

# MILTON'S *PARADISE LOST*, PURITANISM AND TYPOLOGY

From *The Puritan Origins of the American Self*, by Sacvan Bercovitch

For the seventeenth-century Puritan, *exemplum fidei* denoted a type of Christ; and what he meant by type pertained equally to biography and to history. In its original form, typology was a hermeneutical mode connecting the Old Testament to the New in terms of the life of Jesus. It interpreted the Israelite saints, individually, and the progress of Israel, collectively, as a foreshadowing of the gospel revelation... With the development of hermeneutics, the Church Fathers extended typology to postscriptural persons and events. Sacred history did not end, after all, with the Bible; it became the task of typology to define the course of the church ("spiritual Israel") and of the exemplary Christian life. In this view Christ, the "antitype," stood at the center of history, casting His shadow forward to the end of time as well as backward across the Old Testament. Every believer was a *typus* or *figura Christi*.... (Yale UP, 1975, pg. 36.)

## NOTE BY PROF. VICKI SILVER OF UC IRVINE

Typology as a method is expounded in *Paradise Lost*: 11.315-54; 12.147-51; 12.238-44, 285-314.

<u>Types of Christ/Messiah</u>	<u>Types of Anti-Christ/Satan</u>
Abel (11.429-60)	Cain
Sons of Seth (11.556-97)	Sons of Cain
Enoch (11.638-710)	Giants
Noah (11.712-902)	
Patriarchs (12.13-78)	Nimrod
Abraham (12.105-51)	
Jacob (12.151-63)	
Moses/Aaron (12.169-244)	Pharaoh
Joshua (12.260-67)	
David (12.319-30)	
Disciples (12.485-507)	Prelatical Church (12.507-50)

All the types of Messiah are fulfilled, as both Michael and the narrator take care to point out, in Jesus (12.285-314, 356-71, 386-466), their antitype. More particularly, Adam himself is the type of Christ, that "one greater man" of PL 1.4. This mode of "figural," or prefigurative, reading applies to women (Eve/Mary), and to events (for example, the covenant with Noah anticipates the covenant with Abraham, with Moses, and finally with the New Covenant embodied in Christ's passion and resurrection) or actions (Moses' bringing the Israelites out of Egypt foreshadows Christ's universal redemption of man). Still more pertinent to seventeenth-century history and literature, prefigurative reading applies to seventeenth-century persons and events. So Nimrod, in all likelihood, is a type of Charles the First, if not of Charles the Second as well. The Civil War enjoyed numerous expressions in both Testaments, but none are mentioned in *Paradise Lost* itself.) Perhaps the best example of supra-gospel typology appears in early American literature. America, as conceived by the Protestants who made it their home (the Massachusetts Bay Colony in particular), was at once New Eden and New Jerusalem; the migration itself became an analogue to exodus, to baptism, and to purification of the church. In the hands of Cotton Mather, the governor of the colony, John Winthrop, became the new Nehemiah, or "Nehemias Americanus." For seventeenth-century ideologues, reformers, and sectaries, typology becomes a method of reading not only scripture, but secular history and current events. By comparison with Mather, Milton articulates only the most accepted and orthodox correspondences in *Paradise Lost*. (Note: Samson is a type both of Adam and Christ; cf. Milton's *Samson Agonistes*.)

See also: *The Cambridge History of the Bible* (multivolume, eds. P. R. Ackroyd and C. F. Evans, Cambridge UP, 1975); *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: an Historical Approach* (Jack B. Rogers and Donald K. McKim, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999), and *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (Sacvan Bercovitch, Yale UP, 1975).