

■ England as the Elect Nation in Milton's Polemical Prose*

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Abstract

This paper examines how Milton employs the idea of England as the elect nation in his polemical prose to engage with specific and immediate polemical contexts. Applying the Israelite paradigm, Milton compares England to biblical Israel, regarding his nation as “the” elect nation in the sense that it is elected by and covenanted with God to play a peculiar role in God’s providential plan. Moreover, Milton also utilizes the notion of the elect nation to serve his polemical interests throughout his prose career. In the early 1640s, Milton believed that England was specially chosen by God to initiate the Reformation and called for a further reformation, urging Parliament to extirpate prelacy, to legalize divorce, and to tolerate unlicensed printing. Furthermore, Milton’s concept of national election is intertwined with the idea of individual election: England is elected to certain privileges, and the English people are also blessed with God’s saving grace. *Areopagitica* signals the peak of Milton’s complacent confidence in England as the elect nation—a nation of prophets. However, Milton modified his buoyant optimism about the elect status of England with the doctrine of the remnant in around 1650. To justify the regicide, Milton argued that England was elected to establish the first Commonwealth in Europe in three of his antimonarchical tracts. But after that England ceased to play a leading role in God’s plan; England was not “the” but only “an” elect nation. In Milton’s late polemical prose, England was compared to Israel as God’s covenanted nation in the sense that God

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* The author thanks National Taichung University of Education for sponsoring this research. The author also thanks the two anonymous reviewers for their precious suggestions and insightful comments.

(Received 22 May 2017; Accepted 30 March 2018)

would not forsake England even though the nation had failed the covenant. Once elected and favored by God but now rebellious and treacherous to God, England, like Israel, needed salvation, and God would redeem the nation through the remnant only when they truly repented.

Keywords: elect nation, Israelite paradigm, Milton, national covenant, polemical prose, remnant

Introduction

The topic of the elect nation in early modern English studies has drawn much critical attention. However, scholarly debate has tended to focus on the role John Foxe (1516-87) played in the development of the idea of England as the elect nation; few critics have devoted attention to an overall examination of Milton's view on this issue. Some scholars mention Milton in passing while they consider a broader subject of the idea of the elect nation in the formation of early modern English nationalism. For example, John McKenna claims that Milton, among other Elizabethan and Stuart Puritans, "argued mightily that God was English and England His Elect Nation" (25). Krishan Kumar states "there is no need to deny that [Milton] along with several other Puritan writers saw England as the elect nation" (108). The issue of the elect nation in Milton's works has received more critical attention when scholars investigate Milton's Hebraism or Judaism. The most extensive account of Milton's notion of England as the elect nation is given by Achsah Guibbory's "Milton, Prophet of Israel."¹ Guibbory focuses on Milton's identification of England with biblical Israel and himself with a national prophet. In her discussion on how Milton assumed prophetic voices in his poetry and prose throughout his writing career, Guibbory approaches the topic of the elect nation from a soteriological viewpoint, repeatedly referring to England as "redeemed Israel" (140, 142, 143, 146, 147).

Nevertheless, the soteriological definition of the elect nation could be misleading, as I will illustrate in the next section. This paper, by contrast, adopts a different approach to probe into the issue. I will begin with a survey of the scholarly debate over the issue of England as the elect nation. I will point out that the redemptive view of England's elect status has generated huge critical controversy concerning whether England is "the" or "an" elect nation. I agree that an elect nation should be conceived as a nation elected by and covenanted with God to serve a providential purpose. In this sense, England was *the* elect nation when a unique role was assigned to no other nation but England.

Scanty scholarly attention has been paid to how Milton utilized the idea of the elect nation as a polemical strategy throughout his prose career. I choose to focus on Milton the polemicist rather than Milton the theologian or Milton the historian because I want to demonstrate how Milton's idea of England as the elect

¹ Jeffrey Shoulson and Elizabeth Sauer discuss the idea of England as the elect nation in only a few of Milton's works. Shoulson's *Milton and the Rabbis* only examines *Of Reformation* and *Animadversions* (32-34). Sauer considers *Of Reformation*, *Areopagitica*, *Eikonoklastes*, and *Readie and Easie Way* in her "Milton's Peculiar Nation" (48-50).

nation served as a polemical vehicle rather than a theological doctrine² or a comment on ancient history.³ Moreover, I also intend to discuss Milton's view on the relationship between national and individual election, which has been largely unexplored in past critical discussions. I attempt to examine how Milton's notions of national and individual election changed in different polemical milieux.

Scholarly Debate over the Elect Nation Theory

According to William Haller, John Foxe was the originator of the idea of England as God's elect nation. Haller first proposes his "elect nation theory" in *Liberty and Reformation in the Puritan Revolution* (1955): "All history, according to Foxe's *Actes and Monuments*, centered in the age-long struggle of Christ and Antichrist; the pope was Antichrist; and England, the elect champion of the true faith, was his chosen enemy, especially called by God to be the agent of his predestined overthrow" (19). Later, in *Foxe's Book of Martyrs and the Elect Nation* (1963), Haller holds Foxe responsible for the construction of the idea of England as the nation that "assumed something of the nature of a mystical communion of *chosen* spirits, a *peculiar* people set apart from the rest of mankind" (245; my emphases).⁴

Haller's elect nation theory is built upon the Israelite paradigm⁵—England's identification with biblical Israel as God's elect nation:

That the grounds for such a view of England's place in history were to be looked for first in scripture was, of course, beyond dispute. The will of God had made itself known directly to the people of Israel as to no people before or since. It followed that the

² Milton's theology is most systematically expressed in *De Doctrina Christiana*. It should be noted that most scholars support Miltonic authorship of the posthumously published Latin treatise despite some remaining doubts (Campbell *et al.* 1-4).

³ It is arguable that history can be employed to persuade and move the reader to action, but Milton's *History of Britain* goes beyond the scope of my present paper because the indeterminacy of its audience makes it difficult to evaluate how Milton utilized the book to serve a specific polemical purpose. Should it be placed in a context of its publication in 1670 so that we focus on its Restoration audience (Hamilton 241)? Or should it be put in a context of its composition before the Restoration? Moreover, the posthumous publication of the Digression further complicates the indeterminacy of its audience. The Digression, in which Milton drew parallels between ancient British history and his time, has generally been considered to be part of Book III of *History of Britain* but was never published in Milton's lifetime. Thus, when a truncated edition of the Digression was first printed in 1681, it served not so much Milton's polemical objectives as "Tory political interests in the Exclusion crisis" (Achinstein 205).

⁴ "Chosen" and "peculiar" are synonyms for "elect" (Haller 245; C. Hill, *The English Bible* 269; Sauer, "Milton's Peculiar Nation" 36). Cf. 1Pet. 2:9: "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people" (KJV).

⁵ The term is first used by Michael McGiffert in "God's Controversy with Jacobean England" (1153).

record of Israel's experience was the most authentic and authoritative record of God's will that ever was, and that the history of every other people, notably now the English people, was to be understood only by the light of the record of that chosen nation as brought to fulfillment in Christ and His church. (134)

The first edition of Foxe's *Actes and Monuments*, commonly known as *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, was published in 1563. Scholars generally agree that the Israelite paradigm was a commonplace in Elizabethan England. Patrick Collinson notes that the English people began to speak of the nation as "God's people" in the Elizabethan period (*This England* 169). "Since at least the 1570s," observes Achsah Guibbory, "English people had been describing themselves and England in terms of analogies with biblical Israel" (136). "By the mid-Elizabethan years," marks Theodore Bozeman, "advanced Protestants had learned to portray with a particular intensity their nation's temporal weal and woe in terms of the Israelite paradigm" (*Precisianist Strain* 35). By 1604, states Michael McGiffert, "the Judaic characterizing of God's Englishness, and of England's prominent place under divine watch and ward, had achieved the power of a paradigm" (1152). Alexandra Walsham highlights "the preaching of the Israelite paradigm" in Paul's Cross sermons between 1558 and 1640 (281-82). England, like biblical Israel, was God's elect/chosen/peculiar/covenanted nation.⁶

Haller's elect nation theory soon gained critical attention, and some scholars acknowledged Foxe's contribution to the English Protestants' belief in "God's special providence for England" (Fixler 38), "the historic mission of their role" (Lamont, *Godly Rule* 23), and their "special role as God's champion" (Capp 158). However, recent scholars have traced the nascency of the concept of England as the elect nation back to the fourteenth century and thus refute Haller's praise of Foxe as the originator of the idea (Collinson, *This England* 173; McKenna 27; Kumar 109).⁷

Moreover, Foxe's "assertion of national vocation" (J. Hill 88) has also been questioned by other critics. T. H. L. Parker disagrees with Haller's thesis that "the *Actes and Monuments* is a religionationalistic book designed to give Englishmen the belief that England was a nation chosen by God above all others to do his will" (68). Viggo Olsen agrees with Parker and insists that Foxe never isolated English history from "the universal church" (40). Richard Bauckham, Paul Christianson, Patrick Collinson, Katherine Firth, and David Loewenstein maintain that Foxe's

⁶ For more examples of England as God's chosen nation, see C. Hill, *The English Bible* 264-71.

⁷ Joseph Strayer has shown that France, among European nations, was the first nation to be called the holy kingdom and the French the chosen people in the thirteenth century (300-14). McKenna has demonstrated that English publicists borrowed the idea of the elect nation from France in the fourteenth century (27). Patrick Wormald has even pushed the origin of the idea of England as "an elect nation" back to Venerable Bede (219).

conception of the true Church is “international” (Bauckham 86; Firth 108; Loewenstein 10) or “universal” (Christianson 41; Collinson, *This England* 193). William Lamont later also modifies his assessment of Foxe by pointing out “the intended European dimension” of Foxe’s original work (*Richard Baxter* 14).

Thus, by claiming that Foxe was an internationalist rather than a nationalist, scholars reject Haller’s elect nation theory and argue that Haller’s England was not “the” but “an” elect nation. David Armitage explains that “election, within the Calvinist scheme of double predestination, was no respecter of national boundaries, and the true church of the elect was invisible and eternal rather than visible and earthly” (78-79). Collinson observes that “Foxe explicitly denied that the Church belonged to any single nation” (*This England* 193). The critical consensus is, summarizes Jesse Lander, “if England is elect, it is only as an elect nation within the context of the international protestant church, rather than the singular case that Haller defines” (59). In other words, England as a visible national Church is only one of the protestant churches, and the invisible, true church of the elect comprises believers from not only England but also other protestant nations.⁸

We have seen that the controversy over England as “an” or “the” elect nation has been approached from the Calvinistic view of election, which is closely related to the conception of redemption/salvation. But the soteriological perspective of the elect nation would lead to a question: would God choose a nation (or nations) and grant the nation’s people (or nations’ peoples) eternal life? Perry Miller, in his analysis of the seventeenth-century New England jeremiad, argues that a nation “has no life beyond this world; a whole people are not saved in a lump for believing, but only particular persons” (479). Therefore, the soteriological definition of election is questionable since God would not “elect” or “choose” a nation or state and grant everlasting life to the whole people of the nation or state. In other words, the elect nation is a misnomer if *elect* is understood as redemption/salvation. For Miller, an elect nation does not mean that the whole nation will be redeemed or saved; rather, an elect nation means a nation elected by and covenanted with God, and the national covenant is a covenant of works. Miller’s argument is based on the Calvinistic distinction between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. The covenant of works was first made in the Garden of Eden between God and the prelapsarian Adam, promising life for obedience and death for disobedience. After Adam’s fall, God made a new covenant—the covenant

⁸ Some scholars use typology, instead of the Israelite paradigm, to describe the relationship between ancient Israel and early modern England. Mary Morrissey observes that their use of the term “type” is rather loose (55-56). According to typology, Israel is a *type* of the true Church. But as mentioned above, England was not “the” Church, so it cannot be the *antitype* of Israel. Accordingly, the Israel-England relationship is not typological in the strict sense of the term.

of grace—with Abraham, promising eternal life for faith. The covenant of works is valid for all human beings (since Adam is the father of all men), but the covenant of grace is in force exclusively for the elect individuals (since Abraham is the father of faith).⁹ Accordingly, the covenant of grace is, holds Miller, “founded upon the timeless decree of predestination,” and the individual is “united irrevocably to God,” for salvation is “given for faith and not for works” (479). The national covenant, in contrast, is not an individual but a communal covenant, and thus must be a covenant of works, which does not involve a nation’s “salvation or damnation hereafter, but only concern[s] its present existence” (479). In summary, according to the two-covenant theory, an elect nation is a nation covenanted with God, and the national covenant is a covenant of works not a covenant of grace—the former is about this-worldly reward or punishment for a nation, while the latter is concerned with other-worldly salvation for the faithful elect within all nations.

From this perspective, an elect nation should be understood not as a nation chosen by God to be saved on Judgment Day but as a nation elected by and covenanted with God to fulfill certain purposes on earth. Accordingly, a modified view of Haller’s elect nation theory has been proposed. Richard Helgerson, while criticizing Haller’s theory of Foxe’s nationalism, agrees that Foxe granted England “a quite extraordinary place in the universal scheme” (263). Similarly, David Loades, disagreeing with Haller’s elect nation thesis, acknowledges that Foxe “had a special destiny in mind for the English” (283). Jessie Lander concludes that “Protestant internationalism was not incompatible with a sense of England’s unique role and status” (74). Elizabeth Sauer proposes that “early modern writers conceived of England as both ‘an’ and ‘the’ elect nation, that is, continuous with other peoples and nations professing the Reformed religion, and as specially chosen” (*Milton* 12).

The Idea of England as God’s Elect Nation in Milton’s Early Polemics

In his early polemical prose, Milton, like Foxe, believed that England was specially chosen by God to play a leading role in God’s providential plan. Generally speaking, Milton in the early 1640s revered Wycliffe as the first religious reformer, and thus England was *the* elect nation that initiated the Reformation. For example, in *Of Reformation* (1641), Milton argued that “*Wicklef’s* preaching” served as a light for “all the succeeding *Reformers*” so that England “had this *grace* and *honour* from GOD to bee the first that should set up a Standard for the re-

⁹ For a succinct introduction to the two covenants, see Morgan xx-xxi.

covery of *lost Truth*, and blow the first Evangelick Trumpet to the Nations, holding up, as from a Hill, the new Lampe of saving light to all Christendome” (6). Similarly, in *Animadversions* (1641), Milton claimed that God “had this Iland [England] under the speciall indulgent eye of his providence; and pitying us the first of all other Nations . . . opening our drousie eye-lids leasurly by that glimmering light which *Wicklef*, and his followers dispers’t” (36). In addition, in the preface to the second edition of *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (1644), Milton reminded Parliament that “England hath had this honour vouchsaft from Heav’n to give out Reformation to the World” and that “*Wicklef* . . . open’d the eyes of *Europe* . . . in Religion” (sig. A4r).¹⁰ Likewise, in *Areopagitica* (1644), Milton maintained that England was “chosen before any other, that out of her as out of *Sion* should be proclam’d and sounded forth the first tidings and trumpet of Reformation to all *Europ*” (31). If the “divine and admirable spirit of *Wicklef* had not been suppressed by the prelates, “the glory of reforming all our neighbours had bin compleatly ours” (31). Also, in *Tetrachordon* (1645), Milton reassured that “*Wicklef* that Englishman [was] honor’d of God to be the first preacher of a general reformation to all *Europe*” (91).

The idea of England as the elect nation, however, was not merely a religious belief for Milton; the notion was also utilized to serve a rhetorical purpose. In 1641, Milton participated in the prelacy controversy, and in *Of Reformation* and *Animadversions* he urged England to further the Reformation. Wycliffe was elected by God to launch the Reformation in England, but England’s Reformation was impeded by “the continuall eagernes and extreame diligence of the *Pope* and *Papists*” who had worked so hard “to stop the furtherance of *Reformation*” “for sixe or seven Kings Reignes” (*Of Reformation* 8, 6). Claiming that God was “*Brittains* God,” Milton invited “every true protested *Brittaine* throughout the 3. *Kingdoms*” to recount “the patience and long suffering that God hath us’d towards our blindness and hardness time after time” (*Animadversions* 35-36). Once elected by God to play the leading part in the Reformation, England now had fallen behind other “reformed Churches beyond the seas, the *Grizons*, the *Swisses*, the *Hollanders*, the *French*” (*Of Reformation* 83). Milton reminded his readers that England was God’s elect nation and urged them to continue the unfinished Reformation—to eradicate prelacy in England.

What is more, in the two antiprelatical tracts, Milton expressed his fervent millenarianism, maintaining that England was chosen by God to play a key role in the apocalyptic drama. In *Of Reformation*, Milton identified prelacy with the

¹⁰ In this paper, page numbers concerning *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* refer to the second edition.

Antichrist (62), imploring God deliver England from the bondage of prelacy (88). He exhorted England to abolish prelacy and be prepared for “the Eternall and shortly-expected King” (89). In *Animadversions*, Milton averred that God had certainly “visited this land” and God’s “Kingdome is now at hand, and [God] standing at the dore” (38). Soon all the saints would praise the Lord when God had “settld peace in the Church, and righteous judgment in the Kingdome” (38). The extirpation of episcopacy would complete the Reformation and expedite the coming of the millennial kingdom. Jeffrey Shoulson rightly observes that Milton, like his millenarian contemporaries, “combine[d] the language of apocalypse with the idea of English election” (33).¹¹

But the abolition of episcopacy was only one of the reforms sought by Milton. In *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, Milton urged for reform of marital law. According to Canon law, marriage was a sacrament, and thus divorce was unacceptable as well as unlawful. Milton pleaded with Parliament to seek the elect nation’s further reformation by abrogating sacramental marriage: “Yee have now, doubtlesse by the favour and appointment of God, yee have now in your hands a great and populous Nation to Reform” (sig. A3r). He appealed to the nation: “Let not England, forget her precedence of teaching nations how to live” (sig. A3r). But he also warned Parliament that should England fail in implementing divorce laws, “all hope of true reformation in the state” (sig. A4r) would be gone. Thus, England, though elected by God, would lose its “wonted prerogative, of being the first asserters in every great vindication” (sig. A4v).

Another stumbling block that impeded the accomplishment of the English Reformation was the pre-publication censorship instituted by the Licensing Order of 1643. In *Areopagitica*, Milton employed the idea of England as the elect nation to impel Parliament to repeal the Licensing Order. He admonished Parliament not to repeat the past mistakes made by the “perverse” prelates that had suppressed Wycliffe’s freedom of speech (31). Now England was offered another chance to play a leading role in God’s providential plan, and England had to respond to God’s election: “God is decreeing to begin some new and great period in his Church, ev’n to the reforming of Reformation” (31).

Although Milton believed that England was the elect nation, he did not identify the national covenant exclusively with the covenant of works, as Miller proposes. In *Of Reformation*, Milton cried to God not to turn His back on England: “O thou . . . of thy *free grace* didst motion *Peace*, and termes of Cov’nant with us . . . didst build up this *Britannick Empire* . . . stay us in this felicitie” (87-88). For

¹¹ Also see Sauer, “Milton’s Peculiar Nation” 48.

Milton, the national covenant is also a covenant of grace.

In fact, the applicability of Miller's distinction between the covenant of grace and the national covenant to early modern writings is questionable. Bozeman in "Federal Theology and the 'National Covenant'" observes that there seemed to be "a peculiar blurring of the line between individual and community" in Elizabethan puritanism (389). He contends that the "transit from the individual . . . to the corporate plane . . . was a presbyterian commonplace, a basic reflex of thought" (399). Having examined several Elizabethan presbyterian writings, Bozeman concludes that the Israelite paradigm in Elizabethan England "proved both corporate and personal, national and gracious" (402). Collinson sides with Bozeman in his study of the rhetoric of Paul's Cross sermons and the parliamentary fast sermons. He notes that the "preachers moved imperceptibly between their address to the individual, to the Church, to the nation, and to covenanted groups and remnants within both Church and nation" (*This England* 177). Walsham states that "the national covenant and the covenant of grace were tightly interlaced" in English protestant thought (306). Edward Vallance also regards the national covenant "as incorporating personal and corporate elements and offering both spiritual and temporal punishments and rewards" (32).

Consequently, an elect nation is more than a nation chosen by God to serve a providential purpose; the people of an elect nation are chosen by God for salvation too. For Milton, England was elected to certain privileges, and the English people were also blessed with God's saving grace. But how many Englishmen were blessed with the electing grace? Or, how many Englishmen belonged to the invisible church of the elect? And who were God's elect? In the early 1640s, Milton held high hopes for the majority of the English people to be elected to eternal salvation. One of Milton's habitual uses of the Israelite paradigm in that period is the Exodus parallel: England seeking further reformation is analogized to Israel leaving Egypt and heading to Canaan. In *Of Reformation*, Milton branded the bishops as "Egyptian task-masters of Ceremonies thrust purposely upon the groaning Church to the affliction, and vexation of Gods people" (19-20). In *Animadversions*, Milton asked God: "shouldst thou bring us thus far onward from *Egypt* to destroy us in this Wilderness" (38)? In *Areopagitica*, Milton, as Moses wished all the Israelites were prophets in Num. 11.29, uttered his great expectations: "For now the time seems come, wherein *Moses* the great Prophet may sit in heav'n rejoicing to see that memorable and glorious wish of his fulfill'd, when not only our sev'nty Elders, but all the Lords people are become Prophets" (32). Milton was confident that England would complete the Reformation and become a "Nation of Prophets" (31), a "noble and puissant Nation" (34) just as the Israelites would enter the Promised Land. *Areopagitica* signaled the peak of Milton's com-

placent confidence in England as the elect nation. Of course, Milton understood that England as a visible, national church could not possibly consist of the elect only; he did not think "that all in a Church is to be expected *gold and silver and pretious stones*," and he also assumed that "it is not possible for man to sever the wheat from the tares" (37)¹² until the end of the world. Nevertheless, Milton believed that "there were no small number of as great spirits among us" (33) and envisioned a potential godly nation of prophets.

The Idea of the Elect Nation in Milton's Regicide Polemics

Unfortunately, Milton's high hopes for a nation of prophets in the early 1640s did not last long. In February 1649, within a fortnight after the beheading of King Charles I on 30 January, Milton published *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* to defend the trial of Charles I. In *The Tenure* Milton did not identify his intended audience with the Israelites heading toward the Promised Land. The absence of the Exodus parallel seems somewhat eccentric, since "[t]hroughout the 1640s and 1650s, no story captured the imagination of the godly like this one," observes John Coffey (26). The Israelites in this tract were not praised as a chosen nation but upbraided as a rebellious people "who rejected [God] and his forme of Government to choose a King" (37). The Israelite paradigm had shifted from the Exodus parallel to the exemplum of the Israelites' plea for a king.

It is apparent that Milton's idea of the elect nation had undergone some changes. In *The Tenure* England was still *the* elect nation in the sense that it was elected by God to be a model commonwealth for other nations that "are now labouring to be [England's] followers" (37). Moreover, Milton believed that England would fulfill a providential mission by establishing a Commonwealth that would antecede God's millennial kingdom, as he prayed that the "only just & rightful kingdom . . . may com soon"¹³ at the end of the second edition of *The Tenure* (59).¹⁴

However, Milton was not so optimistic about the elect status of the English people as he expressed in his early polemical prose. In the opening paragraph of *The Tenure*, Milton distinguished "good men," who were "govern'd by reason,"

¹² Allusion to the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares (Matt. 13.24-30).

¹³ Scholars generally regard that kingdom as the millennial kingdom. See Barker 212-13; Fixler 156; C. Hill, *Milton* 282; Lewalski 19; Loewenstein 63-64.

¹⁴ Some of the existent copies of the second edition are dated 1649 and some 1650. Most scholars agree that the first issue of the second edition appeared probably in September or October 1649 (Togashi 74).

from “bad men,” who governed themselves by “inward vitious rule” and support “Tyrants” (1).¹⁵ Apparently, the “bad men” were those who agreed to negotiate with Charles I—“the Presbyterians, who now so much condemn deposing” (29). In addition, “most men,” claimed Milton, were subject to “sloth or inconstancie, and weakness of spirit” (2-3). In other words, Milton feared that most English people were “vulgar and irrationall” (3) and “wicked” (4) and would follow the Presbyterians to sympathize with the tyrant. Milton’s idea of England as the elect nation had been modified by the concept of the remnant.

The remnant motif plays an important part in the Bible—the terminology is used no less than 540 times in the Old Testament (Hasel 132). God promises to treasure Israel as His peculiar people if they keep His covenant (Exod. 19.5-6), but Israel, though elected by God, has repeatedly failed God’s covenant. The remnant can refer to the faithful minority in a sinful nation or the survivors after God’s punishment.¹⁶ The doctrine of the remnant indicates God’s unfailing grace for his covenanted people. After punishing the backsliding Israel, God would preserve a remnant of His chosen people and restore the nation through the remnant.

In the New Testament, Paul claims that the remnant are elected by grace (Rom. 11.4-5). Milton distinguished two kinds of grace in Book III of *Paradise Lost*. Some people are “chosen of peculiar grace/ Elect above the rest” (III. 183-84) and would never sin. Except for the “super-elect,”¹⁷ the rest of human beings, however, shall hear God’s “call, and oft be warnd/ Thir sinful state” (185-86). For those fallible human beings, God would offer “grace” that “invites” the fallen “to appease betimes/ Th’ incensed Deitie” (186-88). The grace that antecedes human repentance is “prevenient grace” (XI. 3), a divine call for repentance. With prevenient grace, God “will cleer thir senses dark,/ What may suffice, and soft’n stonie hearts/ To pray, repent, and bring obedience due” (III. 188-90).¹⁸ But God would only accept man’s prayer, repentance, and due obedience that is “endeavord with sincere intent” (192). In summary, the remnant can refer to either

¹⁵ Hereinafter page numbers concerning *The Tenure* refer to the first edition.

¹⁶ Gerhard Hasel further identifies a special group of the faithful remnant: the eschatological remnant, “consisting of those of the faithful remnant who go through the cleansing judgments and apocalyptic woes of the end time and emerge victoriously after the Day of Yahweh as the recipients of the everlasting kingdom” (130).

¹⁷ Some scholars use this term to refer to the “elect above the rest” through “peculiar grace.” See, for example, Danielson 83, Myers 81, and Fallon, *Milton’s Peculiar Grace* 187.

¹⁸ This passage and XI. 2-5 (“from the Mercie-seat above/ Prevenient Grace descending had remov’d/ The stonie from thir hearts, & made new flesh/ Regenerate grow instead”) allude to Ezek. 36.26: “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh” (KJV).

the faithful remnant—those who are elected by peculiar grace and have never sinned—or the penitent remnant—those sinners who respond to God's prevenient grace with sincere repentance.¹⁹

The two sorts of grace can be found in *The Tenure*. As mentioned above, "good men" "govern'd by reason" are the "super-elect," blessed with God's peculiar grace. They steadfastly supported the regicide and "love[d] freedom heartily" (1). Except for the few good men, most men were sinners but were offered prevenient grace. Of the sinful majority—the Presbyterians and their followers—Milton still had hope for some people "who comming in the course of these affaires, to have thir share in great actions . . . begin to swerve, and almost shiver at the majesty and grandeur of som noble deed, as if they were newly enter'd into a great sin" (4). He wished to "exhort them not to startle from the just and pious resolution of adhering with all their assistance to the present Parliament and Army" (4). Milton anticipated that they would respond to God's prevenient grace: "God as we have cause to trust, wil put other thoughts into the people . . . will incline them to hear' n rather with erected minds to the voice of our supreme Magistracy" (36-37). Unfortunately, it is impossible to determine how many of the Presbyterians would repent, but Milton expected "very many [of them] to be good & faithful Christians" (39).

Patrick Collinson has identified the idea of the remnant as a recurring theme in the early modern English prophetic mode of sermons (*Birthpangs* 20-27).²⁰ In this prophetic preaching, "England was compared to Israel in its disobedience, Israel under judgment" (*Birthpangs* 18). The "godly remnant" were the "virtuoso minority," distancing itself from "the 'reprobate,' 'carnal' majority" (*Birthpangs* 21). The preachers sometimes hoped that the remnant "might for a time redeem and preserve the nation" (*This England* 172), as we have seen in *The Tenure*. But sometimes the preachers were pessimistic, only expecting the remnant to "survive the temporal ruin of the nation" (*This England* 172), as we will see in *Eikonoklastes*.

In 1649 Milton, as Secretary for the Foreign Tongues of the Council of State, was assigned to respond to *Eikon Basilike*, Charles's posthumously published book portraying him as a martyr,²¹ and published *Eikonoklastes* in October accordingly. In this antimonarchical tract, Milton continued to compare the English

¹⁹ For a detailed discussion on Milton's notion of prevenient grace, see Boswell's "Milton and Prevenient Grace."

²⁰ The "prophetic mode" of sermon is more commonly known as the "jeremiad" or the "hosead." Collinson uses the three terms interchangeably (*Birthpangs* 18; *This England* 178).

²¹ *Eikon Basilike* was published in early February 1649, only a few days after the execution of Charles I (Wilcher 289). Milton was commissioned by the Council of State to answer it soon after his appointment as Secretary for the Foreign Tongues on March 15 (Fallon, "Nascent Republican Theory" 317).

people to the sinful ancient Israelites who pleaded for a king, as he did in *The Tenure*. He blamed the Israelites for having “revolted from the true worship of God” (198) and compared the sympathizers of Charles I to “those foolish *Israelites*, who depos’d God and *Samuel* to set up a King” (223). He inveighed against the English people as “an inconstant, irrational, and Image-doting rabble” (241).

While castigating the ungodly majority of the nation, Milton uttered his hope for some “few” people in the preface: “now with a besotted and degenerate baseness of spirit, except some few, who yet retaine in them the old English fortitude and love of freedom . . . the rest imbastardiz’d from the ancient nobleness of thir Ancestors, are ready to fall flat” (sig. B3v). What is more, in the preface to the second edition of *Eikonoklastes* (1650), Milton claimed that his readers were “few perhaps,” but those few readers were “such of value and substantial worth” (sig. A3r), and he limited the elect status of the English people to those “few,” “who [God] hath selected as the sole remainder . . . to stand upright and stedfast in his cause” (sig. B3v).

To conclude, in *The Tenure*, Milton still abided by his faith in England as the elect nation that would play a unique role in God’s providence in the latter days as he did in the antiprelatical tracts, yet now he expressed his contempt for the multitude and held that England was elected only through the remnant. But in *Eikonoklastes*, Milton appeared to be more pessimistic and seemed to put his hope in a very small remnant. Moreover, in *Eikonoklastes* Milton did not mention that England would play any role in God’s providence. In other words, England ceased to be *the* elect nation; if England was ever elected, it was only *an* elect Protestant nation.

While Milton seemed to invest his hope in only the remnant of the nation in 1650, he regained his faith in a great number of the English people in his *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio* (commonly referred to as the *First Defense*), published in February 1651.²² Once more, Milton employed the Exodus parallel in this Latin regicide tract. He admitted that his fellow Englishmen were wicked but not inexcusable: “whatever Vices they have, they have learnt them under a Kingly Government; as the *Israelites* learnt a great deal of Wickedness in *Egypt*” (69). Even though they were delivered by God out of Egypt, they still had not unlearned their vices in the wilderness: “And as they, when they were brought into the Wilderness, and lived under the immediate Government of God himself, could hardly reform; just so ’tis with us” (69). Milton, however, had high expectations for the English people: “But there are good hopes of many amongst us; that I may not here celebrate those men amongst us, that are eminent for their

²² Wing M2166. I use Joseph Washington’s translation (*A Defence of the People of England*), published in 1692, Wing M2104.

Piety and Virtue, and Love of the Truth; of which sort I persuade my self we have as great a number" (69). Milton was more optimistic now since he held good hopes for a great number of his countrymen instead of only a remnant minority of the English people.

Near the end of the *First Defense*, Milton turned to his fellow countrymen, reminding them that they were the people of the elect nation: "[God] has gloriously delivered you, the first of Nations . . . he has endued you with greatness of mind, to be first of mankind . . . after having conquered their own King" (245). England was elected by God to play a leading role in His providence: to become the first nation declaring no king but God.

Yet we might be puzzled by Milton's changing attitudes toward the English people if we notice that the *First Defense* was published only a few months after the printing of the second edition of *Eikonoklastes*.²³ In January 1650, the Council of State ordered Milton to retort Claudius Salmasius's *Defensio Regia pro Carolo I* (1649), a book in response to Milton's *The Tenure* (Lacey 91; Raymond 273). In other words, it took Milton most of 1650 to write the *First Defense*, in which he articulated his confidence in a great number of his countrymen, and in the meantime he published the second edition of *Eikonoklastes*, in which he uttered his faith in only a small remnant.

To explain the inconsistency of Milton's attitudes toward the elect status of the English people, I argue that the notion of individual election, like the idea of national election, was utilized to serve Milton's different polemical interests. Thus, we should take into account the different intended audiences of the tracts. *The Tenure* and *Eikonoklastes* were written for Milton's fellow Englishmen, while the *First Defense* was intended for international audiences. As mentioned above, Milton wrote *The Tenure* and *Eikonoklastes* to deprecate the English Presbyterians and their followers who sympathized with Charles I. But Milton targeted foreign enemies in the *First Defense*. Salmasius, a French scholar at Leiden when he published *Defensio Regia*, wrote the book "specifically for an educated, European audience who were discussing the implications of events in England" (Lacey 91). Facing a foreign threat, Milton underlined his national identity by presenting himself as "Ioannis Miltoni Angli" (John Milton, an Englishman) on the title page. In the Preface, Milton identified himself as a defender of his "Valiant and Worthy Countrymen" (ii), refuting "the Sawciness and Lies of this Foreign Declamator" (iv). Milton's role as a spokesman for England reinforced a bond of cohesion between him and his fellow countrymen, and the bond naturally lent itself to the expectant

²³ It was published sometime between July and December 1650 (McDowell 225).

attitude toward the elect status of the English people.

Milton's bond of cohesion with his countrymen was again demonstrated in *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio Secunda* (commonly referred to as the *Second Defence*), printed in 1654.²⁴ Like the *First Defence*, the *Second Defence* aimed at foreign audiences: Milton was "about to address in this as [he] did in [his] former defence, the whole collective body of people, cities, states, and councils of the wise and eminent, through the wide expanse of anxious and listening Europe" (479). In the beginning of the treatise, Milton praised the virtue of his "fellow-citizens, far exceeding that of their progenitors in greatness of soul and vigour of enterprise" (477). The bond of brotherhood made Milton feel proud to be English: "who does not identify the honour of his country with his own?" (478).

The honor of his country was the elect status of England: "Britain, which was formerly styled the hotbed of tyranny, will hereafter deserve to be celebrated for endless ages, as a soil most genial to the growth of liberty" (478). England was the elect nation "disseminating the blessings of civilization and freedom among cities, kingdoms and nations" (480). It is noteworthy that it was the first time for Milton to introduce the concept of England as the elect nation to foreigners.

To sum up, the idea of England as the elect nation was presented in three of Milton's antimonarchical tracts. To justify the regicide, Milton identified England as the elect nation in the sense that England was the first Commonwealth in Europe. While addressing the English people in *The Tenure* and the end of the *First Defence*, Milton reassured them that God had liberated England from tyranny. While addressing foreigners in the *Second Defence*, Milton encouraged them to follow England to become a Commonwealth.

Concerning the elect status of the English people, Milton was confident in the majority of his fellow countrymen only in the *First Defence*, while in *The Tenure* and *Eikonoklastes*, Milton put his hope on only a remnant minority. Even near the end of the *Second Defence*, Milton also expressed his concern about whether the majority of the English people would stay on the right path. He warned his fellow citizens not to "plunge into the same depravity" of the royalists (525). God would be "weary of protecting" them if they fell into "an abyss of corruption" (525). Milton exhorted the English people to rid themselves of their "dissensions," "jealousies," "superstitions," "outrages," "rapine," and "lusts" (526). Fearing that the people would "basely relinquish the path of virtue" and "do any

²⁴ The *Second Defence* was a rebuttal against the anonymous *Regii Sanguinis Clamor ad Coelum*, a reply to Milton's *First Defence*, published at the Hague in 1652 (Hammond 171-72). The book was written by Peter du Moulin, but Milton mistook the author as Alexander More, "part Frenchman and part Scot" (*Second Defence* 482).

thing unworthy" of themselves (527), Milton was not sanguine that most English people would keep themselves from the abyss of corruption.

The Idea of the Elect Nation in Milton's Late Polemics

Milton's fear of the English people plunging into the same depravity of the royalists came true in 1660, when Parliament decided to end the Commonwealth and to bring Charles II to the throne. In the first edition of *The Readie and Easie Way* (February 1660), published only a few days after the restoration of the Long Parliament, Milton was aware that the restoration of monarchy was around the corner, but he still had hopes for the remnant. He "persuaded" himself that the remnant were "of a great number, far worthier then by their means to be brought into the same bondage," and he trusted that the remnant were reserved "by Divine providence to a better end; since God hath yet his remnant, and hath not yet quenched the spirit of libertie among us" (6). However, the second half of the previous sentence was deleted in the second edition of *The Readie and Easie Way*, published in early April 1660, when the Long Parliament had been dissolved and the Convention Parliament was about to assemble.²⁵ The deletion implies that Milton was less confident about God's providence for England as the restoration of the English monarchy loomed. Nevertheless, the fact that Milton still retained the first half of the sentence in the second edition suggests that he did not give up "persuading" himself that the remnant were "of a great number" (38).²⁶

But the remnant "of a great number" were still only a minority, as Milton reflected that "a greater number might be corrupt" in the pre-Purge Parliament (13). Notwithstanding, he also believed that "a great though not the greatest number" of the remnant "might be more in waight, then the others in number" (14). In other words, the remnant minority were enough and more valuable than the ungodly majority for Milton. Thus, while lamenting on his countrymen's "ingratefull backsliding" (24), Milton still clung to the hope for the remnant of the country.

In *The Readie and Easie Way*, Milton once more employed the exemplum of God's displeasure over the Israelites' plea for a king to censure "the rebellious *English*" (75). The Israelites originally "were governd in a Commonwealth of God's own ordaining, he only thir king, they his peculiar people" (76), but "the gentilizing *Israelites*" chose "to resemble heathen" and "clamourd for a king" (76-77). Like

²⁵ The italics were deleted in the second edition: "I perswade me of a great number, far worthier then by their means to be brought into the same bondage, and reservd, I trust, by Divine providence to a better end; since God hath yet his remnant, and hath not yet quenched the spirit of libertie among us."

²⁶ Hereinafter page numbers concerning *The Readie and Easie Way* refer to the second edition.

Israel, England, once God's most favorite nation, turned most rebellious. Milton seemed desperate when he cried to the intractable English people as the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah shouted to the perverse Israelites (Jer. 22.29): "I were sure I should have spoken only to trees and stones; and had none to cry to, but with the Prophet, *O earth, earth, earth!* to tell the very soil it self, what her perverse inhabitants are deaf to" (106-7).

Nevertheless, Milton still believed that God would not forsake England even though the nation had failed God's covenant. Milton concluded the tract by recalling a message delivered by John the Baptist to the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matt. 3.9): "I trust I shall have spoken perswasion to abundance of sensible and ingenuous men: to som perhaps whom God may raise of these stone to become children of reviving libertie" (107). The Pharisees and Sadducees, among other Jews, were Abraham's descendants, God's chosen people. But God would discard them and raise up children unto Abraham out of the stones if they did not sincerely repent their sins (Matt. 3.8). Milton seemed to have lost all his hope for his contemporaries—"a misguided and abus'd multitude" (108)—yet he still placed his hope in *some* "sensible and ingenuous" remnant that God would preserve for the future.

Milton's hope for a saving remnant that would revive England's elect status did not die out with the failure of the Good Old Cause. In *Of True Religion*, published in 1673, more than a decade after the Restoration and a year before his death, Milton still admonished the English people against idolatry (popery). On 15 March 1672, King Charles II issued the Declaration of Indulgence, extending religious liberty to Nonconformists and Catholics. However, Parliament, discontent with its indulgence of Catholics, compelled the king to rescind the Declaration and issue the Test Act on 25 March 1673, enforcing conformity to the English Church (Sauer, *Milton* 110-11). A veteran polemicist, Milton stepped into the controversy with his wonted use of the Israelite paradigm. By quoting Ezek. 8.7-12, Milton compared the practice of popery in England to the wicked abominations done by the elders of Israel (11). God was offended and provoked to "bring on and hasten his Judgements on the whole Land" (11). Yet Milton also announced hope for his readers by alluding to God's redemption of Israel in Ezek. 36.26: "God hath giv'n a heart to the people to remember still their great and happy deliverance from Popish Thraldom" (3). It is noteworthy that Ezek. 36.26 is the same reference used by Milton to elaborate on the workings of prevenient grace in *Paradise Lost*.²⁷ As discussed above, God would offer prevenient grace to invite people to repent, and the re-

²⁷ See note 18.

pentant remnant would answer the divine call.

Conclusion

I have demonstrated that Milton regarded England as “the” elect nation in the sense that the nation was elected by God to play a dominant role in the divine plan. In his antiprelatical prose, Milton asseverated that England was chosen by God to initiate the Reformation and to usher in the millennial kingdom. But the idea of England as the elect nation not only offered Milton an interpretive framework for understanding the role played by his nation in divine providence but also provided him with a polemical tool. Milton utilized the notion to plea for a further reformation in the early 1640s, urging Parliament to extirpate prelacy, to legalize divorce, and to tolerate unlicensed printing.

What is more, Milton's concept of national election was intertwined with the idea of individual election: England was chosen by God to lead other nations, and the English people were also elected to salvation. In the early 1640s, Milton often used the Exodus parallel to express his high hopes for the majority of the English people to be elected to eternal salvation. However, after the regicide, Milton's belief in the elect status of the English people fluctuated between good hopes of “many” people and dispirited faith in only “few” elect remnant. The Exodus parallel was used only in the *First Defence*, while in *The Tenure* and *Eikonoklastes* Milton employed the exemplum of the Israelites' plea for a king, comparing the English people to the ungrateful, rebellious, and sinful Israelites.

In *The Tenure*, the *First Defence*, and the *Second Defence*, England was still the elect nation, chosen by God to establish the first Commonwealth in Europe. Yet in *Eikonoklastes*, England ceased to be assigned any part in God's providence; England was not “the” but only “an” elect nation saved through the remnant. Finally, after the failure of the Good Old Cause, Milton never regained his sanguine confidence in his fellow citizens. Yet he never relinquished the doctrine of the remnant: God would preserve a remnant of the English people and redeem England as long as they sincerely repented.

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從密爾頓議論文看英國為蒙揀選之國

摘要

本文探討密爾頓在其議論文當中，如何運用英國作為蒙揀選之國的概念，即時回應特定議題。根據以色列典範，密爾頓把英國比擬為舊約的以色列。英國是唯一被神揀選、與神立約的國家，在神命定計畫中扮演獨特的角色。在整個寫作生涯當中，密爾頓不時運用此概念作為議論的策略性工具。在1640年代初期，密爾頓相信英國蒙神特別揀選，作為宗教改革的領頭羊。並據此呼籲英國要貫徹改革，要求議會廢除主教制、合法化離婚、開放出版自由。此外，英國身為蒙揀選之國，神的救恩也降臨到英國人民。密爾頓在《論出版自由》中，展現了對英國為蒙揀選之國的高度信心——他期待英國人民都成為先知。然而到了1650年左右，密爾頓一方面談英國為蒙揀選之國，一方面也談餘民的概念。在三篇反君主體制的文章中，密爾頓為弑君辯護，強調英國蒙神揀選、建立共和政體、為歐洲其他國家樹立典範。除此之外，英國沒有在神的命定計畫中扮演特殊角色。英國已不再是唯一蒙揀選之國。在密爾頓後期的議論文，英國仍舊被比擬為以色列，雖蒙揀選但悖逆犯罪，然而神並不棄絕。若英國誠心悔改，神就不會離棄他們。藉著餘民，英國終將得到救贖。

關鍵字：以色列典範、密爾頓、國家聖約、蒙揀選國度、餘民、議論文

