MILTON'S SCRIPTURAL THEOLOGY

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MILTON'S SCRIPTURAL THEOLOGY

CONFRONTING *DE DOCTRINA CHRISTIANA*

by
JOHN K. HALE

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The cover's Latin words and phrases are chosen equally from Milton's topics and his personal style in examining them. The prevailing monochrome suggests print and bibles, academic and preaching garb, or the pen and ink of a controversial manuscript. Polemic is suggested in the lineation, by jagged diagonals, tilting and criss-crossing.

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PART 3: TRINITY

ABBREVIATIONS

Works by Milton

DDC	*De Doctrina Christiana*, with reference to each book and chapter, for instance, as II.3 for Book 2, Chapter 3
MS	Kew, National Archives / Public Record Office [PRO], Manuscript S/P 9/61

Texts and Translations of *De Doctrina Christiana*

Oxford	*The Complete Works of John Milton*, 13 vols. Edited by Thomas N. Corns and Gordon Campbell, vol. 8: *De Doctrina Christiana*. Edited and translated by John K. Hale and J. Donald Cullington (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012)
Yale	*Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, 8 vols. Edited by Don M. Wolfe et al., vol. 6: *ca. 1658–ca. 1660 [De Doctrina Christiana]*. Edited by Maurice Kelley with translation by John Carey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973). All references are to vol. 6 unless otherwise indicated

Studies

MMsDDC	Gordon Campbell, Thomas N. Corns, John K. Hale, and Fiona Tweedie, *Milton and the Manuscript of De Doctrina Christiana* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)

Bibles

JTB	Junius–Tremellius–Beza (1623–1624)
KJV	King James Version or Authorized Version

FOREWORD: MILTON'S PERSONAL BEST

THIS FOREWORD TELLS how I began my twenty-five years of research into Milton's "best possession," to help explain the meaning and range of its phrasing, and why I refer to it as his "Personal Best."

To speak of your "personal best," be it in throwing the javelin or finishing a crossword puzzle, is to measure yourself by some wider standard so as to take satisfaction in your own prowess when at maximum extension, whilst recognizing that that best is not the world's best. Milton spoke of *De Doctrina* as "this my best and most precious possession" (*haec, quibus melius aut pretiosius nihil habeo*). So he is not making quite the same claim, not taking pride in performance or prowess. Recognizing his due humility, I nevertheless take the surviving work as his "best" contribution to theology, and in many senses "personal."

For one thing, its theology is distinctive in several unorthodoxies, and their zestful advocacy; also in some orthodoxies, like his measured account of Predestination. At the least, *De Doctrina* is his one and only worked-out Credo. And it figures, albeit belatedly, in histories of the great mid-century Trinitarian debate: it is on the wider map of theology; it counts. As to its being his "personal" best, Milton's Epistle declares it personal, his very own excogitation from scripture, since "whoever wants to be saved must have a personal faith of their own" (MS 1f). Also, he had to complete the compilation "if I did not want to be unfaithful to myself": *nisi mihimet forte infidus esse volebam*—strong language, emphasizing his selfhood (*mihimet*). Thus *De Doctrina* is personal as being appropriative and self-directed, potentially even self-centred.

For my study, I heed his words, reading the original Latin words themselves, in order to probe the personality and selfhood which argument and style reveal to close reading. These close readings are extended to include the perspective of the readership Milton envisaged. By several means, I move to assessment of the work and its aim, its degrees of success, and its by-products, as these reveal Milton at his "personal best." The further implications of that phrase are addressed, in that while to a candid appraisal—or to historians or methodologists of theology—his best might not seem the very best ever, this work remains unutterably precious to Milton, and reveals to close reading the passion and energy of his mind in its acts of thought. Thus to understand the personal dimension of his theology is to understand, and to evaluate, his mind in action.

Getting to Know *De Doctrina*

In 1993, in the aftershock of William Hunter's 1991 impugning of Milton's authorship of *De Doctrina*, I was invited by Gordon Campbell and Thomas Corns to join their multidisciplinary inquiry into the manuscript, as its Latinist.[1] Did the Latin style resemble

1 Hunter, *Visitation Unimplor'd*.

Milton's elsewhere? Did it do so in whole, or in part, or hardly at all? I looked for words which a right-minded humanist would have abhorred (as grounds for disauthenticating), and I examined word-frequencies. In the upshot, though I did find words which had been blacklisted by purists of Milton's time, they tended to be ones occasioned by theologians he was refuting, or by topics which had generated technical terms, usually from Greek into Latin, like *hypostasis* or *blasphemare*. And as for the word-frequencies, they crystallized something for me about the mind behind the manuscript. Just below the most frequent words (*et*, *sed*, and so forth) came a bunch of logical connectives which delimited: *duntaxat* and synonyms meaning "only," and double negatives like *non nisi*. These I found used habitually and insistently. Reading them in context showed that in their incidence quality matched quantity. Now while such locutions had thrived at least since Doubting Thomas, and are certainly not unknown in theological Latin, I could only acknowledge that they had special force in *De Doctrina*, both numerically and when I was examining its most animated passages.

I had become convinced Hunter was wrong. That conviction remained muted in the multidisciplinary inquiry's first reports, among other reasons because mine was a supporting role. It became more central to the inquiry's eventual book, *Milton and the Manuscript of De Doctrina Christiana*.[2] My own portion (Chapter 6) builds *duntaxat* into a much wider gathering of linguistic evidence for single authorship, namely Milton's.

Meanwhile, in 2000 or thereabouts, Campbell and Corns had invited me to edit *De Doctrina* for their proposed *Oxford Complete Works of John Milton*. This task occupied me increasingly till 2012, though it did also enable me to write papers and essays on the spadework: especially translation, but also style. All the same, I obeyed the imperative to preserve editorial detachment and impersonality. I postponed publishing on matters of opinion, and did not record where immersion in the original Latin, and the original manuscript, had suggested views and responses of my own. These, with the teeming detail which occasioned them, are now receiving expression. After all, to return now to that personal dimension, though I am a theological amateur, so was Milton. In writing personally at last, I am approximating to Milton's stance as declared in the opening Epistle.

The Personal Element

That personal element (to be defined in a moment) is confirmed by the quirks and twists of his argumentation, for the close reader of his actual words. At times, indeed, changes to the manuscript pages demonstrate his discovering mind, in the moment of intervention, addition, or, occasionally, revision. For often enough, his mind moves eagerly onward in the direction already taken. How could it not, since he prides himself on working

2 By Gordon Campbell, Thomas N. Corns, John K. Hale, and Fiona J. Tweedie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). See, for instance, Conclusions (155–61) and the chapter on "Latin Style"; henceforth abbreviated to *MMsDDC*. Further observations lie dispersed in earlier reports and conference papers, and subsequently in the notes of our Oxford edition, *De Doctrina Christiana*, vol. 8 of *The Complete Works of John Milton*, ed. Thomas N. Corns and Gordon Campbell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); henceforth abbreviated to *Oxford*.

out his beliefs from collecting then collating scripture? Only then, if at all, a paragraph or section continues into addressing what professional theologians had said. In these circumstances, when he has laboured hard and long in the vineyard of scripture for himself, he finds them nearly always wrong. But, as he declares, it was from the outset some dissatisfaction with the "lengthy volumes of theologians and their Systemata" which had made him systematize scriptural beliefs for himself. I have been experiencing a similar dissatisfaction with Milton's lengthy theology, not with its length but with the certainty by which he moves to conclusions, some of which feel foreknown. The closed fist is often felt in an ostensibly open-handed inquiry.

Hence, naturally, the personal character of my own product. Hence too my sense of having belatedly qualified myself to have an opinion on issues arising, opinions gained from travelling the same route, over the many years of the authorship inquiry and then of editing and translating *De Doctrina*.

The route was that of Milton's chapters, the eventual reader's route. Yet it had not been his route of composition, though the scheme of topics was there from early on. For one thing, by the nature of a commonplace book you enter your evidence according to topic, in its allotted place (*topos* = "place") in the traditional scheme of Topica, and your reflections likewise. You work all over. Manifestly too the manuscript pages show an older state of the fair copy in the chapters which we read later, in much of Book 2—something unavoidably back-to-front is embedded. The chapters we read sooner because of their numbered sequence tend to be the ones later finished, with the fifth chapter of the fifty arguably the latest of the fifty.

As a close reader of everything in the manuscript I began by transcribing it all in its numerical sequence. I did it three times in succession. This gave me the experience, which I imagine to be unusual, of reading Milton's best possession in its Latin original, in manuscript, in its entirety, and closely. It has been a privilege. Despite some risk of distortion through myopia, the value is that of very close encounter. It brings a serious pleasure in reading this Latin from appreciating Milton's energies, and so a pleasure of appreciating the work, pleasures found independently of theological propositions.

Translation and annotation, on the other hand, were shared with Donald Cullington: their strength belongs at least equally with him, as an impartial outsider to Milton studies, unburdened by the element of personal engagement. He feels no need to wrestle with Milton, or to take him personally, whereas I do.

In accordance with my own trajectory, my studies move from the original impulse of the authorship debate, to the fruits of transcription like a sense of strata, to the organization, to source studies, to linguistic or philological investigations like Milton's etymologizing, to questions of Latin style. These each contribute something to my personal impressions, whether in the form of an answer to an existing question or the framing of a new one. Finally, I attempt a response of my own to Milton's eager advocacy on matters of scholarship and faith, by way of his magisterial chapter on the Trinity, and a fresh view of the relations obtaining between *De Doctrina* and *Paradise Lost*. I want to link the personality on view in the do-it-yourself theologian of the Latin with the supreme epic poet of the English. I want to "use or not use" his thinking, in the spirit of his challenge.

The chapters use a varying sense of what is "personal" in Milton's style and mind: individual, quirky, eccentric; impassioned, irascible, scathing; interpersonal, ad hominem; partisan, opinionated, irreducibly the outcome of choice or axiom within the protestation of believing only what scripture can avouch. Further forms of this work's personality (which differs from that of *Paradise Lost*) are proposed in the course of examining passages. I depend throughout on linguistic and literary methods of inquiry, as suggested by the too rarely visited Latinity of *De Doctrina*, Milton's own original dictated words.

Now it might be felt that the "personal" and "passionate" engagement in *De Doctrina* is simply Milton's incessant subjectivity. That which in his verse makes for the "egotistical sublime" which Keats identified, and in his English prose works appears as a fiery one-sided partisanship, or in his Latin *Defences* as advocatorial propaganda for the Interregnum regime, appears in *De Doctrina* too, as a systematic preference for his own elucubrations from scripture. The continuities with these works do reappear from my study of its topics and Milton's treatment of them. Nonetheless, for Milton himself the stakes are higher than for his other prose. He claims that salvation depended for him on excogitating from scripture alone what it is "safe" to believe (*nihil mihi tutius neque consultius visum est*, Epistle line 51)—"if I did not want to be unfaithful to myself" (*nisi mihimet forte infidus esse volebam*, line 54), which shows an anxiety both puritan and existential. This is an unusual mixture of anxiety with confidence, not found in his other works, which is what strikes me as personal, and having a unique passion, and worth examining for its own sake as well as to fill a lacuna in Milton studies. It is a *peculiar* passion, both through its remote but alluring strangeness, and because it is peculiar to Milton in *De Doctrina*. And if anyone suspects him of sales talk, of talking his subject up as usual, I would reject this jaundiced view as improbable and perhaps anachronistic, for he toiled at this work for years and years, before and during his blindness, into an enormous manuscript, which demonstrates the prolonged revision of a treasured work. "I have laid up for myself a treasure": not a monumental futility, but (for this devout and unusual person) a safe stronghold, *ein feste Burg*. *Magnum me subsidium fidei [...] vel thesaurum reposuise*.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND DEDICATION

The approach in this volume to understanding *De Doctrina* had a first sketch in *Milton Studies* as "Peculiar and Personal: Milton's *De Doctrina Christiana*."

I am grateful to colleagues who have discussed parts of the undertaking with me, especially Gordon Campbell, Donald Cullington, Christopher Holmes, Jason Kerr, and Jeffrey Miller. I received help in preparing the manuscript from Sarah Entwistle.

The dedication records the wider debt to my family, especially my grandchildren (Lucas, Juliet, and Harry), born during the years I was working on this book.

John K. Hale, Litt. D.
University of Otago, December 2018

PRELIMINARIES: AUTHORSHIP, MEDIUM, AUDIENCE

BEFORE COMMENCING THE studies of Milton's personality in action in the main chapters, I need to ground them in certain indispensable contexts. Did Milton author the work? Why is it in Latin, and of what sort? What readership, and kind of reading, does the work require?

The Authorship Question

William Hunter made much of discontinuities and differences between *De Doctrina* and Milton as known from his life and other works, and between one part of *De Doctrina* and another. Accordingly, if I am to describe the "personal" dynamic of the work, and Milton's "personality" expressed within it, we need to be sure that Milton was indeed its author, throughout. Fuller accounts, written by others and/or myself, can be found in *MMsDDC*: here, at whatever risk of repetition in later chapters, I summarize the things which stand out, and dwell on the linguistic matters which are my chief concern.

Three main possibilities confront us: first, *De Doctrina* was composed in full by Milton; second, it was composed in part by Milton; third, it was not composed by him at all, whether by a single unknown or several. Hunter suggested one or two names for the third possibility: none drew support. The second possibility complicated proceedings. He observed, for instance, that Book 1, Chapter 10 used the three different Latin words for "marriage." But Donald Cullington demonstrated that the three words have distinct meanings, which Milton differentiates here just as classical Latin had done.[1] Indeed, within the headlong reverie of Chapter 10, divided authorship is singularly unlikely. It repeats so many of Milton's published arguments about divorce. To tell the truth, while we must thank Hunter for calling such attention to *De Doctrina* in its original Latin, he did at times resist the natural, obvious, first explanation.

If we start afresh, on the other hand, we find Milton's authorship quite secure unless and until one undertakes to suspect everything. The MS carries his name, at the beginning and on page seven where the first substantive chapter begins. Although it is not written in his own hand, he was blind, and could not have penned it even if he had wanted to. The name, though written in a different lettering from that of the first 196 pages, is written in the same hand, only in uppercase letters: this scribe, Daniel Skinner, wrote all the rest of the 196 pages, and corrections or additions on many later pages. He signs off at the end in the same hand and UC/lc variation as at the outset.

My own readings of the text produce one characteristic feature after another. To name a few:

i. The author of *De Doctrina* is working from England, as reference to the expulsion of the bishops "olim" shows (*Oxford*, 1246, MS 732). Other allusions to church–state

1 Cullington, "The Latin Words for 'Marriage' in *De Doctrina Christiana*, bk. 1, chap. 10," 23–37.

arrangements fit only England. One scribe forgets himself and begins a note on the MS in English.

ii. The author has published other work or works advocating divorce reform (*Oxford*, 392, *ut nos alias ex aliquot scripturae locis et* ***Seldenus*** *idem docuit* ["as we have shown elsewhere from several passages of scripture, and as **Selden** has also shown"]). This points to *Tetrachordon* especially but not only.

iii. *De Doctrina* has the same organization as *Artis Logicae*, two books, fifty chapters in all, divided 33:17. To get this arrangement, changes have been made from that of the chief model of either work, respectively Downham's *Ramus* and Wolleb's *Compendium*.

iv. Similarities occur of wording and choice of examples between the *Logic* and *De Doctrina*, like the intrusive imperative, *Evigilent hic politici*: "Here let the theologians awake."[2] Compare a kindred moment in *De Doctrina*, *Politicis etiam atque etiam legendum* ("to be read again and again by statesmen," *Oxford*, 1242). Another (*Oxford*, 220) is the shared reversal of orthodox opinion in *tempora omnia praesentia* non *sunt* ("[to God] all times are NOT present"); since as Campbell says, "the simplest explanation [of the repetition] would be that Milton recycled his own phrase."[3]

v. The author of *De Doctrina* alludes to several known favourite ancient writers of Milton's, especially Euripides and Homer, and, among Romans, Horace. His regular practice in texts, and the witness of the early *Lives*, agree with the showing of these poets (and ancient poets generally) in *De Doctrina*. See also Chapter 6.

vi. Two of the theologians who inform *De Doctrina*, Amesius and Wollebius, are known from an *Early Life of Milton* to have been regularly used in his study, by his pupils.[4]

What is more, a prolonged reading of Milton's Latin, such as for the Oxford *Defences* volume, will uncover more resemblances. To give a recent example, in translating the *Second Defence* recently for the *Oxford Milton*, Cullington and I found that Milton uses the rare word *ventilare*, to winnow, paired with *excutere* (copytext 155). The same metaphor appears, in the same pairing, in *De Doctrina* (MS4i).

And so on.

Taken singly, these features read like Milton. Moreover, when taken together, and when I add to them the general tenor and feel, and indeed the whole vibrant personality which this Latin exudes, and shares with Milton's other mature prose Latin, to doubt his authorship becomes uneconomical, in fact unreasonable, at least till weighty new counterevidence is discovered. To put it bluntly, how many libertarian Latinists living in Interregnum England, with a taste for Euripides in thought and phrasing, combined

2 *MMsDDC*, 103; *Oxford*.

3 Campbell, "The Authorship of *De Doctrina Christiana*," 129–30.

4 See *Early Lives of Milton*, 61. "The next work after this, [in the pabulum of Milton's pupils] was the writing from his own dictation, some part, from time to time, of a Tractate which he thought fit to collect from the ablest of Divines, who had written of that Subject; *Amesius*, *Wollebius*, &c. *viz.* A perfect System of Divinity, of which more hereafter."

a predilection for Latin phrases of limitation with heterodox views of the Trinity and strong opinions on tithes, and had published pamphlets in favour of divorce? Who are the other candidates with the requisite variety and accomplishments in their linguistic and literary repertoire?

The Latin Medium

When Hunter began his campaign, Milton scholars apart from Maurice Kelley had not thought much about the Latin of Ramist theologies. On the other hand, the work of Leo Miller on the State papers had provided a test of Milton's preferred Latinity there. Milton preferred a more Roman way of designating and entitling, which his masters would then remove for clarity of recognition (*Status Generales* offended Milton's Latinity, but to practical people it referred more unmistakably to the Dutch "States General"). Milton tended also to cavil at unclassical Latin, by inserting such phrases as *ut vocant* ("as they call it")—like a scare quote. Did *De Doctrina* use any such words or phrases which might disauthenticate those portions of the work, or the whole work? When I examined the candidates, namely words not found in classical Latin dictionaries, or marked there as "late" or "ecclesiastical," all expressed concepts which Milton had perforce to discuss, from their use in theologians he was reading for rebuttal. (This is setting aside the Latin of the Protestant Latin Bible which he used for the citations, these being indeed in a different Latin, but not Milton's anyway.)

In fact, theological Latin employs many technical terms, whether deriving from the original languages of the Bible itself, or from doctrinal discussions. Milton may take up the Latin version or inspect its Hebrew or Greek original, or both. But this belongs to his analyses, not to his personal style. The main definitions and distinctions in every chapter, and the discussions which follow each body of scriptural citations, are composed in the Latin normal for these theologies. Often enough Milton's formulations begin with the words he read in his model or matrix, Wollebius. And we make much of that fact, since we can pinpoint moments when the Latin quoted from Wollebius becomes his own appropriation (see Chapter 4). These moments hold greatest interest when he parts company. Often, we note an increase in animation and heterodoxy, yet not always: occasionally, Wolleb waxes scornful where Milton does not, but either way, Milton is his own man within the norm of this Latin style, the genre of this neo-Latin discourse. But there is no change in the norm of the Latin itself.

Intellectuals of all kinds used the same Latin, for exposition of ideas, presenting evidence, and dealing with rival opinion. It was classical, and broadly Ciceronian, the lucid expository Cicero of the philosophical works, punctuated when occasion arose by the more oratorical Cicero, partisan and advocatorial, deploying crooked arguments too to win his case. But its lexis went far wider than Cicero, into any "Golden" Latin, and a good deal more, in that conglomerated eclectic Latin which purported to be timeless, and was undiachronic. *De Doctrina* is a fine example. Its individuality oscillates, as for any author, to be recognized by the usual means, like stylistic register or imagery.

Protestant theology was written in Latin and printed, the two things together making for ease of access by Europe. Milton models his theology on that of his predecessors, in

all sorts of ways. Even while spurning their *Systemata* as scholastic and interminable, he wields scholastic thought-forms freely, in the course of composing what is by far his lengthiest work. This was how his age did its thinking: so did he. And even while such Latin can seem uniform, and unvaried and certainly inelastic by comparison with Greek or English, Milton's has its own energy, variety, and expressiveness, as I again show, in chapters on some of their clearest manifestations.

Readers and Reading

Milton's manuscript opens with an elaborate address to readers. It explains his work's personal origin and importance—to himself, and so to them. He does it in what, although not so named, is helpfully termed the "Epistle." For it is aligned with the epistles of the New Testament, by its forthright epigraph ("To all the churches of Christ"), launching the address in a style even higher than the Ciceronian.

He speaks of a form of publication which must mean print: "I now make these things public (*palam facio*) [...] I share [my work] as widely as possible (*quam possum latissimè*)"—very emphatic, since *quam latissimè* by itself would imply *possum*. Likewise, the epigraph sounds its trumpet to "all who profess the Christian faith anywhere among the peoples (*ubicunque Gentium*)." This ubiquity can only mean print, which he had regularly used to spread his ideas. And print in Latin aims at educated believers across Europe. The desire to get the widest attention possible, even though we soon learn that only Protestant readers are envisaged, is manifested by the address to *Universis Ecclesiis*, for "universal" entails coverage or extent, as still felt in "the universe." Qualifications then follow, as "purer" religion is specified, as to be found only in scripture. And cautions follow, and anxieties. Not every reader is going to like this book, but in a bold and sincere voice Milton will risk it for the greater good.

Thus the epistle intends an international readership of an already Protestant persuasion, yet perhaps equally of believing Christians who are not committed to a particular church. Reading is an individual, personal activity. The epigraph insinuates this by greeting not only churches, all of them,[5] but also (*nec non*), at greater length of phrasing, any believer anywhere: *omnibus Fidem Christianam ubicunque Gentium profitentibus*. The latter invitation contains more words, is emphasized by the amplitude of the litotes *nec non*, and gets the last word of the eleven-word dative phrase of the dedication. If the appropriating of New Testament and Pauline epigraphs is felt, then a distinctive widening of address is felt too—from localized particular gatherings in a city or region (Corinth, Galatia) to confessional churches unlocalized, and to Reformation Europe.

Such a close reading of the exact Latin words may seem like a priori squeezing. At least it has the interest of novelty, and suggests serious new understanding. It is supported by another unfamiliar testing, of reading aloud (as we would of course do for

5 May *Universis* include geographical thrust, lacking from *omnibus*, as in "the universe" "wherever you turn," and hence a glance at the potential ubiquity of a printed book?

Milton's English poems). Taken together, these things alert us to the personal, and interpersonal, the emphasis which is my theme. The *inter*personal is clearest in the epistle—so much so, indeed, that our first substantive chapter looks hard at the Epistle to show how embedded, indeed constitutive, is this personal drive, here and then throughout *De Doctrina*. Milton's hopes, but also fears, are to be felt; first hopes, then tensions and anxieties, integral to the whole undertaking; hopes set high then modified; fears disallowed yet re-entering willy-nilly.