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Merit

Mary Christopher Pecheux O.S.U.
The College of New Rochelle

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Trinity*, it seems clear at least that the Son's* position in heaven is his by right; he is Son of God both by merit and by birthright; he reigns by right of merit; is worthiest to reign (*PL* 3.309; 6.43, 888). He is deserving of his role as head of the angels*, at the right hand of the Father*.

Christ's exaltation as man, as the *CD* (1:16) states unequivocally, is partly from his own merits, partly from the gift of the Father (15:313). *PL* 3.311ff., echoing Philippians 2:6-11, sees his final exaltation as a reward of his humiliation; and Christ himself speaks, in *PR* 3.196, of meriting his exaltation.

Men are justified by the application to them of Christ's merits. Statements to this effect abound, both in *CD* and *PL*. "It is evident therefore that justification, in so far as we are concerned, is gratuitous; in so far as Christ is concerned, not gratuitous; inasmuch as Christ paid the ransom of our sins, which he took upon himself by imputation, and thus of his own accord, and at his own cost, effected their expiation" (16:27-29; see also *PL* 11.35-36; 12.409-10).

The attitude toward man's own power to merit is less clear-cut. While it is stated categorically that no countenance can be given to the doctrine of human merit, "inasmuch as both faith itself and its works are the works of the Spirit, not our own" (16:41), and the Father is at pains to make clear that those who are saved are saved by grace*, not their own will (*PL* 3.174ff.), this doctrine is accompanied by a certain respect for man's part in the process, the view held by Arminians*. It is Christ's merits, not his own, which justify man; yet the faith* in those merits must be accompanied by some corresponding works on man's part. *CD* avoids the use of the term *merit* (which *Areop* does apply, somewhat loosely; see 4:319), but stresses the fact that good works must accompany faith and that they will be rewarded, a point made more than once by Michael in *PL* 11: "By Faith and faithful works"

MERIT. Merit may be considered in relation to Christ and in relation to man. Quite apart from the controverted question of Milton's precise views on the

(64); "And one bad act with many deeds well done / Mayst cover" (256-57); Abel's faith will not lose its reward (458-59); Adam is shown "what reward / Awaits the good" (709-10). A purely passive justification through Christ's merits seemed to Milton incompatible with free will*: "Since therefore we are not merely senseless stocks, some cause at least must be discovered in the nature of man himself, why divine grace is rejected by some and embraced by others" (14:129); if our personal religion were not in some degree dependent on ourselves, God could not properly enter into a covenant with us (15:215). His explanation turns on a distinction between man's natural and supernatural faculties: the power of willing and believing is a gift of God, but so far as it is inherent in man, it is from a natural faculty (14:139); it is always God who shows mercy, but one man may be less reluctant, less backward, less resisting than another (14:133).

The angels, too, seem to have power to merit, both in their initial test (God praises Abdiel for his fidelity) and perhaps in the attainment of a certain rank in the hierarchy; see *PL* 2. 18-21; 3. 305-11; 5. 588-94. An ironic inversion of angelic merit is seen in certain terms applied to the fallen angels: Satan is raised by merit to his eminence in hell (*PL* 2. 5-6); his followers have achieved merit in counsel and fight (2. 21); even Sin and Death "have amply merit'd" (10. 383-93).

To summarize: in Milton's thought, Christ as God has in some sense merited his position in heaven; as man, he has certainly merited his own exaltation and the justification of mankind. No man is able, strictly speaking, to merit his own justification, but there is a sense in which his cooperation merits further grace. The angels have at least a limited power of meriting. [MCP]