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Milton, Newton, and the Making of a Modern World

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In recent decades Isaac Newton's voluminous manuscript writings have become more easily available to scholars, and Newton scholarship has demonstrated the centrality for Newton of his biblical, theological, and his vitalist explorations. The intellectual profile of Newton that has emerged parallels Milton's in striking and significant ways. Two figures "church-outed," to borrow Milton's term, by high church Anglicanism, Milton and Newton considered themselves to be prophets, part of, to borrow Newton's term, "a remnant, a few scattered persons which God hath chosen ... earnestly to search after truth." Each devoted himself, in a rigorous, energetic embrace of Protestant principles, to working out his faith through careful reading of the Bible. Intellectually acute and philologically informed, both critically read the Scripture before the publication of Richard Simon's 1678 *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* and found whatever evidence there was for Trinitarian belief textually corrupt. Each subscribed to an Arian Christology of the Son of God as begotten in time and neither co-essential nor co-equal with the Father, and each flirted with a Socinian understanding of the Son's

role as exemplar of obedience rather than as redemptive sacrifice. And, turning to natural philosophy, each denied the existence of a separable incorporeal soul and each articulated a vitalist understanding of matter, a belief that can be shown in each case to be integrally connected to shared theological beliefs. Milton's thought, I will argue, is not the builder of a monument to dead ideas, as Walter Raleigh argued, but an early adopter of a set of ideas characteristic of the Newton circle that coalesced years after his death.

Steve Fallon is the author of *Milton among the Philosophers* (Cornell 1991) and *Milton's Peculiar Grace* (2007), and he is the co-editor of *The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton* (Modern Library, 2007) and *Immortality and the Body in the Age of Milton* (Cambridge UP, 2017). He was named Honored Scholar of the Milton Society of America in 2011, and he subsequently served as president of the Society. He is a member of the Standing Committee of the IMS.