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# John Milton

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## The Religious Economics of Paradise Lost

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Comparative investigations of the dynamic of religious market structures indicate a divergent impact of state religion and the constitutional protection of religion on society. This paper is an interdisciplinary approach that seeks to provide an explanation of the contemporary mechanisms of the competitive religious market. The method includes a variety of perspectives from the domains of literature, theology, sociology and economics. I do not pretend to offer a definite explanation of the reason why religious affiliation increases in a market structure based on the constitutional protection of religion (Iannaccone, Finke and Stark 351). My concern is to advance an explanation of the indirect effects of such a market structure from a religious Miltonic perspective by means of *Paradise Lost*. This perspective departs from what I call the 'cultivation of religiosity' in its intent to proselytize or generate a higher commitment among existing adherents by establishing a self-sufficient dynamic of the investment of *religious human capital*, i.e., religious knowledge.

In my forthcoming discussion of religious market structures, I will discuss Milton's theology, by means of *Paradise Lost* and other writings, and implement my insights on the underlying dynamic of Adam Smith's philosophy. Smith recognized in *The Wealth of Nations* that establishment would ultimately undermine state religion and that religion would prosper in a free and open religious market. I use the epic poem *Paradise Lost* because it is, to my mind, a synthesis of the theological writings of John Milton and a perfect example to demonstrate the dynamics of the open religious marketplace. It features the society Milton envisaged, comparable to the twentieth century United States of America, in which "all persons ground their own beliefs on individual choice" (Myers 2008; 391). *Paradise Lost* thus not only contains valuable hints on the mechanism of a competitive religious market but also

provides an acceptable explanation of the increase and decrease of religious affiliation by connecting Milton's theology to Smith's philosophy.

## 2. COMPARATIVE EXAMINATIONS

Charles M. North and Carl R. Gwin examined the impact of state religion and the constitutional protection of religion in 59 different countries and published their results in the essay *Religious Freedom and the Unintended Consequences of State Religion*. Religiosity is measured in the percentage of the population that attends at least once per week a religious service. Remarkably, the examination of the church-state relations shows that both church establishment as constitutional protection have significant effects on society:

The existence of a state religion reduces attendance by 14.6-16.7% of the total population, whereas each decade of constitutional protection increases attendance by approximately 1.2% of the population. Thus, having an established state religion can undo the positive effect of well over a century of constitutional protection of religious freedom. The same is true of other forms of religious regulation, including a registration requirement: we find that government regulation of religion is associated with lower religious attendance' (North & Gwin 116).

Comparative investigations of religious institutions clearly demonstrate the huge difference in religious affiliation between a competitive religious market structure, as we find it in the United States, and a monopoly in the form of an established church, such as in England or Sweden. In Protestant countries with numerous competing churches it is not only the rate of church attendance that increases but other factors as well, such as the frequency of prayer and the belief in God (Iannaccone, Finke and Stark 351-52). Laurence R. Iannaccone, Roger Finke, and Rodney Stark argue in *Deregulating Religion: The Economics of Church and State*

that the difference is traceable to the dynamic of religious competition in the United States which contrasts with the state officially established churches as, for instance, in the United Kingdom. Other examinations had already demonstrated the low levels of church attendance in Great Britain (North & Gwin 105). Further evidence of differential rates between the state church and nonstate churches demonstrated that non-Anglican Protestants were much more likely to attend church frequently than were members of the established Church of England (105). Indeed, “Across Protestant nations, rates of church attendance and religious belief are substantially higher in highly competitive markets than in markets monopolized by established churches” (Iannaccone 1991; 156). These results suggest that the indirect effects of a competitive market outweigh the positive benefits of state support of a church such as the absolute control of the religious market.

### **3. RELIGIOUS MARKET STRUCTURES**

The examinations demonstrate that in the past two decades, economists and sociologists alike have given increased attention to the study of religious market dynamics. Scholars such as Iannaccone, Stark and Finke advance theoretical perspectives in order to explain the discrepancy of religiosity between an open and closed market structure. They invoke the analogy of Adam Smith’s market competition to explain the increase of religious affiliation in society. They provide their findings however while remaining unaware that many of their insights were first conceived by John Milton. Moreover, Milton devised this analytical framework of a competitive religious society exactly *because* he was concerned with “the advancement of religion” (*CPW* 7:245). Already in the seventeenth century his writings focus on the perspective of the consumer of religion. He emphasized the benefits of a religious

market based on individual preferences, that, when applied, would sustain religious participation.

### 3.1. THE PRODUCT DOMAIN OF RELIGION

In order to apply Milton's theology to Adam Smith's principles of the competitive market, I begin by (1) establishing the product domain of religion and (2) describing how this principally involves the investment of human capital in a religious market. This section presents economical concepts defined for philosophical and literary use regarding *Paradise Lost* in order to understand the world in the poem as a competitive religious market.

Determining the product domain of religion in general results to be problematic, as religious commodities are neither tangible goods nor commercial services. The precise definition of the product of religious organizations can indeed be elusive, as Kent D. Miller writes in *Competitive Strategies of Religious Organizations*. Miller therefore uses the product of religious organizations as defined by the sociologists Rodney Stark and William Bainbridge in *A Theory of Religion*, which I introduce here as well. According to Stark and Bainbridge, "*Religious organizations are social enterprises whose primary purpose is to create, maintain, and exchange supernaturally-based general compensators*" (Miller 436 original italics). Under "compensators" they understand all the postulations of rewards "according to explanations that are not readily susceptible to unambiguous evaluation" (436). Specific examples of compensators which religious organizations provide are the promises encompassed by religious doctrines, religious experiences, prayer for aid, guidance and confessing guilt, private devotionalism, and moral superiority. All these can be found in *Paradise Lost* as well, where, for instance, the efficacy of the medium of prayer helped Adam and Eve to restore their human condition.



Viewing the product domain of religion as reward has provided important insights into some areas of religious studies. However, although I recognize the significance of these religious products for the 'cultivation of religiosity', I do not consider them to be decisive because they do not explain the increase or decrease of religiosity in society. Therefore, I want to go beyond the individual and organizational level of religion by using and reconceptualising Iannaccone's notion of 'human capital' as a profitable commodity. I consider human capital to be the main product of religion. Human capital exceeds the supply and demand concepts of the religious market. It is in the first place to be understood as "religious knowledge [and] familiarity with church ritual and doctrine" (Iannaccone 1990; 299). Human capital, however, not only includes the acceptance of the products supplied by a religious distributor but is also "determinant of one's ability to produce" religion (299). From the moment the individual practitioner has developed a certain capital of religious knowledge, he can invest this capital in the religious market. This investment can consequently result in a profit or loss situation according to the degree that the individual has increased or decreased his convictions of a particular religious truth. Consequently, the participant has either increased or decreased his religious conviction and thus his religious knowledge or human capital. Because human capital is "both a prerequisite for and a consequence of most religious activity" (299), I see a decrease of capital as highly improbable because the starting capital has already been (partly) internalized before the initial religious participation. The dynamic consequently makes the consumers of religion "simultaneously suppliers and producers" of their own religiosity (Miller 437).

The specification of the product domain of religion allows profound insights into the 'cultivation of religiosity' in *Paradise Lost* which can be applied to society in general. Using

the notion of human capital, we can analyse the effectiveness of a competitive market in the acquisition of practitioners of faith. The assessment of souls and “the advancement of religion” (CPW 7:245) is, after all, the paramount objective of Christianity. The depiction of Milton’s God reflects the desire of religious individuals such as Milton to generate a higher commitment among existing adherents. In *Paradise Lost* these adherents are represented by Adam and Eve. This paper then argues, in line with Milton, that the competitive religious market results to be highly efficient in that it establishes a self-sufficient mechanism of increasing religious affiliation.

### 3.2. THE RELIGIOUS MONOPOLY

The following section will go on to (1) describe the disadvantage of a religious monopoly before addressing (2) the benefits of a competitive religious market. I will present Milton’s opinions concerning a religious monopoly while providing textual support from *Paradise Lost* and historical facts. After the exposition I will adduce arguments that associate the character of Satan in *Paradise Lost* with the religious monopoly of an established church.

#### 3.2.1. The dynamic of a religious monopoly

Milton questioned the efficiency and legitimacy of the establishment of the Protestant church as a monopoly and it would indeed turn out to be “a great enemy to good management”, as Adam Smith wrote a century later (Smith 135). The disadvantages of a religious monopoly are twofold and they both concern the fact that a monopoly largely ignores the ‘demand-side’ of the needs of religious consumers. As such, the ‘supply-side’ is responsible for (1) the false representation of religion and (2) the increased probability of corruption of God’s absolute truth. Moreover, the supply-side alters the opportunities for

consumers to invest their human capital in the religious market. Arguably, this first results in a stagnation of faith in the religious organization followed by a gradual decline of religiosity as it “more and more alienates the minde from [...] religion” (CPW 7:270).

It was evident for Milton that government regulation plays a significant role in shaping the religious tendencies of the age. In this respect, the greatest decay and corruption of the religious conscience and religion itself “came about with the establishment of state religion under Constantine” (Martin 884). Milton charged the religious system for dictating church doctrines and liturgies, punishing enemies and heretics, convening church councils, collecting taxes, controlling its polity and property, and, of considerable importance to this dissertation, appointing bishops and clergy (Witte 1562). These measures facilitated the transition from religious pluralism to a religious monopoly which convinced Milton that, to this day, Protestants and Catholics are “enthralled” (PL 6.181) by Constantine’s measures. The church as a consequence, in the words of *Paradise Lost*, “to their own vile advantages [...] turn / Of lucre and ambition, and the truth / With superstitions and traditions taint” (PL 12.510-12).

The Roman religious institution that was established by Constantine eventually translated itself in the Church of Rome. Significantly, in *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, Milton locates the beginning of the English Reformation in the sixteenth century in Henry VIII’s rupture with Rome and its historical legacy: “[I]t pleas’d God to make [Henry] see all the tyranny of Rome [...] and to make him the beginner of a reformation of this whole Kingdom” (CPW 2:347-48 cited in Feisal 947). The decision of the pope in not conceding Henry’s divorce from Catherine of Aragon lead to the fragmentation in part of Catholic dominion. From that day on, the history of England came to be defined by a “continuous

struggle against popery” (Fatovic 41). Milton’s contempt is evident, too, from *Paradise Lost*, where Catholics reside in “The Paradise of Fools” (3.496):

Embryos and idiots, eremites and friars  
 White, black, and gray, with all their trumpery<sup>1</sup>.  
 Here pilgrims roam, that strayed so far to seek  
 In Golgotha<sup>2</sup> him dead, who lives in Heaven;  
 And they who to be sure of Paradise  
 Dying put on the weeds of Dominic,  
 Or in Franciscan *think* to pass disguised.

(3.474-80 italics mine)

And

[In] the devious air; then might ye see  
 Cowls, hoods and habits<sup>3</sup> with their wearers tossed.  
 And fluttered into rags, then relics, beads,  
 Indulgences, dispenses, pardons, bulls.

(3.489-92)

When Charles I, however, came to be associated with Catholicism in the seventeenth century, “anti-popery became a pervasive feature of serious oppositional political thought” and this “especially among Dissenters who detected disturbing signs of popery in Anglicanism” (Fatovic 42). Indeed, Barbara Kiefer Lewalski writes in *Milton and Idolatry* that

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<sup>1</sup> Religious paraphernalia. The white friars are Carmelites; the black, Dominicans; and the gray, Franciscans (NAEL 1882)

<sup>2</sup> Place where Christ was crucified (NAEL 1882)

<sup>3</sup> The dress of religious orders, together with (next lines) saints’ relics, rosary beads, various kinds of pardon for sins, and papal decrees (“bulls”) (NAEL 1882)

many Reformist Protestants associated Roman Catholicism with the *Antichrist* because of its exterior manifestation of worship. A form of worship which they now saw reflected in Anglicanism as well. Lewalski gives the examples of mass, clerical vestments, religious statues and images, paintings and even church music. The Church of England was consequently seen to approach this false representation of religion in which the preferences of the consumer were subordinate to the usage of liturgy, altars, vestments, art, and, most importantly, the rule of bishops, who were still appointed by the state and determined policy. For Milton, it was idolatrous to attach a special sanctity to any human institution or person, whether pope, king or prelate (214). These figures of authority are all comparable to the *Antichrist*, who was an “Artificer of fraud; and the was first / That practised falsehood under saintly show” (PL 4.121-22). The deception of the false reverence consists in the fact that it “invites humans to offer implicit faith and special devotion to some person, institution, or object that is not God” (Lewalski 215), which results in the enslavement of individual conscience and of society as a whole. Indeed, the primary concern of Milton was to protect “the individual’s liberty of conscience and freedom of worship from what he called the greedy idols of legally-established Anglicanism and the spiritual tyranny of idle ceremonies, corrosive customs and erroneous beliefs” (Witte 1529). For Milton, there is no need for “rites” as it is “adoration pure / Which God likes best” (PL 4.736-38).

Another matter of concern besides the false representation of the practise of faith is the fact that the combination of temporal and spiritual power in the establishment of an official church increases the probability of “corrupting the teachers” of religion (CPW 7:245). It increases the possibility that “Wolves shall succeed for teachers” (PL 12.508) and shall seek

[T]o avail themselves of names,  
 Places and titles, and with these to join  
 Secular power, though feigning still to act  
 By Spiritual, to themselves appropriating  
 The spirit of God, promised alike and given  
 To all believers; and from that pretence,  
 Spiritual laws by carnal power shall force  
 On every conscience.

(12.515-22)

Soon enough, “Spiritual laws by carnal force” were indeed imposed “on every conscience” (12.521-22). It was only because Henry VIII “found it, or imagined it, for [his] interest to league [him]self with some one or other of the contending religious sects” (Smith 685), which in England was the Protestant movement, that he removed himself from the authority of the Church of Rome. In this action he “makes himself supream lord or pope of the church as far as his civil jurisdiction streches [...] while he himself assumes to rule by civil power things to be rul’d only by spiritual” (CPW 7:253). In doing so, the Protestant monopoly in the form of the established Church of England had “shared in the victory of its ally” and was enabled by the favour and protection of the state “to silence and subdue all its adversaries” (Smith 685). In the same manner “the Roman Catholic clergy called upon the civil magistrates to persecute the Protestants, the Church of England [began] to persecute the Dissenters” (683). Indeed, to the shame of Christians, the churchmen of a monopoly “never cease calling on the civil magistrate to interpose his fleshlie force” (CPW 7:259).

Not only Catholics, but indeed also other Dissenters, such as the Pilgrim Fathers, had to flee the oppressive religious environment in England where they were persecuted by Archbishop William Laud. They refused to adhere the religious beliefs and practices of the established Church of England which they deemed to be unscriptural. In the American “waste lands” (Smith 144) they could organize their worship independently of a central church, and according to their own religious consumer preferences. The diversification of religious sects in colonial America came to epitomize religious, albeit Protestant, liberty. Significantly, the wasteland of America in *Paradise Lost* features the moment of Adam and Eve’s deepest shame after the Fall (Stevens 791):

They gathered, broad as Amazonian targe,  
 And with what skill they had, together sewed,  
 To gird their waist, vain covering if to hide  
 Their guilt and dreaded shame; O how unlike  
 To that first naked glory. Such of late  
 Columbus found the American so girt  
 With feathered cincture, naked else and wild  
 Among the trees on isles and woody shores.

(9.1111-18)

It is to England’s shame, Milton writes in *Of Reformation*, that so many of her best subjects have been forced to go into exile there: “[W]hat numbers of faithfull, and freeborn Englishmen, and good Christians have bin constrain’d to forsake their dearest home, their friends, and kindred, whom nothing but the wide Ocean, and the savage deserts of *America* could hide from the fury of the Bishops” (CPW 1:585 cited in Stevens 791).

Ironically then, after the Pilgrim Fathers had fled Laudan persecution, their social and legal system came to be closely connected to their religious conviction and again resulted in the establishment of a monopoly. Not only the Pilgrim Fathers, but many other Dissenters “established their congregational churches as the official religion” (Lambert 2). They organized a market structure based on an official church which was “supported by tax revenues and defended by the coercive arm of government” (2). Religious liberty consisted thus in the establishment of various church governments. There was no sign yet of the competitive religious market we now know today as the state imposed punishment upon the notions of heresy and blasphemy, which were defined by the church, “even to the point of executing” (1).

The general tendency, Smith notes, is that a religious sect in the form of a monopoly finds itself “incapable of making any vigorous defence against any new sect which chose to attack its doctrine or discipline” (683). The clergy of the establishment, subsequently, in such a situation, “have commonly no other resource than to call upon the civil magistrate to persecute, destroy or drive out their adversaries, as disturbers of the public peace” (683). The establishment of a religious monopoly, then, always seems to result in the suppression of consumer preferences and alters the circumstances of human capital investment. Milton observed therefore that the bankruptcy of the ‘cultivation of religiosity’ appeared to be a consequence of the fact that a state monopoly “incorporated with a national church exercis’d more in bodily than in spiritual worship” (*CPW* 7:254).

### 3.2.2. Satan

After describing the blind dynamic of a religious monopoly this section adduces arguments that associate the character of Satan in *Paradise Lost* with the “state-tyrannie over the



church" (*CPW* 7:254). It is almost self-evident that by considering God and Satan as theologians the latter represents the disadvantages of the monopoly market structure. Nevertheless, these arguments are necessary for the further demonstration of my reading of *Paradise Lost* as a competitive religious market.

We are first introduced to the religious marketplace in *Paradise Lost* through the words and opinions of Satan. He is the first theologian to appear in the poem since he is the first character that reflects on the subject of God. Simultaneously, he is "the first to use bad theology" (Myers 2004; 100) because his words deform and corrupt the truth about God. Satan and the assembly of fallen angels consider God to be "an ethically arbitrary tyrant whose absolute power undermines both his own goodness and the freedom of his creatures" (102). The fallen angels argue that God desires absolute obedience which is described by Mammon as "Forced Hallelujah's" (*PL* 2.243). They selectively forget that, although they are fallen angels, they still have the freedom to build a palace and conduct parliamentary debates in hell. Therefore, all their rhetoric and arguments "Of providence, foreknowledge, will and fate" is dismissed by Milton as "Vain wisdom all, and false philosophy" (2.559, 2.565). Significantly, by referring to the fallen angels as theologians, Milton points to the corruption that had infiltrated the established church: "So clomb this first grand thief into God's fold: / So since into his church lewd<sup>4</sup> hirelings climb" (4.192-93).

With Feuerbach in mind, who argued that the Christian idea of God is simply a projection of human consciousness, we can observe that the God described by Satan and the fallen angels is nothing more than the projection of *Satan's* character on God. Indeed, as Myers observed, the "knowledge of [God] is nothing other than a knowledge of Satan"

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<sup>4</sup> The original meaning was 'lay or non-clerical', generalized to 'ignorant' and thence to 'wicked, unprincipled' (Oxford 90).

(2004; 118). This inversion implies that it is Satan himself who needs to be designated with the titles he directs towards God, such as “Monarch” (*PL* 1.638). Moreover, already in the first book Satan acts as a tyrant who installs a government in hell because it is “Better to reign in hell, than serve in heaven” (1.263). At least in Hell he “may reign secure, and in [his] choice / To reign is worth ambition though in hell” (1.261-62). As a consequence, Satan aligns his own theological opinions with his institution of state, determining its policy and corrupting the truth about God. In other words, he is the first to establish an official church that is supported by the state.

The symbolically charged value of the character of Satan is emphasized in the Fall of Adam and Eve as they become “enthralled” (*PL* 6.181) in their subscription to Satan’s church. Myers notes that “The human will which was created free is shown through the fall to have become enslaved” (2004; 247). Adam and Eve lose their liberty to choose and become enslaved to themselves as they would under the monopolies of Anglicanism or Catholicism. Indeed, in a religious monopoly one becomes “enthralld to man instead of God [and] almost becoms no conscience, as the will not free, becoms no will” (*CPW* 7: 256). In the fall, their spiritual liberty is “displaced by a self-focused narrowness and a self-chosen poverty of genuine possibilities” (Myers 2004; 247). Consequently, the human couple is restricted in their investment of human capital because Satan’s monopoly controls the religious market. From that point on, no further investments can be made. However, *before* Adam and Eve lost the means to invest their human capital they have gained a significant profit from the Fall. The Fall itself can be considered as the initial investment of mankind’s religious starting capital because their knowledge increased for the first time (*infra*). Mankind is from that moment aware that Satan embodies the false representation of religion and the corruption

of God's absolute truth. Because of this profit Adam and Eve grow in capital and their percentage of religious affiliation rises.

### 3.2.3. The disadvantages of a religious monopoly

The following can be observed from my comparison of a religious monopoly with the Fall of Adam and Eve: if only the government and its corresponding religious institution control the distribution of religious knowledge on the market then the religious market is, first of all, saturated with the same (corrupted) product. Secondly, it becomes less attractive for consumers to further invest their human capital (or they simply cannot invest) in that market *because* of its limitedness. Thirdly, as the supply-side alters the accessibility of human capital investment (prohibition, persecution, punishment, etc.), the current capital present in the religious individual stagnates before gradually declining because the monopoly "more and more alienates the mind" (*CPW 7:270*), or the capital has never set of altogether. These factors thus entail the decrease of religiosity because of the decrease of inner persuasion, conviction and participation in the market. As a result, the religious monopoly proves to be counterproductive to the 'cultivation of religiosity.'

### 3.3. THE COMPETITIVE RELIGIOUS MARKET

The primary concern of every religious institution is how to most effectively proselytize among the potential adherers of their faith in order to "advance religion" (*CPW 7:258*). Therefore, the institution has to reinforce the conviction of the validity of its religious claims in order to increase its credibility. But since God himself represents absolute religious truth it is to mankind's advantage if they would adhere his religious principles. Therefore, because of his ultimate goodness, the God of *Paradise Lost* devised the competitive religious market

which he conceived to be the appropriate system to install. The ensuing section explains that His objectives were twofold: (1) to induce the investment of human capital in the religious market for a growing understanding of absolute truth which leads to (2) the acquisition of authentic faith that would set in the self-sufficient dynamic of the autonomous investment of human capital.

### 3.3.1. Mankind

The opening lines of *Paradise Lost*, “Of MAN’s first disobedience, and the fruit / Of that forbidden tree” (1.1-2), not only indicate that the poem’s primary concern is the human condition but also denote the importance of (volitional) obedience to God. Most Christian institutions consider this to be to the advantage of mankind since God is the representation of the ultimate good and absolute religious truth. In other words, obedience always results in a profit situation, for instance, because of the existence of compensators. The protagonists, Adam and Eve, feature as a married couple living in a garden, and the poem’s “climax consists in the eating of a piece of fruit” (NAEL 1830). Seemingly unimportant, this action however did establish the postlapsarian human condition in which man is both the producer and consumer of religion. The Fall counts as a direct result from the fact that absolute religious truth only belongs to the knowledge of God. This entails that absolute truth is inevitably understood by “humane reason” in various ways (CPW 7:246). Therefore I see Adam and Eve both as exceptional, since they epitomize the beginning of the dynamic towards ever increasing religiosity, and as prototypical examples of individuals in and for society as they are “The only two of mankind, but in them / The whole included race” (PL 9.415-16).

### 3.3.2. The benefits of a competitive religious market

The benefit of a competitive religious market involves (1) the argument that authentic faith installs a self-sufficient dynamic of the investment of human capital which (2) entails the reciprocity between religiosity and commitment. In the poem, Milton's God sets up the ideal and exemplary conditions that are critical for the initial success of the foundation of an efficient system for the 'cultivation of religiosity.' Milton understood that "the state, a statue or a state-religion [...] cannot, much less the state [...] settle or impose one tittle of religion upon our obedience implicit" (CPW 7:259). Therefore, the God in the poem can "only recommend or propound it to [Adam and Eve's] free and conscientious examination" (259).

The conception as stated in *De Doctrina Christiana* that only authentic faith through the individual conscience is opposed to "hypocritical worship" (WJM 77) is central to the competitive religious market in *Paradise Lost*. Worship in which the external forms of religion are respected without any internal spiritual involvement is considered to be "a high offence against God" (77). In other words, authentic worship, according to Milton's God, is based on the voluntary contribution to and participation in religion and not upon the automatic imitation of divine dictates. Through this voluntary contribution, human capital is invested and results in a profit situation for the investor since he or she has increased his knowledge of God's truth. A higher commitment is in the advantage of the individuals, as is the case with Adam and Eve, because it brings along the development of their religious starting capital. The stimulation of the degree of commitment increases the rate of religiosity, stimulates commitment, again increases the rate of religiosity, etc. Obviously, voluntary contribution implies the presence of a self-sufficient dynamic of the investment of human capital.

Voluntary contribution, however, reflects the idea stated in *A Treatise of Civil Power in Ecclesiastical Causes* that true belief and authentic obedience to God are only possible through the “inward perswasive motions of [the] spirit” (CPW 7:262). In fact, Milton wrote that God is only concerned with “the inward man and his actions” (257) because “beleef or practise in religion” (246) can only be truly experienced according to “conscientious perswasion” (246). The stimulation of commitment, then, has to be adequately addressed by God according to the feasibility of extracting such contribution from mankind.

The “classic collective action problem of motivating participation” (Miller 437-38) is cunningly solved by Milton’s God through the establishment of a competitive religious market. Although Adam and Eve may just be imitating God’s dictates in the beginning the poem, their religious human capital will rise in value because of the confrontation with ‘lesser good.’ In order to achieve or maintain the inner persuasion of their commitment to God, Adam and Eve need to be involved in a “perpetuall progression” (CPW 2:543) of faith. Indeed, as Milton writes in *Areopagitica*, “cloister’d vertue, unexercis’d & unbreath’d, that never sallies out and sees her adversary [...] slinks out of the race” (515) and entails the decrease of religiosity. Because of the limited understanding of Adam and Eve of God’s principles, they have to be induced to invest their initial knowledge of God in the religious market to gain profit, i.e., an increased knowledge of the constitution of God. Therefore, Milton’s God institutes a free competitive marketplace of biblical ideas in which the absolute meaning of religious truth can be discussed or experienced through the confrontation with other parties such as Satan. The world in *Paradise Lost*, and in a broader context the world of man, is consequently the first instituted “free marketplace of ideas with the entire nation involved in the unregulated production and consumption of knowledge” (Lambert 183). As

God would know, pluralism is credited for producing religious vitality (Miller 444). The pluralism involved in *Paradise Lost* accommodates the customer understanding of Adam and Eve's religious truth. Through this religious pluralism, truth can be "discovered by free and robust education and inquiry, experiment and debate" (Witte 1530). The search for absolute religious truth through "religious rivalry among differentiated competitors" as a consequence "increases consumer surplus" (Miller 444). The competitive religious market in this way "contributes to dynamic efficiency by motivating innovation" of religious thoughts and knowledge (444). This entices commitment, understanding of God's absolute truth and the further increase of religiosity.

### 3.3.3. The dynamic of the competitive religious market

My proposition of a Miltonic mechanism of the competitive religious market propounds that "voluntary contribution" (Smith 682) is responsible for the production of religious vitality. This section portrays the investment of human capital as a dynamic response to exterior pressure which incites investment. The segmentation of the market can as a result be seen as a self-sufficient system of the accumulation of human capital. For the establishment thereof, Adam and Eve have to be induced to invest their starting capital, which happens through Satan and the Fall.

The first requirement to actively engage in the binary opposition between good and evil, or, in less dramatical terms, the competitive religious market, is the development of the "will and reason" (*PL* 3.108). God says in book 3 that he will "place within [man] as a guide / [His] umpire conscience" (3.194-95). Likewise, the angel Raphael tells Adam in book 7 that "in his own image he / Created thee, in the image of God" (7.526-27). By being created in God's image, John Witte argues, each person has the "image of the mind of God" within him

which is to be understood as “a conscience of right reason that gives him access to divine truth and direction and a will and capacity to act on that knowledge” (1548). In other words, Milton thought it viable for mankind to invest their religious human capital in the market in order to achieve a higher understanding of the absolute truth because “the spirit it self of God [is] within us” (*CPW* 7:247).

As “reason also is choice” (3.108), man has the freedom to choose how to act on that knowledge through his conscience. When God gave Adam reason, “he gave him freedom to choose, for reason is but choosing; he had bin else a meer artificiall *Adam*” (*CPW* 2:527 original italics). The purpose of this capacity for independent decision-making is voiced by Raphael when he says to Adam that if man “can no other choose” and “will but what they must” (*PL* 5.533-34), then there is no actual freedom and hence, no authentic faith. Indeed, Adam and Eve are capable to choose because, in the mind of Milton, “no obedience [could be] truly acceptable to God, unless possible alternative choices also exist” (Myers 2004; 190). As God says:

What pleasure I from such obedience paid,  
 When will and reason (reason also is choice)  
 Useless and vain, of freedom both despoiled,  
 Made passive both, had served necessity,  
 Not me.

(3.107-11)

According to Milton, “Though but endeavoured with sincere intent”, God’s “ear shall not be slow, [his] eye not shut” (3.192-93). This is later demonstrated in the redemption of Adam and Eve through the sacrifice of Christ. Practitioners of faith, in other words, do not have to



fear God's indictment of their behaviour as long as it flows from a genuine desire for religious truth. As stated earlier, human capital is "a prerequisite for [...] religious activity" (Iannaccone 1990; 299) which implies that the starting capital has already been (partly) internalized before the actual participation. Genuine desire for knowledge is consequently an intricate part of the investment of starting capital of individuals in a religious community. This is reflected in the initial curiosity of Adam and Eve for truth through which knowledge could accumulate. Their redemption is a confirmation of the fact that God's "eye [is] not shut" (3.193) for sincere religious individuals.

The second cog in the mechanism of the competitive religious market concerns the fact that, as a consequence of the inevitability of religious choice, the teachers of religion "depend [...] for their subsistence upon the voluntary contributions of their hearers" (Smith 682). Therefore, without the incorporation of an established religion by political institutions, i.e., a competitive religious market, there exists a multitude of religious sects of which each teacher feels "the necessity [...] of using every art [...] to increase the number of disciples" (686). Indeed, because of the existence of various factions that are concerned with their own interests, "the teachers of each sect [...]" are compelled to observe that "candour and moderation" (686) are more effective regarding the convincement of the 'inward man.' Religious factions with a lot of "hypocritical worship" (*WJM* 77), on the other hand, "see nothing round them but followers, disciples, and humble admirers" (Smith 686) that are not concerned with the investment of human capital (*supra*).

We find an example thereof in *Paradise Lost* where Satan is not only the representative of the idea of an established church but also a competing sect. The system in *Paradise Lost* at this point is still a competitive religious market because Satan has not yet

managed to impose his established system on mankind or heaven. We know he cannot use violence because it would not affect the inward man. If even God needs to convince the human will to achieve authentic obedience, that is, humans need to convince themselves of God's goodness, then the opposite needs to be implemented in the same way. It is essential for Satan to conquer the 'inward man' because this is the place where authentic belief and obedience resides. For Satan, however, this is only possible by "deceit and lies" (*PL* 5.243), as he is not in the possession of any religious truth, and not "By violence" (5.242) for in this manner he "cannot [...] determine to the conscience without conviction" (*CPW* 7: 249).

Thirdly, from the previous argument follows that, because of the competitors' cunning, the religious individuals acting within the market are obliged to develop their critical awareness of religious truth through rational inquiry. In other words, they incessantly have to invest their human capital in order to develop their religious knowledge. The investment can thus be seen as a dynamic response to exterior pressure which leads to an increased religious conviction. Indeed, Milton wrote that people's innocence must not be preserved because "our faith and knowledge thrives by exercise" (*CPW* 2:543).

Because Satan uses "art [...] to increase the number of his disciples" (686), the Fall is to my mind not so much a result of a tendency to sin as it is a consequence of man's ignorance about his own human condition and God. The Fall can consequently be seen as the initial investment of mankind's starting capital and installs a self-sufficient dynamic towards an ever increasing religious affiliation. Consider the following occurrence; although the angel Raphael has warned Adam of the coming danger, could Adam fully grasp the extent of its implications? He simply could not understand it, as man, after the warning, still remains in the dark about what it is exactly that he needs to anticipate. Adam nor Eve have

ever encountered Satan and are relatively inexperienced in the area of evil. At a given point in the poem Satan himself thinks aloud about their condition:

All is not theirs it seems:  
 One fatal tree there stands of knowledge called,  
 Forbidden them to taste: knowledge forbidden?  
 Suspicious, reasonless. Why should their Lord  
 Envy them that? can it be sin to know,  
 Can it be death? and do they only stand,  
 By ignorance, is that their happy state,  
 The proof of their obedience and their faith?

(4.513-20)

Consequently, “Man [can] be seduced [...] believing lies against his maker” (10.41-42) because of the lack of an adequate degree of human capital concerning evil in the same way that any other religious individual in modern society can be seduced by ‘false’ advertisers of religious truth. Because Adam and Eve do not understand what they are choosing for, the Fall itself is an act of “wilfully”, but ignorantly, “transgressing” (5.244) boundaries. The conversation of Satan and Eve at the Tree reveals the degree of their inexperience and ignorance:

Will God incense his ire  
 For such a petty trespass, and not praise  
 Rather your dauntless vertue, whom the pain  
 Of death denounced, whatever thing death be,  
 Deterred not from achieving what might lead

To happier life, knowledge of good and evil;  
 Of good, how just? of evil, if what is evil  
 Be real, why not known, since easier shunned?

(9.692-99)

Here, Satan tries to convince Eve to eat from the fruit of the “forbidden tree” (1.2) even though she knows the punishment for it is death, “whatever thing death be” (9.695). This not only reveals the extent of the ignorance of Adam and Eve but also points to the fact that neither man, nor Satan, and not even God know what death is as they have not experienced it before (*Oxford* xxi). The fact that Adam and Eve were “wilfully transgressing” (*PL* 5.224) a crucial religious boundary only points to their lack of human capital as they had no knowledge of what they were transgressing. Indeed, “blasphemie [...] is far from conscience in religion” (*CPW* 7:250). Therefore, the Fall is rather a result of man’s ignorance than of intentional disobedience and can be seen as the initial investment of human capital for the acquirement of religious knowledge. The Fall in *Paradise Lost*, then, is not an indication of the imperfection of Adam and Eve and mankind in general; rather, it is an example of their dynamic perfection (Myers 2004; 185). This dynamic perfection is possible because “God made [them] perfect, not immutable” (*PL* 5.524) and thus “free to fall” (3.99).

The fourth and final cog of the mechanism concerns the fact that the investment of human capital results in a profit situation according to the degree that the individual has increased his conviction of a particular religious truth. Arguably, it was quite necessary for man to fall as it involves the establishment of a permanent dialectic which allows them to achieve authentic faith. The Fall of Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost* increases their human capital because they develop the notions of good and evil together with the ascription of

meaning to these terms. To be sure, “it was from out the rinde of one apple tasted, that the knowledge of good and evill as two twins cleaving together leapt forth into the World” (*CPW* 2:514). The interpretation of the concept good, and therefore knowledge of the constitution of God, can as a consequence be seen to be enclosed in the act of the Fall because “what wisdom can there be to choose [...] without the knowledge of evill?” (514). Through the investment of human capital, “Virtue can be better known and appreciated by seeing its opposite in vice” (Witte 1595) and can literally be seen as the “Knowledge of good bought dear by knowing ill” (*PL* 4.222). To be sure, we can observe that God establishes his absolute goodness and omnipotence precisely because of the existing opposition in the competitive market:

Easily the proud attempt  
 Of spirits apostate and their counsels vain  
 Thou hast repelled, while impiously they thought  
 Thee to diminish, and from thee withdraw  
 The number of thy worshippers. Who seeks  
 To lessen thee, against his purpose serves  
 To manifest the more thy might: his evil  
 Thou usest, and from thence creat'st more good.

(*PL* 7.609-16)

This last excerpt from *Paradise Lost* epitomizes the proposition developed in this section. Adam and Eve are induced to invest their religious starting capital through their experience with Satan. The investment of their human capital is consequently to be seen as a dynamic response to exterior pressure which incites participation. Through this participation,

mankind increases his knowledge of the truth about God which convinces them of His greatness. Therefore, after the redemption Adam and Eve gain a “paradise within” (12.587) which “suggests the birth of a new mode of interiority” and the development of “critical faculties” (Rosendale 162). They are “thrice happie [as] they know / Their happiness” (7.631-32) because of the accumulation of human capital gained from the initial investment. Therefore, the Fall can be seen to initiate the self-sufficient system of the investment of human capital that is responsible for the production of religious vitality because Adam and Eve are finally able to independently “discern / Hypocrisy” (3.682-83). As a result, the confrontation with different competitors in the religious market proves to be highly effective for the “perpetuall progression” of faith (CPW 2:543).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have provided a Miltonic perspective, by means of *Paradise Lost* and other writings, of the indirect effects that are responsible for the increase of religious affiliation in a market structure based on the constitutional protection of religion. The approach departed from the ‘cultivation of religiosity’ in its intent to proselytize or generate a higher commitment among existing adherents of the Protestant faith. Remarkably, Milton devised this analytical framework of a competitive religious society *because* he was concerned with “the advancement of religion” (CPW 7:245). He focussed on the preferences of the consumer in order to sustain the “voluntary contribution” (Smith 682) to religion. The analogy of Adam Smith’s market competition indicates the effectiveness of a market system “led by an invisible hand” (Smith 384) for the ‘cultivation of religiosity.’ I have focussed on the reciprocity between the supply-side and the demand-side of religion because, to my mind, the dynamic through ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors in a competitive market is responsible

for the establishment of a self-sufficient mechanism of the investment of human capital. In such a system, consumers of religion result to be “simultaneously suppliers and producers” of their own religiosity (Miller 437). The personal involvement of individuals such as Adam and Eve is consequently demonstrated to be essential for the increase of religious vitality and religiosity in society. Paul Stevens concludes his essay *Milton in America* with the message that “The best academic criticism allow us to see [Milton’s] presence in the very fabric of our culture, enabling us to defamiliarize it and see ourselves anew” (798). I hope to have shown precisely this – that Milton’s invisible hand is orchestrating the symphony of religious sects in societies with a competitive religious market structure, such as the United States.

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