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Dear Fellow S.K.C.M. members: In this issue of the *E-MAIL COMMUNIQUE* begins an essay on some of the misconceptions about John Milton. These result from distortion of history to make one side look better, at the expense of the other. Milton wrote *Ikonoklastes*, an exercise in destroying Charles's image (*eikon*). Milton's supporters—Charles's detractors—have been working at this ever since with considerable success, suppressing Milton's opportunism and even dishonesty. Sometimes propaganda, distortions, outright lies, and suppression of information. In addition to better understanding Milton, being more aware of these techniques in general helps us as citizens. Here is some background; next time, we'll see how good Milton was at his job. *-MAW*

Benign or Poisonous? John Milton: Blind Bard or Protector's Propagandist?

As you may know or predict, I am not fond of Milton, but not simply because he was allied with those opposed to King Charles I. Although many opposed to Charles were despicable, some of them were men of principle and conscience. Milton was an eager opportunist, the tool of a repress-sive, totalitarian regime. He was something of a Latin scholar. Macaulay opined that Milton's poetry in Latin was better than in English.

After the beheading of the King, Milton became the Commonwealth's Secretary for Foreign Tongues, translating official documents into Latin, the *lingua franca* of the day. It was a hack job, far beneath one of his literary talent

*Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise
 To scorn delights and live laborious days*
 —John Milton, *Lycidas* (1637)

As such, Milton worked for the other team. It sounds so trifling to put his party's and the King's opposure this way, but my purpose is to emphasize that we are not dealing with two entities, like sports teams or rival corporations, that enjoy moral equivalency. No, the King's opponents were not the 'loyal opposition'. It is an oversimplification, but not a gross exaggeration, to say that Charles and the side of right were noble and good, while those led by Cromwell were scheming, dishonest, and bad. They were revolutionaries and rebels, sometimes necessary rôles it is true, but there is often insufficient rationale to justify such disruptive behavior. This, in fact, is the very point John Keble makes in his well-known sermon for Royal Martyr Day, 1831, "The Danger of Sympathizing with Rebellion". Rebellion may begin with a legitimate grievance, but it doesn't stay that way.

Milton lived from 1608 to 1674, was married three times, and had three daughters by his first wife. He displayed scholastic ability at Christ's College, Cambridge before he was twenty, and decided not to pursue the clerical career he had sought because he rebelled against trends in the church, it is often said, 'the church under Laud'; not strictly true as Laud was still in his ascendancy, although Charles had already acceded to the throne.

Our poet thus chose a literary life. Thumbing his nose at the authorities surely made him feel good; it began the rebellious, notable anticlerical theme† that characterized him during his life. He took the 'grand tour' in Italy at age 29. Upon his return he became involved in agitation against Episcopacy, in favor of divorce, in support of freedom of the press *, especially against the king and in favor of the rebels, whom he joined in 1649, beginning to write in defense of the regicide, that it was justifiable and even desirable. The Church's Episcopal government, for which Charles would give his life, Milton saw as tyranny. He saw life-long marriage as oppressive, a clerical invention. He rebelled against order itself and was far 'advanced' compared to his nominal allies; he surely abhorred their piety. He was at heart an anarchist. Later in life his

THE first organizational meeting to form a Tennessee Chapter of the Society of King Charles the Martyr will be held at 11 a.m. on Saturday 26 September 2009 at Saint Ann's Church, 419 Woodland St., Nashville, Tennessee. For directions to the church visit www.stannsnashville.org. For more information contact Greg Smith at 615-310-4765 or by email: gregsmithdtm@charter.net [There are now Eastern and Western Episcopal dioceses in the state, in addition to a central one retaining the name of the original, the Diocese of Tennessee.]

views became even more radical. He had already lost the support of the Presbyterians and would have lost more support or been marginalized altogether had his *Defensio Doctrina Christiana* not been published 150 years posthumously. That 1825 publication occasioned Macaulay's essay on Milton (covered in next installment). Even then it was shocking to many, e.g., to John Keble, who was familiar with Milton's works but had not realized he held such extreme views. Although you might think I am too hard on Milton, the saintly Keble came to the same viewpoint. The King and his opponents were not morally equivalent. Cromwell would go to any length, altering the date on the death warrant over fifty-seven men's signatures, and indeed replacing two of those because those men had absented themselves by the new date. Yes, the end justified the means.

Milton's place in history having been fraudulently fixed by distorted Whig history, school-children for centuries have been taught that Cromwell and his supporters like Milton were early advocates of parliamentary democracy and vanquishers of Divine Right, but Cromwell is not mentioned as a prototype, albeit on a smaller scale, of dictators. Of those who 'know' that Divine Right is bad, few even know what it is. They think that a ruler under Divine Right believes that he has power from God, and that any action taken is thus justified. (The sovereign's protection from lawsuits is hardly obsolete, being reflected in our law today as the doctrine of Sovereign Immunity.) They don't know that the coronation oath is about responsibility, not license. The coronand is anointed—set aside—for his office, and promises to care for and protect the Church and the people of his realm. Charles took his coronation oath seriously. A participant, summarizing the notable aspects of the five-hour ceremony, noted "with what religious solemnity and personal devotion King Charles submitted himself to his hallowing, investiture and Coronation."

Edward Hyde, the Earl of Clarendon, was very close to Charles I. He was his minister, rather like the U.S. President's Chief of Staff, but he was no toady, having sat in both the Short and Long Parliaments and in opposition until 1641. After loyally serving Charles I, who greatly valued him for his impartiality, he followed the legitimate king into exile, serving Charles II as lord chancellor and chief minister from 1658, and as chancellor of Oxford University from 1660. After a falling out with the King he was impeached and in 1667 went into exile in France, the 'fall guy' for military failure in Holland. It was a blessing to us, because whilst in exile, he wrote his authoritative *History of the Great Rebellion* and his autobiography, largely incorporated into later editions of the *History*. Clarendon had no axe to grind for the Charleses. He wrote not for praise but for posterity, saying about King Charles:

"In that very hour when he was thus wickedly murdered in the sight of the sun, [Charles] had as great a share in the hearts and affections of his subjects in general, was as much beloved, esteemed, and longed for by the people in general of the three nations, as any of his predecessors had ever been. . . . [He] was the worthiest gentleman, the best master, the best friend, the best husband, the best father, and the best Christian, that the age in which he lived produced."

—Lord Clarendon, *History of the Great Rebellion*, published first in 1702-4 but in no proper edition until 1888 (acc. to *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, 4th Ed., 1967). For two centuries it was unavailable to refute 'Whig history.

Anyone who has read Sir Winston Churchill or heard his legendary speeches knows that he was blunt, as blunt as his visage when clenching a cigar in his jaw, plainspoken and outspoken. He also had the benefit of three centuries' perspective on the XVII and closeness to the atrocious acts of XX Century dictators when he wrote about Charles. (In contrast, Harry Truman, haberdasher and machine politician yet a surprisingly successful U.S. President, was so clueless regarding European history that he said Charles I was a despot like Stalin and Hitler.) Concerning the sentencing and death of Charles, Churchill wrote as follows:

"This was not only the killing of a king, but the killing of a king who at that time represented the will and traditions of almost the whole British nation.

". . . In the end [Charles] stood against an army which had destroyed all Parliamentary government, and was about to plunge England into a tyranny at once more irresistible and more petty than any seen before or since. He did not flinch in any respect from the causes in which he believed. . . . He adhered unswervingly to the Prayer Book of the Reformed Church and to the Episcopacy, with which he conceived Christianity was interwoven."

— Sir Winston Churchill, *The New World*, 1956 (Vol. 2 of *The History of the English Speaking Peoples*). His pellucid words merit reading and rereading.

After providing that background, I now wish to mention a word Milton coined, assuredly one of his more notable achievements. It is a word I much like: 'Pandemonium'. Its etymology, "full of demons", is perfectly suited to its first use, being in fact literally the case, while the sound of the word suggests noise, chaos, and tumult, characteristics of that of which it is the name. Ironically, the very same properties also characterize anarchy. Such powerful suggestion of what it stands for is more difficult for a word to achieve than is onomatopoeia. In its original meaning and first definition, it is capitalized. Pandemonium is the name of the capital city of Hell.

Milton did not understand, but should have, that order is Godly, anarchy, hellish. Had he understood, he would have found alliance with the rebels impossible.

Milton became an irritable old coot. Around the time of the Restoration, after the death of his second wife, as he went blind, he taught his three daughters to read various foreign languages to aid his studies. He was harsh and grumpy to them, and they were disrespectful to him in return. It must have been quite a scene, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, the cast recruited from the Tower of Babel. After all, that rebel was never of an irenic kidney. Unlike the program on NPR, the daughters' reading aloud wasn't very enjoyable, and not only because of the invective in the air. It was because they were taught phonetically, presumably due to the press of time: Hence none could understand what she or her sisters read!

Milton is regarded by many people as harmless, a pious old blind guy, but this was simply not the case. First off, he was not pious, but an iconoclast by nature. Lee Hopkins told me that Aldous Huxley considered Dante and Milton to have been the most ill-tempered of poets. Apart from his temperament, Milton surely was no Dante *redivivus*, but a bit of an opportunist, rather unlike a scholar seeking Wisdom and Truth. (Of course, Dante used satire and even ridicule to make his points about contemporary secular and ecclesiastical politics, which were often the same in those days. Neither Dante nor Milton was coarse, but Dante seems more elegant. But perhaps that's the Italian language.) Personally, I get the sense of Milton's trying to craft his prose or verse to suit his ends, rather than letting inspiration guide him. As a result of letting his feelings get out of control, he became more like a political propagandist, a party hack who was so enraged by the Restoration of Church and Crown, a devastating defeat for the 'Protectorate' and 'Commonwealth', a humiliating popular vote of no confidence—that it didn't just ruin his whole day, it ruined the entire remainder of his life. After all, the Commonwealth was paradise; in a sense each symbolized the other: To me, *Paradise Lost* is an allegory and *Paradise Regained*, a fantasy. Their underlying meaning is skilfully muted amidst the poetry of these highly admired classics

With the foregoing as context, we'll go back eleven years, to the beheading of King Charles I. This audacious act punctuated the end of the conflict called the "Great Rebellion" or "Civil War" and ushered in the bleak, gray, repressive, eleven year interregnum, at the beginning of which it was Milton's lot to be selected by the new régime to write a book to counter the martyred King Charles's surprisingly successful—embarrassingly so, to the rebels—book, entitled ΕΙΚΩΝ ΒΑΣΙΛΙΚΗ (*Eikon Basilike*, The Image of the King).

[This essay will continue in a future issue of the *EMAIL COMMUNIQUE*. Thanks to Lee Hopkins for bringing to my attention the lines from Milton's *Lycidas* and Aldous Huxley's observation about Dante and Milton.]

* ☞ Did Milton support freedom of the press when his side was in power? That's a fair (rhetorical) question, isn't it?

† Milton's poem, "On the New Forces of Conscience under the Long Parliament" written in 1646, after the episcopate had been outlawed, shows his anticlericalism directed toward those of his own party:

"Because you have thrown off your Prelate Lord,/And with stiff vows renounced his Liturgy,/To seize the widowed whore Plurality,/From them whose sin ye envied, not abhorred, . . . But we do hope to find out all your tricks,/. . . worse than those of Trent,/. . . That . . . the Parliament/ . . . When they shall read this clearly in your charge:/New *Presbyter* is but old Priest writ large."

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REMEMBER!