

## Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 334  
Paradise Lost  
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**Teacher: Dr. Michael S. Heiser (MH)**  
**Host: Trey Stricklin (TS)**  
**Guest: Dr. Louis Markos (LM)**

### Episode Summary

Dr. Louis Markos returns to the podcast (first appearance, episode 322), this time to talk about the influence of Paradise Lost, the classic work by John Milton, and its influence on Christian thought about Satan and demons. Dr. Markos is Professor of English at Houston Baptist University. He is an authority on C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien and also teaches courses on mythology, Classical Literature and Victorian and Romantic Literature. Dr. Markos recently reviewed Dr. Heiser's book, *The Unseen Realm*, and found its emphasis on the supernatural metanarrative of the Bible not only fascinating, but quite important for contemporary believers, especially millennials

### Transcript

**TS:** Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 334: Paradise Lost with Dr. Louis Markos. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike! I hope you drank a lot of tea to keep up with Lou here, because he's *high* energy.

**MH:** Yeah, I'm caffeinated, so... We'll do our best. I'm not promising anything, but we'll do our best.

**TS:** Yeah. Should be a great conversation. I'm looking forward to it.

**MH:** Yep. And we had good comments the first time he was on, so we're having him back. And if you listened to the first one, you know what to expect. So you might as well just take a seat and get comfy. Because if you stand up to do anything, you're going to miss something.

**TS:** [laughs] There you go.

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**MH:** Well, we are indeed back with Dr. Louis Markos from Houston Baptist University. And for new listeners, I'm going to have Lou introduce himself again—just what your background is, your degrees, what you teach. And then we want to jump into our discussion for today.

**LM:** Great! Well thanks, Mike! It's great to be back on the program. My name's Lou Markos. I'm a professor of English and Scholar-in-Residence at Houston Baptist University. And I'm about to start my 30<sup>th</sup> year of teaching.

**MH:** Wow.

**LM:** I was an undergrad at Colgate back in the '80s in Upstate New York. And I double-majored in English and History, and then moved on to the University of Michigan for my Masters and PhD, focusing on English. And my specialty is the 19<sup>th</sup> century British Romantics and Victorians, but I also specialize in all the classics of Greece and Rome, critical theory, and also anything to do with C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien. And that's kind of the connection. When I read your book, *The Unseen Realm*, and saw the amazing connections to *The Silmarillion* (that's the prequel to Lord of the Rings) that kind of got me fired up. And that set off our first discussion. And I'm really excited about our second talk here.

**MH:** Yeah, absolutely. I can't let this go here. I know we're sort of in a new round of "Is it a quarantine or not?" here in Florida. And I know in Texas you're doing the same thing. But about a week before these new mask edicts came down, the news was out and on the radio we heard that the local theaters in Florida were going to reopen (I guess they're not now). And to get people into the seats, they were going to show back-to-back-to-back *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. And so we were all set to go. [laughs] And it's like, now, "Aw, I guess we're not going to do that." But we have a lot of Tolkien fans in the house.

**LM:** It just shows how much we want to be part of that great story—that metanarrative. We want to be heroes. And the only way our society is telling us to be heroes now is either to be completely passive sheep who just sit around and do nothing [MH laughs] or go crazy and start tearing down statues. You know? I think we need a better metanarrative, Mike, than what's being given to us. [laughs]

**MH:** Yeah, *The Lord of the Rings* would be a nice place to start, but who knows when we'll get to see that, at least in theaters anyway. But if this lasts long again, I'm sure we'll make our way through it again. But this time (as I told you in texting back and forth), we're going to have the uncut version with the extra stuff in there. We want the extra material. So we have not yet done that as a family. So I'm sure we'll...

**LM:** Oh, you *have* to do that. There is *only* the extended edition, Mike. [MH laughs] Forget about the theatrical. There is *only* the extended edition.

5:00

**MH:** Okay. Alright. That's not going to be much of an argument in the house. [LM laughs] I'll win that one pretty easily. Well, today we want to talk about something that came up the first time you were on. We sort of segued here and there into Milton's *Paradise Lost*. And we both kind of wondered, "Hey, what influence did this piece of literature... It's sort of part of the Western canon. What sort of influence has this had on how Christians just generally across denominations have been trained to think about angels and demons and Satan?" And so I wanted to have you back and talk specifically about Milton. I'm sure we're going to go to other places. Because there's other literature that's going to contribute to how Christian theology has been articulated and how it trickles down from the pulpit into the pew. And really, from the average person who goes off and maybe reads Milton in high school... I guess they still read it in high school. Who knows what they're reading now?

**LM:** [laughs] Really.

**MH:** [laughs] Or college. Whatever. I mean, it filters into Christian homes and Christian circles. And so to me, that *has* to have some kind of influence. Because I run into things periodically that Christians believe is doctrine that, having written *Unseen Realm* and *Angels and Demons*, I know some of these ideas are close to, if not a bull's-eye, for what Milton is saying that aren't really part of the ancient scriptural or Second Temple Jewish traditions. So this is a question I've been wondering about. And I figured you'd be the perfect guy for this.

But to jump in here, can you tell us a little bit about Milton? And then we'll jump into what you think about that question as far as the story. Maybe you even want to summarize the story like you did with *The Silmarillion* last time. But I'll let you just get into it...

**LM:** I guess to start with Milton, Milton is in some ways the most unlikely person to write the great epic about Satan's rebellion against God and the great war in heaven. And the reason I say that is because people forget Milton was a Puritan. And he was a member of the Puritan revolution. Those are the people that seized control of England, that executed Charles I, that got Oliver Cromwell on the crown and all of that. When I say that's odd about it is that you would think that because Milton was a revolutionary, he would sort of be on the side of Satan, right? And in fact, the Romantics came along later and said, "Oh yeah, he was really of Satan's party but didn't realize it." But it's just so strange that this great revolutionary writes this great hierarchical epic about the war in heaven. But he was a great poet—one of England's greatest poets. Maybe second after Shakespeare. And he had to write an epic. Mike, if you're going to be a great poet in the great tradition, you want to write an epic. We need to start by saying that everybody always jokes about how Shakespeare knew little Latin and less Greek and only had a regular education. That wasn't Milton. Milton was highly educated, knew all of the languages. In fact, he set

aside five years of his life when he just read everything he could find, in English or Latin or Greek or Hebrew. So he *did* know the Second Temple stuff (Enoch and all that). He knew the Bible inside and out. And what's funny about this and kind of sad (I'm speaking Protestant to Protestant here, Mike) is that a lot of the errors that we might see in Milton is because Milton was a super-duper Sola Scriptura person. And in fact, towards the end of his life, he wrote this thing called *De Doctrina* ("On Christian Doctrine") where some of the stuff he says borders on Aryanism—the subordination of the Son. Mostly because, remember the word "trinity" is not in the Bible. Right? I mean, some of these words we use—theologians use—are not in the Bible. I believe that they're there (the *idea* is there). But Milton just pressed it to the limit.

And so we do need to understand that whatever mistakes he made, Milton knew the Bible inside and out. And it's just interwoven into everything that he writes in *Paradise Lost*. So... I know, there's so much to talk about. We'll kind of go around it here. But... And yet, at the same time that Milton wants to be as faithful to the Bible as he can, opening up every Scripture and using things like Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 (he's using all that stuff), he also was writing an epic in the tradition of Homer and Virgil.

**MH:** Yeah.

**LM:** And so he is also bringing in Greco-Roman material. We can unpack that as we go along. But he sets himself a sort of strange task. [MH laughs] Because everybody that writes an epic has to be bigger. Right? So *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* are big, but Virgil's *Aeneid* is the entire history from Troy to Rome. It's like a 1200-year historical span that Virgil's covering in his own way. So what can you do to top that? And then what can you do to top that Catholic Dante dude who told us about heaven and purgatory and hell? How do I top him? Because he certainly wants to top Dante, even though he never mentions him. He does want to top him as well. So if you want to just keep expanding and expanding and expanding, what better way than to go from *before* the creation of the world all the way to the Second Coming and the New Jerusalem? And so he really wants to be... See, because of Dante, that makes Italy the great successor to Rome and the empire and the great literature of Virgil and Ovid and Horace and Livy and all those people. And in a way, it's almost like Milton is saying, "No, no, no. The new Rome is actually England." [laughs] Okay?

10:00

**MH:** Yes. [inaudible]

**LM:** Yeah. "And the new Virgil is not Dante. The new Virgil is me. I'm going to write the epic, and I'm going to write a specifically *Protestant* epic." So he's trying to do so many things. And in one sense, he is one of the extreme examples—best examples—of bringing Athens and Jerusalem together in all of these ways. But again, he sometimes argues himself into a corner. Because you have to tell an epic. And there needs to be an epic battle, right? Now I think it's pretty clear

that Satan was cast out of heaven, but it never really tells us that Satan got an army together and there was a war in heaven—all that stuff. But what are you going to do? You're telling an epic. You have to have a war. And it's funny because Milton, in one of his invocations, says, "Epics don't have to be about wars. They could be about other things." But he still has to tell a war because he's writing an epic. So he's painting himself into a corner.

**MH:** Yeah, and the classical tradition gives him all the fodder he needs because of the contests between the gods. So right there, the table is set for him.

Now you used the phrase "reconciling Athens and Jerusalem." So do you think that... I'll use the word "palatable." Because in biblical scholarship, there's a lot of talk about how Hellenistic Jewish writers (Philo is the go-to example here) were writing about biblical history... He's a Jew, so it's the history of his own people and God's dealings with them. But to make that palatable to a Greco-Roman, Hellenistic (we'll just say Hellenistic to be broad here and more accurate)... A Hellenistic audience. So he adopts these allegorical interpretations and whatnot. Do you think that there's something in Milton that is trying to please a particular audience as far as how these things can be married? I'll give you another example. Like today, I can pull books off my shelf... And I have a whole shelf in my library that I call the Wacky Wall. [LM laughs] It's when I do PaleoBabble stuff (strange beliefs people have about antiquity). And I can pull off a few volumes here that are going to say things like, "Well, the story of the Flood and Noah is something that you can track through the building of the Parthenon" (the sculptures of the Parthenon). To sort of take those images and retell the biblical story. And people who do this today are trying to deliberately and intentionally reconcile these two things as though one was not only the mirror image of the other, but one pilfered the other.

**LM:** Right.

**MH:** It's sort of this kind of apologetic. Do you think there's anything like that in what Milton is doing...

**LM:** I think so.

**MH:** ... or is he just drawing things when he needs them?

**LM:** Let me step back and give us a framework, and then we'll come back to Milton. Now whenever you notice a connection between the Bible and something in your paganism and mythology and ancient Greece and Rome, there's always three different ways to read that over. Actually, there's four ways. One way is to say it's a complete coincidence. But Mike, if all of them were coincidences, we wouldn't be having this conversation. Right? I mean, we don't want to dismiss

everything as a coincidence. When we see a link between the Titans going against the Olympians (their war in heaven) and we see other things, and we see about demons that are imprisoned underground like the Titans—all that sort of stuff... Whenever we see a connection like that, there are three ways to read it. One way to read it is to say that what we're seeing there is a demonic deception to deceive the elect. And I think sometimes that could be the case. This is Satan doing some kind of perversion, and he's doing it to confuse people and get power over them.

**MH:** Like a counterfeit.

**LM:** Right, like a counterfeit. That's what H. Richard Niebuhr would call "Christ against culture" and all of that stuff. It's evil and... That would be the kind of person who not only obviously is against black magic séances and all, but would even be against say Tolkien and Lewis because they have wizards. This is... Anything having to do with magic is just bad. Okay. That's one way.

The other extreme (and this would be sort of the liberal theological way to read it) is to say that the reason we see parallels between, say, Greek mythology and the Bible is because the Bible is itself a myth, or nearly a myth. It's a little bit more sophisticated, but Jesus is just yet another Corn King myth. He's not different. He's just the Hebrew version of that. So we've got the two extremes.

**MH:** Yeah, that's the Joseph Campbell...

15:00

**LM:** Yeah, the Joseph Campbell kind of stuff. Going back to James Frazer in *The Golden Bough*. Those are, like, the two extreme versions. Right? And again, we can see both. And sometimes there could be a few cases where that's true. But in the middle is what Niebuhr would call (his book is called *Christ and Culture*) "Christ over culture"—that what we see in the pagan stuff are foreshadowings or glimmerings or intonations of a truth that is only revealed in Scripture. So... Let me... Because to me, one of the most fascinating things that Milton does in the first couple of (basically in book one, and book two is where we meet the demons in hell)... This is what I would argue he's doing. What do you do with these devils? You've got devils. And then you've got these false pagan gods, all around the world. How do you make this connection? Well, what Milton does is he names all of... He never tells us the previous angelic names of his demons, because they've been blotted out of the Book of Life and no one will hear them again. Instead, they will in time take on the names of the pagan deities (of the Philistines, the Canaanites, the Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Phoenicians, etc.) So they're named Baal and Molech and Osiris and Dagon and Beelzebub... All these names, right? But what's interesting is he doesn't give them the names of the Greco-Roman gods or of the Norse gods. We find out that those gods, they sort of dwell in the cold middle air. So Milton is not saying that the gods of Greece and Rome are true, but he doesn't completely demonize them. He finds a sort of middle ground for them. And that, in a way, is the middle ground where his

epic is dwelling. Because it is using the structure of Greco-Roman epic, but filling it with a biblical content. So to me, that's one of the ways that Milton gets around that. That there's no truth, let's say, in...

**MH:** Is he trying not to offend a particular reader with that?

**LM:** I think so. It's really odd, because if he was only writing for Puritans... A lot of the Puritans were Bible-Only people. "What can we learn from the Greeks and Romans?" So if he only wanted to please his fellow revolutionaries, then just get rid of all that pagan stuff. But instead, I would still say that even though he's a Puritan and in one sense an extreme person who should say, "What hath Athens to do with Jerusalem?" he is still working completely in the tradition, not so far away from Dante, I think, as he would have us believe. He still clearly sees there's wisdom and truth. But, like, for instance, when he introduces us to paradise, to the Garden of Eden, basically he says, "Here is the true Hesperides." You know all these pagans have stories about the Golden Age and the golden apples of Hesperides... But here... If true anywhere, it is true here. And I think we obviously have to be careful and show discernment. But if the stories in the Bible are true (stories of the Flood, stories of Babel, all of those things) then they should have some kind of glimmer in the rest of the world. Right?

**MH:** Yeah.

**LM:** But they're only going to appear mythically, in what we call general revelation rather than the special revelation of the Scriptures. So I think we can learn a great truth from something like the Titans and Olympians having their war. We talked about this last time, that it's that incredible passage in 2 Peter about how the spirits are chained in bondage. They're chained. And it says that they were put into Tartarus. And that's the only time in the New Testament that the word Tartarus is used for hell. Not Sheol, not Gehenna. Only one time: Tartarus.

**MH:** And it's not ambiguous. If you're using language like that, it's not ambiguous. On the biblical studies side, let's just take Old Testament. So the natural connection between Old Testament material... Let's just say Genesis 1-11, even though it's wider than that. The natural connection point for that is going to be Mesopotamian material, for the most part. And there's some Egyptian stuff there. There's some Canaanite stuff there. But that's where you get it. Well people who are classicists... There are people who specialize in the relationship of classical literature with ancient Near Eastern mostly when they say that. Mesopotamian stuff. Like M. L. West's book, *The East Face of the Helicon*. There is something really textually to be said for the notion that the Greco-Roman material does imbibe pretty frequently and often deeply into Mesopotamian material.

20:00

**LM:** Hmm.

**MH:** And so when you get a connection with either Hellenistic Jewish, Second Temple Jewish, or New Testament stuff to that Greco-Roman stuff, just by definition, there's also going to be connection points back to the older material from Mesopotamia. Whether the writer or the reader is conscious of that, you do have this, "Hey, here's a primeval event. Even before it gets written biblically, there's a memory of it, and something gets written down." And so it's the most normal thing in the world to have the different versions of this event sound like each other at points. But they're also going to have differences because there are particular agendas to writing. In the biblical case it's often polemic. But that makes a lot of sense. I mean, that's not a contrived idea, to make "I've got to have God over all, so I'm going to make up this approach." No, this approach is actually rooted textually in the material. If you just do from one end to the other, comparing it, in what we would call the Mediterranean world, these links are discernable.

**LM:** They are! One of the things I love about your writing, Mike, is that you're reclaiming that for us by helping us to understand that the word *elohim* can be both singular and plural and that we can speak of gods without falling into polytheism. And I think one of the things you're reclaiming for Christians (especially evangelicals, but all Christians) is no, we don't have to fear, as you call it, "divine plurality" (the use of *elohim* as a plural). That doesn't mean that we have to go away from monotheism. We're not understanding what's going on here. And even Lewis and Tolkien... Sometimes they used the phrase "gods." Even Tolkien sometimes uses the phrase gods (Valar and stuff like that). I think they're so plain with that understanding that there's something... Because look, if... Here's the thing. Jesus is the savior of the world. He is the messiah of the Jews. But he's also the savior of the world. And so when Jesus came, if his message only had relevance to the Jews and was completely foreign to all the Gentiles, it would seem like a foreign god had invaded the world. Right? I mean, yes, God only spoke directly to the Jews before the coming of Christ, but that doesn't mean he ignored that other 99% of humanity. He spoke to them through *general* revelation.

**MH:** And it would almost require those who are speaking to a lost world (whether they're Jew or, like in Paul's case, the message of the gospel)... It would almost require that they deny everything the person listening to them believes. But they don't have to do that.

**LM:** Right.

**MH:** Like the Deuteronomy 32 worldview to me is the biggest link here that Paul has. I mean, when he goes into the Gentile city, he knows immediately how they're thinking about their relationship to their gods. And he doesn't have to say, "Oh, just forget about that." [laughs] "Oh, that's just made up."



**LM:** Yeah, yeah.

**MH:** He doesn't have to confront them on those terms. Rather he's saying, "Yeah, I get it, but let's think a little bit differently about it and then bring Jesus into the conversation as the Most High incarnate. I mean, it's a natural..."

**LM:** "Therefore what you have worshiped in ignorance I will proclaim as known." It doesn't have to be a wall. It can be a ladder. That's the way I like to put it.

**MH:** Yeah, and he's doing that.

**LM:** Remember we believe that Jesus came in the fullness of time. So he chose to come into the world into a Greco-Roman world. But remember that Greco-Roman... Okay, the difference between Hellenic and Hellenistic. When we say Hellenic, we're talking about the Golden Age of Athens, 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. When we say Hellenistic, we're talking about the more global kind of Hellenism that Alexander the Great spread throughout the world. And we need to remember that, with the exception of Greece itself, everything Alexander conquered was in Asia. Very different. Whereas it's almost the opposite with the Roman Empire. The Romans could never really hold those Parthians (those Persians). They were always breaking... I mean, they had Egypt, but they didn't control the whole East. But Alexander the Great did and his Hellenistic idea brought in those Mesopotamian ideas. And then those ideas, through the Koine Greek influenced, of course, the Septuagint and influenced the New Testament. So it is part of that. And whatever... God chose to have his New Testament written in Greek using a lot of Greek words like *theos* and *logos* and other words that are part of Greek philosophy. They rejected words like Zeus, right? That doesn't come up in the New Testament. But [inaudible] there in Hellenistic philosophy that *did* influence the New Testament because again, all truth is God's truth. God is drawing that truth out.

25:00

**MH:** It's as though the table was being set for something. [laughs]

**LM:** Yeah, yeah.

**MH:** Because you know, Alexander was very syncretistic in his approach, you know?

**LM:** Yeah, it's very clear!

**MH:** He's not saying, "Dig this up and turn over here. Oh, well I'm this deity. I'm that deity. You thought you were doing this and you're really doing that, so let's just make the transition here." And it sets all sorts of tables for later conversations that the New Testament's going to take advantage of.

**LM:** I mean, I tell you. If you want to put down *Paradise Lost* against *The Unseen Realm* and your other books, the whole issue... What Milton would have written if he'd read your books... I don't know, Mike. [laughter] But basically... And it's not just Milton. Most Christians have done that. Most of the verses in the Old and New Testament that in your book you read as having to do with the actual sons of God (angels) that slept with the daughters of men and gave birth to the Nephilim and then the Nephilim die and their spirits become devils and stuff like that... Almost all of those verses (like in 2 Peter and Jude and whatnot) are probably referring to that event (to Genesis 6) in Milton are used to refer to the war of Satan and his angels against God. And in fact, I was just reading it over again this morning to get ready. *Paradise Lost* was a great book, but there's a lot of padding. Okay? I mean, he needs to have 12 books in his epic so it can be like Virgil's *Aeneid*, right? And book 11 and 12 have a lot of padding where basically the archangel Michael sits down with Adam and gives him the whole history of the Bible, basically.

**MH:** Yeah. [inaudible]

**LM:** And if you read book 11, he does [inaudible] the daughters of men as human. He uses that concept. So he's not going to import that. If those sons of God are just priestly people (whatever—the line of Seth and the line of Cain or whatever) then what are you going to do with 2 Peter and Jude and all that stuff? Well, it must be referring to... And then, you know, you go to Revelation and you've got the dragon knocking down a third of the stars. That's where Milton gets the idea that when Satan rebelled, he took a third of the angels with him. Actually, according to Dante, a third of the angels went with Satan, another third went with God, and the other third were opportunists and refused to take sides. And they are in Dante's vestibule, in the opening place to it. He's mentioning that idea, too. But it's difficult to read this, right? Because whenever you deal with prophetic literature, it's difficult. Because time is always in flux. Are you talking about the past? Are you talking about the near future? Are you talking about the far future? Are you talking about the Second Coming? And as far as I can tell, what Milton is doing... I mean, he's a smart guy. He knows that when he's reading in Revelation about the dragon and the woman and all that sort of stuff, maybe what was happening in the heavenlies when Jesus was born on earth and Herod tried to kill the innocents, it seems to me that what Milton is doing is taking that event that is in a way spiritually what's happening on Christmas and also reads it backwards as a... I don't know what word to use. As pointing backwards and also a prophecy to the end. You know, just like somebody saying... Like the abomination of desolation.

**MH:** Yeah, he gives it the flux or the flex time that he would use throughout his own work.

**LM:** Right. And that's what he's doing. And he's not the only one that's done that. We have this idea of, "I saw Satan fall. Satan was cast out." We get all this

imagery. But you're right in your book. There is no place in the Bible that describes a full-scale war where Satan before even the creation of Adam and Eve or even before the creation of the earth that there was this war in heaven, this epic war in heaven that... I mean, obviously there are devils. Right? We get to hear about devils. And we get to hear about Satan. And I mean, he's trying to put the pieces together and come up with a sort of epic cosmic way of looking at history.

30:00

**MH:** Why do you think...? Because he actually has more than one pre-creation conflict. So why do you think he does that? I mean, he... I'll just leave it there. Do you think he just sort of needs that to build up, or is that coming from somewhere?

**LM:** Like you said, the New Testament clearly identifies the serpent in Eden as Satan, so he's already there. And we sort of need a backstory. And also, this allows us to see that God knows the whole story, even before it begins. Right from the beginning... And also, I think what's really interesting about Milton (and Lewis picks up on this)... I guess it doesn't really say this anywhere in the Bible but is such a compelling explanation. Why did Satan rebel? And what Milton comes up with is, Satan rebelled when God the Father got all the angels together and said, "Jesus, my Son, he is my anointed one. He is my Son. You all must listen to him."

**MH:** Yeah, "He's my co-regent."

**LM:** And the way Milton... It's when that happens Satan rebels. He will not serve God the Son. He doesn't recognize... It's basically a kind of envy and malice that comes out of him. "I will not serve." And he gets a third of the angels, tempts them to come with him and rebel against that. So I mean, it is a little bit like Psalm 2. "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry. I have appointed him." All that sort of stuff. And the nations rage at that. Well, in some ways Milton's taking that right back to the beginning, that in a way there's always been enemies of the Christ. So I don't know. It's compelling...

**MH:** I can see where he has to pit those two things against each other (Christ and Satan). And he also has to answer or address the question of, "Well, how did we get this figure Satan to begin with?" And then those are two questions that are not directly but, of course, indirectly relate to the Genesis 3 event. So I agree, he's trying to... He's got one dot and two questions. [laughs] So how do we put these things together? And he comes up with this precursor rebellion that sort of gives him this status. And then we have a decision to go corrupt the creation and to tempt Adam and Eve and whatnot. So he's raising the obvious questions and then he's answering them in a very specific way.

**LM:** And remember, the whole reason of *Paradise Lost* is to justify the ways of God to man. In other words, at its core, *Paradise Lost* is a theodicy—a meditation

on God's justice. "What is the origin of evil?" Because even though he's very Puritanical, and in that sense very Calvinistic, this is a book that's all about free will.

**MH:** Yeah, it feels really odd. Yep.

**LM:** God elects, chooses, prevenient grace... I mean, it's got all of that. But it is what we would call a free will theodicy. It's as much a free will theodicy as C.S. Lewis. And C.S. Lewis is certainly... I wouldn't call him an Arminian, but compared to Calvinists, he's certainly not a Calvinist. Whether he would call himself an Arminian, I don't know. But he's certainly not a Calvinist. He (Lewis) makes that clear. And in that sense, he's kind of close to Milton. But he's also not a Puritan in that sense (C.S. Lewis). But you know, again, we have to come up with an origin for evil that will not implicate God. [laughs] So ultimately... And what we need is... We not only need the disobedient free will choice of Adam and Eve, but let's move backward to an earlier act of disobedience by Satan, who will become the serpent. And I mean, Milton certainly understands the nature of evil. Why does Satan tempt Adam and Eve? Because the only way he can get back at Yahweh—at Jehovah—is to mess up his creation. And you know that phrase "misery loves company"? Satan won't be so upset in his misery if he can drag a bunch of other suckers down with him. So it's really funny, because Milton's greatest trouble is that he in one sense over-heroized Satan and made him seem like the hero. But at the same time, if you read it carefully, he shows Satan to be nasty and peevish and like a nasty kid that would rather break his own toys than let other kids play with them.

35:00 **MH:** Yeah, even when Raphael (I guess it is) explains to Adam and Eve what led up to this, it's like they can't fathom a being this sinister (this evil).

**LM:** Yes. Let me show you. This is... I think Milton at his best... This is the one place where even I think he outdoes Dante in his understanding of the twisted nature of evil. And this, I think, is his best example of Christianizing all sorts of pagan mythology. Alright. Satan... We're told this in book 2. At the very moment that Satan rebelled against God... It's a very mental, spiritual moment, when he turned against God; out of his head springs Sin. And it's just like the famous story of Greek mythology, that Athena popped right out of the head of Zeus in full armor. So in rebelling, Satan actually gives birth to Sin. So Sin is the daughter of Satan. But she comes out and the...

**MH:** God didn't put sin there, yep. So that's...

**LM:** Right, he didn't make sin. So sin pops out of the head of the rebellious, disobedient Satan. At the very moment he turns against God, out comes Sin. And Sin is a beautiful woman. And at first they're all afraid of her. But then they're all lured by her, and they come toward her. And when Satan looks at her, he falls in lust with her because she's in his image (a sort of perversion of man being in

God's image). He falls in lust with her. And he rapes his own daughter. And then Sin gives birth to Death. And when she gives birth to Death, Death rips out of her and rips open her loins. And it's sort of grotesque. All of this is tied to Greek mythology and Ovid. And then Death runs out and... Like he said, like a dog. And then Death turns around and then rapes his own mother. And then she gives birth to these hideous beasts that keep coming in and out of her womb and then tormenting her all the time. So this gives us sort of a frightening, incestuous family (like all the scariest stories in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* put together). But what we're getting at is the sort of incestuous nature of sin and how Satan gives way to death. And his depiction of Death. He's got a little stinger on his tail. "Death, where is thy sting? Where is thy victory?" And it's his way of using... His allegory ultimately is mythic. But it's a way of getting at the grotesqueness of sin.

And the only person that does a better job... Now in some ways you could argue Tolkien does a better job than Milton. And the reason I say that is that Milton shows all this grotesqueness, this perverseness, this twisting and horror. But at the same time, he can't help making Satan heroic. You know? He's whatever, the Hector, the Tereus, the person that the hero's got to kill. Right? Whereas in Tolkien, he understands evil in its true nature. Shelob, Sauron, what ends up happening to Saruman... How it makes this almost into a shadowy thing. And actually, the way Milton describes Death, he is a sort of shadowy figure with crowns and stuff on him. He's a terrifying figure. So Milton does really understand the... And I should step back. The obvious thing to say is that one thing Dante and Milton have in common is they both have an Augustinian understanding of sin as a perversion or a negation or a privation of something good. They all... And that's also shared by Lewis and Tolkien. It's also shared by the author of Harry Potter. She also has an Augustinian understanding of sin. Whatever you think about her theology, she understands that sin is a negation. It's not a positive thing. But it's a tearing away and a perversion and a twisting of things. And Dante and Milton both show that powerfully, and Lewis does, as well, in things like *The Great Divorce*.

**MH:** In your research, have you come across any... What's the Puritan reaction? Because on the one hand, you could see where... It depends what kind of Calvinist you are, I guess. But you could see Puritans being happy with the clarity of, "Okay, sin is here, not because of something God dictated."

**LM:** Right.

**MH:** But then you also have this thing on the other side about "these are free will decisions" (of Satan in this case).

**LM:** Right.

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**MH:** So what's the Calvinist response to this? Have you come across Calvinists objecting to what Milton said? "Don't read Milton, because he has the *low* view of sovereignty," or "He doesn't [inaudible]..." [crosstalk]

**LM:** [crosstalk] The weird thing about that is...

**MH:** Or do they go to the other side?

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**LM:** Yeah. The strangest thing about it is I don't really see that. I might be missing it. But I don't see it. Because we all want Milton on our side, because he's the great poet. You know? We want him on our side. And first of all, *Pilgrim's Progress* (which is the other great Calvinist epic) is also all about free will. And it seems pretty darned works-oriented. And at the end of *Pilgrim's Progress*, when he gets to heaven, he finds out that there's a pit right to hell at the very border of heaven! It's like that game Chutes and Ladders we play with our kid, right? When you get to the very top, and you don't want to fall in that chute. It takes you all the way back down to the beginning. So what the heck is that all about? He's crossed the River Jordan and he's in heaven, and yet there's a pit even there.

So that's an odd thing about our two greatest Puritan poets or writers are Bunyan and Milton, and yet... But ultimately, God's sovereignty is there. I guess the way that he puts it is that God says that man was sufficient to stand, but free to fall. And Milton says something really weird, and I've never seen any other Calvinist writer or actually anybody else say this. When God is speaking about salvation and all, he basically says that "I have called certain people to be my elect." Right? So there are certain people where it seems that grace is irresistible. That "There are certain people who I've called and basically have no choice. As for the rest of people, they've got a choice. They can reject or accept." So it's a really weird mixture of, "Okay, I've got my certain elect that I've chosen, whether they will or not, and then the rest of the people are free to choose." Again, I don't think I've ever seen that anywhere else. And I'm not even sure where he got the idea. I think he sort of played with... It's just like Milton says, "Everybody's called to marriage, and then a few of them don't get married." That's kind of twisting it around. [laughs] Let me see if I can find that. [pause] Oh yeah, here. He says it this way. He says,

Some I have chosen of peculiar grace  
Elect above the rest; so is my will:

So "There are some I've absolutely chosen."

The rest shall hear me call, and oft be warnd  
Thir sinful state, and to appease betimes  
Th' incensed Deitie while offerd grace

Invites; for I will clear thir senses dark [LM: that's preventing grace],  
What may suffice, and soft'n stonie hearts  
To pray, repent, and bring obedience due.  
To Prayer, repentance, and obedience due,  
Though but endevord with sincere intent,  
Mine ear shall not be slow, mine eye not shut.

So some people are absolutely called and everybody else has choice. So that's kind of weird. It's almost a mixture of a double-predestination and a complete free will. Very strange. And Milton, like you said, does some odd things.

**MH:** Yeah, it might be his way of just struggling with the fact that Scripture seems to suggest both. You know?

**LM:** [crosstalk] Yeah. There are definitely people that are elected.

**MH:** [crosstalk] Systems typically... Yeah. They go to one pole and then shoot at the other pole. Rather than just struggle with the fact that you get hints of both.

**LM:** Yeah. The thing that bothers me and what I tell the Calvinists is, that if you believe in a complete view of the predestination of the elect, if only the elect are predestined, then you *have* to believe in double predestination. Right? Because there's no third choice. If God only chooses some and the others aren't chosen, then you have... In other words, double predestination is implicit in a completely predestinarian view. Whereas Milton tries to have it both ways.

**MH:** Maybe that's why people didn't... As you just said, you don't recall coming across any sense that—or any study that—the Puritans rejected him. Because everybody gets to be happy. Everybody gets to be a little disgruntled. But they all get to be happy.

**LM:** [laughs] Maybe that's what it is, yeah. And God is clearly sovereign in this. In fact, one of the reasons that the Romantics (particularly Blake and Shelley and others), why they had their own reading is number one, they thought Satan was the hero because he was the rebellious, energetic one. (Remember, they're writing in the shadow of the French Revolution.) But the other thing they did that we're still struggling with as Christians is they ended up seeing Milton's Jehovah as a negative character because they saw Milton's Jehovah as very static, very smug and self-sufficient, just sitting up in the world, playing around. And to kind of quote C.S. Lewis, the only reason that they believed that and people still believe it today is because we've lost the sense of what it means to be king. That the really dignified person at the top is the one that doesn't run around hectically like a chicken with his head cut off. That God is the "unmoved mover" of Aristotle. That the dignity... We're seeing this being lost. I mean, I would just, with all of this Black Lives Matter I was saying to my son (because I've lived half my life as

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a Yankee and half as a Southerner) that one of the worst things about slavery is that slavery was so bad that when they got rid of it, there was this idea that we had to throw the baby out with the bath water. So there were all these great things about the Old South, but the feeling was, because of this one sin, we have to throw out everything else. And one of the things we lost was a different kind—a sense—of dignity and honor. Where did you grow up, Mike? Are you a Southerner or a Yankee?

**MH:** I grew up in Pennsylvania...

**LM:** Okay, so you're a Yankee like me.

**MH:** But I went to school for a couple of years in the South. And I know what you're talking about because the school I was at would sort of... They had the trappings of a genteel kind of culture, like Sunday in the dining hall was different than the other days.

**LM:** I don't know if you felt this way, but a lot of Yankees, when we come down here, the first time you come down here and somebody says, "Yes, ma'am," or "Yes, sir," do you ever remember feeling like, "Is that guy patronizing me?" Because a lot of Yankees feel that way. Maybe you were young enough when you came down here.

**MH:** I didn't, because I had been exposed to some people from the South. So I kind of knew...

**LM:** Okay. So you had seen that.

**MH:** Yeah. I had kind of heard that before and I knew it was just, "that's how you do it here."

**LM:** But it does. And I remember myself, until I got used to it, and I still know some of my friends in the North that still think they're all patronizing them by saying, "Yes, ma'am." No, there's an actual respect here, you know? It's not a bad thing. [laughs]

**MH:** Yeah, I know what you're talking about there. Let me ask you this question. You will run into angel names in *Paradise Lost*. Gabriel – that's biblical. But you get Uriel, you get Raphael.

**LM:** Yeah.

**MH:** And so my distinct impression is that, "Okay, Milton *has* read something like the Apocrypha..."



**LM:** Oh, he's clearly read obviously the Apocrypha to begin with, like Tobit and stuff.

**MH:** This is where you get the multiplication of angel names in Second Temple literature.

**LM:** Right.

**MH:** So that's what I was going to ask you. Do you think this reflects the knowledge... [crosstalk]

**LM:** [crosstalk] Yeah, he was highly, highly educated. He'd read all of this stuff. And of course, he would also be familiar with Dionysius (the one we call Pseudo-Dionysius today). I remember on the angelic names... That was early medieval. They thought it was written by Dionysius, the one that Paul converted at the Areopagus. But yes...

**MH:** What do you make of...?

**LM:** His name is Dionysius (or Denis as he's called in French writing). He wrote a bunch of books on the divine names and the celestial hierarchies and all of the stuff we read in Dante about the angels and whatnot is coming out of that book that they used to think... But then later on we discovered he's more like maybe 500. We don't know exactly. Kind of on the cusp of the medieval age. So Dante would've known...

**MH:** Yeah, because he's known very early (at least the Greek portions). I mean, there's no reason why he wouldn't have known this material, in Greek anyway.

**LM:** Yeah. So we know that. But Milton was so well-read that there are clearly references to things like... I'm sure he probably... And I think 1 Enoch was available back then. I'm trying to remember. Was Enoch available back then? I think it was.

**MH:** Yeah. The Greek portions. And the Greek portions typically cover... Most of it's going to be the Book of the Watchers (the first 36 chapters). So yeah, you're going to get a lot of that stuff there that would've been accessible in Greek.

**LM:** In a way, he's just kind of putting it together. This is kind of a weird analogy, but it's sort of like the difference between a premillennial and an amillennial. The things that the premillennials see as happening over a long period of time (like the rapture and the Second Coming and all that sort of stuff)... For the amillennial, that's all happening at the same time. "Boom. The trumpet sounds, Christ returns, the rapture... It's happening at the same time. Let's just make it real, real simple. [laughs] We don't need this long, stretched-out thing." And one of my friends who likes to make fun of the premillennials calls it the yo-yo theory. [MH laughs] Right? Because God raptures up his saints and then he puts them

back down on the earth for the millennial kingdom, and then he takes them back up to heaven. [laughs] And he calls it the yo-yo theory. I thought it was pretty funny. [laughter]

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**MH:** What do you make of the Adam and Eve relationship in *Paradise Lost*? Because they have sexual relations. The way they approach each other and that, prior to the Fall and then after the Fall. It's lustful, post-Fall, it's not pre-Fall. What do you think Milton's [inaudible]?

**LM:** First of all... And I'm glad... Milton is "a Puritan." But if Milton lived today, he might very well be a Libertarian or something, because he believed in complete liberty of the Christian. And he really scandalized people by writing the *Doctrines of Divorce*, I mean, basically allowing divorce for incompatibility (that's what we would call it today). He believed in... I don't know that I'd go so far to call him an antinomian, but he borders on it sometimes, in believing in such complete freedom of the Christian. But he makes it very clear... It's almost like he stops the camera and says, "Look, everybody! Adam and Eve are having sex right now. Okay? I want you to understand..." [MH laughs] Well, first of all, I don't know where it comes from. This is *not* a doctrine of the Catholic Church. But it's this idea that original sin *is* sex, which of course it's not. They were told to be fruitful and multiply before the Fall. In fact, marriage is the only institution that predates the Fall. Maybe that's why it's being attacked so much today, I don't know. But "Be fruitful and multiply." And so first of all, Milton's a liberal. He actually allows Adam and Eve to stay in Eden for a few days before they fall. And I think Dante gives them about six hours. That's what Adam tells him when Dante meets Adam in paradise. But he wants to make it clear that sexuality is a good thing. And in fact, one of the most shocking parts is we get a little dissertation on angel sex! Apparently, the angels also have sex. But when they do it, there's no boundary whatsoever. Mike, do you remember... Did you watch a movie called *Cocoon*?

**MH:** Oh, boy. Um...

**LM:** Remember the movie *Cocoon* where these little pods end up...

**MH:** I do remember... Right. And the old people become young again, yeah. [crosstalk]

**LM:** Yeah, become young again, because they're stealing the energy.

**MH:** Ron Howard.

**LM:** There's one really funny scene where Steve Gutenberg (I think that was the name of the actor) falls in love with one of the alien ladies and wants to make love with her. And she says, "Well, we do it a little different way." And she kind of goes up in the air. And then she goes right through him. [laughs] And he yells

out, "If this is foreplay, I'm a dead man." Anyway. It's funny, and I don't know if they had Milton in mind. Because Milton actually has the angels talking about completely merging together somehow. He also says that angels eat! Well, what does that mean? Does that mean angels go to the bathroom? And no, angels don't have to relieve themselves because they sweat out the waste. [laughs] So Milton has a lot of fun. He comes up with some crazy ideas.

**MH:** I know. Right. He is another good example of not only answering questions that the Bible doesn't answer but also raising questions the Bible doesn't ask. [laughs]

**LM:** Yeah! I know, raising even more! I'll tell you. What's interesting is that despite the power of Milton's descriptions of hell, I still think that today in people's Christian imagination, our image of hell is probably still more influenced by Dante's *Inferno*. I mean...

**MH:** Why don't you compare those two? Let's talk about [inaudible].

55:00

**LM:** They're very... See, this is what's amazing about Dante. And I write about this. And I wrote a book called *Heaven and Hell: Visions of the Afterlife in the Western Poetic Tradition*. And I argue there that what's really weird about Milton is that, okay, Virgil is quoting everything from Homer. Dante is quoting from Virgil and Homer. But when you get to Milton, it's like he leaps over Dante and goes right back to Virgil and Homer. And I argued that there's no clear reference to Dante in *Paradise Lost*. No. He read *Paradise Lost*. He would have probably read it in the original Italian. He knew *Paradise Lost*, but he makes no reference. And a lot of people would say, "Well, that's impossible. There are so many connections." Well, I don't know if you know this, but Tolkien used to always get mad when people said he was just imitating Wagner's *Ring Cycle*. And at [unintelligible] it's like, "Tolkien's got to be facetious here. Anybody that's listened to the *Ring Cycle* by Wagner can see all the links." But the only reason that there are links between the two is because both Wagner and Tolkien are going back to the same sources: *The Nibelungenlied*, the *Völsunga Saga*, the *Eddas*, all that sort of stuff. They're going back to the same original thing. Well the same thing with Milton. He's going back to the same sources as Dante, but of course he's read Dante. But he agrees with Dante. He also makes use, just like Dante makes use of things like the River Lethe, the River of Forgetfulness, but then Milton will do something different with it. So for Dante, when you get to the top of Purgatory, once you've purged away all your sins, you cannot even bring with you the memory of sin. And so the last thing they do in the Garden of Eden is they drink from the River Lethe to forget even their memory of sin and move on. But Milton, who, of course, doesn't have Purgatory, he makes a very interesting use of it. It turns out that in hell, the devils are being blown around they're going from super cold to super hot. And as they go around they see the River Lethe and they all want to drink from it, because if they could just get one drop, it would help them to forget their misery. But every time they get close, they're blown away, just like

Tantalus who tried to get the grapes and they go away, he tries to drink the water and it gets sucked out. And so there's a different use of it. And that happens throughout. They do different things with the idea of limbo and whatnot, with Milton, of course, having a more Protestant view of things and Dante having a more Catholic view of things. But...

**MH:** With all these touchpoints, what do you think... Okay, you're in Milton's era and your work is widely read. You've got a couple centuries between then and now. How would you describe the influence? Would you use a word like *direct* for any of it? Would you use the word *indirect*? Would you use some other word? In other words, how influential do you think Milton's characterization of these things, his retelling...?

**LM:** I think the best way to describe it, oddly, is to compare it to Sigmund Freud. Today most people haven't read Freud, but we are influenced by him whether we read it or not. If I'm talking to you and I mention my wife, but I say "my mother" instead, you'd say, "Oh, that's a Freudian slip." Even if I've never read any Freud, immediately I start psychoanalyzing myself. So the Freudian understanding of dreams and the subconscious is... And actually, if you haven't read it, it probably influences you even more. Now of course Freud is much different from Milton, because there is a great deal of truth in Milton that we can learn from, whereas Freud pretty much has led us astray for the last 150 years. And the same thing with Milton. I don't know that there are that many people that have actually read Milton. He's a pretty hard read. They might have read bits and pieces. But we all... Only half-facetiously do I call *Paradise Lost* "the 67<sup>th</sup> book of the Bible." Because most of us, whether we have read Milton or not, have that belief that somewhere in the Bible it must describe in detail that great initial rebellion of Satan and the angels against God and they're fighting it and Satan and his angels are cast out and cast into hell. Now I will say, though, just kind of quickly, in asking you, Mike, how do you interpret Matthew 25, the sheep and the goats? Where it says "Depart from me, O ye wicked, into the lake of fire, which was prepared for Satan and his angels." Do you link that to Genesis 6? What do you link that reference to of "prepared for Satan and his angels?" Do you think that's a Genesis 6 thing? What do you think, Mike?

**MH:** I tend to think that since the lake of fire is the terminus point for the wicked... In other words, after... Whether you take a traditional view of hell that you're there forever in torment or you take an annihilationist view, that destination is the terminus point for all the wicked, all who are not on God's side. All anti-Eden...

**LM:** Alright, by which you mean both human and divine.

**MH:** Yes. And so I actually am influenced now by all the stuff I've read and written. But I tend to think that the point is death. That this place (for the devil and his angels), *all* who oppose God on the supernatural side and the human side,

they are going to be eternally dead. They're going to be eternally separated from God.

**LM:** Do you then also link that...? Do you think that's the final...? How do I want to put this? That that's the final end to Psalm 82, when he says, "You are gods, but you will die like men?" Do you think that's the terminus point?

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**MH:** Yeah, I tend to think that that is where all that opposes God is destroyed, either in an ongoing sense (like the traditional view) or in an annihilation sense. Because to me, they're both forever. So I tend to think that when the new earth is created and believers inherit the nations (we displace the fallen gods), that's the next place that we would see them. That now you're going to be cast into the lake of fire. Death itself is cast into the lake of fire and all this kind of stuff. That the vision of the new heavens and earth, this is how things are going to be from this point forward. And everything that opposes God is now eliminated. That's how I tend to look at passages like that.

**LM:** That's interesting. Because you know, C.S. Lewis uses that passage to remind us that if you take that passage literally, it suggests that hell was never intended to house human beings.

**MH:** Right. And I would agree with that. Humanity was created to be part of God's family, to be in God's house. They were not created to die. So I would agree with that assessment.

**LM:** That's one end. And that's why Lewis can make that argument that if we're still human when we die, there's a chance we'll be saved. Right? [laughs] That the *real* problem with the damned is that they're the remains of a human being. That there's nothing left. And that's why, although Lewis never mentioned annihilationism, you could say he's got a sort of semi-annihilationism. Because you *are* in hell eternally. But you're sort of lost. He says, "What's cast into hell is not the man, but the remains of the man," just a shadowy stain is all that's left. Because you know the only life and the only humanity, ultimately, is in God.

**MH:** One last question. What have you read or seen today, either in movies, TV series, whatever... Is there somebody *today* like Milton? And let me preface it this way. I know what you're saying when Milton's influence is kind of like Freud. You could almost say Milton's influence is culturally kind of like the Bible. Because a lot of people have never read through the whole Bible. Maybe portions of it.

**LM:** Yeah, that's true.

**MH:** But yet it still exerts this influence culturally. So I understand where you're coming from there. So are there any voices, any writers, any filmmakers that you think are sort of doing Miltonesque things that are going to have a wider...?

**LM:** One of the things that always bothers me.... I've seen a lot of movies like this. There was one called *Michael* with John Travolta. There was a beautiful one called *Angels*... Oh, what was it called?

**MH:** Please don't say *Angels in the Outfield*. [laughter]

**LM:** *Wings of Desire*—a German movie about angels. It's beautiful. And it was remade in America as *The City of Angels*, with Meg Ryan and... I can't remember who the guy was.

**MH:** Probably Nicolas Cage.

**LM:** Yeah, I think you might be right. I think it was him. And there was a really, really good old movie by the British called... It's got two names: *Stairway to Heaven* or *A Matter of Life and Death*. But I notice that a lot of these movies that are about heaven and about angels coming down, what often happens is that they depict heaven in black and white and they depict the earth as in color. Right? We kind of forget the idea that heaven is *more* than earth, not *less* than earth. Right? We've got that idea. Also, where I see it is, in a weird way... If what Milton is about at the core is the eternal cosmic struggle between good and evil, that seems to have been taken over by Marvel Comics. [laughs] Okay? And it's been taken over by Neil Gaiman, who's not a believer, or Josh Whedon, doing *Buffy*. A lot of these new writers that are doing sci-fi fantasy are not believers. Often they're atheists, in fact. But they're not angry atheists (sometimes), just atheists. I think they've taken over this idea of good and evil. It's very, very strange, Mike. Because we're living in a relativistic world that says everything's relative. And yet we still... The best example of that is the great success of the movie *Ghost*. Do you remember that? With what was that guy's name, the dancer? Um...

**MH:** Patrick Swayze.

**LM:** Thank you. Patrick Swayze. Yeah. *Ghost* is wonderful. Because as a Christian, you get to enjoy it because it's a movie that takes seriously heaven and hell and punishment, but you also get to believe that revenge is good for the soul. [laughter] So I think American Christians, we want to have our cake and eat it too, right? We want to really feel good when the bad guy gets dragged down to hell by demons. So I still think... There was actually a pretty fascinating movie that came out about 20 years ago called *The Devil's Advocate*. Did you see that one, with Al Pacino?

**MH:** No.

**LM:** Oh, and the character... He turns out to be the devil. His name is John Milton. [laughter] Isn't that funny? And he turns out to be the devil character that's

tempting us. So I still think the basic idea of temptation is still with us. Are we going to be the good guy or the bad guy? And even though we get more and more movies where we show that they're pretty close to... Like all the darker *Batman* movies where Batman is a vigilante not so different from the bad guys, and the bad guys create the good guys and the good guys create the bad guys. I think it's at that level that we're still focused on trying to understand the nature of good and evil.

**MH:** Do you think these are intentional competing metanarratives? What I mean by that is, before we started the episode, I was talking about... I just started Douglas Murray's second book, *The Madness of Crowds*. And in his introduction, his short definition for the postmodern is the refusal to believe that there are any metanarratives that have actual meaning. And what I see happening now is a reaction to that. People are gravitating back toward metanarrative. I think this is why the Bible Project is so successful. I think it's why *Unseen Realm* and the lighter version, *Supernatural*, have grabbed a lot of people's attention. Because the emphasis is on metanarrative. So if that's true (and I know that's a bit of a jump) that we're seeing a cultural turn back to metanarrative, but I think that's defensible. But if that's true, are these other things competing metanarratives? Like to hook into the biblical storyline but yet twist or change things a little bit. Do you see...?

**LM:** I don't have time to read all this stuff, but over the last ten years, there have been a lot of fantasy novels and things like that that are obsessed with the idea of the Nephilim. That's kind of a big deal right now. And sometimes they're angels and they have wings, or they don't have wings. And they're engaged in spiritual warfare, back and forth. And I can't remember the names. But that's become very, very popular. Anime coming out of Japan. If you ever see that anime stuff, it's almost always a mishmash of Eastern and Western stuff and there's a few Christian things thrown in.

**MH:** There's a lot of Enochian stuff there, too.

**LM:** Yeah, a *lot* of that. We're drawn into it. Let me put it this way. One of the things that bothers me with the Black Lives Matter is "What do you mean by that?" If by the phrase "Black Lives Matter" you mean that the lives of black people have essential worth and value and dignity and we need to honor that, then yeah, we're working within the Judeo-Christian understanding of virtue and vice and morality. But if by "Black Lives Matter" you mean the ultimate group putting forth Marxist identity politics then I'm opposed to that. You're now dealing with a view of man that is radically outside the Judeo-Christian worldview. That we're all part of competing groups and our identity is reduced to whether we're black or gay or whatever it happens to be. If you read Black Lives Matter, they equate blackness with gayness and transgender. It's kind of wacko.

But here's the point I'm making. The point I'm making is that they are drawing lots of young people, even my students, into something that is Marxist ideology, and as such is opposed to the gospel. Just like liberation theology, which screwed up so many Catholics for so long. It is Marxism with a thin disguise of Christianity. And here's my point: that they're getting young people to join Black Lives Matter not by appealing to a Marxist identity of identity policies, but by appealing to *justice* in the Judeo-Christian sense. In other words, if you join us, you will be part of a metanarrative of good versus evil and justice versus injustice. And so they're appealing in the name of a real Christian virtue to something that is ultimately opposed to Christianity, which is Marxism. So it's... I guess what I'm getting at is that even when you want to draw people into a metanarrative that is anti-Christian, you can only inspire people with imagery and virtues that are ultimately Christian. I mean, that is basically what Marxism is. It is a taking of the whole Christian idea of the millennium and secularizing it into a *secular* utopia that's driven forward by history itself.

**MH:** The restoration of Eden without God.

**LM:** Right. Yeah.

**MH:** So yeah, it's interesting.

1:10:00

**LM:** This, to me, is the danger. And that's why, Mike, we need to give them a better story. The best way we can bring them back is not by revealing all the dark secrets of Black Lives Matter. Let's make *our* story so compelling that they will be drawn towards that. If we want to draw them away from what I call the "pseudo-virtues" (multiculturalism, inclusivism, egalitarianism, environmentalism, all that stuff)... If we want to draw them away from the phony virtues, don't attack the phony virtues; make *our* virtues (the classical and Christian virtues) so compelling that they will be drawn towards that, and then they'll be able to see through the phoniness. But we can only do that by giving them the truth.

**MH:** Yeah, I'm hopeful that what's going on now will really motivate believers not to... Retaliation is going to be useless. But to just what you described—basically give them the better story. It's time to do your job, you know? [laughs]

**LM:** That's right!

**MH:** You know, it's just really fundamental. I know it's a cliché, but back to basics. And you can't get any more basic than the story—the whole metanarrative approach. So yeah, I was just wondering what you thought about metanarrative competition. Because I don't see a distaste for metanarrative in the culture, especially among the young. I see, if anything, they *miss* it. [laughs] You know?



**LM:** Yeah. They do. They want to be part of something bigger than themselves. That's the phrase you hear often. They want to be their best self. That's another phrase I hear often. And again, something like Black Lives Matter is giving them the *illusion* that they're a part of something bigger than themselves that will bring about true justice and charity and love and kindness and all that sort of stuff. And if that's what they think, how can we blame them for going towards that? They don't know any better, because they don't know history. They don't know anything about what Marxism means, or anything like that.

**MH:** Yeah.

**LM:** They have learned about slavery and have learned about the holocaust. And it's right that they should be. But none of them whatsoever know anything about the [inaudible] cultural revolution, know nothing about the Khmer Rouge. They have no idea of the horror that has been done in the name of equality and egalitarianism. And so what do you expect? They're not being taught that. And there's very few movies about it. *Doctor Zhivago*. There's just a very few movies about the dangers of...

**MH:** I think it's important that we remember what you were just describing. It's not... It's really tactically wrong and, frankly, ungodly to attack them, especially if we know that there are these knowledge gaps.

**LM:** Yeah.

**MH:** Like you said, it offers something really meaningful and it's a righteous cause that's getting preempted here. But it offers these things that are completely understandable within the context not only of the human condition, but really a Judeo-Christian worldview, to want these things and to want people to be treated like they ought to be.

**LM:** They don't even understand that Black Lives Matter (in terms of the Marxist group) is self-contradictory. Because their Marxist beliefs cannot support an idea of the essential worth and value of every human being. First of all, since they now completely bought into transgender, there is nothing essential about us at all. How can you have any sense of...? Because that's I think what we're attracted to. We do need to understand we're all made in the image of God. But of course, we need to understand that we're made in the image of God but we're fallen. And that we're *all* fallen. As Solzhenitsyn said, "The dividing line between good and evil doesn't run through nations or parties or ideology, it runs through the soul of every individual human being." And they want... First of all, as you know, Mike, many people have said that "America has two religions. One is utilitarianism (that's for another day). The other religion of America is dualism. And it's this idea that it's kind of a soft Gnosticism. And we're still caught in it. Christians are caught in this idea. Thank God we have N.T. Wright to remind us

about the resurrection of the body, which apparently a lot of Christians have forgotten. [laughs] Because we think the body is bad. Aye, aye, aye!

**MH:** Yeah, we could... Any one of these things we could just go on and on.

1:15:00

**LM:** Hey, one of the things that Lewis adds to Milton (I think it's implicit Milton) is that another reason that Satan rebelled is out of absolute disgust that God wanted to create human beings that would mingle spiritual and flesh. And that the devils are sort of disgusted by our incarnation (that we're enfleshed souls), as if God were slumming or something like that. And I think that that's implicit Milton.

**MH:** I actually think... I would agree. And I also think for me personally, when... We can wrap up with this thought. But I'm actually working on... We had Ben Witherington on the podcast a month or two ago or whatever it is. So he gave me... He's blogged through the *Demons* book and he gave me a list of questions to respond to that he's going to post on his blog in an interview style. And this is actually one of them. What's the motivation for rebellion? He doesn't use the word "disgust," but in the way he crafted the question, it made it fairly easy for me to refer to Psalm 8. I actually think that there's a reason why, in Psalm 8, which is mostly about creation, there's this thing slipped in there about humanity being lower than the *elohim*. [laughs]

**LM:** Ahh! Okay.

**MH:** I don't really think that's accidental. But I think that this is a thread that is actually going to be meaningful. In other words, here we are. We are beings. We're embodied. We are lesser. Even though we're both imagers. They and we are both imagers in our respective realms. But we are still, by definition, viewed as lesser than they are, and so it creates this opportunity. Again, it's not explicit in Scripture, but it creates this opportunity for offense. [laughs]

**LM:** Right.

**MH:** And so what you were just describing, I actually do think that there's a scriptural thread there, that it does get picked up in Second Temple material—this disdain element, that you will read writers (that are of course much older than Milton) that are going to pick up on this. They're going to sniff this out and wonder about it. So I think that there's a lot to be said for that. I think that that isn't just accidental. Of course we're lesser. There's Creator and creature. You don't have to tell us this in Psalm 8, but it's just dropped in there, and then it gets picked up in the book of Hebrews, where clearly humans are preferred over the fallen supernatural beings in terms of redemption. It's all linked back to the incarnation. So now you're doubling down on the offense.

**LM:** C.S. Lewis in his space trilogy (his science fiction trilogy) says... Because when we go to Mars (Malacandra), we meet other rational creatures that are not

human. But he says that ever since God incarnated himself as a man, all future rational creatures will be human. There will not be any more nonhuman rational creatures because God has so...

**MH:** There you go. Right. He's committed himself to this thing. [laughs] This form of creatureliness. And there's Lewis picking up on the same idea. So yeah, I think there's something to that. but again, that's a whole other subject. So I'm just glad we could have the conversation, that... It's...

**LM:** It's great stuff!

**MH:** What you ran through in the hour I think are just obvious touchpoints. And anyone who remembers from high school or college Dante, Milton, some of these other writers, you can't help but notice that maybe not the chapter and verse quotations, but the ideas have filtered down, whether they're conscious or unconscious. It's just unavoidable. It's just *there*. And so on the one hand, we need to be aware of that, that "we're not doing biblical theology when we talk about Milton or whoever." But on the other hand, they knew a lot. And so... I hate to put it this way, but it's almost better if we get *some* rather than *nothing*. [laughs]

1:20:00

**LM:** Yeah. A lot of people, even if they don't agree with everything in your books, Mike, I think they're attracted to the fact that you, living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, are willing to take verses in the Bible seriously that we don't know what to do with. And basically the ones that are supernatural, like the sons of God sleeping with the daughters of men. We don't know what to do with it. I do think that you're getting a younger audience, too, because they're also wanting to take it seriously. The people that like their books are the same young people that are watching the Bible Project (that you're linked to anyway). They're watching that and they're like, "Wow, somebody's taking seriously something like the word *holiness* and what that means." I still think that's probably the best Bible Project animated thing, is the one about holiness. Because it's such a difficult concept to understand. But I think people want to take it seriously, right? And they want to take the supernatural dimension seriously. They don't know what to *do* with it.

**MH:** Yeah, I would hope that people who would listen to this episode and maybe play parts of it for a homeschooler or something like this, if they're... Or if you're actually getting still... I don't know what they're teaching in high school. It's probably not Milton and Dante. But... Somebody can replay parts of this. I would hope that there would be young people in the audience that would think thoughts like, "I want to do this kind of thing that Milton did for this... For anime. For this video game." Because there's all sorts of overlaps that can really build bridges to a generation, I think, that just misses story an awful lot. They want it. And I think that tide has turned.

**LM:** Let's put together the pieces. And to give them credit, the premillennialists, the *Late, Great Planet Earth*, the *Left Behind* series, in their own way, they're trying to put together a bunch of disparate things. But again, I think they're having a hard time distinguishing spiritual and historical and literal. But don't we all? It's not always clear.

**MH:** Well, in that case, it's focused on one...

**LM:** But you know what? Maybe this is the best way to put it, Mike. I think the reason that premillennialism appeals so much to (I guess you'd call them Baby Boomers)... Why it appeals so much to us (that would include me) is because we love all those charts. Right? All those big charts. [MH laughs] I think that's why people like Calvinism, too. Because it's very logical and systematic. And they wanted that chart. I think this generation, they don't care about the chart. They want the metanarrative. They want the story.

**MH:** They want the story.

**LM:** And if your chart is a map of Middle Earth, then they'll look at it. But don't give me something systematic in charts. Give me a story. [crosstalk] Give me something that I can game with, like those crazy Jumanji movies that are coming out over the last couple of years. Let me see how I can be part of this story. You know, and that's exciting. They want to be part of that story.

**MH:** Well, thanks for being with us again. This is always fun. We're going to have to put our heads together and see what else we want to just sort of riff off.

**LM:** Yeah, we'll have to do it again! We could do one on Dante. Heck, there's so much in Dante. On top of both of them. Maybe a good way to put it is I think that in the same way that most Protestants think about the war in heaven because of Milton, I think a lot of Catholics that believe in purgatory just have Dante's purgatory in mind. You know? And in some ways, he's constructing that himself. His hell and purgatory are just as much based on pagan classics as Milton's are. But they make for a compelling, visual story. And I'll tell you this, too! That, like me, any evangelical like myself (and this includes C.S. Lewis, too – well, Protestant) that loves Dante has to... We don't believe in purgatory, because it's really not in Scripture. But we can't just dismiss it, because Dante's presentation of it is so powerful that, "Oh, there must be a spiritual meaning there. There must be something I can learn from this." It's so concrete.

**MH:** When I was in seminary, you find out that non-Catholics have different views of the intermediate state. And eventually some of those get names like "Baptist Purgatory" or "Methodist Purgatory." [laughs] I mean, everybody's got one of these. So yeah, that might be worth doing at some point. Well, thanks again.

**LM:** Well, thanks!

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**MH:** Yep, absolutely.

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**TS:** Alright, Mike. Another good conversation with Lou. You've got to step up your game if you want to keep up with him. That guy... I love him. [MH laughs] He's got energy.

**MH:** I know, I know. I like listening, too. So yeah. It's good. I always learn something. We've had him on twice now. I learned some things. I just enjoy it.

**TS:** Yeah, I haven't read *Paradise Lost*, I don't think, in its entirety. Now the *Divine Comedy* (Dante stuff) I've read. So I need to check that out. I did look up what the first edition of *Paradise Lost* would cost, Mike, and I think they're running about \$50,000. [MH laughs]. Just imagine 350 years from now, the first edition of *Unseen Realm*...

**MH:** Yeah, there you go.

**TS:** I wonder what that would be.

**MH:** [laughs] I tend to doubt it, but wouldn't that be something?

**TS:** Do you collect books, Mike?

**MH:** I do.

**TS:** Do you have any first editions? What's your prized book?

**MH:** Oh gosh. I don't have anything like that.

**TS:** That's what I mean. Something like first edition prints and...

1:25:00

**MH:** Yeah, I don't have anything like that. I guess the ones that I would value more are the ones that I have signed. But there's nothing like a first edition in there.

**TS:** Do you have at least one book that's kind of like your prized possession? That you value personally? More than the others?

**MH:** Well, I would, only because if I ever lost it I'd probably never be able to get another copy. [laughs] So I have stuff like that that's really hard to find. But nothing that anybody would recognize. Just academic stuff that it just took years to find one, and I finally got one.

**TS:** Alright. Well, hey, we're going to have Lou back on in the fall when his books come out. I appreciate Dr. Lou Markos coming on. And with that, I want to thank everybody else for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.