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“Die he, or justice must?": *Paradise Lost* and the Political Theology of Toleration

This paper aims to place into its proper historical context Milton's shocking representation of the logic of the atonement. In the Dialogue in Heaven in the epic's Book Three, the Father explains to the Son that he will not be able simply to forgive the sinful Adam and Eve in light of their dutiful attention to "prayer, repentance, and obedience due." "Die he, or justice must," the Father explains, defining divine justice as a phenomenon that necessarily seeks the maximum penalty of death for the first sin. The many scholars who have studied this passage have all explained that Milton here accepts without questioning the understanding of divine justice forwarded by the Magisterial Reformer Calvin. Not only have the scholars been wrong in that assessment (Calvin does *not* argue that God was compelled to demand the death of sinful man), but scholars have also neglected the obvious cultural context informing Milton's presentation of the Father's insistence on the penalty of death. I will explain in this paper that the Father's remark must be seen as the poet's attempt to engage with 1) the larger seventeenth-century European Protestant controversies surrounding the nature of divine justice (Socinus, Grotius, Crellius, and Milton's Reformed countryman John Owen), and especially 2) the immediate English squabbles about divine justice that exploded in the 1650's and early 1660's and which all had the ecclesiological problem of religious toleration in mind (John Owen, John Goodwin, and Richard Baxter). The

Father's terrifying "Die he, or justice must" can only properly be understood, I will argue, in the context of that urgent contemporary theo-political wrangling over the question of religious toleration.

John Rogers, Biobibliography

John Rogers is professor of English at Yale University. He is the author of *The Matter of Revolution: Science, Poetry, and Politics in the Age of Milton* (1996), which was awarded the James Holly Hanford Prize for Outstanding Book by the Milton Society of America. Two other essays, "Transported Touch: The Fruit of Marriage in *Paradise Lost*" (2004) and "Orson Pratt and the Miltonic Origins of Mormon Materialism" (2017), have been awarded the Milton Society's James Holly Hanford Prize for Outstanding Article. Rogers has published widely on a range of seventeenth-century cultural and literary topics, including essays on Milton, Isaac Newton, and Aemilia Lanyer. He is currently completing two books, *Milton's Poetry and the Theologies of Liberalism*, and *Latter-day Milton: Paradise Lost and the Creation of America's God*, a study of the role that the reading of *Paradise Lost* played in the creation of the theologies of the nineteenth-century American religions of Mormonism and Seventh-Day Adventism.