. Accordingly, Satan denies that the godhead (1) has honored the lesser nature of the angels by inhabiting it, (2) has undergone voluntary humiliation by experiencing the limitations of that lesser nature, and (3) has manifested himself more fully by interacting in their nature and form with the very beings that he created. Abdiel, on the other hand, by affirming the very truths that Satan has denied emphasizes that the angels are not by the Son’s ‘reign obscured, / But more illustrious made’ (V, 841-842).

Resemblances between Begettings of the Son as an Angel and as a Man

The Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah presents the Christological angel as an intermediate state through which the deific Son passes in order to become human, a view that accords with the concept of gradation that we traditionally associate with the Great Chain of Being. To enter the world, the deity would descend through the heavens, departing from the seventh one where he divinely dwells. Inhabiting those realms while descending through them, he would adopt the form and nature of their respective beings, which are lower than deific but loftier than human. Thereafter, the deity, upon entering the world below the

firmament, would inhabit the human condition and appear in human nature and form. The apocryphal book narrates these two descensions as consecutive occurrences in a continuous process of humiliation. For Milton, the begetting of the Son as an angel begins the process whereby the deity reveals himself more fully to his created beings: first to the angels, then to humankind. The first begetting occasions the rebellion of Satan, who perceives the proclamation of the Son’s kingship as a usurpation of his own role, which he construes as that of principal leader or governor of the angels. The second begetting, prophesied in the epic, will occur because of the anticipated transgressions and eventual fall of humankind and the deity’s endeavor to offer redemption. *Paradise Lost*, moreover, integrates these two separate and distinct descensions into a prolonged characterization of the Son, emphasizing his voluntary humiliation. To expound this point, I will comparatively cite the similar, indeed nearly identical, discourse of the Father’s decrees in Milton’s epic: first, as the Son is begotten as an angel in Book V; then, during the celestial dialogue in Book III as the Father anticipates the Son begotten as a man.

First, in both decrees in *Paradise Lost* the Father refers to the Son as ‘anointed’ (V, 605; III, 317), a denomination that pertains to the Christological angel and to Jesus. Second, the Father designates both the Christological angel and the incarnate Son as the ‘Head’ of the angels (V, 606; III, 319). Third, in both decrees, he commands the angels to ‘bow’ their ‘knees’ (V, 607-608; III, 321) because the Son is still the Lord, whether he appears as an angel or as a man. Fourth, in both instances the Father describes the Son’s ‘reign’ (V, 609; III, 318) as lasting. Fifth, in Book V, all of the angels ‘abide’ (l. 609) under the headship of the angelic Son, and in Book III all angels that ‘bide / In heaven, or earth, or under earth in hell’ (ll. 321-322) fall under the Son’s authority. Sixth, in both pronouncements the Father cites particular choirs of angels, such as Thrones, Princedoms, Powers (V, 601; III, 320), that come under the kingship of the Son. And another choir that the Father terms Dominations (V, 601) in the one decree, in the other he analogously calls Dominions (III, 320).

Most important is the seventh similarity in the Father’s two discourses. When the Father commends Abdiel for providing ‘the
testimony of truth’ (VI, 33) about the begetting of the Son, he condemns Satan and the fallen angels,

… who reason for their law refuse,
Right reason for their law, and for their King Messiah, who by right of merit reigns. (VI, 41-43)

Likewise, after the Son volunteers in the celestial dialogue to undergo a second humiliation by becoming human, the Father proclaims that the Second Person

… hast been found
By merit more than birthright Son of God,
Found worthiest to be so by being good,
Far more than great or high … (III, 308-311)

The use of the word ‘merit’ in both decrees highlights the Son’s twofold humiliation as an angel and as a human being, lesser states that he assumes rather than coveting the divinity into which the Father begat him. In accordance with Paul’s letter to the Philippians (2. 6-11) and with the prologue of John’s Gospel (1. 14), the Son in *Paradise Lost* does not cling to his divinity but willingly relinquishes it in acts of humiliation and love. Indeed, in the letter cited above, Paul recounts that the Son ‘though he was in the form of God did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped’. Rather, ‘he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness’, humbling himself, and ‘becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross’. And ‘because of this, God greatly exalted him’. When integrating these passages from Paul into the celestial dialogue, Milton highlights the Father’s emphasis on acts of humiliation. Because of such acts, the Son’s ‘merit’ (III, 290), more than his divine birthright, distinguish him as ‘worthiest’ and as ‘being Good’ (III, 310), homophonous wordplay on ‘God’. Therefore, the Son acts both goodly and godly while he accrues merits to be ‘Imputed’ (III, 291) to humankind and as he conforms his will to God the Father’s plan of redemption.

**Conclusion**

From what I have recounted, *Paradise Lost* presents a prolonged characterization of the Son, in the course of which he is differentiated
ontologically from the Father. Such differences explain, for instance, why the Son during the celestial dialogue in Book III lacks the divine attribute of omniscience. While some commentators contend that the Son’s lack of omniscience indicates Milton’s subordinationist, if not Arian, views, I am emphasizing another perspective: that the Son as an angel participates in the celestial dialogue with lesser knowledge than the godhead. This point becomes clear when the Father asks of the angels, ‘Which of ye will be mortal to redeem / Man’s mortal crime?’ (III, 214-215). This question, if earnest, is posed for all of the angels to hear and for one or more of them to volunteer; but only the Son as an angel replies. In doing so, he thereby manifests the perfectability of the angelic nature by exercising its fullest capability of self-sacrificing love.

More important for our purposes is the fact that the Son as an angel in *Paradise Lost* establishes an important analogue of the Second Person’s appearance as a man, precisely what Milton recounts in *Paradise Regained*. With more limited knowledge than he possessed as an angel, the Son reflects, in turn, the perfectability of the human nature that he inhabits. Indeed, the Father announces to the angels in *Paradise Regained* that ‘This perfect man’ (I, 166), Jesus or the Son on earth, embodies ‘consummate virtue’ (I, 165). Finally, the Father in *Paradise Regained* affirms that Jesus ‘by merit call’d my Son’ will ‘earn Salvation for the Sons of men’ (I, 166-167). This affirmation validates the greater importance of the voluntary humiliation of the Son, rather than his divine birthright, as the more perfect way and means of expressing his goodliness and godliness. Therefore, the Son in *Paradise Lost* is the angel of the Lord, a point of view consonant with the Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah, earlier Jewish theology, Jewish Christianity, and certain ante-Nicene conceptions that subordinate him to the Father. And in *Paradise Regained* the Second Person is incarnate, thereby consummating his descent. More concisely, in the longer epic, the Son is the *theangelos*; in the short epic, he becomes the *theanthropos*. 