



‘Henry More’, *Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception*, ed. Hans-Josef Klauck et al. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2020), in press.

More, Henry (1614-1687), an English philosopher, theologian and poet. The most important member of the Cambridge Platonists, a group of seventeenth century thinkers associated with the University of Cambridge. Accepting of the developments of Galilean science, Cartesianism and atomism, they sought an alternative to the faltering philosophical foundation of Aristotelianism by looking to the Platonic tradition, viewed through the framework of Renaissance perennial philosophy. More’s Christian apologetics argued for the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, and the veracity of Christian ethics in light of the atheistic, mechanistic, and fatalistic conclusions drawn from the thought of Spinoza and Hobbes.

The interpretation of the Bible figures prominently in More’s defence of Christianity. He maintained Christianity’s rationality, not because it could be axiomatically or evidentially demonstrated, but because it was in accord with both human reason and Biblical revelation. For More, both Protestant enthusiasm (More 1656), and rationalistic atheism (More 1663a), threatened this rationality in mutually reinforcing error: ‘For the Atheist’s pretence to Wit and natural Reason... makes the Enthusiast secure that Reason is no guide to God: And the Enthusiast’s boldly dictating the careless ravings of his own tumultuous Phansy for undeniable Principles of Divine knowledge, confirms the Atheist that the whole business of Religion ... is nothing but a troublesome fit of over-curious Melancholy’ (More 1656/1662: 1-2). The Bible combated both narrow reason and irrationality by communicating expanded divine reason, articulated rationally through symbolic and allegorical form.

The content and form of scripture meant that it could not be reduced to logical abstraction, or understood as an expression of voluntarist omnipotence. Instead, the Bible articulated its own philosophy of reason, ‘couched somewhere continuedly under the Letter of History as a more Inward Mystical Meaning thereof.’ (More 1664c: 483-9). More’s allegorical approach was shaped by Philo and Origin, and by his own philosophical method, which used poetry to express his version of Christian Platonism (More 1642, 1647). Obscurity and mystery in scripture, More argued, was not obscurantist, but indicated knowledge so removed from human capacity that it required a figurative veil (More 1664a). His three-fold allegorical reading of Gen 1 claimed to identify ‘Theorems of Natural Philosophy and Metaphysicks’, including improvements upon Cartesianism (More 1663b: 127). He later developed a method for the critical analysis of prophecy, including a dictionary of ‘iconisms’, or symbols (More 1664b).

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