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Freedom to Fall: Milton's Christ, *Supernatural*'s Castiel, and the Secularity of Choice

By Cassidy Trudeau

Introduction: Defining Secularity

"I'm the one who gripped you tight and raised you from perdition."

With Castiel's first appearance in CW's *Supernatural* (2005-present), he ushered in the introduction of angelic lore to the show's canon. Before Castiel's entrance in season four's premiere, "Lazarus Rising," the cult television show's depiction of religious imagery did not focus on the divine, but creatures posing as the divine. Hell and demons existed in the canon, but Sam and Dean Winchester battled with their religious faith early on in show. Creatures that appeared to be divine, whether they indicated the presence of God like in the episode "Faith" (1.12) or angels in "Houses of Holy" (2.13), turned out to be reapers and ghosts. These narrative decisions created a focus on the power of familial ties and free will, rather than the power of Christian divinity. Religious imagery was simply used as a plot device. However, a Christian mythos linking together previous episodes became obvious after "Lazarus Rising" and the rest of season four aired. Sam Winchester's psychic abilities (specifically the ability to exorcise demons with his mind) and his addiction to demon blood prepared him to become Lucifer's "true vessel"—the only mortal body capable of containing the might of an archangel. In juxtaposition, Dean's actions—such as selling his soul to save Sam's life, his forty years spent in Hell, and his eventual resurrection—anoointed him as the Righteous Man, or Michael's true vessel. The Winchesters' destinies are to be the tools of the Apocalypse. *Supernatural* utilizes religious allusions as rhetorical devices but focuses on themes of faith in family over the divine and the strength of free will.

Religious imagery, length, and theme of free will connect *Supernatural* to John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Milton's work explores the definition of free will within the framework of predestination and depicts familial relationships between Satan, The Son, and God to establish a tradition in which divinity is humanized. Milton attempts to justify God through these themes, specifically portraying divinity positively to foster absolute faith in his readers. In comparison, *Supernatural*'s disregard for God's grace and focus on humanity's importance over divinity appears secular. However, to be "secular" in a modern context is to be removed from religion. *Supernatural* and its connection to a religious epic like *Paradise Lost* subverts this concept of secularity.

Such a subversion is not new, though. In the introduction to *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor establishes three definitions of secularity: 1) removal from God in public spaces, 2) the disintegration of religious practice, and 3) belief in God has become one of many options people can rationally choose between. The first two definitions align with a basic understanding of secularity. When the third definition is broken down, there are two different eras of thought. The first is the "naïve" era in which Christianity is assumed. I refer to this as absolute faith. The second is the "reflective" era. Taylor describes this era the time period "in which faith, even for the staunchest believer, is one human possibility among others" (Taylor 3). When Taylor speaks of choice, this includes faiths outside Christianity. I refer to this era as humanism—which Taylor describes as "accepting no final goals beyond human flourishing, nor any allegiance to anything beyond this flourishing" (Taylor 3). *Paradise Lost*, as a text, focuses on absolute faith, as demonstrated by Milton's intention. *Supernatural*, however, posits humanism as the ultimate choice. The Winchesters, and eventually Castiel, put the lives of others before themselves. The Winchester philosophy is that humanity, despite its flaws, is worth saving. *Supernatural* is an

encapsulation of Taylor's definition of secularity and Milton's idea that Christianity hinges on free will gifted from God—the *freedom to fall*.

Paradise Lost as a text functions as the turning point for what *Supernatural* accomplishes thematically. In “No More Mr. Nice Angel: Angelic Ethics from *Paradise Lost* to *Supernatural*,” Scott Culpepper catalogs the thematic connections and alterations of angelic depictions from medieval texts to *Supernatural*. Milton's *Paradise Lost* is where Culpepper pauses and gestures towards a change in portrayal of the divine, showing that human characteristics in God, The Son, and Satan set the foundation for future texts to do the same. Culpepper refrains from making any explicit claims about what these connections across time and medium mean, but through his chronological history of texts he implicitly argues that our perception of the religious and the imagery tied to it has shifted over time.

The shift from *Paradise Lost*'s utilization of anthropopathy to inspire absolute faith to *Supernatural*'s utilization of anthropopathy for humanism is demonstrated by Lauren Holder's dissertation “Common Christs: Christ Figures, American Christianity, and Sacrifice on Cult Television.” At one point, Holder discusses how texts such as *The X-Files*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and *Supernatural* are able to invoke Christian topoi, like the Christ-figure, without being inherently religious due to the fact Christian imagery is ingrained within popular culture. This demonstrates how *Supernatural* is a secularly ambiguous text. Such collective memory allows for the alteration of these Christian topoi, as Holder demonstrates with her definition of the Common Christ: “Common Christ[s]... are people who are less likely to be the image of sinless perfection and, more often, violent and profane saviors who do not always repent of their sinful ways” (Holder 2). While I argue that *Supernatural* is a thematic revision of *Paradise Lost*, the canon lacks a Christ figure throughout all fourteen (current) seasons. The absence of Christ as a

character is not like God's because Christ is never mentioned. Christ is not an actual character who influences the tone and development of the text through absence. He is simply left out of the text. Due to this absence, many definitions of the Christ-figure can be inferred from *Supernatural's* canon. Holder analyzes Dean as the Common Christ. Dean's vulgarity, violence, and repeated sacrifices show that he fulfills Holder's definition. I do not disagree with her analysis. However, Holder overlooks Milton's influence on *Supernatural's* treatment of the divine and how his influence reflects cultural changes. Castiel's function as a "Miltonic" Christ-figure addresses issues of secularity and cultural meaning.

Castiel begins his journey as an "angel of the Lord," then deliberately falls from grace in order to stop the Apocalypse with the Winchesters. Castiel showcases Milton's themes—use of free will and divine characters with human emotions—and in doing so, demonstrates Taylor's two eras of thought. Castiel, as the Miltonic Christ-figure, personifies the shift in religious thinking from absolute faith to humanism. I define Miltonic Christ-figure through close readings of *Paradise Lost* and analyze Castiel's character arc in seasons four and five within the definition I cultivate to support my argument.¹

Not Your Average Christ

In *Paradise Lost*, Milton shifts focus from Satan's journey to corrupt man, Heaven's attempts to save man, and man's repentance. I focus primarily on scenes directly associated with the Son to create a definition of the Miltonic Christ-figure. Milton shapes the depiction of the Son in *Paradise Lost*, as well as other Christian imagery, with his religious and political

¹ For the sake of this paper, I contain Castiel's character arc within seasons four and five. I do so because of the finality of season five as the intended series finale. I also do it because my arguments become more complicated due to the canon of later seasons. For instance, Castiel's attempt to be God in season 7. These are interesting complications to my argument I wish to revisit in a larger piece of work.

opinions. In one of his other works, *Christian Doctrine*, Milton states that “God is always described or outlined not as he really is but in such a way as will make him conceivable to us . . . in my opinion, then, theologians do not need to employ anthropopathy, or the ascription of human feelings to God” (Milton 402). In *Paradise Lost*—a text he wrote around the same time as *Christian Doctrine*—God is portrayed as a predominantly aloof, powerful, and omnipotent figure. However, *Paradise Lost*’s exploration of compassion, doubt, and free will through the characterization of the divine cast establishes a foundation of anthropopathy later texts build upon. *Supernatural* projects familial dynamics onto divine characters, including God (otherwise known as the writer, Chuck).

Milton’s theology distinguishes itself from other Christian-based texts due to anti-trinitarianism. Orthodox belief based on the Nicene Creed holds onto a standard of the Holy Trinity, which balances God, the Incarnation (God’s human form, Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit as equal. Milton’s work creates a generational hierarchy in which the Begotten Son is below the Father.² The Son differs from the Incarnation because he has yet to take on a human form and is not God himself. He is the Word and is “begotten” his godly grace, shown in the lines, “Into thee such virtue and grace / Immense [God has] transfused, that all may know / In heav’n and hell thy power above compare” (Milton VI.703-705). This generational separation between God and the Son allows for Milton to focus on modeling his ideas around free will. The Son is bestowed free will, just like Satan, all angels, and humanity. God defines free will as creation being made “just and right, / Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall.” (Milton III. 97-98). Milton’s model for free will is three part: 1) perfection demonstrated by the Son, 2)

² In the *Christine Doctrine*, Milton wrote: “For a real son is not of the same age as his father, still less of the same numerical essence: otherwise father and son would be one person. This particular Father begot his Son not from any natural necessity but of his own free will: a method more excellent and more in keeping with paternal dignity, especially as this Father is God.”

abuse demonstrated by Satan, and 3) appropriate repentance demonstrated by Adam and Eve. The Son utilizes his free will not to fall through sin, but to volunteer himself as the savior of humanity. Satan abuses free will by continuously enacting harm upon Heaven and humanity. Satan's use of free will is malicious. Adam and Eve sin and fall when tempted by Satan, but they use their free will to repent for their sins. They do not abuse their free will and continue to have faith in God. The alignments Milton directs his readers towards are obvious—readers strive to emulate the Son, and when they fail, they repent—but Milton portrays these models through the character arcs of Adam and Eve, Satan, and The Son. The gift of *choice* is the ultimate base of these characters' personalities. In the case of the divine characters, such as the Son, these characteristics are anthropopathic and eventually morphs into the tradition of whole narratives revolving around free will.

Milton's ascription of human characteristics and feelings to divine characters, specifically the Son, is best shown through the voluntary fall. Milton dedicates an entire scene in Book III to describe how the Son chooses to fall and save humanity from sin. After God proclaims to all of Heaven that Satan will tempt Man into sin, the Son, asks if God will allow him to succeed, "Or wilt thou thyself / Abolish thy creation, and unmake / For him, what for thy glory thou hast made?" (Milton III. 162-164). Milton poses these questions through the Son's dialogue with a heightened level of anxiety. The words "thyself" (referring to God) and "unmake" are singular in their presence on the page, magnifying the question so it stands out from the surrounding language. God's ability to create gives him power and glory, while humanity's corruption ultimately weakens it. Humanity no longer appears in God's image, but as something that God could destroy. The diction succinctly expresses the Son's own thoughts and the underlying purpose of the entire poem: "to justify the ways of God to man." (Milton I. 26). The Son's

questions reflect humanity's own, humbling his character soon after his introduction into the narrative. God answers the Son's, and thus, humanity's questions, when he proclaims:

[man] with his whole posterity must die,

Die he or justice must; unless for him some other able, and as willing, pay

The rigid satisfaction, death for death.

Say heav'nly Powers, where shall we find such love,

Which of ye will be mortal to redeem

Man's mortal crime, and just th' unjust to save

Dwells in all heaven charity so dear? (Milton III. 209-216)

God's dialogue depicts the familiar patterns of the Christ-figure archetype. There is sacrifice, death for sin. The scene works to portray Milton's beliefs on free will in the presence of an omnipotent God. Milton frames this in the *Christian Doctrine* by stating, "By virtue of his wisdom, God decreed the creation of angels and men as beings gifted with reason and thus with free will. At the same time he foresaw the direction in which they would tend when they used this absolutely unimpaired freedom. What then? Shall we say that God's providence or foreknowledge imposes any necessity upon them? Certainly not" (Milton 405). God can foresee the future; he knows of Man's fall just as surely as he does the Son's. However, the destination of the Son (or any other one of God's creations) does not happen because God foresees it, but simply due to choices made through free will. God remains removed from these actions. Milton justifies God through dialogue and physicality. By heightening the compassion present in the Son's character, Milton further glorifies his sacrifice and humanity. The Messiah King and his saviorism is not a given in *Paradise Lost*. While this

compassion is not void of violence, shown later in *Paradise Lost*, it does appear human. The Son loves humanity as he does God, shown by his decision to voluntarily fall. The Son is not void of emotion like the Father Milton wishes to create, exaggerating the potency of the sacrifice and establishing the foundation later Miltonic Christ-figures, such as Castiel, are based upon.

Milton continues the momentum of the scene through the Son's speech. He says, "I offer, on me let thine anger fall; /Account me man; I for his sake will leave / Thy bosom, and this glory next to thee / Freely put off, and for him lastly die / Well pleased," (Milton III. 237-241). These lines show that the Son in *Paradise Lost* does not begin as a mortal figure whose purity and sacrifice cleanses humanity. Instead, his origin is divine. The sacrifice gains poignancy because the Son leaves the beauty of Heaven and experiences mortality. The enjambment emphasizes the loss of God's grace. The Son's own vulnerability at the loss the Father is heightened by the line, "on me let Death wreck all his rage" (Milton III. 241). God's wrath now accompanies Death's to emphasize the violence of the future Passion. The fact the Son voluntarily offers himself to this violence highlights the strength of his compassion. Milton corrals this violence and vulnerability with more components of the Christ-figure in the Son's speech:

But I shall rise victorious, and subdue	250
My vanquisher, spoiled of his vaunted spoil;	
Death his death's wound shall then receive, and stoop	
Inglorious, of his mortal sting disarmed.	
I through the ample air in triumph high	
Shall lead hell captive maugre hell, and show	255
The powers of darkness bound. Though at the sight	
Pleased, out of heaven shalt look down and smile,	

While by thee raised I ruin all my foes,
 Death last, and with his carcass glut the grave:
 Then with the multitude of my redeemed 260
 Shall enter heaven long absent, and return (Milton III. 250-261).

These images connect to the patterns of the literary Christ-figure based on Biblical canon. Christ rises from the dead after the Passion to defeat Death, allowing for souls to enter Heaven. It is due to Christ's sacrifice that souls can return "redeemed" with him to Heaven. These connections, while consistent across medium and time in the form of the Christ archetype, are not static. They develop, as seen in Lauren Holder's definition of the Common Christ, "people who are less likely to be the image of sinless perfection and, more often, violent and profane saviors who do not always repent of their sinful ways" (Holder 2). These Common Christs still meet the major criteria of the archetype; they die as a sacrifice and are resurrected. Milton's Christ-figure follows the same patterns, but on a more physical level. Milton takes the metaphorical battles against Death and Sin and physicalizes them through personification. The Son is resurrected, which "subdues" his "vanquisher." This resurrection *wounds* Death, gesturing to the personification of the abstract. With Death defeated, the Son continues to "ruin his foes." The imagery of "darkness bound" is victorious in nature, despite the implicated violence and power involved. These lines implicitly posture what Milton's Christ promises: there's a compassionate savior who *physically* protects humanity from evil. The physicality of the future fall of the Son in *Paradise Lost* is rewritten and intensified in future texts like *Supernatural*.

The physicality Milton's Christ embodies continues when he is anointed as the Messiah King. God decides to send The Son to speak with Adam and Eve about the Original Sin—
 "Whom send I to judge them? Whom but thee / Vicegerent Son, to thee I have transferred / All

judgement, whether in heav'n, or earth, or hell" (Milton X. 53-55). God transfers his power to the Son, utilizing him as the Word with which he speaks to humanity. The Son then goes to "judge / On earth these thy transgressors" (Milton X. 71-72). The Son's position of bestowed power reminds us of the hierarchy between Father and Son, but also gives him power later Christ-figures mimic.

In these sections, it is clear that Milton's work is not secular by any definition, including Taylor's. *Paradise Lost* does not remove God from its lines; Milton embraces and preaches Christianity. He assumes absolute faith of his readership. The text exists within the naïve era. However, Milton introduces the humanization of divine characters, specifically the Christ figure, into literary tradition. *Supernatural*, and other similar texts continue Milton's themes and questions as "secular" media in the reflective era.

"I'm an angel, you ass:" Castiel's Narrative

Supernatural embodies aspects of Milton's work, including focus on free will and anthropopathy. As the Miltonic Christ-figure, Castiel personifies the shift from absolute faith *Paradise Lost* represents to humanism. To fully encapsulate how Castiel's character does so, I analyze his function as a prototype. Prototype, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is "the first or primary type of a person or thing; an original on which something is modelled or from which it is derived." This definition is similar to archetype. Archetypes stem from Jungian theory; they "represent psychic patterns of inherited behavior and are thus distinguished from instincts, which are physical impulses toward action." (Feist 603). Prototype is the original set of patterns Jung defines as the basis for archetypes.

However, I utilize a different definition of prototype from Christine Downing's article *Typology and the Literary Christ-figure: A Critique*. Instead of being the *literal* primary type from which the rest are derived, Downing's prototype appears later in time. Readers believe that prototypes are the first iterations of archetypes due to their dominance. The prototype appears dominant in history because it fulfills the promises of the archetype. Her example is Moses versus Christ. Moses is a prophet archetype because he speaks for God, acts out miracles, and leads the Israelites to the promised land. He establishes a set of promises for God like compassion and freedom from hardship. Christ fulfills those promises by taking them a step further. His sacrifice allows everyone entrance into Heaven for the rest of eternity. Christ's actions are global and spiritual in nature, while Moses's are central and physical. Hence why the term is the Christ-figure and not the Moses-figure, despite the fact Christ chronologically comes after Moses. Within the tradition *Paradise Lost* established, Castiel is the prototype of the Miltonic Christ-figure. Castiel, chronologically, comes later in time, but fulfills the promises Milton's Christ establishes: to save humanity physically from sin through a voluntary fall.

Castiel begins as the Son does in *Paradise Lost*, as a divine figure in Heaven. In "Lazarus Rising" (4.01), Castiel proves his angelic status by showing shadows of his wings. The low angle, bright flash of light, and accompanying thunder visually and audibly demonstrates his power. The canon of the first few episodes define Castiel's position. In "Are You There God, It's Me, Dean Winchester" (4.02), Dean says, "I thought angels were supposed to be guardians. Fluffy wings, halos—you know, Michael Landon. Not dicks."³ Castiel glares at Dean as he

³ When Dean references Michael Landon in this scene, he calls attention to previous depictions of angels in popular culture. Culpepper summarized, "the premise of *Highway to Heaven* was that Jonathan Smith (Michael Landon) must earn back his wings because he had committed some unspecified offense that causes him to lose his wings. On Earth, he meets Mark Gordon (Victor French), who becomes his partner and friend" (Culpepper 26). The reference in *Supernatural* connects to Culpepper's own claims: that Milton helps launch a theme of humanizing divine characters.

responds, “Read the Bible. Angels are warriors of God. I’m a soldier.” These quotes define how angels function within the *Supernatural* canon in these beginning episodes. The Heavenly Host is militarized. They are powerful, aloof, and demand respect. Castiel’s assertion about angelic nature is reminiscent of Milton’s opinions of anthropopathy. However, like *Paradise Lost*, *Supernatural* is anthropopathic in nature. This episode also introduces the familial dynamics the angels use to describe their relationships with each other and God. They refer to one another as brothers and sisters—Castiel says that he lost “six brothers” in this same conversation—and God as Dad. Castiel is generationally separate from God, following the theology Milton establishes in *Christian Doctrine* and *Paradise Lost*.

Castiel further emulates the Son, and distinguishes *Supernatural* as another anthropopathic text, due to his love of humanity. Castiel demonstrates this similarity through his interactions with Uriel starting in “It’s the Great Pumpkin, Sam Winchester” (4.07). Through Uriel’s character, the showrunners of *Supernatural* hint at the corruption of the heavenly host, an important distinction from Milton’s divine cast. Milton depicts Uriel as “one of the sev’n / Who in God’s presence, nearest to his throne / Stand ready at command”—Uriel is the archangel that watches over Earth from the Sun (Milton III. 648-653). Uriel says that “to witness with thine eyes what some perhaps/Contented with report hear only in heav’n: / For wonderful indeed are all his works, / Pleasant to know, and worthiest to be all” (Milton III. 700-703). Uriel feels blessed to watch over humanity from the sun, and comments that humanity is “wonderful.” Uriel speaks highly of humanity, of God and all his creations. He does not appear to work against divine providence in this instance, and instead upholds it by warning Gabriel of Satan’s descent into Eden.

In *Supernatural*, however, Uriel takes on a very different role. Instead of being an archangel, Uriel is considered a “specialist” of unknown rank. The military language used invokes violent and active associations, unlike the passive viewer of humanity Uriel represents in *Paradise Lost*. During “It’s the Great Pumpkin, Sam Winchester” (4.07), Castiel and Uriel are sent by Heaven to wipe out a town and prevent the raising of Samhain. The raising of Samhain is one of the 66 seals that unlock Lucifer’s cage in Hell. Their plan would kill thousands of innocents, which Dean and Sam, as defenders of humanity, will not allow. Ultimately, Uriel and Castiel step back so the Winchesters can try to save the seal and the town in time. Uriel claims that they are following orders from a “mud monkey” and that humans are “savages, just plumping on two legs.” Castiel admonishes him for these statements, claiming that Uriel is “close to blasphemy.” The difference in Uriel’s personalities across texts emphasizes Castiel’s role as the defender and lover of humanity, further aligning him with the Miltonic Christ. In the *Supernatural* canon, God falls into the archetype of the absent father (another anthropopathic association and perpetuation of the generational hierarchy). Uriel, upset by his Father’s neglectful nature, reveals that he follows Lucifer in “On the Head of a Pin” (4.16). Dialogue like, “no will. No wrath. No God” emphasizes Uriel’s anger. He claims that Satan attempted to defend angel kind and was punished unjustly for it. Uriel attempts to persuade Castiel to join him, but Castiel refuses. Before this moment, when Castiel and Uriel are portrayed together on screen, Uriel is on the right and Castiel on the left. Characters placed on the left side of the screen are antagonists in the scene. Castiel works against Uriel and all of Heaven’s beliefs. When it is revealed that Uriel is working with Lucifer, however, the power shifts. Castiel is now on the right, the protagonist and defender of humanity. He upholds the true nature of Heaven, to serve God. Castiel remains righteous like the Son; he is still firmly rooted in absolute faith. Uriel’s

moral corrosion reveals a much larger problem, though: both Heaven and Hell have their own agendas, but each involve an investment in the Apocalypse. Neither Heaven nor Hell care about human lives that will be lost in the process. This alteration in divine portrayal from *Paradise Lost* inspires more revisions of Miltonic ideas, like the influence of doubt in the framework of free will.

Castiel moves closer to humanism in his character arc by expressing doubt. In “It’s the Great Pumpkin, Sam Winchester” (4.07) Castiel claims that he is not “a hammer, as you say. [He has] questions, [he has] doubts.” Despite his earlier statement that he is a soldier, Castiel now rewrites himself as a character with free will. He is not a tool of God that acts out divine providence. In “On the Head of a Pin” (4.16), Castiel tells Anna, an angel who had been human before, that he is “considering disobedience.”⁴ When he fails to articulate what he is feeling, Anna says, “What you’re feeling? It’s called doubt.” These confessions of Castiel’s moral dilemmas are partnered with Uriel’s symbolic corruption. Castiel exhibits more human feelings in the face of the new threat to humanity. This anthropopathy mimics what Milton inadvertently creates in *Paradise Lost*, because doubt is a human characteristic. Milton doesn’t write explicitly about doubt, but physicalizes it through Satan’s speech in Book IV. Satan questions God’s decisions and his place in a world foreseen by God. Doubt influences the rational used to make decisions (given by the gift of free will). For Satan, he embraces evil instead of repentance—“Farewell remorse: all good to me is lost; / Evil be thou my good” (Milton IV. 108-109). For Castiel, the doubt is not in “God” as a perfect divine Father in this moment, but the corrupt

⁴ Anna was once an angel, Castiel’s garrison leader in fact. She ripped out her grace and fell. As a human, she forgot her angelic past. However, she begins to have visions of the Apocalypse. She meets the Winchesters, restores her grace, and attempts to fulfill Heaven’s agenda.

Heaven he believed to be holy. Doubt enables Castiel's fall from grace, demonstrating a transition from absolute faith to humanism.

Castiel's progressive movement towards humanism is enabled through his confrontations with the Winchesters. He learns about humanity and the power of free will through them. In "Lucifer Rising" (4.22), Dean confronts Castiel with three options: side with corrupt Heaven, Lucifer and Hell, or Sam and Dean, who represent all of humanity. Castiel ponders this choice, saying "What is so worth saving? I see nothing but pain here. I see inside you. I see your guilt, your anger, confusion. In paradise, all is forgiven. You'll be at peace." Castiel refers to the Last Judgement, but with no named Christ and an absent God to raise the dead and lead them to the Promised Land, the promise of paradise is empty. The Apocalypse in *Supernatural* has higher stakes because it does not guarantee Heaven. Dean entreats Castiel to understand that "there is a right and there is a wrong" in this scenario, which inspires Castiel to act. By choosing to help the Winchesters, Castiel "rebels" and falls from grace, just as the Son volunteers to fall and die to save humanity. In the process of assisting the Winchesters, he is slaughtered by the archangel Raphael. However, he is resurrected, albeit with limited angelic power because he is ostracized from Heaven. Castiel's fall allows him to judge the "transgressors" of *Supernatural*, the divine characters who are indifferent to humanity's destruction. The active nature of Castiel's rebellion imitates the Son's physical actions (defeating Death and Sin, judging Adam and Eve in Eden). Before this point, Castiel balanced on the precipice between absolute faith and humanism. His realization as the Christ-figure (sacrifice, death, and resurrection) shows that he has shifted into humanism.

By moving forward from one era of thought to another, Castiel falls from grace. His rebellion counteracts Milton's intent to justify God. *Supernatural* does not ignore the dilemma of

portraying rebellion against divine providence. In “Free to Be You and Me” (5.03), Castiel speaks with Raphael about his search for God. Castiel genuinely believes that his resurrection was orchestrated by God, but Raphael counters him by claiming God is long gone and Lucifer might have raised him. While this postures Castiel as a satanic figure, Castiel’s use of free will is only considered bad in the eyes of Heaven simply because he doesn’t follow orders. Heaven’s opinion of Castiel holds little weight within the canon because of its corruption and the absence of God. Castiel’s righteousness is solidified in “Abandon All Hope” (5.10). A high angle shot shows Castiel standing on a street gazing up at a window. On the right half of the screen is a marquee that reads “JESUS SAVES.” When Castiel enters this building, Lucifer traps him in holy fire. Lucifer never claims to have raised Castiel. Instead, he discusses their similarities.

I rebelled, I was cast out. You rebelled, you were cast out. Almost all of heaven wants to see me dead, and if they succeed, guess what? You're their new public enemy number one. We're on the same side, like it or not, so why not just serve your own best interests? Which in this case just happen to be mine? (5.10)

The placement of the words “Jesus Saves” in the *mise-en-scène* aligns its positive meaning with Castiel’s character. The diagonal sight line created by the bottom of the marquee instructs the viewer to make this association by leading the viewer’s eyes from the words to Castiel in the center of the shot. As Castiel enters the conversation with Lucifer, the viewer has already interpreted Castiel as a Christ-figure. Lucifer’s speech then appears as a temptation to an ultimately pure and powerful character. This dynamic has been portrayed before in the Temptation of Christ. In Luke 4:1-2, “Jesus... was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil.” One of the temptations is for power, when the devil says “To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give

it to anyone I please. If you, then will worship me, it will all be yours” (Luke 4:6-7). Lucifer mimics the nature of this temptation by offering Castiel a similar amount of power, further posturing Castiel as Christ when he rejects. Castiel continues to use his free will to protect humanity, particularly its symbols, Sam and Dean Winchester. Joshua, the only angel still able to communicate with God, tells the Winchesters that God did in fact raise Castiel from the dead, solidifying his righteousness (“Dark Side of the Moon”). This is further proven when Joshua, the only angel still able to communicate with God, tells the Winchesters that God did in fact raise Castiel (“Dark Side of the Moon”). The Miltonic Christ-figure that Castiel embodies puts faith not in divinity, but humanity. The archetype promises sacrifice and physical saviorism. By putting his faith in humanity, Castiel fulfills these promises and takes them a step further. Castiel fulfills the promise of physical saviorism and sacrifice, taking it a step further by saving humanity from a corrupt divinity set out to destroy it.

Castiel’s status as a prototype is poignant due to the intense nature of his sacrifice. Both Castiel and the Son offer their bodies to violence to protect others from harm. The Son protects humanity from sin, but never has to question the Father or the heavenly host. Castiel not only falls from grace but loses complete faith in the Father. This is shown in “Dark Side of the Moon” (5.16). The scene is set up in a high angle that shows Castiel glaring at the sky. A close-up of Castiel’s face reveals his anger, betrayal, and sadness. His emotions are heightened by the silence before he whispers, “You son of a bitch. I believed in...” In comparison, Castiel’s sacrifice is more wrenching than the Son’s. He loses his home, his family, and his faith in God. Castiel’s arc from absolute faith to humanism is realized because all belief in divinity is destroyed. While this moment is not similar to Milton’s Son, there is a moment in the Bible that shows Castiel’s loss of faith is part of the much larger tradition of the Christ-figure. When Jesus

is on the cross and cries out, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46). Castiel, despite his personification of society’s acceptance of secularity, is aligned with the moral good the Biblical Jesus and Miltonic Christ represent. The anthropopathy strengthens the narrative as a whole. Viewers can embody the nature of the Miltonic Christ-figure on an individual level by aligning with Castiel’s character arc and the Winchesters’ mission.

The Road So Far: What Miltonic themes in *Supernatural* mean

Taylor’s framework of secular thought and definitions—particularly rational choice in which Christianity is simply an option—suspends the CW’s *Supernatural* as a secular epic. The nature of its secularity is demonstrated by the Miltonic themes in its core, and by Castiel. Castiel, as a singular character, actively embodies Miltonic topoi, including the facets of the Christ-figure. By acting as the prototype of this religious figure, he personifies the shift from absolute faith to humanism. Castiel begins as a divine figure who has complete faith in the Father and the Heavenly Host. Through a series of trials, Castiel begins to exhibit human characteristics like compassion, doubt, and use of free will. When Castiel falls to save humanity from a corrupt divinity and Heaven, he represents humanism, one of the options of the reflective era.

The treatment of compassion, doubt, and free will do not just imply *Supernatural* is a revision of *Paradise Lost*. It demonstrates that *Supernatural*, as a secular epic, is the prototype. I have contextualized these themes as strictly Miltonic in nature for the purpose of my argument, but the function of *Supernatural* as a textual prototype reveals the influence of literature on culture. *Paradise Lost* allowed Milton to grapple with theological issues. The text became a basis for conversation. *Supernatural* is a touchstone for understanding and interpreting these same issues in current American culture. Milton provides a launching point in which Biblical

components can be analyzed, explored, rewritten, and justified. *Supernatural* fulfills the promises of this ability by not only paying homage to *Paradise Lost*, but celebrating the new era of religious thought it exists in.

The text's position as a prototype is "ordained" by God in the season five finale, "Swan Song" (5.22). At this point in the series, the viewer knows the character Chuck as a human prophet, whose book series "Supernatural" will later become the Winchester Gospels in the Bible. Later in the series, however, it is revealed that Chuck is God. This changes his lines at the very end of "Swan Song", when he writes, "So what's it all add up to? It's hard to say. But me, I'd say this was a test... for Sam and Dean. And I think they did all right. Up against good, evil, angels, devils, destiny, and God himself, they made their own choice. They chose family. And, well... isn't that kinda the whole point?" This quote contains the layers of meaning, theme, and tone of *Supernatural*. Milton justifies absolute faith to his readers, but *Supernatural* and its God justify humanism. Neither is wrong, *Supernatural*, as a text of the reflective era, simply provides its viewers with choices. This marks it as the prototype of *Paradise Lost*. By ordaining this portrayal, the creators continue Milton's legacy by convincing the viewer to consider these issues. They encourage us all to utilize free will for good.

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