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THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

THE CONCEPT OF RESPONSIBILITY IN MILTON'S MAJOR POETRY

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

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BY

FRANCES MARIE SAUNDERS

1974

THE CONCEPT OF RESPONSIBILITY IN MILTON'S MAJOR POETRY

APPROVED BY

James H. Sims

Rudolph C. Bambas

Jack L. Kendall

Robert J. Bauer

Allan H. Gilbert

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

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The end then of learning is to repair the ruins of of our first parents by regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love him, to imitate him, to be like him, as we may the nearest by possessing our souls of true virtue, which being united to the heavenly grace of faith, makes up the highest perfection.

(Of Education)

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INTRODUCTION

The end of learning that Milton envisions in his tractate Of Education (1644) is that such learning

> repair the ruins of our first parents by regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love him, to imitate him, to be like him, as we may the nearest by possessing our souls of true virtue, which being united to the heavenly grace of faith makes up the highest perfection.[1]

This is a didactic, moralistic view of education which one may accept as a serious intent on Milton's part. I believe that this serious, moralistic purpose of Milton, as stated here, is also discernable in most of his work, and in particular in his three major works. The source of such a concern on the part of Milton is, of course, not difficult to ascertain. It is a cardinal precept of the Puritan faith which Milton embraced that a converted man seek to share his faith with other men who had not yet come to the light. The important influence that this teaching and other facets of the Puritan faith had on Milton I will discuss in Chapter I. Milton's early and continuing sense of responsibility for accomplishing the will of God in his own life is the subject of Chapter II. It is in particular Milton's sense of responsibility for accomplishing the will of God in his own life that leads me to believe that Milton was concerned that individual men come "to know God aright," or more specifically,

that men learn how to come into right relationship with God.

In his tractate Of Education he suggests one way by which such a serious, moralistic end of education may be accomplished:

> because our understanding cannot in this body found itselfe but on sensible things, nor arrive so clearly to the knowledge of God and things invisible, as by orderly conning over the visible and inferior creature, the same method is necessarily to be follow'd in all discreet teaching. (CPW, II, 368-69)

He is suggesting that the best way to learn about God and things invisible, which we sometimes have difficulty in understanding, is to examine things visible and concrete which we can more readily understand. Thus, if we can "con the visible and inferior creature" we may come to understand the invisible -- to apprehend the spiritual -- and thus be instructed and edified. If, for example, we see dramatically portrayed for us how God deals with a man, Adam, in a concrete, specific situation as we do in Paradise Lost, we may come to some understanding about the nature of God and his attitude toward men. In the same way, if we have portrayed for us the concrete and specific acts of a particular man, Jesus, in a particular situation as he reacts to temptation, as we do in Paradise Regained, we may come to understanding something of the power of temptation and the possibility of overcoming it. And if we see Samson, who is in his personal dilemma because of his choice, who learns

by suffering, and chooses to reassert his relationship with God, we may learn that such a course is possible for us. In other words, if an artist, such as Milton, provides us with enough concrete experiences which dramatically portray for us basic spiritual truths, then we, too, through a learning process may come to know God aright.

One way of viewing Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained, and Samson Agonistes, then, is to see these works as particularly engaging the reader in a learning process so that he may ultimately make his choice as to what his response to such teaching will be. Stanley Fish in his recent book Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost (1967) is also concerned with reader involvement. His argument essentially is that Milton deliberately manipulates the reader through various situations so as to cause the reader to develop an awareness of his sinfulness and his relation to Adam. His emphasis is on manipulation of the reader which causes him to do something whereas I am emphasizing the instruction of the reader which enables him to choose to do something. Further, I am suggesting that such instruction continues through Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes to enable the reader to make choices which are significant for himself.

The way by which I see Milton accomplishing this task of helping men to know God aright is by a developing and growing pattern of instruction evolving out of the theme of man's

responsibility for his relationship to God. That is to say, that by emphasizing through his three poems the theme that whatever one's personal relationship with God is, at any particular time in any given situation, that relationship is a result of one's own personal free choice, Milton is both instructing the reader of this truth and giving him the opportunity to choose if he will accept the truth for himself. I believe that this theme does engage the reader in a personal reaction. He is both a spectator viewing the action of others in the poems, and he is also increasingly a participant because he is being led to make a choice, a judgment for himself regarding the responsibility of those in the poem, and, by analogy, his responsibility. He observes and learns, for example, that in the context of Paradise Lost Adam and Eve are each clearly responsible for their free choice which determines their relationship to God. And because he identifies with them in their human freedom to choose, he recognizes that he too is responsible for whatever choice he may make regarding his relationship with God. Further, in Paradise Regained the reader sees exemplified in the choice and action of the man Jesus what man's relationship to God should, and can be. And he can decide if he, too, will resist temptation so that his relationship with God will be modeled after the example of Jesus. And finally in Samson Agonistes the reader, as he enters into the choice and actions of Samson, a man most like himself in that he is neither pre-

lapsarian nor virgin born, may come to experience vicariously within the context of the poem the same kind of faith that Samson experiences. This end result, however, will be the reader's only if he chooses this for himself.

I am limiting this study to this one theme because I believe it is a major theme -- one which links the three works together -- and also because it is a theme which progressively instructs the reader as to how he may, if he so chooses, come to have what to Milton constitutes a right relationship with God, a relationship which will enable the reader to say with Adam

> Henceforth I learn, that to obey is best,
> And love with fear the only God, to walk
> As in his presence, ever to observe
> His providence, and on him sole depend. (PL, XII, 561-64)

This method of thematic instruction regarding one's responsibility for one's choice follows a pattern: as the reader is being instructed concerning this concept, the responsibility for his personal choice is being progressively turned over to him, so that as he is learning about choosing, he is increasingly given the responsibility for choosing. For example, in Paradise Lost the reader is bombarded from all sides with the fact of man's responsibility. He is being taught -- overtly and constantly -- by one specific example after another that one is free to choose one's relationship with God and responsible for that choice. In Book I it is Satan who teaches him when he says, "in my choice / To reign

is worth ambition though in Hell" (I, 261-62). Satan is in Hell rather than in the presence of God because that is what he chose for himself. In Book III, God teaches this truth. In speaking with the Son he says of men and angels, "Authors to themselves in all / Both what they judge and what they choose; for so / I form'd them free" (III, 122-24). In Book VI Abdiel affirms this truth by his action. He chooses to defy Satan and remain true to God. Later Raphael is dispatched to remind Adam and Eve of their responsibility for their choice. By the time the reader begins Book IX he has had clear instruction that one is free and one is responsible for his choice. He has had this truth as clearly defined for him as Adam and Eve have had it defined for them. But even as they, he is responsible for choosing how he will respond to this clear instruction.

In Paradise Regained the teaching method becomes less didactic and less obtrusive. The reader is not bombarded on every side from every personage in the poem with the truth that man is free and therefore responsible for his choice. Rather he is quietly shown by the specific conduct of the man Jesus that one is responsible for his choice in any and every temptation, and moreover that one can, if he so chooses, overcome temptations common to man. The epic voice does not comment as overtly in this poem as it has in Paradise Lost; rather the reader sees Jesus overcoming temptation, and the demonstration is the lesson.

In Samson Agonistes, finally, the reader is immediately and personally involved with the action himself. He is no longer being taught, as in Paradise Lost, or shown, as in Paradise Regained, but he is both left and let to experience along with Samson the significance of Samson's human dilemma, and he is responsible for evaluating and deciding for himself the foolishness or the wisdom of Samson's action. No one is there to guide him as he makes his choice---it is now fully his responsibility to respond as he will. Therefore he is at the point which I believe the works themselves through this thematic perspective have led him: he must decide if he believes that Samson's action is heroic or foolish, and if he responds affirmatively then he has chosen to believe that Samson's faith in God is right and good, and to that degree at least he has affirmed his own faith.

This emphasis which I am making on the validity of interpreting these poems from the perspective of the individualistic, intensely personal and responsible position of man, and of the reader involvement in the poems is an emphasis which has been made by others. James Holly Hanford in "Milton and the Return to Humanism" (1919) has emphasized the importance of interpreting Milton's works, and in particular Paradise Lost, from a broad, humanistic viewpoint, and he defines the character of that humanism:

> The essential character of that humanism is its assertion of the spiritual dignity of man, its recognition of the degree to which his higher

> destinies are in his own hands, its repudiation of the claim of his lower nature to control his higher or of any force or agency external to his own mind and will to achieve for him salvation.[2]

Humanism, thus defined, emphasizes the degree of responsibility that lies with man regarding his own personal destiny.

Northrup Frye in his book The Return to Eden (1965) emphasizes the importance of this individualistic, personal approach. In his essay, "The Garden Within" he says that "the theme of the externalizing of the demonic and the internalizing of the divine runs through every aspect of Milton's writing."[3] Such externalizing and internalizing can be accomplished only with an individual; it cannot be done in mass.

In contrast to this emphasis on the interpretation of Milton's poetry through the perspective of the individual is a recent book by E. L. Marilla, Milton and Modern Man (1968). His view is that the three major works of Milton can best be viewed as a study of human society; that their unity lies in the emphasis on man as a social creature, and that the crucial problem is what happens to society as a result of man's action. In his interpretation, Paradise Lost is "a study of human society and of the perils that constantly menace the best of all worlds that man is privileged to inherit,"[4] and Paradise Regained becomes "a projection of the challenges that confront man in his attempt to re-establish the good society that he lost through moral

and intellectual defection."[5] In his interpretation of Samson Agonistes, Samson is redeemed as he reassumes his role as deliverer of Israel and carries out his divine purpose in relation to his society.[6] Further, Marilla feels that the three major works are almost certainly a planned trilogy; that they "represent a combined projection by a thoroughgoing Christian humanist of the issues that always confront those who would build and protect a civilized state."[7] Marilla's interpretation is certainly an interesting and provocative one, and is valuable as a divergent view to the personal, individualistic emphasis that I am indicating as important. Such an interpretation focuses on the importance of relationships and responsibilities that exist in a parallel line -- that is, on man's relationship with man, and no one would deny the importance of this emphasis. But my view, concerned with the importance of the relationship that exists on a vertical line -- that is, on man's relationship with God, is, I believe, more fundamental because this relationship is the only one which, finally, we are responsible for. That one can profitably study Milton's poems from either perspective-- with the emphasis on the individual or the emphasis on society -- and significantly relate his views to our twentieth century world is indication of the continuing contemporaneousness of his views.

Further validation of the contemporaneousness of

Milton's works (if such validation is necessary) may be made by suggesting that at one particular point --freedom of man and responsibility for choice-- Milton and the modern Existential thinker are in agreement. In suggesting that such parallelism of thought exists, I am not claiming any special clairvoyant ability of Milton to anticipate what most scholars consider to be a twentieth century philosophy.[8] Rather I am saying that both Milton and the Existentialist attempt to grapple with age-old philosophic questions, and in particular with the question of man's freedom and choice.

In discussing this analogy between Milton and modern Existentialism I am limiting the comparison to the facet of Existentialism already named -- freedom and choice -- for the obvious reason that this is the concept I am primarily concerned with in Milton's works. But it is noteworthy, too, that this is one of the most important concepts in Existential thought. The Encyclopedia of Philosophy states:

> If any single thesis could be said to constitute the doctrine of existentialism, it would be that the possibility of choice is the central face of human nature. Even the thesis that existence precedes essence often means no more than that men do not have fixed natures that limit or determine their choices, but rather it is their choices that bring whatever nature they have into being.[9]

Further it is stated that as existentialists develop this thesis, they are involved in at least three separate contentions:

> The first is that choice is ubiquitous. All my actions imply choices. Even when I do not choose explicitly, as I may not do in the majority of cases, my action bears witness to an implicit choice. The second contention is that although in many of my actions my choices are governed by criteria, the criteria which I employ are themselves chosen, and there are no rational grounds for such choice. The third is that no causal explanation for my actions can be given.[10]

A brief elaboration on this Existential idea concerning freedom and choice and a limited discussion of the relationship of this concept to Milton's poems is a necessary and arbitrary limitation of scope. But even such a brief and limited treatment will, hopefully, serve to stimulate one's consciousness of the timeliness and relevance of both Milton and the Existential philosopher for the twentieth century reader.

NOTES

[1]Don M. Wolfe, general editor. Complete Prose Works of John Milton (New Haven, 1953), II, 366-67. Unless otherwise indicated, all prose references will be to this edition. Hereafter references will be placed in text of the paper.

[2]James Holly Hanford, "Milton and the Return to Humanism" in John Milton: Poet and Humanist (Cleveland, Ohio, 1966), p. 179.

[3]Northrup Frye, "The Garden Within," in The Return of Eden (Toronto, 1964), p. 109.

[4]E. L. Marilla, Milton and Modern Man (University, Alabama, 1968), p. 15.

[5]Marilla, p. 15.

[6]Marilla, p. 17.

[7]Marilla, pp. 17-18.

[8]Alasdair MacIntyre in his article on "Existentialism" in the Encyclopedia of Philosophy, (1967) III, p. 147 says that its protagonists have traced it back to Pascal, to St. Augustine, even to Socrates. But the consensus of opinion is that the movement began with Soren A. Kierkegaard. This illustrates the truth that any movement, if defined broadly enough, can be traced back almost indefinitely.

[9]Alasdair MacIntyre, "Existentialism," Encyclopedia of Philosophy (New York, 1967), III, 149.

[10]Encyclopedia of Philosophy, III, p. 149.

CHAPTER I

INFLUENCE OF PURITAN THOUGHT ON MILTON

In order to understand Milton's concept of the responsibility of man, it is necessary to examine Seventeenth Century Puritan thought on the subject. I agree with William Haller's prefatory remarks in his book The Rise of Puritanism that "one could not justly understand Milton at any point in his career without understanding his relation to Puritanism," and that . . . "one who studies Puritan thought will be drawn near to the central fire which still burns in the pages of Milton."[1]

Everett H. Emerson states a little less vehemently that "The thoroughly individualistic Milton reveals the inadequacy of labels, but to say that Milton was a Puritan is to recognize a dominant force in his life."[2] One cannot escape the fact that Milton was a Puritan, and although there are important points at which Milton came to differ from the orthodox mainstream of Puritanism,[3] his basic ideas are squarely in the Puritan tradition. In this connection E. M. W. Tillyard says,

> It is of course extremely unfortunate that we have to use the word Protestantism at all in talking of Milton. But we can hardly help it. The reason is that a certain set of impulses, of prime importance in human nature, ever-existing, but fluctuating in their relative power,

> became for a couple of centuries associated with a certain type of religion. If they were expressed they were expressed typically par excellence, through that religion rather than in another way. Those impulses were in the main the desire of the individual to stand alone and accept responsibility, and a belittling of all material and adventitious props in exercising this responsibility. The first of these impulses was general to the Renaissance, the second the specific mark of the most centrally Protestant man, the Puritan.[4]

A systematic examination of historical Puritanism[5] is beyond the scope of this study, but what is attempted is an examination of some of the spiritual tenets of Puritanism which relate specifically to the development of Milton's ideas. I am particularly interested in the Puritan concept of the responsibility of man for his relationship with God, and how that basic relationship affects his personal life and his life with other human beings. Further, an attempt is made to analyze the important part that this concept played, not only in Milton's personal life, but to illustrate the importance of the concept in the great poetry of his later years.

That it is difficult to set down a prescribed set of distinctive Puritan characteristics goes almost without saying. As Everett H. Emerson says in English Puritanism From John Hooper to John Milton:

> In recent books John F. H. New and Michael Walzer have tried to demonstrate that Elizabethan, Jacobean, and Caroline Puritanism had a set of distinctive characteristics, but Charles and Katherine George and Lawrence Slacik have argued that Puritanism had no such consistency. Indeed, one who seeks to characterize the Puritanism of the ninety years after 1530 finds it difficult to isolate specific characteristics which differentiate the nonconformist from his conformist brethren. The Puritan tradition was Calvinist; it was

> identified with strict moral standards and hard work, especially in the Seventeenth Century; and it stressed the importance of grace and the process of salvation.[5]

This general statement and assessment is true, but the significant fact is that Puritanism of whatever period and whatever persuasion "stressed the importance of grace and the process of salvation," and it is in receiving grace and exercising faith that man's personal responsibility becomes so very significant. This is a basic concern which is recognized by most scholars as characteristic of the Puritan faith.

Some other general assessments regarding the Puritan and his faith can be made. The Puritan was primarily interested in the spiritual, and his essential world view and personal concern was moral and other-worldly. He was primarily interested in how one could obtain salvation from sin and find forgiveness and right relationship with God in this world, and he was keenly aware of the eternal significance of such a relationship. Moreover, he was vitally concerned with the moral implications and responsibilities inherent in and growing out of this personal relationship. This emphasis on the spiritual is the essential concern of the Puritan despite the Puritan involvement in political and civic affairs of the Seventeenth Century.[7]

In order to ascertain what were some of the important spiritual tenets of Puritanism during the Seventeenth Century, it will be instructive to turn to the Puritan pulpit for enlightenment. This is so for at least two reasons. If one

wants to understand the faith and spiritual values of any age, it is important to listen to what the preacher says because it is from the pulpit that systematic theology is articulated into practical theology. What may be an orthodox theological concept written down in a book of theology may become something quite different when practically applied by a preacher in the pulpit. This is true in Seventeenth Century England, particularly with reference to those of the Puritan persuasion because of the important place the preacher and his sermon had in Seventeenth Century Puritan life. Douglas Bush states, "It is hardly possible to exaggerate the importance of the sermon in the Seventeenth Century world."[8] Charles H. George, well known historian, says,

> Insomuch as there is a Puritan mind, it is truly approached through the clergy--even though there was an emphasis on laymen, it is through the preachers that one finds the prime and final source of the Puritan ideology.[9]

The important place given to the sermon in Puritan life reflects the primary significance given to the spiritual, and a good sermon was considered to be a means by which a man could come to be convicted of sin, and convinced of his need for grace. For this reason there was a great emphasis on preaching throughout the history of Puritanism. Thomas Cartwright, a leading Puritan divine and focus of Puritan preaching at Cambridge in the 1570's, stressed the importance of the preaching of the sermon. He taught that

> as when the fire is stirred up and discovered it giveth more heat than when it is not, so the word of God by preaching and interpretation (as it were stirred up and blown) maketh a greater flame in the hearts of the hearers than when it is read.[10]

John Udall, a Puritan martyr of the 1580's, makes clear the importance of the sermon and the common view of the Puritans toward the sermon that it should instruct them in the ways of God, as he says,

> . . . the end wherefore Christ Jesus when he ascended into heaven . . . gave gifts unto man, was for the edification of the body of Christ; that is, to build up God's people in the true knowledge of the Holy Word, and so to confirm them in the faith, and reform them in their lives. Now to the end that this may be done . . . the workman whom God hath fitted to this great work must be . . . taught unto the kingdom of heaven . . . furnished with all kinds of knowledge meet to express God's will to His people in most effectual manner . . . .[11]

Another early Puritan minister who stressed the importance of the sermon was Richard Greenham, graduate of Pembroke College, Cambridge, who in 1570 became rector at Dry Drayton, three miles from Cambridge, and who remained at that post for twenty years. His interest and concern lay in helping individuals more than in reforming churches. His devotional collection A Garden of Spiritual Flowers was very popular and went through eleven printings from 1607 to 1638, but his great concern was also the sermon and the potential effect that the preaching of the Word has on the listener. He puts the matter very eloquently:

> It is good still to attend upon hearing the Word, although we feel not that inward joy and working of God's Spirit, which either we have felt, or desire to feel.

> The preaching of the Word is God's ordinance: if it hath not wrought heretofore, though it work not presently, it may work hereafter. And because we know not who is the man, what is the time, where is the place, which is the sermon that God hath appointed to work on us, let us in all obedience attend on the ministry of every man, watch at all times, be diligent in every place, and run to every sermon which we can conveniently, because though the Lord touch us not by this man, in this place, at this time, through such a sermon, yet He may touch us by another.[12]

Richard Stock, who preached in the church at All Hallows and is best known as John Milton's childhood rector, indicates in the funeral elegy of John, Lord Harrington, the important place that the sermon occupied in the life of any Puritan saint. In speaking of Harrington, he says,

> . . . he did not miss ordinarily twice a day to hear the Word publicly; no, not when he was a courtier. Yea, he hath ridden four miles to the public worship of God when he could not enjoy it nearer.[13]

Stock further comments on Harrington's proper respect for the sermon, and reveals the prevalent attitude that the sermon was the actual Word of God.

> In the hearing of the Word, he [Harrington] was one of the most attentive and revered hearers that I ever observed, for he well knew that he was before God and that he heard not the words of man but God . . .[14]

He further indicates what the proper reaction should be for one who has heard a Puritan sermon, as he continues to speak of Harrington's piety:

> After he had heard, he usually withdrew himself from company before dinner . . . that he might for the space of half an hour meditate upon what he had heard.[15]

As Stock's words of praise for Harrington indicate, the sermon was an important concern for the Puritan because the hearer

was expected to meditate on what he had heard and be guided and changed thereby. The sermon was to be used as an instrument for pointing out to the man in the pew what his personal responsibility toward God was, both for salvation and for lifelong service to God, and one feels that Milton early responded to such preaching with a dedication of life and talent.

Milton, from his earliest childhood, heard innumerable sermons preached from Puritan pulpits, and their influence on him must have been considerable. That the Puritan church and the Puritan minister were an integral part of Milton's life from early childhood is a point made by William Riley Parker in his biography of Milton. He believes that the parish church and the preacher had an important and continuing influence on Milton. He says,

> Another important influence upon the boy Milton, difficult to gauge but dangerous to ignore, was that of the parish church. When Richard Stock became rector of All Hallows, Bread Street, on 20 March 1611, he took his parish duties seriously. Moreover, he was in the habit of assisting his parishioners in writing wills and handling estates, so that his relations with the scrivener must have been frequent. Besides preaching twice on Sunday (he demanded strict observance of the Sabbath), he catechized the children of his parish during the week, boys and girls on alternate days.[16]

That Puritan sermons had their continuing influence on Milton at least as late as 1634 is suggested by William Haller in his analysis of the influence which a contemporary preacher, Thomas Goodwin, had on Milton's thought. Haller states that such influence can be illustrated by comparing

the sermon theme of Thomas Goodwin with one of the themes of Milton's Comus, written in 1634. Thomas Goodwin in 1636 published a volume of sermons, preached over a period of eight years before at Cambridge. The title of the volume of sermons was A Childe of Light Walking in Darkness: or A Treatise Showing the Causes by which, the cases wherein, the ends for which God leaves his children to distress of conscience. Together with directions how to walk, so as to come forth of such a condition. In this series of sermons Goodwin's purpose is to give encouragement to those who even after conversion are afflicted by rational doubts concerning predestination and fears for their own election under that great law. In his sermon he uses almost poetical allegory in speaking of a child of God's perplexity on this issue and compares him to someone walking in momentary darkness; someone momentarily lost from his source of strength, but he goes on to say that though the child of God is momentarily lost in despair, in spiritual darkness, God, who alone knows his heart, will surely save him. He is a child of light, even in the dark. God does not desert him. He merely lets him encounter temptation in order to strengthen him by great spiritual trials for great spiritual happiness, in order to make him wise experimentally to comfort others. These were the themes which were dealt with constantly by the Puritan preacher of Milton's day and one may conclude with Haller that

> Whether the author of Comus ever heard Goodwin at Cambridge instructing saints how to walk safely through the night of doubt and fear, we cannot tell. Sermons from some quarter depicting the journey of the saint guided by light within his own clear breast, he could hardly have avoided.[17]

The point here is to note that Puritan thought and teaching had a pervasive influence on Milton, and to stress particularly that Puritan preaching had its effect on him. That he was influenced by the content of these sermons may hardly be doubted; and the concept of the responsibility of man toward God as the Puritan preacher explained it must have influenced Milton's personal view. I am suggesting, then, that the primary spiritual concerns reflected in the Puritan pulpit of Milton's day influenced Milton's thinking as he was developing his personal concepts; and further, that having had the office of the pulpit denied him, his three later great works can be considered as reflecting what was one of the important questions of Milton's contemporaries and of Milton himself--what is the responsibility of man in his personal relationship to God?

The message of the Puritan divine, then, is important to an understanding of Puritan ideology and theology, of the "Puritan mind." The Puritan preacher was concerned with his personal impact on individual men. His business was to help others along the way into which God had already directed him. The new spirit in him reached out to the spirit of the individual sinner still struggling in the

darkness to help him into the light. He was an individual "converted" man, a man who had experienced the calling and grace of God, and part of his responsibility as a regenerate soul was to reach out for another individual man with whom to share his experience. The plethora of spiritual autobiographies, biographies, and sermons all give witness to this feeling of responsibility. The converted man felt obligated to admonish and exhort his fellowman toward a right relationship with God. In 1654 Samuel Petto, a Puritan divine, said,

> Christians know not what they loose [sic], by burying their experiences: they disable themselves for strengthening the weake hands, and confirming the feeble knees of others, and it is a great disadvantage to themselves.[18]

One is reminded that when Milton set out in Paradise Lost to assert Eternal Providence and justify the ways of God, he was attempting to do so to "men" -- he was an individual, converted man speaking to other individual men for the purpose of helping them to the light. This feeling of personal responsibility on Milton's part was attributable in part at least to the influence that Puritan thinking had on him.

The aim of the Puritan divine, then, was to arouse every man to ask himself, what must I do to be saved? He was to probe the conscience of the sinner, to name and cure the malady of his soul, and send him out strengthened and emboldened for a life-long battle with the world, the flesh, and the devil. Because it was important that each individual

man, rich or poor, ignorant or intelligent, understand the Puritan message, it was imperative that the preachers preach plainly and perspicuously, "that the simplest man may understand what is taught as if he did hear his name."[19] Thus the Puritan sermon, in contrast to the Anglican, was plain, straightforward and explicit.

William Perkins, a fellow at Christ's College at the same time Milton was there, was a very popular preacher. According to Knappen, the historian, he was one of the two Puritan theologians of that period who attempted a systematic treatment of Christian theology. It was he who warned the preacher that he must not "tickle the itching eares of his auditorie with the fine ringing sentences of the Fathers," but must "observe an admirable plainness and an admirable powerfulnesse" so that the unlearned might be able to grasp the eternal issues in which he was involved.[20]

Most importantly, the message of the Puritan divine was based on Biblical truth as they interpreted it. Their supreme authority was the Bible; all their teachings were verified by it. Edward Dering, a leader in the first generation of Elizabethan Puritans, along with Perkins, in one of his sermons emphasizes that the Bible is the touchstone to try the virtues of all things religious. "God spake it; therefore we must do it. God spake it not; therefore we have nothing to do with it."[21] He also gave this advice to preachers from his deathbed: "Dally not with the

word of God, make not light of it. Blessed are they that use their tongue well when they have it."[22] Samuel Hieron, a Puritan divine, whose work entitled A Help Unto Devotion went through about thirty-five editions in the first fifty years of the Seventeenth Century, emphasizes in a prayer the importance of the Word:

> And seeing, O Lord, thy holy Word, which Thou Thyself hast inspired, is the treasury of all true knowledge, where only that wisdom is to be the revenues whereof do far exceed the finest silver, therefore make me a diligent and busy searcher of that sacred book, that it may be a familiar unto me and dwell plenteously in my inward parts and that so I may feel the sweetness of it in my soul.[23]

John Preston, who succeeded John Donne in 1622 at Lincoln's Inn, in speaking of "heavenly wisdom" says, "this is revealed to us in the holy Word of God, which was written by God Himself, though men were the mediate penmen of it . . ."[24] The Puritan believed that the truth in Scripture, when brought to bear upon a man's conscience by force of reason, would change his life. Milton concurred with this Puritan concept. He felt that right reason and the Holy Spirit made it possible for any man to interpret the Bible for himself. He states in The Readie and Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth (1660) that

> The whole freedom of man consists either in spiritual or civil libertie. As for spiritual, who can be at rest, who can enjoy anything in this world with contentment, who hath not libertie to serve God and to save his own soul, according to the best light which God hath planted in him to that purpose by the reading of his reveal'd will and the guidance of his holy spirit. (CPW, V, 450)

And again in A Treatise of Civil Power (1659) he indicates the importance of the scripture and man's responsibility for his own interpretation of it as he is guided by the Holy Spirit.

> . . . the main foundation of our protestant religion . . . having no other divine rule or authority from without us warrantable to one another as a common ground but the holy scripture, and no other within us but the illumination of the Holy Spirit so interpreting that scripture as warrantable only to our selves and to such whose consciences we can so persuade, can have no other ground in matters of religion but only from the scriptures. (CPW, V, 540)

In this connection, Everett H. Emerson says, "One clear indication of Milton's continuing identification with Puritan ideals is his attitude toward the Bible."[25] The Bible was the complete and unique authority for the Puritan because he believed in the divine nature of the Bible. William Perkins affirms that the Scriptures were

> of sufficient credit in and by themselves, needing not the testimony of any creature, nor subject to the censure of either men or angels, binding the consciences of all men at all times, and being the only foundation of our faith and the rule and canon of all truth.[26]

The Bible was not only the unique authority; it was a complete one. Speaking of the Old and New Testaments, Perkins further declares that "not only the matter of them but the whole disposition thereof, with the style and the phrase, was set down by the immediate inspiration of the Holy Ghost."[27]

What were the Biblical truths that the Puritan believed in so explicitly? What was his theology which he based so

firmly on the Bible? What was it the preachers preached, and what did they believe? Two emphases can be used to describe their primary interests: emphasis on the individual and emphasis on the experiential. They were concerned with the individual and they were concerned about his personal experience with God. Everything they believed centered on the individual, personal nature of man's relationship with God, and that relationship was always worked out in a day-by-day experience. A man's personal salvation was a result of an experiential encounter with God in an existential situation. Their chief source of Biblical inspiration was the book of Romans and the teaching of Paul. As Haller states, "They urged the people to base their understanding of the word of God upon Paul's epistle to the Romans."[28] Their reliance on Pauline doctrine centered in the book of Romans, as interpreted by them, plus the Calvinistic influence of their day, led to a particular emphasis being made by them. M. M. Knappen in discussing in particular the influence of Calvinistic thinking on the Puritan mind, states:

> To this fact [Calvinistic influence] may be attributed the surprising lack of Christological thought in this avowedly Christian movement. It is quite unfair to say that the Puritans were an Old Testament group who cared little for the teaching or attitude of the new dispensation. As we have seen, their standard of authority was a New Testament one, and they were prolific in their output of commentaries on the epistles and apocalypse. But it is true that the four gospels do not appear to have attracted them particularly. Certainly the person of Christ figures very little in their literature.[29]

And Haller says,

> The Puritan saga did not cherish the memory of Christ in the manger or on the cross, that is, of the lamb of God sacrificed in vicarious atonement for the sins of man. The mystic birth was the birth of the new man in men. The mystic passion was the crucifixion of the new man by the old . . .[30]

Therefore one can look at the Puritan experience as having a heavy emphasis on man and his effort, his responsibility. It was, in this sense at least, a man-centered religion, and the doctrine of the responsibility of man for assuming or rejecting his relationship with God may be considered an important theme of practical Puritan belief as it was propounded from the Puritan pulpit. In other words, the Puritan pulpit emphasized that man was responsible for his relationship with God, and that this relationship was intensely personal and individual because each man was free to choose this relationship. Milton was also influenced by this intensely personal approach of the Puritan to God, and this is reflected in his concern with the responsibility of man in his three great works.

If the Puritan divines relied so heavily on the book of Romans and the instructions of Paul therein, what did men learn from their preaching? They learned that all men are sinners because they have disobeyed the law of God. They are sinners by nature and sinners by individual choice. They are sinners by nature because of the Adamic sin; they have partaken of Adam's nature and hence his tendency to

sin. But more importantly, each individual man is a sinner by his own free choice. "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23 KJV). "There is none righteous, no, not one." (Romans 3:10 KJV). Man can choose to sin because he is a free moral agent.

Because man chose to sin, he comes under just condemnation. Moreover, there is nothing that man can do of his own motion to remove the universal imputation of sin. This concept of universal depravity paradoxically enhanced the self-respect of the ordinary man. If none were righteous, then one man was as good as another. Each man was of intrinsic worth and each man was individually responsible for his own fate, for his own relationship with God. Each man had individually and personally chosen to sin and was individually condemned. He had no recourse, no help for salvation except from outside himself. This outside help came from God and was a result of God's grace. Yet, paradoxically, each man must avail himself of that help by the exercise of personal faith. God in effect freely chose to redeem man in the person of his Son, who, taking upon himself the nature of man, atoned once and for all for the sin of man. As stated in Romans 5:12, 18b:

> Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned, . . . even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.

Therefore, a man was saved, not by satisfying the law, which he could not do, but by accepting what Christ did for him. To benefit from Christ's atoning work, to achieve new life, the sole agency was faith. Haller states,

> The manifestation of grace in the elect was faith. Those destined to be saved in Christ believed in his power and willingness to redeem.[31]

M. M. Knappen calls this "correct intellectual faith." He quotes Richard Greenham, a Puritan divine, who in his preaching stressed the outward, visible results of such saving faith and who said,

> They that willingly hear and joyfully embrace the doctrine that we are by law condemned for sin, by the Gospel saved through faith in Christ, and thenceforth endeavor to have this world crucified unto us, and us to be crucified unto the world and to become new creatures shall also be saved and find mercy and peace.[32]

Knappen further states that with the Puritan proper intellectual belief is manifested by certain attitudes of heart and results in certain spiritual exercises:

> One must next renounce and repent of every known sin. He must study God's requirements as set forth in the Bible, realize his shortcomings, and 'rip up' his heart in genuine repentance. Not only the present mode of life but all the past must be dragged into the white light of conscience, dissected, and examined with a determination to overlook no slightest failing or secret desire. When the depth of his iniquity became apparent, it was to be contrasted with the height of God's standard, and one could then realize the hopelessness of his situation if no outside aid were forthcoming. Thus the penitent reached a state of holy desperation. Convinced of his extreme sinfulness and inability to help himself, he cast himself wholly on the mercy of God. Then came the peace that passeth all understanding, the definite assurance of salvation as the Holy Spirit convinced him that by justifying faith he was numbered among the elect.[33]

Thus salvation came to the individual believer through a definite experience which he was obligated to secure. Knappen says,

> The Puritan writing theology gave to God all the responsibility and, therefore, all the glory for man's salvation. But in the pulpit, as in popular writing, he was delightfully inconsistent, putting the burden on the individual.[34]

Haller states something of this same idea:

> . . . the preachers were to find it practically inadvisable as well as theoretically impossible to name the man who might not be saved. Rather, all their interest lay in exposing everybody -- the great mass of the people -- to the preaching of the covenant of grace. They spoke and acted, therefore, as though there were no conscience which could not be awakened, as though every common sinner might be converted into a saint.[35]

Furthermore, the Puritan divine insisted that although it was necessary that they as preachers be trained for the preaching of the Word, they were equally emphatic that proper understanding of the word and conversion resulting from such understanding lay within the realm of possibility for all men. Haller says that

> . . . for the understanding of the word, for conversion to the faith, they were insistent that nothing was required but the natural capacities of the lowliest, most ignorant and least gifted of men. The light of nature could not in itself save, but when aided by the light of faith as revealed in scripture . . . and in preaching . . . it was all that any man needed.[36]

This emphasis on individual responsibility was evident even in the husband-wife relationship. The Puritan code regarding marriage was based on the patriarchial conception of the family as conveyed by scripture and tradition. Haller states,

> The Puritan exaltation of the family could serve only to make the godly hold to that conception and the more earnestly. But Puritan individualism also had its effect and must be taken into account. Though the wife must be subordinate to the husband, woman must be regarded as equal to man in her title to grace and in her independent responsibility before God. She too had to go on spiritual pilgrimage and make spiritual war, and she had to go on her own feet and fight her own battle.[37]

The uniting of husband and wife in the marriage relationship was a uniting of two souls of differing capacities, but of the same kind, sharing the same freedom and the same responsibility. Again, Haller says of the woman:

> She was not his body slave, but the companion of his soul. He must cherish her as such, respecting her spiritual integrity and affording her the same freedom for spiritual effort which he himself enjoyed.[38]

This concept has its impact on Milton and must be considered for a proper understanding of his handling of the question of responsibility in the sin of Adam and Eve in Paradise Lost. This will be discussed in more detail in a later chapter.

Examples of the intensely personal nature of the salvation experience and man's personal responsibility for this experience, based on his freedom of choice, can be illustrated from any of the many spiritual autobiographies which began to be written as early as 1608. They continued to be written until late in the Seventeenth Century, partly as a result of seventy years of expert preaching which encouraged such individual religious experiences and expression. The titles of one by Richard Kilby, written in 1608,

indicates the personal nature of his concern: The Burthen of a Loaden Conscience. Ten years later he wrote Halleluia: Praise Ye the Lord, for the Unburthening of a Loaden Conscience in which he tells of his personal struggle against sin and temptation and his search for God.[39] The personal conviction and guilt of sin and the personal joy upon the experiencing of conversion is evident from these two titles. The intensely personal, individual approach to conversion and the personal dealing between God and man is substantiated by the testimony of one Jeremy Heyward, who emphasizes this individualistic, personal relationship. He says,

> The Lord hath opened my eyes to see sin, and showne me myself, and I lay under his wrath half a year, and so long as I sought to make out my own righteousness, I lay thus; and yet this while, I followed the meanes, heard the Word, and I saw at length nothing but Christ would serve me, and till then I could have no comfort, wherefore one first day of the week, I fell to prayer, I prayed thrice, and at the third time I heard him say, Loe! My grace is sufficient for thee, whereby I was much satisfied ere since rowling myself on Christ, and living in him alone, and I find so great a change, that I can say, whereas I was blinde, now I am sure I see.[40]

Clearly Heyward and others of his persuasion assume that there could be no human nor institutional mediator between individual man and God. The Puritan was firm in his belief that his salvation experience was secured by his individual, personal response to the claims of God as revealed to him through the Bible, through the preaching of the Word, and the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit.[41] As Dowden states,

> The unvarying central element of Puritanism maintained that the relation between the invisible spirit of man and the invisible God was immediate rather than mediate.[42]

This encounter of man with God in conversion, in the Puritan faith, was always a lonely and authentic one-to-one relationship. Watkins, emphasizing the nature of the personal encounter, says,

> In the empty room in the stillness and cold light of dawn, the lonely soul cries out to God and becomes aware for a moment of a stirring beyond its own consciousness; something alive pierces through from the outside and presses downwards like a living weight . . .[43]

One of the ideas that the Puritan faith emphasized most forcefully, then, was that individual men and women could achieve, and indeed were responsible for achieving, a personal relationship with God, and this came about as each individual man committed himself in faith to God. A corollary to the emphasis given to individual responsibility for salvation is the emphasis on the experiential nature of that encounter. The initial encounter of man with God was subjectively experienced. The preacher was particularly concerned that he preach only what he himself had experienced so that he could offer himself as experimental proof of his own teaching. His life was to reflect his profession; his whole career was to be a sermon. One is reminded that Milton felt that "one who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought himself to be a true poem" (CPW, I, 890) which indicates that he felt his life should be exemplary in discipline and conduct in order that he might share his vision with other men.

Above all, the preacher wished to testify that the doctrines he upheld had been proven upon his pulses. The life of Dr. Thomas Goodwin, who was at one time President of Magdalen College, Oxford, is a case in point. Goodwin, upon hearing a funeral sermon preached on October 2, 1620, found himself "to be as one struck down by a mighty Power" and for the first time came to see "by a new sort of illumination" his sinful condition before God. After this shattering discovery, he relates his encounter with God:

> So God was pleased on the sudden, and as it were in an instant, to alter the whole course of his former dispensation towards me, and said of and to my Soul, yea live, yea live I say, said God; and as he created the World and the Matter of all things by a Word, so he created and put a new Life and Spirit into my soul, and so great an alteration was strange to me. The word of Promise . . . he let fall into my Heart . . . so this speaking of God to my soul, although it was but a gentle Sound, yet it made a noise over my whole Heart . . . . God took me aside, and as it were privately said unto me, do you now turn to me, and I will pardon all your Sins tho never so many as I forgave and pardoned my Servant Paul . . .[44]

The intensely personal nature of the encounter is apparent, and implicit in Goodwin's account is the fact that he, Goodwin, had to choose if he would "now turn to God" or not. He did so choose, and his own words indicate this fact and the consequent happy results of such decision:

> I observed of this Work of God on my Soul, that there was nothing of Constraint or Force in it, but I carried on with the most ready and willing Mind, and what I did was what I chose to do. With the greatest freedom I parted with my Sins, formerly as dear to me as the apple of my Eye, yea as my Life, and resolv'd never to return to them more.[45]

This concept of man's initial personal encounter with God, his responsibility to make a choice freely and willingly, in a living situation, to God's claims, and the resultant happiness if he chooses God's way is characteristically Puritan, and it is characteristically Miltonic.

And just as the initial encounter of the Puritan with God was experiential and individual, so his continuing experience was experiential and individual. Moreover, the convert was certainly conscious of his continuing responsibility for his continuing relationship with God. He kept watch on his moral and spiritual life for fruits of the Spirit which were outward signs of saving grace in his heart. This sense of responsibility for his day-by-day conduct has come to be identified as Puritan morality. Part of this serious concern for his personal conduct is indicated by the intense self-examination to which the Puritan subjected himself. To the modern man, the Puritan may seem morbid in his introspection, an inhibited moral bigot. The Seventeenth Century Puritan did not see himself in this light. The Puritan preacher was offering to him a new and exciting life growing out of a joyful salvation experience. According to Haller,

> The Puritan preacher proffered to a multitude in his own age what seemed enlightenment and a new freedom. He proferred the means to a more active and significant life, a means of overcoming fears, a counsel of courage, a vision of adventure for courage to undertake, a program of self-discipline for making adventure a success, a prospect of success certain to be attained sooner or later.[46]

The Puritan was buoyed by the thought that if he lived a godly life each day that he could be assured of true happiness both in this life and the life to come. Moreover, this desire to live a godly life convinced him of his salvation, and the continuing daily experiences with God in his life, which he believed were his, he saw as characteristic of the converted man. In other words, the Puritan felt responsible for living out his faith in daily experience. Knappen states that for the Puritan, "Salvation without an appropriate manner of life was sheer stupidity."[47] For the Puritan, the law of predestination worked itself out in his life on a day-by-day basis. Those who believed, those who were the elect, showed that they were indeed God's chosen by the living testimony of their lives. When God called his elect to repent and believe, he also called on them to act. And act they did. The Puritan imagination saw the life of the spirit as pilgrimage and battle; he was the wayfaring and warfaring man, and he was responsible man. Just as he was responsible for choosing the Christian way in the initial experience, so he was responsible for the continuing experience of Christian living. Moreover, the Puritan never felt that he had arrived to his highest potential in his spiritual life. He was always in the process of becoming, and what he was becoming was predicated on his own free moral choice. He was always what he chose to become. And he chose what he was to become when confronted

by real temptation in an existing situation. The concept of temptation was central in Puritan thought because it was only as a man was tempted that he could know, or experience, his own response. Only in the experience of temptation could he freely choose God's way; only thus could he be a genuinely virtuous person, and as a consequence be confirmed in his knowledge that he was indeed one of God's elect. This Puritan idea that what one is is revealed in an experiential temptation situation is shared by Milton. His most famous statement is found in Areopagitica:

> He that can apprehend and consider vice with all her baits and seeming pleasures, and yet abstain, and yet distinguish, and yet prefer that which is truly better, he is the true warfaring Christian. I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered vertue, unexercis'd and unbreath'd, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortall garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat. Assuredly we bring not innocence into the world, we bring impurity much rather: that which purifies us is triall, and triall is by what is contrary. That vertue therefore which is but a youngling in the contemplation of evil, and knows not the utmost that vice promises to her followers, and rejects it, is but a blank vertue, not a pure: her whiteness is but an excremental whiteness. (CPW, II, 514-16)

For Milton there could be no real virtue that was not an individual, experiential virtue coming out of a situation where real temptation necessitated choice. Man was responsible, because he was free, for choosing what he would do and whom he would trust, and for analyzing why he chose as he did. Furthermore, such freedom to choose included the privilege of making mistakes and learning from them. This

was part of the joy and continuing hope that the Puritan faith held out, and which Milton believed in. One chose, in a temptation experience, because one must, and one was responsible for the consequences of that choice. But one could also choose again. Knappen points out the Puritan position in this matter:

> Sin's power in the Christian was weakened and would be continuously diminished if he did his part, but it was never abolished completely, and the Almighty took this into consideration when evaluating human conduct. The fatal thing was not to sin but to tolerate and enjoy such delinquency. As long as one repented of the evil and struggled against it, one was in good state.[48]

Thus life was never static and rigid, but dynamic and fluid, and there was always the possibility of the individual experiencing and learning and becoming more than he had been before. Temptation might be strong, others might directly try to influence, but one must ultimately choose for himself. One was individually responsible, and one could not be compelled to do or be other than what he personally chose.

Thus the Puritan divines labored incessantly not only to help people of all ages and conditions to find the way of salvation based on personal, responsible encounter, but they labored equally hard to teach them that they were personally responsible to experientially "work out their own salvation with fear and trembling." One of their best preachers, William Perkins, defined theology as "the science of living blessedly forever."[49] This living out of one's initial

experience was, for them, an individual response to a new and exciting pattern for a significant and adventurous life. That we today are not so exhilirated by the thought of such an adventuresome journey may be part of our spiritual ennui or it may be as Watkins suggests that,

> This particular pathway to the New Jerusalem has been flattened out and trodden down by so many generations of pilgrims, and so many have left a detailed account of their journey, that the way has for a long time been regarded as the safest, drabbest, and most respectable of all. We no longer embark on a hazardous expedition, but join a conducted tour through the litter left by thousands of picnic parties.[50]

But this was not true for the Puritan, nor, one feels, for Milton. They emphasized that individual men and women could achieve a personal relationship with God, and that that relationship could permeate all of daily life with the light of eternity.

It is at these two points -- personal responsibility based on freedom of choice, and experiential faith -- that one finds Milton most in agreement with the Puritan preacher of his day. To cite one example from his prose, Milton in Areopagitica clearly states that man is responsible for his response to God. He says,

> If every action which is good, or evill in man . . . were to be under pittance, and prescription, and compulsion, what were vertue but a name, . . . many there be that complain of divine Providence for suffering Adam to transgresse, foolish tongues! when God gave him reason, he gave him freedom to choose, for reason is but choosing; he had bin else a meer artificial Adam, such an Adam as he is in the motions. We ourselves esteem not of that obedience, or love, or gift, which

> is of force: God therefore left him free, set before him a provoking object, ever almost in his eyes; herein consisted his merit, herein the right of his reward, the praise of his abstinence. (CPW, II, 527)

He is saying that Adam was responsible for his relationship with God because he was free to choose and that all men after him are in like manner responsible. Man comes to define himself as man as he personally experiences temptation, and personally and freely chooses his response to the temptation. The burden of responsibility is his and he cannot escape it. That men, even those of the Puritan persuasion, do try to escape such heavy responsibility leads Milton to speak of "implicit faith." In the same prose work he says,

> There is not any burden that some would gladier post off to another, than the charge and care of their Religion. There be, who knows not that there be of Protestant and professors who live and dye in as arrant an implicit faith as any lay Papist of Loretto. (CPW, III, 543)

But such "implicit faith" will not do for Milton. Man cannot shift his individual responsibility for his relationship with God off on another, nor can he find meaningful existence apart from personal, existential living out of that faith. Personal responsibility and personal, daily experiences are part of the glory and burden of being human.

The didactic element was strong in Puritan thought and in the Puritan divine who articulated Puritan beliefs and the didactic element in Milton was equally strong. No one, I think, would argue that the poetry in the three major works does not transcend the mere didactic, or that it does

not engage the reader in such a pleasurable aesthetic experience that believer and non-believer alike may appreciate these great poems. But it is equally true that the didactic purpose of Milton is clear. He did have his audience in mind as he wrote, and he intended to communicate his vision of life so as to influence those who read what he wrote.

NOTES

[1]William Haller, The Rise of Puritanism (New York, 1957), p. 292.

[2]Everett H. Emerson, English Puritanism From John Hooper to John Milton (Durham, North Carolina, 1968), p. 277.

[3]Basil Willey in The Seventeenth Century Background (New York, 1934), pp. 237-38, states that Milton departed from current Protestant orthodoxy in that he abandoned the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination; he refused the Son equal status with the Father; he believed that God created ex deo rather than ex nihilo, and he accepted the doctrine of the mortalism of man.

[4]E. M. W. Tillyard, The Miltonic Setting (London, 1938), p. 76.

[5]Everett H. Emerson, English Puritanism, has made a complete and definitive examination of historical Puritanism in the first chapter of his book.

[6]Emerson, p. 44.

[7]Michael Fixler, Milton and the Kingdoms of God (Northwestern University Press, 1964), pp. 44ff., shows that there was a small fringe group of Puritans who were fanatically this worldly in their notion of the immediacy of the millenium and whose considerations, though spiritual in intent, were firmly focused on this world and the imminent establishment of God's kingdom on this earth. But the large percentage of Puritans were focusing their interest in the next world.

[8]Douglas Bush, Paradise Lost In Our Time (Glouster, Massachusetts, 1949), p. 296.

[9]Charles H. and Katherine George, The Protestant Mind of the English Reformation, 1570-1660 (Princeton, 1961), p. 121.

[10]Quoted in Emerson, p. 45.

[11]Quoted in Emerson, p. 112.

[12]Quoted in Emerson, p. 418.

[13]Quoted in Emerson, p. 197.

[14]Quoted in Emerson, p. 197.

[15]Quoted in Emerson, p. 197.

[16]William Riley Parker, Milton, A Biography (Oxford, 1968), I, p. 9.

[17]Haller, p. 144.

[18]Owen C. Watkins, The Puritan Experience (New York, 1972), p. 234.

[19]Haller, p. 30.

[20]Quoted in Watkins, p. 7.

[21]Quoted in Emerson, p. 57.

[22]Quoted in Emerson, p. 59.

[23]Quoted in Emerson, p. 185.

[24]Quoted in Emerson, p. 242.

[25]Emerson, p. 286.

[26]Quoted in M. M. Knappen, Tudor Puritanism (Chicago, 1939), p. 355.

[27]Quoted in Knappen, p. 356.

[28]Haller, p. 87.

[29]Knappen, p. 376.

[30]Haller, p. 151.

[31]Haller, p. 88.

[32]Quoted in Knappen, p. 393.

[33]Knappen, p. 393.

[34]Knappen, p. 392.

[35]Haller, p. 169

[36]Haller, pp. 169-70.

[37]Haller, p. 121.

[38]Haller, p. 122.

[39]Watkins, p. 26.

[40]Quoted in Watkins, pp. 37-38.

[41]One may quite validly suggest that such reliance on the Bible, the sermon, and the testimony of others is in itself a form of mediation, and that this is a weakness in Puritan theology, or at the least, a paradox of their faith.

[42]Edward Dowden, Puritan and Anglican (Freeport, New York, 1901), p. 97.

[43]Watkins, p. 45.

[44]Quoted in Watkins, p. 85.

[45]Quoted in Watkins, p. 86.

[46]Haller, pp. 36-37.

[47]Knappen, p. 105.

[48]Knappen, p. 396.

[49]Quoted in Watkins, p. 5.

[50]Watkins, p. 14.

CHAPTER II

MILTON: UNDER THE GREAT TASKMASTER'S EYE

When one attempts to assess Milton's own personal sense of his responsibility as man and poet toward God, it is well to look at events early in his life which may have shaped his thoughts and convictions on this matter. His father's Protestant faith is well known, and one can be sure that the Milton household was one that was Puritan in its faith, its sympathies, and its way of life. One can also be sure that the scrivener and his son heard many Puritan sermons preached in the parish of All Hallows, and although the preacher received no mention in Milton's references to his childhood, he must have been a familiar figure and one who exerted a degree of influence over the family. At any rate there were notable divines who ministered in the church of All Hallows and whose Puritan ideals and concepts helped mold the mind of young John Milton. William Haller suggests

> The scrivener and his son may very well have heard Richard Stock urge parents to dedicate their most gifted children, not those good for nothing else, to the ministry, pressing upon each of his hearers the duty to 'honor God with the best he hath, to thinke nothing too good for him, and to labour that nothing be deare to him in comparison of him, if he call for it.'[1]

Milton must have heard this call to accept one's responsibility for service preached time and again as he was taken to hear

other noted preachers within easy reach of Bread Street: William Gouge at Blackfriars, Richard Sibbes at Gray's Inn, or John Preston at Lincoln's Inn. From such men as these, Milton must also have first heard the Biblical story of man's fall and redemption, and other basic Puritan beliefs which were to influence him throughout his life. These men were preachers of great persuasivness and great influence; and Richard Sibbes, in particular, because of the quality of his preaching and his personal attractiveness drew audiences of men who were important in worldly affairs.[2]

We know that Milton early in his life felt that he was destined for a career in the church for he writes in The Reason Of Church Government in 1642 that he is having to abandon his original plan for a career in the church, "to whose service by the intentions of my parents and friends, I was destin'd of a child, and in mine own resolutions." (CPW, I, 822). We know that from early childhood he was afforded advantages in learning by his father that would equip him for this important task. Milton acknowledges that his father destined him from a child for the pursuits of polite learning and consistently encouraged him in his studies. He provided a housemaid to sit up with him while he studied late at night. He urged him to study French, Italian, and Hebrew after he had mastered Latin and Greek so as to better prepare himself for his role as preacher. Milton himself in his poem Ad Patrem (1637) speaks gratefully

of his father's continuing support to pursue his voracious desire for knowledge:

> And finally all that heaven contains and earth, our mother, beneath the sky, and the air that flows between earth and heaven, and whatever the waters and the trembling surface of the sea cover, your kindness gives me the means to know . . .[3]

His father also provided a tutor for him early in his youth, a Puritan divine, Thomas Young, whose influence was certainly important in shaping Milton's ideals and concepts of his own personal responsibility and accountability to God. Milton indicated the degree of influence that Thomas Young had on him in a letter to Young when Milton was nineteen wherein he indicated that he "had not done enough" until he had expressed "the unparalled gratitude" which Young's merits justly claimed from him (CPW, I, 311). The closeness and high esteem that Milton held Young in is indicated by his reference to him as a Father. He says, in the same letter, "For I call God to witness how much I honor you as a Father, with what a singular respect I have always followed you . . . " (CPW, I, 311).

These early Puritan influences certainly left their impression on Milton, and he entered Cambridge in his seventeenth year, in 1625, intending to prepare for the pulpit. When he enrolled, Cambridge had a long tradition of Puritanism, but events were occurring which were leading to the stifling of the Puritan faith. Charles I had come to the throne; Laud was gaining increased power, and the strength

of Puritan influence at Cambridge was ebbing.[4] This repression of Puritanism may have caused Milton to consider abandoning his original plan for a career in the church; but as late as July 2, 1628, Milton still planned to enter the priesthood, or so a letter to Alexander Gill at St. Paul's School seems to indicate. He is concerned with the lack of genuine learning that the future priests are acquiring. He classes himself among the group, stating,

> There is really hardly anyone among us, as far as I know, who, almost completely unskilled and unlearned in Philology and Philosophy alike, does not flutter off to Theology unfledged, quite content to touch that also most lightly, learning barely enough for sticking together a short harangue by any method whatever and patching it with worn-out pieces from various sources . . . . (CPW, I, 314)

One may detect disenchantment with the depth of study among his colleagues destined for the priesthood, but he apparently is still categorizing himself as one of them.

When Milton retired to Horton in 1632 after graduating from Cambridge, perhaps he still intended a career in the church. However, after a time of solitude and meditation at Horton, he may have begun to question his vocation in his own mind. A letter to an unknown friend, written in 1632, is ambiguous at this point. He is defending himself to this friend who has remonstrated at his apparent idleness. In the process of replying to his friend, he has been searching his own mind as to whether he still intends a career in the church or not. His personal insight is very revealing

of his attitude toward his sense of personal responsibility. He feels very keenly that he is responsible to God for the course of his life. He is grateful that his friend has admonished him as a good watchman, and says,

> The hours of the night pass on (for so I call my life as yet obscure and unserviceable to mankind), and that the day with me is at hand wherein Christ commands all to labor while there is light. (CPW, I, 319)

He is conscious of his "tardy moving," and he recognizes that his love of learning may seem to be deterring him from his appointed task of service to God. But then he uses the Biblical parable of the master of the vineyard to explain his position. The master of the vineyard gave the same penny to each of the workers, regardless of when they entered the vineyard to work. Just so, he is concerned not about being late, but being more fit for greater service to God. Then he appends his Sonnet VII (1632) to the letter in which he underscores poetically this intense feeling of the fleeting passage of time, but his equally confident assurance that his life will be accomplished as God wills it because he, through grace, accepts such a responsibility.

> Yet be it less or more, or soon or slow,
> It shall be still in strictest measure ev'n
> To that same lot, however mean or high,
> Toward which Time leads me, and the will of Heav'n;
> All is, if I have grace to use it so,
> As ever in my great task-Master's eye. (Sonnet VII, 9-14)

Brooks and Hardy concur in this analysis.

> The last two lines make plain his own responsibility . . . . The young poet's confidence in Providence,

> far from mitigating his own responsibility, doubles it; the reference to God as a 'task master' implies that God's overseeing requires his work to be of the best--not merely that a good outcome is certain because of God's supervision.[5]

The great work of the Horton years, Lycidas (1637) with its famous denunciation of the clergy who "for their bellies' sake, / Creep and intrude, and climb into the fold (114-115)" and are "Blind Mouths! / that scarce themselves know how to hold / A Sheephook (119-120)" is cited as indicating that Milton had decided against a career in the church. Hanford thinks this is so. He states: "The rebuke administered to the corrupt clergy is an echo of his own determination not to go into the church."[6] Certainly one feels Milton's anger against these empty and selfish shepherds, and his sense of futility over the loss of a good priest in the person of Edward King, but whether he has decided against a career in the church or not, his sense of personal responsibility for using his talent in the service of God has not changed. Haller suggests that one can interpret the poem as indicating that Milton considered his calling as a poet to be analogous to the calling of a preacher of the gospel. He says,

> The poem is Milton's personal confession of his effectual calling from God to be a poet, as truly such as the testimony of any of the spiritual preachers, the confession of his calling and his answering to the call by the dedication of his talents to service prompted by faith.[7]

Milton is surely identifying with the young priest whose life

has been summarily cut off in its prime. He equates his career as a poet with the career of young King. His puzzlement over the death of a young priest whose potential was so great merges into his concern regarding his future as a poet. He questions the cost of a life dedicated to the arduous labor of a poet as he asks,

> Alas! What boots it with uncessant care,
> To tend the homely slighted shepherd's trade,
> And strictly meditate the thankless Muse? (65-67)

He considers that perhaps "Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise . . . / To scorn delights and live laborous days" (70, 72) which the life of a poet requires. But life is uncertain, and there is always the possibility of "the blind Fury with th' abhorred shears" slitting the thin-spun life before one achieves his goals in life. Therefore the praise and fame that is most meaningful comes from an awareness that one has fulfilled his responsibility as a servant of God. What is important is the sense that one's deeds are finally judged and praised by God, as the poem says,

> Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil,
> . . . . . .
> But lives and spreads aloft by those pure eyes
> And perfect witness of all-judging Jove,
> As he pronounces lastly on each deed,
> Of so much fame in Heav'n expect thy meed. (76, 81-84)

This fame, or reward, is eternal, for the implication is that as Lycidas is immortalized as the genius of the shore, so will any man be rewarded who is faithful to God's purposes

for him. It is this confident assurance that a life dedicated to serving God is presently and ultimately rewarding that lends a calm and quiet dignity and purpose to the concluding lines of the poem: "At last he rose, and twitch't his Mantle blue: / Tomorrow to fresh Woods, and Pastures new" (193-94).

Milton's later words regarding his being denied the opportunity to serve the church must be taken in context of the times and conditions in which he wrote them. It was in 1642 when he was engaged in the bitter controversy regarding the power of prelacy that he stated in The Reason of Church Government his personal feeling concerning one who took orders. He makes his statement that he had been destined for a life of service in the church until

> . . . coming to some maturity of years and perceiving what tyranny had invaded the Church, that he who would take Orders must subscribe slave, and take an oath withal, which unless he took with a conscience that would retch, he must either straight perjure, or split his faith . . . (CPW, I, 823)

Milton is angry that one who pursues the vocation of priest must, under these present conditions, compromise his personal integrity and freedom. But his sense of personal responsibility as servant of God is unchanged. Just before he makes this statement he says, "But where it the meanest underservice, if God by his Secretary conscience enjoyn it, it were sad for me if I should draw back" . . . (CPW, I, 823), which indicates that he is willing to respond to whatever

service God calls him to. Abandoning the pulpit in favor of literature did not mean abandoning his personal ambition to be a great teacher of religion and morality. He did not abdicate his sense of personal responsibility to share his religious experience with the world. Rather, he recognized that his ability as a poet was a God-given talent to be used to fulfill this responsibility. In this same tract in which he presents his reason for not entering the pulpit, he expresses his attitude toward the office of the poet:

> These abilities, wheresover they be found, are the inspired gift of God rarely bestow'd, but yet to some (though most abuse) in every Nation: and are of power beside the office of a pulpit, to inbreed and cherish in a great people the seeds of vertu, and public civility, to allay the perturbations of the mind, and set the affections in right tune, to celebrate in glorious and lofty Hymns the throne and equipage of God's Almightinesse, and what he works, and what he suffers to be wrought with high providence in his Church . . . (CPW, I, 816-17)

In this connection, Haller suggests that

> The repression of the preachers by the prelates was enough to make Milton abandon his intentions of entering the church. Forsaking a career in the church did not, however, mean that he wished to serve God less. It meant by enlisting the Muses in God's service, he expected to serve him more effectively.[8]

Milton was still aligning himself with the spiritual brotherhood of Puritan divines; and although the pulpit was denied him, he could be a voice proclaiming the word through his poetic office. Milton's action thus illustrates the force that one of the outstanding concepts of the Puritan faith had on him personally and as a poet--the concept that once

a man had experienced the grace of God in his heart, it was his responsibility to communicate that faith to other men. In this connection, Haller suggests that Milton's career as poet is comparable to that of a Puritan preacher:

> The preacher's career ordinarily proceeded . . . from his effectual calling by God to the discovery of his special gift and calling to proclaim the word. He then dedicated all his energies to the cultivation and exercise of his gift in the service of the word. He endeavored to make his life one long uninterrupted sermon. Milton undertook his career in the same spirit and according to the same pattern, though neither his gift nor his calling were of the ordinary kind.[9]

Moreover, this responsibility involved not only verbally communicating one's faith, but also living an exemplary life as evidence of God's grace in one's heart. Milton apparently felt this conviction also. J. H. Hanford says,

> Milton intended his life to be edifying. The personal passages in Milton's works were designed to exhibit the works of God in John Milton -- to proclaim the fruits of faith, 'his own faith not anothers,' in order that believers everywhere might be strengthened.[10]

Milton himself in his Apology for Smectymnuus (1642) indicates his conviction that his life must be exemplary if he is to fulfill his hope of writing well, and sharing his faith.

> And long it was not after, when I was confirmed in this opinion, that he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought himself to be a true poem; that is, a composition, and the pattern of the best and honorablest things; not presuming to sing high praises of heroic men, or famous cities, unless he have in himself the experience and the practice of all that which is praiseworthy. (CPW, II, 890)

Milton's acceptance of his responsibility to serve God with his great talent was his unique acceptance of his unique

responsibility. As Haller states, "Poems were to be his sermons, and his life was to be a poem."[11] Milton, the poet, then, cannot be separated from Milton the Puritan and if one is to understand his poetry it must be approached from this unified point of view. It is beside the point to argue that Milton the poet and humanist would have written his great poetry in any event; it is much more to the point to emphasize that the Puritan faith that was Milton's was inevitably a strongly contributing factor in his being the kind of poet that he was. And if one accepts this point of view that from the earliest of Milton's serious poetry he is concerned with his personal accountability and responsibility for the use of his great talent to communicate his faith and glorify God, then his later works may be considered as his mature, dedicated attempt to fulfill this obligation. I am not suggesting that these poems are simply and only Milton's personal polemic for the Christian faith. I am suggesting, however, that this concept of one's personal responsibility to God is endemic to the Puritan faith; it is part of the warp and woof of Milton's life; and it is one of the important themes that runs through Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained, and Samson Agonistes. Furthermore, one can gain meaningful insight into the poems by looking at them through this thematic perspective.

Milton's sense of personal dedication and responsibility may be illustrated by an examination of this thought

in some of the representative works from his early poetry up to the composition of Paradise Lost.[12] This is not necessarily to suggest that the youthful Milton felt the intense degree of dedication and responsibility that the maturer Milton felt, but it is to say that early and late he was conscious of being "under the great Task-master's eye" and responsible to Him for the course of his life.

In Elegy VI (December, 1629), Milton says that he is accepting the principle of conduct which will be conducive to his becoming a poet in the tradition of Homer. E. M. W. Tillyard in The Miltonic Setting treats this poem as a serious self-dedication to poetry.[13] J. H. Hanford says, "We may infer that the Latin utterance represents a definite resolution regarding his life work."[14] He further suggests that:

> Milton's language suggests that the confirmation of his convictions regarding the relation between personal conduct and poetic achievement and the accompanying resolution to devote himself to something higher and more serious than amatory lyric marks a definite stage in his inner history.[15]

Milton himself says to Charles Diodati in the Elegy:

> But if you will know what I am doing . . . I am singing the heaven-descended King, the bringer of peace, and the blessed times promised in the sacred books--the infant cries of our God and his stabling under a mean roof who, with his Father, governs the realms above . . . . These are my gifts for the birthday of Christ . . .

Milton is saying that his "Ode on The Morning of Christ's Nativity" is composed out of a desire to express his sense of the importance of this event to all men and to fulfill his

personal desire to express his gratitude for its significance by presenting the poem as a gift for the Infant-God. W. R. Parker says that "Undoubtedly it [The Nativity Ode] showed him, for the first time, how his own special talents might be used for the glory of God."[16]

The poem itself, although not specifically didactic, contains significant religious truths which apparently reflect Milton's beliefs and exemplify his concern for sharing the significance of the event with others. These truths are presented throughout the poem. In Stanza V, he says,

> But Peaceful was the night
> Wherein the Prince of light
> His reign of peace upon the earth began: (61-63)

The Prince of light is the incarnate God, "the mighty Pan / . . . kindly come to live with them below" (VIII, 89-90). His purpose in coming is that mankind might be redeemed by Him:

> The Babe lies yet in smiling Infancy,
> That on the bitter cross
> Must redeem our loss; (XVI, 151-53)

Furthermore, all the pagan gods are fled before "the dreaded Infant's hand" (XXV, 222), and his deity is confirmed by his power to control them: "Our Babe, to show his Godhead true, / Can in his swaddling bands control the damned crew." (XXV, 227-28). However one views the poem, it contains Biblical truths which Milton felt to be worth communicating, and views which he subscribed to. Hanford says that . . .

"here, for the first time, we have the genuine and characteristic reaction of Milton's personality upon a serious religious object."[17] One can also suggest that his writing on this religious subject is a result of his serious desire to fulfill his sense of responsibility as a servant of God through the instrumentality of his poetry. The quiet conclusion of the poem indicates that the chosen messengers of God, the angels, are ready to do whatever service God may require of them: "And all about the Courtly Stable, / Bright-harness'd Angels sit in order serviceable." (XXVII, 243-44). One may equate this dedication of the angels with the growing sense of dedication on the part of the poet who penned the lines.

This sense of responsibility seems to be borne out by his attempt soon after this, at Easter in 1630, to communicate another great scriptural event -- the passion of Christ. His abortive attempt to write on this scriptural event can be viewed as ineffectual because as Milton says in a sentence appended to the fragment, "This subject the Author finding to be above the years he had, when he wrote it, and nothing satisfied with what was begun, left it unfinisht" (p. 63). This may simply mean that he felt that the subject was too lofty for him at the time, or perhaps it means that although he felt a deep responsibility to write of this awesome event, he felt inadequate for such a task, and preferred to wait until time and experience had

matured him so that he could competently communicate the personal significance of the event. W. R. Parker concurs in this judgment:

> Milton had language and learning and skill enough; he had piety enough; but he lacked the experience of life to make a poem upon so tragic and triumphant a theme.[18]

J. H. Hanford suggests that "The Passion" remained unfinished because the crucifixion was not a congenial theme to Milton at any time, and that even this early Milton felt instinctively that man's salvation depended on himself and that man needed Christ as guide and model rather than as a redeemer.[19] Such judgment may be valid, but it is also possible to suggest that with Milton's writing of Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes he had in these three works so completely handled the whole of the gospel message to mankind--not just the passion-- that he felt no need to go back to this particular event in the gospel story.

Not only did Milton feel responsible for his service to God through his poetic talent, but he felt equally responsible for using his talent as prose polemist in defense of church matters. This is perhaps best illustrated by his own argument in The Reason of Church Government (1642). Milton's primary purpose is to argue that the polity of the church is so important that God through the Bible has prescribed its proper form, and it is to the Bible that he turns for evidence to support his position. But he also

speaks revealingly of his own personal sense of responsibility for entering into the controversy. He identifies himself with other men -- Jeremiah and Tiresias -- who were compelled by divine inspiration to speak "the irksomeness of . . . truth" which brought displeasure on themselves from their contemporaries. Then he states his own position and situation clearly with regard to his keeping silent or speaking out regarding the present problem confronting the church. He says,

> But this I forsee, that should the church be brought under heavy oppression, and God have given me ability the while to reason against that man that should be the author of so foul a deed, or should she, by blessing from above on the industry and courage of faithful men, change this her distracted estate into better days without the least furtherance or contribution of those few talents which God at that present had lent me, I forsee what stories I should hear within myself, all my life after, of discourage and reproach. (CPW, I, 804)

He feels compelled to use "those few talents" which God had lent him. He cannot ignore what seems to him to be the present oppression of the church, for if he does he fears that he will hear a voice within him condemning him for his lack of action.

> Thou hadst the diligence, the parts, the language of a man, if a vain subject were to be adorned or beautified, but when the cause of God and his church was to be pleaded, for which purpose that tongue was given thee which thou hast, God listened if he could hear thy voice among his zealous servants. (CPW, I, 804-05)

And if the church "change this her distracted estate into better days" without his having helped to bring it about, he

will feel equally condemned for not assuming his responsibility. He says,

> Or else I should have heard on the other ear: Slothful, and ever to be set light by, the church has now overcome her late distresses after the unwearied labors of many her true servants that stood up in her defense; thou also wouldst take upon thee to share amongst them of their joy: but wherefore thou? Where canst thou show any word or deed of thine which might have hastened her peace? (CPW, I, 805)

It is his sense of personal responsibility mediated through his conscience that has caused him to act as he has, as he says,

> . . . neither envy nor gall hath entered me upon this controversy, but the enforcement of conscience only . . . (CPW, I, 806)

But perhaps Milton's strongest affirmation of his personal sense of responsibility for serving God and sharing his faith with his fellow man comes after blindness strikes him. We have three personal sources from which to evaluate Milton's attitude toward this event: Sonnet 19 written in 1652 (so Smart dates this sonnet),[20] a portion of the Second Defense of the English People written in 1654, and Sonnet 22, written in 1655.

In Sonnet 19 Milton reaffirms his sense of responsibility for service to God; indeed, if there is any querulousness in the poem it has to do with what one is to do regarding this responsibility when "light is spent." But the emphasis is on affirmation rather than on negation. Milton says,

> . . . my Soul more bent
> To serve therewith my Maker, and present
> My true account, lest he returning chide (4-6)

He has come to a mature conception of the significance of his responsibility to serve God even in his blindness. Now he recognizes that

> . . . God doth not need
> Either man's work or his own gifts; who best
> Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best . . . (9-11)

It is not so important that Milton produce "works" as it is that he "stand and wait" if that is God's will for him.

To understand the prose passage from The Second Defense of the English People, it is necessary to know that his reply was in answer to the charge that his blindness was a judgment on him for his sins. He vehemently denies this:

> For my part, I call upon Thee, my God, who knowest my inmost mind and all my thoughts, to witness that (although I have repeatedly examined myself on this point as earnestly as I could, and have searched all the corners of my life) I am conscious of nothing, or of no deed, either recent or remote, whose wickedness could justly occasion or invite upon me this supreme misfortune. As for what I have at any time written (since the royalists think that I am now undergoing this suffering as a penance, and they accordingly rejoice), I likewise call God to witness that I have written nothing of such kind that I was not then and am not now convinced that it was right and true and pleasing to God. (CPW, IV, Part I, 587)

In his defense of the political actions of the English people, he is expressing confidence that what he has written is pleasing to God; that he is fulfilling his responsibility to God through his service for civil and religious liberty.

In Sonnet 22 (1655) written to Mr. Cyriack Skinner

upon his blindness, he states his affirmative faith in the rightness of his course of conduct:

> . . . Yet I argue not
> Against heav'n's hand or will, nor bate a jot
> Of heart or hope; but still bear up and steer
> Right onward. (6-9)

And he reaffirms that what supports him in his present blindness is that he is conscious that he has lost his eyesight in "liberty's defense."

Milton had earlier stated in The Reason of Church Government (1642) that his life's work would only be accomplished by

> devout prayer to that eternal Spirit who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out his Seraphim with the hallow'd fire of his Altar to touch and purify the lips of whom he pleases . . . (CPW, I, 820-21)

And when one comes to read the opening statement of Paradise Lost with Milton's appeal to the Heavenly Muse to aid his "advent'rous Song" and with his appeal to the "Spirit that dost prefer / Before all Temples th' upright heart and pure" to instruct him, one is aware that his desire to "assert Eternal Providence, / And justify the ways of God to men" is at least in part motivated by his desire to fulfill his own personal sense of responsibility. Milton's great life work, his three major poems, are in one sense at least a fulfillment and culmination of this lifelong attempt to fulfill his personal sense of responsibility for sharing his faith with other men.

Furthermore, because this Puritan faith to which Milton subscribed taught that each man is personally responsible, because he is free, for choosing his relationship with God, this concept is one of the major themes of Milton's three major poems. To look at them for this perspective is one way of examining the poems which brings the reader to the center of Milton's purpose and causes him to enter imaginatively into Milton's world to the degree that he also will, or will not, as he chooses, accept the truths about God that Milton felt were worth communicating.

NOTES

[1]William Haller, The Rise of Puritanism (New York, 1957), p. 292.

[2]Haller, p. 66.

[3]Merritt Y. Hughes, ed. John Milton, Complete Poems and Major Prose (New York, 1957), p. 85. Unless otherwise indicated, all poetry references will be to this edition. References to poetry will be identified in the text by book (where applicable) and line. References to Latin translations will be by pagination in text.

> Denique quicquid habet caelum, subiectaque caelo
> Terra parens, terraeque et caelo interfluus aer,
> Quicquid et unda tegit, pontique agitabile marmor,
> Per te nosse licet, per te, si nosse libebit.
> Dimotaque venit spectanda scientia nube.

[4]Haller, p. 294.

[5]Cleanth Brooks and John Edward Hardy, Poems of Mr. John Milton (New York, 1951), p. 154.

[6]James Holly Hanford, A Milton Handbook, 4th edition, (New York, 1954), p. 168.

[7]Haller, p. 322.

[8]Haller, p. 306.

[9]Haller, p. 306.

[10]Hanford, A Milton Handbook, p. 4.

[11]Haller, p. 306.

[12]James Holly Hanford in his essay "The Youth of Milton" in John Milton: Poet and Humanist (Cleveland, 1966), pp. 1-74 has carefully set forth the record of Milton's awakening to influences of his intellectual and artistic environment, and traced the effects of the emotional and imaginative forces released in him upon the developing processes of his art.

[13]E. M. W. Tillyard, The Miltonic Setting (London, 1938), pp. 177-79.

[14]Hanford, Milton: Poet and Humanist, p. 35.

[15]Hanford, Milton: Poet and Humanist, p. 34.

[16]William Riley Parker, Milton, A Biography (London, 1968), I, p. 67.

[17]Hanford, Milton: Poet and Humanist, p. 35.

[18]Parker, I, p. 72.

[19]Hanford, A Milton Handbook, p. 145.

[20]Because Milton's blindness became complete in 1652 Smart so dated this sonnet. 1655 has also been proposed because it follows Sonnet XVIII in the edition of 1673, and for other reasons which Maurice Kelley summarizes in Modern Philology, LIV (1956), 20-25. But in Review of English Studies, n.s. IX (1958), 57-60, Fitzroy Pyle preferred 1652, and in The London Times Literary Supplement, Sept. 15, 1961, p. 620, C. J. Morse defended 1652 with conclusive proof that the order of the sonnets in 1673 is not chronological.

CHAPTER III

PARADISE LOST: MAN'S RESPONSIBILITY CLEARLY DEFINED

Milton's conviction regarding man's responsibility for his relationship to God grows out of and coincides with the Puritan belief that God can and does deal with individual men, and that individual men may, because they are free to choose, make some response to God. It is in Paradise Lost that this idea is dramatically presented and clearly defined through the action of Adam and Eve and of God's dealing with them in the narration of the Biblical myth. The reader of the epic, because he is a human being like Adam and Eve, confronted in his time and milieu by the essential question of choice and responsibility that confronted them, will almost inevitably identify with them and make a personal response to the poem. How he responds is as personal and individual as the man himself, but he is challenged to respond at the very outset by Milton's statement that he intends to "assert Eternal Providence / And justify the ways of God to men" (PL, I, 25-26). This ambitious statement of intent sets up in the mind of the reader the possibility of choice on his part. He may, after reading the whole of the poem, decide that Milton has justified the ways of God to men, or he may decide that Milton has not. But whether he agrees

or disagrees with Milton's conclusions, he has had presented for him and clearly defined, in the context of the poem, the concept that man is free to choose and therefore responsible for his choices. As the reader looks at the dramatic, experiential encounter of the first man and woman with God, he can analyze the significance and the lesson of the experience, and he can, if he so chooses, accept the truths revealed by Milton's imaginative art.

Inherent in Milton's statement that he is to "justify the ways of God to men" is at least a two-fold obligation on the part of the poet. He must somehow analyze the nature of God and define the kind of God whose ways he is to justify, and he must clearly define man's responsibility toward God by illustrating the kind of relationship that may obtain between them. The reader does come to understand the nature of God as he sees the way God deals with two specific human beings -- Adam and Eve. He comes to see that how God deals with them is determined by the free choice that each exercises in relating to God. Each individual in the poem is responsible for choosing how he will respond to God and thus define his relationship with God.

Milton, then, fulfills his obligation to the reader in that he clearly and dramatically defines God's nature. The reader is not only told about God, but he hears God speak and sees God acting through His Son. In the same manner he clearly defines man's personal responsibility

for his relationship to God as he sees Adam and Eve making their choices. Their individual responsibility is emphasized as it is focused and delineated within the context of one of the most meaningful and intimate of all human relationships -- that of the husband-wife relationship. Furthermore, Milton continues his explanation of the ways of God with men in Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes as he continues the theme of the freedom and responsibility of man to choose what his relationship with God will be. In both these works Milton is still concerned with showing that in any given human situation, a man is still responsible for his response to God and for his relationship with Him because he is always free to choose.

Turning to Paradise Lost, then, what kind of God is portrayed there? If one is not permanently deluded by Satan's lies in Books I and II,[1] or so "surprised by sin"[2] in himself that he cannot correct himself, one may come to the conclusion, after reading all of Paradise Lost, that above everything else, God is good. He is omniscient and omnipotent, but also merciful and kind, and above all, He is concerned with good for men. God desired from the time that He determined to create "a Race / Of men innumerable" (VII, 155) that such men should dwell on earth in joy and peace, and if they continually choose to trust and obey Him, the closeness of their personal relationship with Him

would result in a merging of Heaven and Earth into one Kingdom of joy and union without end.

> . . . till by degrees of merit rais'd
> They open to themselves at length the way
> Up hither, under long obedience tri'd,
> And Earth be chang'd to Heav'n, and Heav'n to Earth,
> One Kingdom, Joy and Union without end. (VII, 157-61)

The first lines that bring God into the epic as a character reveal the good that God has designed for Adam and Eve, and portray His concern that they keep this perfect happiness.

> Now had th' Almighty Father from above,
> From the pure Empyrean where he sits
> High Thron'd above all highth, bent down his eye,
> His own works and their works at once to view;
> . . . . . .
> . . . On earth he first beheld
> Our two first Parents, yet the only two
> Of mankind, in the happy Garden plac't,
> Reaping immortal fruits of joy and love
> Uninterrupted joy, unrivall'd love
> In blissful solitude . . . (III, 56-69)

All the goodness that He has designed for them has been bestowed upon them, and they are enjoying the fruits of His goodness which are joy and love. In addition, more blessings will be theirs if they continue to choose to obey. Raphael in Book V tells them of what future happiness and freedom is possible for them.

> Your bodies may at last turn all to spirit,
> Improv'd by tract of time, and wing'd ascend
> Ethereal, as wee, or may at choice
> Here or in Heav'nly Paradise dwell;
> If ye be found obedient, and retain
> Unalterably firm his love entire
> Whose progeny you are . . . (V, 497-503)

Adam and Eve recognize the goodness of God. Adam speaks to Eve concerning God's goodness:

> Sole partner and sole part of all these joys,
> Dearer thyself than all; needs must the Power
> That made us, and for us this ample World
> Be infinitely good, and of his good
> As liberal and free as infinite,
> That rais'd us from the dust and plac't us here
> In all this happiness . . . (IV, 411-17)

Eve agrees with Adam that God is good.

> . . . what thou has said is just and right.
> For wee to him indeed all praises owe,
> And daily thanks . . . (IV, 443-45)

Then together in an orison of praise they speak of their desire for offspring "who shall with us extol / God's goodness infinite" (IV, 733-34).

But not only do human beings speak of God's goodness. The angels also bear witness to this characteristic of God. Two angels in particular speak of it: the fallen angel, Satan, and the unfallen angel, Abdiel. It is not, perhaps, surprising that Abdiel speaks of God's goodness, but it is worthy of attention that it is this fact, at least in part, that sustains Abdiel in his own personal encounter with temptation. He, too, is responsible for his decision as to what his own personal relationship with God is at any given moment and what it will continue to be, and he makes his decision, when he is tested, on his own experiential knowledge of God's goodness. He says,

> Yet by experience taught we know how good,
> And of our good, and of our dignity

> How provident he is, how far from thought
> To make us less, bent rather to exalt
> Our happy state under one Head more near
> United . . . (V, 826-31)

But the most surprising defender of God's goodness is Satan himself. When he is speaking in Books I and II in an attempt to arouse and inspire the angels who have fallen with him, he speaks falsely about God. But later, in his soliloquy on Mount Niphates, he admits the truth concerning the goodness of the Creator.

> . . . Ambition threw me down
> Warring in Heav'n against Heav'n's matchless King:
> Ah wherefore! he deserv'd no such return
> From me, whom he created what I was
> In that bright eminence, and with his good
> Upbraided none; nor was his service hard. (IV, 40-45)

Satan confirms from his own experience what Adam and Eve apprehend: God is good. Thus one can say that the words of varying personages through the epic show that they agree that the God to whom man is responsible is an infinitely good God.

Adam and Eve know that not only is their present condition in Paradise evidence of God's goodness, but the very act of their creation attests to His goodness. Raphael, in telling Adam of the creation of the world, speaks of this. God's creation of man is motivated in part by his desire to create one who might be like Himself in sanctity of Reason, one who has the ability to acknowledge the source of the good that is his. Man is God's masterpiece because he has this Reason which enables him to respond to God.

> There wanted yet the Master work, the end
> Of all yet done; a Creature who not prone
> And Brute as other Creatures, but endu'd
> With Sanctity of Reason, might erect
> His Stature, and upright with Front serene
> Govern the rest, self-knowing, and from thence
> Magnanimous to correspond with Heav'n,
> But grateful to acknowledge whence his good
> Descends, thither with heart and voice and eyes
> Directed in Devotion, to adore
> And worship God Supreme who made him chief
> Of All his works . . . (VII, 505-16)

It lies within the prerogative of each man to acknowledge "whence his good descends." He may or he may not "adore and worship God Supreme." Therein lies the genesis of his responsibility: he is free to choose what his relationship with the Creator is and will be. This relationship, as one sees in the progressive action of the epic, is authentic and meaningful because he can choose and keep on choosing in any situation and in any testing experience what his relationship to God is and will be. Man is free; he can choose; he is responsible for his choice. This concept is one of Milton's most firmly held beliefs. He specifically states this in Areopagitica (1644):

> Many there be that complain of divine Providence for suffering Adam to transgress, foolish tongues! when God gave him reason, he gave him freedom to choose, for reason is but choosing; he had been else a mere artificial Adam, such an Adam as he is in the motions. We our selves esteem not that obedience, or love, or gift, which is of force: God therefore left him free . . . (CPW, II, 527)

This truth is depicted clearly in the epic that Adam and Eve (as well as the angels) are free, and that whatever their relationship with God is, it is of their own choosing. Early

in the poem, God, in speaking to the Son concerning Adam and Eve and His created angels, and of the foreknowledge He has that Adam and Eve will fall to the "glozing lies" of the Tempter, emphasizes their freedom:

> . . . I made him just and right,
> Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall.
> Such I created all th' Ethereal Powers
> And Spirits, both them who stood and them who fail'd;
> Freely they stood who stood, and fell who fell. (III, 98-102)

And He states the reason for His creating them free: "Not free, what proof could they have giv'n sincere / Of true allegiance, constant Faith or Love" (III, 103-04). The meaningful relationship that God desires with men is based on each man freely and continuously choosing that relationship; a "mere artificial Adam" is not in God's plan for men. And the reader of the poem, who identifies with Adam and Eve this early in the poem, is being led to acknowledge that just as they are free and therefore responsible for choosing and maintaining their relationship with God, so is he.

Adam and Eve are free and responsible and God intends that they continue to remain free. Again speaking to the Son, He expresses this idea:

> . . . Authors to themselves in all
> Both what they judge and what they choose; for so
> I formed them free, and free they must remain,
> (III, 122-24)

God's goodness is manifested by his concern for Adam and Eve as He dispatches Raphael to remind them of this freedom of will, and of the awesome responsibility that such freedom entails.

> Converse with Adam . . .
> . . . and such discourse bring on,
> As may advise him of his happy state,
> Happiness in his power left free to will,
> Left to his own free Will, his Will though free,
> Yet mutable . . . (V, 230-37)

When Raphael comes to give this caution to Adam and Eve, he reminds them that if they continue to choose to be obedient they can achieve further spiritual growth. Adam is astonished to think that he might ever choose not to be obedient. He asks,

> . . . But say,
> What meant that caution join'd, if ye be found
> Obedient? can we want obedience then
> To him, or possibly his love desert
> Who form'd us from the dust, and plac'd us here
> Full to the utmost measure of what bliss
> Human desires can seek or apprehend? (V, 512-17)

He cannot imagine any situation in which he might choose not to be obedient to God whose goodness has provided such bliss for him. The important point that Milton is making is that Adam and Eve are, even now, choosing: They are choosing to be in a trusting, obedient relationship with God. They have not been coerced or forced into this relationship, and they will not be forced to remain in such a relationship. They will do so only if they choose to. This is what their freedom means. This truth is so stated by Raphael.

> . . . That thou art happy, owe to God;
> That thou continu'st such, owe to thyself,
> That is, to thy obedience; therein stand.
> This was that caution giv'n thee; be advis'd.
> God made thee perfet, not immutable;
> And good he made thee, but to persevere

> He left it in thy power, ordain'd thy will
> By nature free, not over-rul'd by Fate
> Inextricable, or strict necessity;
> Our voluntary service he requires,
> Not our necessitated . . . (V, 520-30)

Adam and Eve may need to be reminded of their freedom and responsibility, but such knowledge is not new to them. They have known all along that they are free. Earlier in the poem as they are discussing God's goodness to them, Adam speaks of this.

> In all this happiness, who at his hand
> Have nothing merited, nor can perform
> Aught whereof hee hath need, hee who requires
> From us no other service than to keep
> This one, this easy charge, of all the Trees
> In Paradise that bear delicious fruit
> So various, not to taste that only Tree
> Of Knowledge . . . (IV, 417-24)

They know they are free because the tree is there and they are there, and they can choose to obey or not. They are living in a state of continuous choice each day; they <u>are choosing</u> what their relationship with God <u>is</u>. They are freely choosing, at this particular time and in this particular situation, to trust God. This ubiquity of choice that their situation illustrates is central to the thinking of the Existentialist who insists that the possibility of choice is the central fact of human nature.[3] He contends that such a state of continuing and continuous choice is the condition of all men. He would suggest that even if Adam and Eve had not chosen explicitly, they have chosen implicitly because their action of obedience bears witness to a choice.

Thus the responsibility that is theirs because of their freedom is clear-cut and unmistakable, and it is a continuing responsibility because in Milton's world (and that of the reader), life is a continuing process. Life is not static; it is fluid and changeable. Time moves on; situations change, and just as one is responsible, because he is free, for the choice he makes today, so he is responsible for the choice he makes tomorrow. The conditions of human existence are always fluctuating and changing, and for this reason one's individual freedom is continually being exercised and one's personal responsibility as one makes daily choices is continually being re-evaluated and re-assumed.

This insistence that man is free, and that he can and does make choices, and that he is therefore responsible for himself and his choices is a Miltonic concept which is shared by the Existential philosopher. This concept is perhaps most cogently stated by Jean-Paul Sartre in his essay "Existentialism is a Humanism." The familiar phrase most often connected with existentialism -- existence precedes essence -- is first explained by Sartre:

> What do we mean by saying that existence precedes essence? We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world -- and defines himself afterwards.[4]

Then he explains how freedom is related to such a concept:

> For if indeed existence precedes essence, one will never be able to explain one's action by reference

> to a given and specific human nature; in other words there is no determinism--man is free, man is freedom.[5]

Next he explains how responsibility accrues from such freedom:

> We are left alone, without excuse. That is what I mean when I say that man is condemned to be free. Condemned, because he did not create himself, yet is nevertheless at liberty, and from the moment he is thrown into the world he is responsible for everything he does.[6]

The validity of this concept is being illustrated by the action of the characters in Milton's epic. The reader is being taught that one is responsible for his choice. He is seeing that the happy, trusting relationship that exists between Adam and Eve and God, in this present condition, under these idyllic circumstances, exists because of their present choice to maintain that relationship.

But a more difficult lesson concerning individual freedom, choice, and responsibility is to be learned by Adam and Eve -- and the reader. Because they are free, they are also responsible in any situation, under any circumstances, for their choice of the continuance of this relationship with God. It does not matter that the situation and circumstances in which they must make such choice is exceedingly difficult. Each is still individually responsible; such is their inescapable lot. Adam is reminded of this responsibility of choice just before there is a significant change in Adam's situation, just before Satan begins his assault on Adam and Eve.

> Be strong, live happy, and love, but first of all
> Him whom to love is to obey, and keep
> His great command . . .
> . . . . . .
> . . . stand fast; to stand or fall
> Free in thine own Arbitrement it lies.
> Perfet within, no outward aid require;
> And all temptation to transgress repel.
> (VIII, 633-35, 640-43)

With the opening of Book IX, the reader is told by the epic voice what he already knows: that in a different situation, under difficult circumstances, Adam and Eve separately and individually choose a different relationship with God. Each chooses under great temptation not to trust God. And although the task to record this change is a "sad task," nevertheless the epic voice asserts that the argument is

> Not less but more Heroic than the wrath
> Of stern Achilles on his Foe pursu'd
> Thrice Fugitive about Troy wall; or rage
> Of Turnus for Lavinia disespous'd,
> Or Neptune's ire or Juno's, that so long
> Perplex'd the Greek and Cytherea's Son; (IX, 14-19)

The contrast here is made with reference to other epics: the wrath of Achilles, which is the theme announced in the opening line of the Iliad, the struggle of Turnus and Aeneas for the hand of Lavinia in the later books of the Aeneid, and the persecution of Ulysses by Neptune in the Odyssey, and with Juno's injustice towards Aeneas in the Aeneid. The reader who questions in what way the struggle which Adam and Eve are to engage in is more heroic than the struggle of these other epic heroes may realize how and why this

particular epic so engages him in a personal response. He realizes that it has to do with this question of freedom of choice and personal responsibility because in the world of the pagan epics the heroes in reality have no freedom of choice; their destiny is fated by the gods. But in Milton's world, and in the reader's world, God does not arbitrarily control a man's destiny. He has made men free, and the choice that each individual man makes is of great consequence because his choice determines his destiny. Milton's epic presents this inner spiritual struggle that Adam and Eve engage in as each must individually choose, this time under great temptation, his personal response, a response which determines his individual relationship with God.

When one comes to examine the dramatic presentation of the temptation of Adam and Eve, it is instructive to see how Milton has elaborated on the Genesis account. The Genesis account is spare, and in a sense, ambiguous. Genesis 3:1-7 (KJV) reads as follows:

> Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?
> 2 And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden:
> 3 But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall you touch it, lest ye die.
> 4 And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die:
> 5 For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof,

> then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.
> 6 And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.

Verse 6 can be interpreted that Eve, first tempted by Satan, partook of the forbidden fruit, and then immediately gave it to Adam who was with her, which indicates that the two were not separate, but together, when Satan tempted them. Milton, in his dramatization of this incident, chooses to place Eve alone and separate from Adam in her initial confrontation with Satan, which emphasizes that Eve is both capable of standing against evil, alone, and personally responsible for her free choice. J. M. Evans in discussing Eve's isolation when the serpent approaches her agrees in substance with my point. He says,

> Whereas in Book IV Eve had responded to her husband's admonitions with a clear affirmation of her dependence on him, she is now no longer content either to accept him as her law or to find in her unargued obedience her 'happiest knowledge and her praise.' Instead she proceeds to assume an equality which the whole account of the state of innocence has insisted she does not have. For the first time in the poem she consciously stands on her dignity, resenting any suggestion that she is Adam's inferior. There is more involved here than an innocent and whimsical desire to be alone for a time, more, certainly, than a practical proposal for increasing their efficiency. The vine is trying to disengage itself from the elm.[7]

When Milton portrays Adam's temptation as coming to him after he knows Eve's choice and realizes that he must make an anguished choice between his love for Eve and his love for God,

the tension and conflict in the poem is intensified. But Adam is free and responsible for his choice, regardless of the difficulty of it. The point being emphasized in the poem is that regardless of the difficulty of the situation -- Eve, confronted by one possessing demonic powers of persuasion or Adam confronted by the passion of his love for Eve -- one is still individually responsible for the choice he makes.

It is important, then, for the reader to look carefully at the situation and the circumstances in which Adam and Eve each makes a choice. First, consider Eve's situation. When Satan confronts her, she is alone; she is separated from Adam. But Eve has been alone and separated from Adam before. In fact, she earlier separated herself from Adam and Raphael during Raphael's lengthy visit and discourse after having heard about the enemy seeking to harm them. Concerning Eve's separation from Adam, Stella P. Revard makes a valid point:

> If Eve were truly unable to bear the responsibility of "separateness" surely Raphael would have cautioned Adam here at this very moment of the danger of allowing Eve to fare forth alone. Satan might have lurked in the shadows on this occasion instead of the following day.[8]

Thus it is not the separateness in itself that constitutes the danger; Eve is capable of standing against evil, even without her husband's presence. One needs to remember that throughout the epic to this point, it has been clear that

Eve, as well as Adam, is capable of choosing purposefully to trust and obey God, and in fact has been choosing to do so. One remembers that in Book III when God was predicting the fall, he was speaking of Adam and Eve together as parents of the human race when he says,

> . . . I made him just and right,
> Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall.
> Such I created all th' Ethereal Powers
> And spirits, both them who stood and them who fail'd:
> Freely they stood, who stood, and fell who fell (III, 98-102)

God means that <u>both</u> Adam and Eve were sufficient to have stood in whatever situation they might find themselves. Adam, earlier speaking to Eve of God's goodness, says,

> . . . hee who requires
> From us no other service than to keep
> This one, this easy charge (IV, 419-21)

He is saying that <u>both</u> are responsible, and capable, of choosing to keep God's charge. One does well also to remember that Eve now knows of the Enemy that she and Adam have, one who seeks their ruin. She also knows what concerns Adam:

> His fraud is then thy fear, which plain infers
> Thy equal fear that my firm Faith and Love
> Can by his fraud be shak'n or seduc't (IX, 285-87)

In this assessment she pinpoints the two qualities that will enable her to stand against the potential fraud of the Enemy, if she chooses to exercise them: her faith in God and love for Him; this, rather than the presence of Adam to protect her. Eve, in her own right as an individual, can freely

stand. Adam, in an attempt to placate Eve, suggests that he draws strength from her presence and that she should want her trial with him so that he can strengthen her. Eve's response is:

> If this be our condition, thus to dwell
> In narrow circuit strait'n'd by a Foe,
> Subtle or violent, we not endu'd
> Single with like defense, wherever met,
> How are we happy . . . (IX, 322-26)

If she and Adam must cling together, afraid to move out separately from such a narrow circuit, then they are not individually free and cannot be fully happy. In Milton's world, happiness for human beings can exist only if they are free. One is free if one can personally and independently affirm his "faith, love, virtue" in any trial. To this, Adam gives assent. He acknowledges that the danger lies not in any outward force; the danger lies within each individual whose will is free.

> . . . within himself
> The danger lies, yet lies within his power:
> Against his will he can receive no harm.
> But God left free the will . . . (IX, 349-51)

Adam recognizes that one's relationship to God in obedient faith and love is an individual, freely chosen relationship because God has "left free the will." He warns Eve of possible danger, but finally says, "Go, for thy stay, not free, absents thee more" (IX, 371). With these words Adam is making a significant point about his relationship with Eve, and by analogy their relationship with God. Just

as Eve's relationship with Adam is based on her freely trusting and obeying him as her rightful (human) superior, so their relationship with God is based on each one freely trusting and obeying God (his spiritual superior). In Book IV Milton has made clear two important truths concerning this human pair. First, they are both made in the image of their "glorious Maker." They are His creatures who are equal before Him.

> Two of far nobler shape erect and tall,
> Godlike erect, with native Honor clad
> In naked Majesty seem'd Lords of all,
> And worthy seem'd, for in thir looks Divine
> The image of thir glorious Maker shone,
> Truth, Wisdom, Sanctitude severe and pure
> Severe, but in true filial freedom plac't (IV, 288-94)

In their position before God there is no differentiation made. Each is a human being in whom true filial freedom has been placed: Adam is a free son of God; Eve is a free daughter of God. The differentiation between them then, lies not in their relationship to God, but in their relationship to each other. Adam is Eve's superior <u>in their relationship</u>,[9] but even in the context of this hierarchial relationship Eve is free to give or not to give her love and obedience to Adam. It is love and obedience "requir'd with gentle sway, / And by her yielded, by him best receiv'd" (IV, 308-09). Thus Eve freely gives her love and obedience to Adam, as she freely gives her love and obedience to God. And because she is free, she is responsible for her choice as to whether or not she will continue to love and trust God.

This is true regardless of the circumstances of her situation, and Eve clearly knows this.

When Eve finds herself alone with the Serpent, intrigued by him, she follows him to find the tree which he says has enabled him to become more than beast. When they arrive at the "Tree of Prohibition," Eve's first words to Satan are, "Serpent, we might have spar'd our coming hither" (IX, 647). Then she affirms her personal knowledge of her responsibility for choosing to keep God's commandment.

> But of this Tree we may not taste nor touch;
> God so commanded, and left that Command
> Sole daughter of his voice; the rest, we live
> Law to ourselves (IX, 651-54)

Eve recognizes that she is as responsible before God for keeping His commands as Adam is.

Then Satan as "some Orator renown'd / In Athens or free Rome" (IX, 670-71) begins his eloquent argument to persuade Eve of the lack of goodness on God's part so that she will disobey Him. No one would suggest that Eve is not in a difficult situation, or that she is not up against a powerful adversary. But nevertheless God created her "sufficient to have stood" in any circumstance of life, against any tempter. Her defense is the same defense she has always had: her faith in the goodness of God and her love for Him. She has always chosen before this to exercise her faith and trust in God; she can do so now if she chooses to. She is free and responsible, as she has always been. Satan is

subtle and persuasive in his argument to Eve; the thrust of his argument is that God is not good, that he is withholding something from her that she should desire. But Eve must decide for herself whom she will believe and trust.

Satan recognizes that Eve must freely make her choice. He has done everything he can to cause her to err, but he acknowledges that her supreme "humane" or human quality is her right to choose. He finishes his plea with the words, "Goddess humane, reach then, and freely taste" (IX, 732). If she is to taste the forbidden fruit, she must choose to do so. Satan can persuade and deceive, but he cannot force her to choose against her will. And Milton, as if he wants to emphasize that Eve freely and individually was responsible for her choice, even in this difficult situation, reminds the reader that she did not impulsively reach out for the fruit, but that she "Yet first / Pausing a while, thus to herself she mus'd" (IX, 744). She enters into an argument with herself in which she goes over in her mind all the persuasive arguments of Satan, and she finally asks, almost of herself, the question: "what hinders then / To reach, and feed at once both Body and Mind?" (IX, 778-79). The answer to the question is that nothing can hinder her except her own free will, her own choice to exercise her faith and trust in the goodness of God. She chooses this time not to trust and obediently love God. Rather, "her rash hand in evil hour / Forth reaching to the Fruit, she

pluck'd, she eat" (IX, 780-81). Eve, in her experiential encounter with this temptation, has again made her independent, free choice. That is her human prerogative and her human responsibility. She cannot escape the burden of freedom and moral choice.

The Existentialist not only views Eve's choice as one which she is personally responsible for, but also believes that in her choice she has affirmed the value of what she has chosen. Both Eve now, and Adam, in his subsequent choice, are by their actions acquiescing to the truth held by the Existentialists that whatever choice one makes that is the choice that one most values. Sartre, in illustrating the truth of this concept, gives the example of the young man who came to him during World War II for advice. He wanted to know whether he should stay in France with his mother who had no other means of support or leave France and join Free French forces abroad. Sartre refused, of course, to advise the young man, but the young man finally chose to stay with his mother. Then Sartre says,

> The value of his [the young man's] feeling for his mother was determined precisely by the fact that he was standing by her. I may say that I love a certain friend enough to sacrifice such or such a sum of money for him, but I cannot prove that unless I have done it. I may say, "I love my mother enough to remain with her," if actually I have remained with her. I can only estimate the strength of this affection if I have performed an action by which it is defined and ratified.[10]

Thus Eve now, in her choice, and Adam later in his choice,

prove by their choice where their values lie. Thus the Existentialist and Milton agree that choice defines values and delineates relationships. This is an important truth that is being borne in upon the reader.

Just as Eve cannot evade her responsibility for her personal choice, neither can she escape the consequences of her choice which are immediately experienced in her own personality. The immediate consequences are dire ones indeed. She turns to worship a thing --the Tree-- rather than God. God becomes in her thought now "the Great Forbidder," and she determines to bring Adam into the same condition that she is in. She says, "Confirm'd then I resolve, / Adam shall share with me in bliss or woe" (IX, 831). Eve has momentarily forgotten that just as Adam could not coerce her in her free choice, neither can she force Adam to share with her in her disobedience unless he chooses to do so.

It is at this point in the epic that the concept of one's personal responsibility for his relationship with God is focused so sharply and defined so clearly for the reader because it is illumined against the background of the very meaningful relationship that exists between Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve love each other; out of this relationship certain obligations and deep emotional ties have evolved. What happens to one deeply affects the other. And the reader of the epic is immediately emotionally involved in

the tension and conflict. Some critics think, and A. J. A. Waldock says that Milton fails here because we sympathize with Adam when he chooses to share Eve's fall and disobey God. Waldock further says that Adam is exemplifying one of the highest, and one of the oldest of all human values, selflessness in love, and that Adam is faced with a conflict between the powerful human values and the "mere doctrine that God must be obeyed."[11] This is how Waldock sees this incident, but the reader does not necessarily respond in the same way. He may assert in his own mind that Adam's problem is not just a matter of obeying an abstract doctrine; it is rather choosing to respond negatively to God who has given the best that He has (which included Eve) to Adam. How the reader personally responds to the situation he sees portrayed determines whether or not he is learning what Milton would have him learn and whether or not Milton will ever justify God's ways to him. He is engaged in choice-making even as Adam and Eve are, and how he subjectively reacts to situations such as this one is determined by whether or not he chooses to believe that God is dealing fairly with Adam and Eve.

But whatever his viewpoint, the reader must surely see that Milton is portraying with dramatic clarity that in the context of this intensely meaningful human relationship, the individual must make a choice, and it is a difficult one. There is no easy way out for Adam; he must choose.

Life eventually presents one with such painful alternatives, and it is at these painful moments that one finally recognizes where one's supreme loyalties lie. As in the case of the young French youth, torn between choice of country or mother, it is one thing to say that one's supreme love and loyalty is such and such. But one gives proof of that love, of its value, as he makes his choice. This is Adam's position now as he contemplates what his choice will be. Adam has never imagined that he would be confronted with such a choice between God and Eve. His personal agony is clear as he contemplates Eve's present condition.

> O fairest of Creation, last and best
> Of all God's works, Creature in whom excell'd
> Whatever can to sight or thought be form'd,
> Holy, divine, good, amiable, or sweet!
> How art thou lost, how on a sudden lost,
> Defac't, deflow'r'd, and now to Death devote? (IX, 896-901)

But he also recognizes that her condition is of her own choosing. She has "yielded to transgress / The strict forbiddance" (IX, 902-03). As he agonizes over his own personal decision, he acknowledges that his choice is his to make, and he determines to make it, knowing the cost and consequence of that choice: "I with thee have fixt my Lot, / Certain to undergo like doom" (IX, 952-53). He has made his existential choice. He is what he purposes to be. The reality of what he is is evidenced by his action and choice.

Adam, having made his choice, attempts to defend to

himself (and Eve) the reason for his decision. In so doing he consciously or unconsciously delineates two important relationships: his relationship with Eve, and his relationship with God. And there is a right relationship with each. Of Eve he says, "Flesh of Flesh, / Bone of my bone thou art" (IX, 914-15), which indicates the closeness that he rightly feels for her. This relationship is an important one; one which God established earlier because of His goodness toward Adam. When Eve was given to Adam as "his other self," Adam recognized not only God's benevolence in His creation of her, but also the important place she was to hold in Adam's life. When Adam saw Eve after her creation, he cried out in joy:

> . . . thou has fulfill'd
> Thy words, Creator bounteous and benign,
> Giver of all things fair, but fairest this
> Of all thy gifts, nor enviest. I now see
> Bone of my Bone, Flesh of my Flesh, my Self
> Before me; Woman is her Name, of Man
> Extracted; for this cause he shall forgo
> Father and Mother, and to his Wife adhere;
> And they shall be one Flesh, one Heart, one Soul. (VIII, 491-99)

No other human being is to be as important to Adam as Eve is. But Adam also recognizes that Eve is a creature even as he is. It is God who is "Creator bounteous and benign," and only God is worthy to be obeyed by His creature, man. Later when Raphael comes to the garden to warn Adam and Eve concerning Satan's presence, he reminds Adam of what Eve's relationship to Adam is. She is "fair no doubt, and worthy

well / Thy cherishing, thy honoring, and thy love, / Not thy subjection" (VIII, 568-70). Man is to subject himself only to God, because only God is worthy of man's submission. Therefore there is a distinction between these two important relationships that Milton is trying to get the reader to keep clearly in mind. There is a sense in which Adam and Eve are "one Flesh," and rightly so -- in their relationship with each other. But there is also one sense in which each is uniquely separate and individual -- each in his personal relationship with God.

Therefore Adam's attempt to justify his personal decision to fix his choice with Eve because he says, "Our state cannot be sever'd, we are one, / One flesh" (IX,958-59) is a confusion of these relationships. Regardless of the tie which binds them to each other in their personal love relationship, each is still individually responsible for choosing to trust and obey God, and thus maintain his personal love relationship with Him.

Eve seizes on Adam's statement that they are "one Flesh" with enthusiasm. She praises him for this "illustrious evidence" of his "exceeding love." The thoughtful reader remembers, however, that immediately after Eve had partaken of the fruit she had not thought of herself as "one" with Adam. Rather she had selfishly considered keeping the knowledge she had gained "without Copartner" (IX, 820) so that she might indeed be superior to Adam.

The reader must also remember that Eve, who is now fallen, is capable of deceit and lying. Therefore Eve's affirmation is surely suspect when she suggests that she would "rather die deserted" than do anything "pernicious" to Adam's peace. And when she finally says to him, "On my experience, Adam, freely taste" (IX, 988) she is now like Satan in that she is distorting freedom; that is, she is using the word "freely" deceptively. She knows that a decision made by Adam on her experience is not completely free. But Adam knows that the choice he is to make is one he will freely choose to make. Adam knows that when she gives him "of that fair enticing Fruit / With liberal hand" (IX, 996-97) that he has to decide if he will reach out and take it, and when he does take the fruit, he does so "against his better knowledge, not deceived" (IX, 998). He knows what he is doing, and he freely chooses to do it. To those who suggest that Adam's act was caused by his great passion for Eve, the Existentialist response is:

> The Existentialist does not believe in the power of passion. He will never agree that a sweeping passion is a ravaging torrent which fatally leads a man to certain acts and is therefore an excuse. He thinks that man is responsible for his passion.[12]

Adam has made his personal, individual, existential choice in a difficult situation, and he is responsible for that choice.

It is after the fall that each begins to deny his personal responsibility by blaming the order for the choice

each had independently made. Their recriminations against each other are undoubtedly familiar to any person who has sought to slough off his personal responsibility on to someone else. Adam says to Eve:

> Would thou hadst heark'n'd to my words, and stay'd
> With me, as I besought thee, when that strange
> Desire of wand'ring this unhappy Morn,
> I know not whence possess'd thee; we had then
> Remain'd still happy, not as now, despoil'd
> Of all our good, sham'd, naked, miserable. (IX, 1134-39)

Eve responds emotionally to his attempt to place the blame on her with her defense:

> Being as I am, why did'st not thou the Head
> Command me absolutely not to go,
> Going into such danger as thou said'st?
> Too facile then thou didst not much gainsay,
> Nay, didst permit, approve, and fair dismiss.
> Hadst thou been firm and fixt in thy dissent,
> Neither had I transgress'd, nor thou with mee. (IX,1155-61)

Revard suggests that . . . "they are illustrating a familiar postlapsarian human tendency to argue circumstance rather than self as the designer of any evil or mishap that might occur."[13] And the reader of the epic, because he, too, is fallen as Adam and Eve are, may lose sight of the fact that each is personally and individually responsible for his choice, whatever the circumstances. If he has not fully learned the lesson of man's responsibility, he may begin to defend either Adam or Eve (and by extension himself). But such "mutual accusation" made between them (and in the reader's mind as he tries to assess blame) is simply a very human attempt to avoid accepting responsibility. Neither

Adam nor Eve is willing to be "self-condemning." Thus the book ends on a hopeless note.

It is necessary then to turn to the judgment scene to be reminded once again of the concept that has been made so clear thus far, but which one so easily tends to forget: one who is free is responsible for his personal choice. When the Son comes to judge the pair, his question to Adam is simple and straightforward: "hast thou eaten of the Tree / Whereof I gave thee charge thou shouldst not eat?" (X, 122-23). He is asking Adam the question, "What have you done?" He is not concerned with the circumstances in which Adam found himself when he had to choose, nor with the difficulty of the choice. He is concerned with Adam's free and independent act based on his free and independent choice. Adam's attempt to shift the blame to Eve is useless; the Son demands that Adam stand alone and accept his responsibility for his own sin.

God's question to Eve is the same one He asks Adam. "What is this which thou hast done?" (X, 158). Eve, too, is a free and responsible human being and God treats her so. Again, God is not concerned with the circumstances or the situation attendant upon Eve's choice. He pronounces His judgment on Adam and Eve for the free and independent choice that each made. Each is judged because each is responsible.

After a time they, individually, come to admit this responsibility. Adam finally comes to accept the fact that

the responsibility for his own personal act of disobedience lies within himself.[14] He sees that his attempt to evade his responsibility is futile. Through his own violation of divine trust he is responsible for his own personal relationship to God as it now stands. He has wreaked havoc on himself, and he accepts his responsibility for his broken relationship with God. In his long soliloquy he says,

> . . . Him [God] after all Disputes
> Forc't I absolve: all my evasions vain
> And reasonings, thou through Mazes, leads me still
> But to my own conviction: first and last
> On mee, mee only, as the source and spring
> Of all corruption, all the blame lights due (X, 828-33)

Eve also comes to accept her responsibility for her sin. She says to Adam, "both have sinn'd, but thou / Against God only, I against God and thee" (X, 930-31). And as each begins to accept individual responsibility for his broken relationship with God, each begins to make his individual way back to Him. Just as each chose to rebel, so each must choose to come back to God in faith and trust, if that is what he desires. And each can make his way back to God because life is a dynamic continuum, and as such presents one with a continuing potential for choice. In Milton's world there is always possibility of choice and movement on the part of man. He may move upward or downward because he is free. There is a <u>continuing</u> responsibility for choosing what one's <u>continuing</u> relationship with God will be. This is true whether one is choosing to rebel against God or choosing

to obey and trust God. In the Existentialist world, there is also this concept of this continuing responsibility for one's continuing choice. Soren Kierkegaard, the Christian existentialist, in the conduct of his own life illustrates the truth of this view. He chose to be a Christian, and this momentous decision gave his whole life a new direction because he had accepted, not a doctrine, but a new way of life. He dared to risk his whole life in his decision to become a Christian, but he also believed that he never could "be" but would always only "be becoming" a Christian by ever renewing his relationship with God and making it the decisive fact of his life. He chose what he had to become; it was a free choice, and it had to be renewed freely day by day, throughout the rest of his life. Thus both Milton and the Existentialist affirm that because man is free he can choose what he is and what he is to become.

One can choose what he is to become, and therein lies one's hope. Although Adam and Eve had at a particular time each chosen not to trust God, they are free and they can choose again. Adam recognizes this truth as he suggests to Eve,

> What better can we do, than to the place
> Repairing where he judg'd us, prostrate fall
> Before him reverent, and there confess.
> Humbly our faults, and pardon beg . . . (X, 1086-89)

They freely go to the place where God judged them and

individually confess to Him: "Both confess'd / Humbly thir faults, and pardon begg'd" (X, 1100-01). This scene reiterates the concept of the responsibility of each individual for his personal relationship with God which Milton is setting forth in Paradise Lost. Each person individually chooses and keeps on choosing even as Adam and Eve have. Adam and Eve are each where they are now, praying and repentant, because this is where each is choosing to be. They have once again made a personal decision to trust and obey God, and in the Miltonic universe individual commitment to God is of supreme importance. Each creature is so made by God that he is free to decide if he will trust and serve God or not, and because he is free, he is also responsible.

Books XI and XII underscore this concept. Even in a fallen world, which is the world that Adam views in Book XI and is told about in Book XII, men are still individually and personally responsible for choosing their relationship with God. When Adam is led to the hill in Paradise to view the future of mankind and the effects which his "original crime" will have, he is appalled at the unfolding scene of human anguish. He is able to accept with some equanimity what he sees only because he realizes that each individual man in each individual epoch of history has the same freedom of choice and burden of moral responsibility that he has had. Men need not choose to disobey God, but because the world which Adam views is now a corrupted world there is a

preponderance of individual men who personally choose to disobey God rather than to obey Him. Therefore the one man who chooses to obey and serve God stands out in lonely isolation from the great body of mankind. The individual man makes his individual choice, and although there may be thousands who choose not to obey God, there is always one who chooses to obey Him.

In the context of the poem Adam and Eve have learned about "the ways of God with men" because they have personally experienced His ways with them. They have learned that they really are free to choose what their relationship with God is, and as a consequence they are also responsible for that relationship. They have learned this important lesson of their responsibility, but they have also learned a greater lesson. Adam says,

> Henceforth I learn, that to obey is best,
> And love with fear the only God, to walk
> As in his presence, ever to observe
> His providence, and on him sole depend (XII, 561-64)

The reader of Paradise Lost has been led to learn, along with Adam and Eve, about human responsibility. He has been bombarded from all sides by the words and actions of the widely differing personages in the epic with the fact that in God's world (the created world of Milton) one is free to choose his relationship to God. In Book I, it is Satan who illustrates this truth by word and deed. Satan, magnificent angel that he is, has chosen to be a rebel

toward God. He says that

> . . . in my choice
> To reign is worth ambition though in Hell.
> Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav'n (I, 261-63)

He has made his choice: he will not serve in Heaven. He has chosen Hell instead, and that is where he is. The reader, because he is a fallen man, may be deceived by Satan's posture and rhetoric into admiring him, but he is expected to see, this early in the poem, that whatever relationship one who is free chooses, that is what his relationship with God is.

In Book III, it is God who states that men and angels who are free are "authors to themselves" in all that they choose:

> . . . Authors to themselves in all
> Both what they judge and what they choose; for so
> I form'd them free . . . (III, 121-23)

In Book VI, it is Abdiel who illustrates by his adamant stand against Satan's blandishments that one who chooses to can stand against Satan and remain in an obedient relationship to God.

These incidents and these messages are signposts along the way to educate the reader that each individual, created being is free to choose--and responsible for his choice. For the reader, however, the climactic center of Paradise Lost is Book IX for here he sees clearly portrayed in the action and interaction of two human beings with each other and with God the clearest manifestation of this

important theme. In the context of this book, he sees that Adam and Eve are indeed free. They are free as they choose in their initial experience to obey and trust in God. They are continuously free, and in a time of great temptation, each chooses not to obey and trust God. And they are still free when each chooses to make his way back once again to an obedient, trusting relationship with God.

The reader is an observer of the poem as he watches this truth enacted in the lives of Adam and Eve. He becomes a participant when he realizes that he, too, is responsible for his relationship with God. The choice is his to make. Whatever his choice may be, the reader of Paradise Lost has had this truth made clear to him. Man's responsibility has been clearly defined.

NOTES

[1]Satan's worst epithets for God are "Potent Victor," "Tyrant of Heaven," and "Almighty Conqueror," and one does well to remember that Satan is using these terms after his own rebellion in which he sought to be a "potent victor," "a tyrant of heaven," and an "almighty conqueror."

[2]The reaction of all readers, as stated by Stanley Fish in his book, Surprised by Sin (New York, 1967), p. 1.

[3]Alasdair MacIntyre, "Existentialism," Encyclopedia of Philosophy (New York, 1967), III, 149.

[4]Jean Paul Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism" in Existentialism From Dostoevsky to Sartre, ed. Walter Kaufmann (Cleveland, World Publishing Company, 1956), p. 290.

[5]Sartre, p. 295.

[6]Sartre, p. 295.

[7]J. M. Evans, Paradise Lost and the Genesis Tradition (Oxford, 1968), p. 274.

[8]Stella P. Revard, "Eve and the Doctrine of Responsibility In Paradise Lost," PMLA, LXXXIX (January, 1973), p. 72.

[9]John Halkett in Milton and the Idea of Matrimony (New Haven, 1970), pp. 125-28, bases much of his interpretation of Paradise Lost on the hierarchy of the marriage relationship. He stresses the unique role of Adam as sustainer, protector, and advisor to Eve, and the role of Eve as a "meet help to Adam" who willingly acknowledges her position as subservient to Adam. Halkett makes the fall and the restoration from the fall contingent upon each assuming his proper role in the matrimonial relationship.

I would agree that this hierarchial concept exists in the marriage relationship, and that Milton maintains that each has a proper role to fulfill in regard to the other, but I would stress that each is individually and separately responsible for his role with God. There is a higher relationship, an object of love higher than that which exists between man and woman: one's personal relationship to God.

[10]Sartre, p. 297.

[11]A. J. A. Waldock, Paradise Lost and Its Critics (Cambridge, 1947), p. 35.

[12]Sartre, p. 295.

[13]Revard, p. 70.

[14]John Halkett says that only after Eve's offering in Book X to bear the punishment of both their sins does Adam, moved by her offer, desire to make the same sacrifice, and that "The act of performing once again the office proper to the husband . . . leads Adam to full repentance" (p. 134). But this interpretation seems to overlook the significance of Adam's long soliloquy in which he admits his own guilt (X, 828-34), and the comment of the epic voice which tells us that God's prevenient grace had already clothed their nakedness. It seems rather that Eve's confession and humble appeal to Adam restores their relationship, and that even this relationship was mended as each accepted his personal responsibility for his act toward the other.

CHAPTER IV

PARADISE REGAINED:

MAN'S RESPONSIBILITY PERFECTLY EXEMPLIFIED

The reader of Paradise Lost, as he has observed the actions of Adam and Eve in that epic, has had at least one important idea made clear to him: one is free to choose and keep on choosing his relationship to God, and he is therefore responsible for what that relationship is. This is true regardless of the difficulty of the circumstances or the agony of the situation in which one must make his choice. He has learned that the choices that Adam and Eve make are meaningful and determinative in their lives, both with regard to each other and in their relationship with God. As an observer, he has seen these truths illustrated in their lives. As he identifies with them, he becomes increasingly a participant in the poem as he, by analogy, realizes that he, too, is responsible for whatever choices he makes regarding his relationship with God.

Milton has clearly defined, in the context of Paradise Lost, man's personal responsibility for his relationship to God. In Paradise Regained he presents a further truth. Regardless of the temptations one encounters, it is possible to maintain an obedient, trusting relationship with God.

In Paradise Regained he is shown how he can maintain this kind of relationship if he chooses to do so. Thus the poem functions in a dual capacity for the instruction of the reader. He is shown what his responsibility regarding temptation is (he is to resist it), and he is shown how he is to accomplish that responsibility (he is to imitate the actions of the man Jesus).

One reason the poem works so effectively to impress these truths on the mind of the reader is that in the poem the major emphasis on the character of Jesus is on his humanity. He is a man, and although the reader is always aware of the fact that Jesus is unlike him in that He does not sin, he is equally aware that (in the context of the poem) Jesus is like him in that He can and does make a choice that he will not sin. In other words, the reader sees Jesus as a man who is tempted, but who chooses not to sin, and that prerogrative is his also.

In Paradise Regained Jesus is a man experientially confronting temptation to evil who, in his lonely encounter, cannot escape the fierceness of the temptation, nor his responsibility for the choice he makes. It is as Jesus, the man, makes his individual, personal choice that he comes to define his relationship to God. He is exemplifying by his action the concept that man is responsible for his choice even in the severest temptations as powerful forces are brought to bear on him -- and that it is his choice

which defines his relationship to God. It is when Jesus is confronted in an existential situation by real temptation and the necessity of choice that he becomes a man "like as we are." It is as the reader sees Jesus, a man, making the right choices that he learns that it is possible for him to choose rightly. One of the purposes of Paradise Regained is to show men how to face temptations that are real and common to every man, and how to make a choice, if one is willing, to reject evil for good. My position is essentially that of Irene Samuel who says,

> Milton chose it [the temptation experience] because it was regularly taken as the ground for the imitatio Christi and therefore offered itself as that action in Christ's life which might be amplified and explored as defining the right way for every man. What Milton chiefly does is elaborate the temptations into arguments and the rejections into counter-arguments so that every man may see in the exemplary answers a complete program for regaining Eden.[1]

The reader, then, becomes an important character in the poem in the sense that he is there listening to the temptations of Satan and learning from Jesus' responses. Because the reader knows the Biblical story, he already knows that Jesus will reject Satan's temptations. There is no suspense concerning this. But with Milton's expansion of the Biblical account there is a learning and choosing response going on in the mind of the reader. Milton is teaching him truths concerning a man's responsibility when he is presented with temptations or trials which necessitate a choice, a choice which aligns him either

with God or with Satan. In this sense, Paradise Regained is a dramatic poem. It is valuable as an experience for the reader, as well as for a demonstration of what happens to Jesus. Its moral value lies not just in what happens to Jesus, but in what happens to the reader. And if what happens to him is a spiritual experience wherein he learns how to emulate Jesus and, more importantly, chooses to do so, then something significant has occurred.

To enable the reader of Milton's day and our day to say Yes or No (whichever he chooses) to temptations which are common to all men and which can be destructive if they separate man from God, the poem does two things. First, the temptations are clearly identified; one is told what these temptations are. Then Jesus explains why they are to be refused. The reader is obligated to think through both Satan's presentation of the temptation and Jesus' answer as to why he rejects it. Then he chooses whether or not he will accept Jesus' conclusions based on His values. He will do so only if he is willing to come to accept the idea that spiritual values are of greater value than anything else; that what is most important is one's relationship to God.

Moreover, if the example of Jesus is to be meaningful to the reader, he must believe that it is in his strength as a man that Jesus overcomes these temptations. The reader accepts the dichotomy of Jesus' role in the poem: He is

the man whose "firm obedience fully tried / Through all temptation" (PR I, 4-5) defeats the tempter, and thus recovers Paradise for all mankind; that is, He is the Messiah foretold. But he is also a man, and as a man, he has to learn, to experience temptation, and to choose if he will trust God or not, as any man must. The emphasis in the poem is, I believe, on his humanity. The lesson which I believe Milton is concerned with presenting is meaningful to the reader if he believes in the humanity of Jesus. This is to say that Jesus' conduct based on his choice can be meaningful only if the reader feels that such choice of conduct is also possible for him.

This essential humanity of Jesus is indicated by the fact that he gradually learns his mission; he is not all knowing from the beginning. This is clear from the text itself. As he "forth walk'd alone, the Spirit leading" (I, 188-89) into the "desert wild" he has a multitude of thoughts swarming in his mind. He recapitulates the experiences he has had and the knowledge he has gained -- his learning of the Law; his desire to rescue Israel from the Roman yoke; the words of his mother concerning his birth; and his knowledge that he is the Messiah whose "way must lie / Through many a hard assay even to the death" (I, 264-65). But, human-like, he does not know what awaits him in the wilderness. He has a growing, experiential knowledge that comes to him, as it does to any man, and he has to

walk by faith.

Before looking at Milton's portrayal of the temptations of Jesus, it is well to look at the Biblical account in the gospel of Luke (KJV) which he used as the basis for his poem. It, like the Genesis account of the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden, is very spare and laconic:

> 1 And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness,
> 2 Being forty days tempted of the devil. And in those days he did eat nothing: and when they were ended, he afterward hungered.
> 3 And the devil said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread.
> 4 And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.
> 5 And the devil, taking him up into an high mountain, shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time.
> 6 And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it.
> 7 If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine.
> 8 And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.
> 9 And he brought him to Jerusalem, and set him on a pinnacle of the temple, and said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence:
> 10 For it is written, He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee:
> 11 And in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.
> 12 And Jesus answering said unto him, It is said, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.
> 13 And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season.

One can see that Milton's poem greatly expands on this brief

account, and one reason for this expansion is to identify, or explain clearly what these temptations are (as Milton interprets them) so that the reader may know what the individual temptations are that he is to resist. Note for example that the Biblical account (v. 5-6) simply states that Satan showed Jesus "the kingdoms of the world" and said he would give Jesus "all this power" and "the glory of them." One may well ask, "What does this mean?" Milton expands on this temptation for the purpose of explaining what this means so that there will be no doubt as to what the reader is to resist, as he sees Jesus saying No to Satan's appeal.

With the encounter of Jesus with Satan, the first temptation is clearly identified and the instruction of the reader is begun. This first temptation comes through an appeal to a very basic human need, a need which must be met if life itself is to be sustained --the need for physical food. Jesus has not tasted "human food" for forty days; Satan reminds him that it is not likely he will find any in such a desolate, solitary place and then says,

> But if Thou be the Son of God, Command
> That out of these hard stones be made thee bread
> (PR, I, 343-44)

The temptation is to satisfy this normal physical need but through a supernatural means, a means that the reader knows is not available to him.[2] Jesus says No, because there is something more important than satisfying this normal human

need of bread -- that is his need to maintain his trusting relationship with God; his belief in God's power to meet his physical need. He will trust God, even as other men, Moses and Elijah in the past, trusted Him. He is affirming his bond with men, and when the reader sees Jesus refuse this first temptation he begins his identification with Jesus because he sees that Jesus has identified with man and man's limitations by refusing to perform a superhuman miracle. If Jesus as a man trusts God for his physical need, the reader is beginning to see his human responsibility -- he is also to trust God for his need.[3]

Satan departs briefly to reconnoiter with his "demonian spirits," but he comes back again to appeal once more to Jesus through his physical need of food. And this time the temptation is keener because Jesus now is hungry. He says,

> Now I feel I hunger, which declares
> Nature hath need of what she asks (II, 252-54)

And Milton proceeds to impress the reality of the hunger that Jesus is experiencing so that the reader will know that this is no play-acting on Jesus' part as he resists the temptation. He sleeps and dreams of "meats and drinks, Nature's refreshment sweet" (II, 265), wakes "and found all was but a dream" (II, 283). But the lavish banquet spread before Him by Satan is no dream. The epic voice says,

> Alas how simple to these Cates compar'd
> Was the crude Apple that diverted Eve! (II, 348-49)

These are sophisticated, luscious viands which are appealing to Jesus (and the reader). The temptation is genuine, and Jesus' active refusal of the food is proof of the genuineness of his earlier words -- that man does not live by bread only -- because now is he acting on that belief. He is saying No to Satan and Yes to God. He is in the process of trusting God to provide for His needs. He has a genuine hunger, a real need, but he refuses Satan and chooses to believe that "God / Can satisfy that need some other way / Though hunger still remain" (II, 253-55). He refuses Satan's "pompous delicacies" and chooses in the face of this very basic human need to trust God to provide for him. This is what he is doing. He has made his choice, and set the example for the reader, but the reader must decide for himself if he will emulate this example. Is it possible to resist the need of the flesh and put one's personal trust in God before a very basic physical need? Jesus has demonstrated that it is; the reader must choose for himself if he will accept the truth that this is possible and if he will act on this principle himself. In Milton's world, the genuineness of one's choice is validated by one's act. What one does is proof of what one is. This is the view of the Existentialist as well, and Jesus here and throughout the poem is existential man in the sense that he assumes the responsibility for his action, and chooses for himself what he will do, and what he is. It is his

action that determines the reality of what he is. The Existentialist insists that man is free to choose and responsible for the choice he makes, and that by his action he validates the choice he has made. In illustrating the importance of choice in one's life, and action which is the result of one's having chosen, Sartre says,

> The doctrine I am presenting before you . . . declares that there is no reality except in action. It goes further, indeed, and adds 'Man is nothing else but what he purposes, he exists only in so far as he realizes himself, he is therefore nothing else but the sum of his actions, nothing else but what his life is.[4]

A man is "the sum of his actions" and this one act is a part of what Jesus is. He has made this choice for this temptation. He is a man who trusts God. But life presents other temptations, and the necessity for other choices. In existential terminology, one is constantly in the process of becoming, and what one becomes is determined by one's continued choice. What Jesus finally is, is what he continually chooses to be, and the poem reveals that he is of all men the most authentic because his choice is consistently to be obedient to God regardless of temptation. The reader has had the opportunity to see Jesus refuse to use supernatural powers to meet a basic human need. He has seen Jesus demonstrate by his personal action that he will trust God for this need, and it is becoming clear to the reader that such a trusting relationship is possible for him. He has the example of Jesus, a man, and he, as

a man, must choose if he will trust God for all the physical needs that are his.

The next temptation presented is Milton's explanation of what "the kingdoms of the world" entails. The generalized New Testament concept of "kingdoms of the world" become specific with Milton. He explicitly names the things which he thinks are a part of the kingdoms of the world, and which constitute a real temptation to a numan being. Jesus is confronted in his human nature with the genuine appeal that they make to him. The reader knows that these are real temptations to Jesus as a man because they are things that appeal to him as a man.

This "kingdoms of the world" temptation is many faceted and complex and therefore subtle and insidious in appeal. Satan's first part of this temptation is an involved one. He tempts Jesus to "get riches first, get Wealth, and Treasure heap" (II, 427). This he must do, Satan says, in order that he may get Empire and from acquiring an Empire gain glory for himself. Since these things are humanly appealing, why and how Jesus rejects this temptation is important to the reader. Because the temptation is complex, Jesus gives an involved answer by which he clarifies for the reader certain other truths inherent in the situation which Satan has deliberately not revealed. The reader must then evaluate the evaluations of Jesus; he will accept them as valid or not.

First, to Satan's statement that one must get wealth if one is to gain empire, Jesus reminds Satan (and the reader) that this is not always true. Empire has been gained by those "in lowest poverty" who had the necessary qualities of virtue, valor and wisdom. He mentions Gideon, Jeptha, and David of the Hebrew nation, and Quintius, Fabricius, Curius, Regulus of the Roman empire. If one has these virtues, it may be possible that circumstances will enable one to obtain an empire, but what really matters is that one possess these virtues. Furthermore, Jesus reminds the reader of what he already knows from observation of human experience; namely, that an earthly crown often sits on one's head as "a wreath of thorns" and "Brings dangers, trouble, cares and sleepless nights / To him who wears the Regal Diadem" (II, 460-61). There is another kingdom which one may aspire to rule which to Jesus is of greater individual significance, and one which lies within the realm of possibility for the reader. Jesus says,

> Yet he who reigns within himself, and rules
> Passions, Desires, and Fears, is more a King (II, 466-67)

The reader who has been made aware in Paradise Lost of his responsibility for his relationship with God and who has learned that he is like Adam in that he has not always been able to control his "Passions, Desires, and Fears" can see the significance of this statement. It does not finally matter if one is ruler of an empire or not; it does finally

matter what one individually is; that is, if one can control himself, because as he has learned in Paradise Lost, one is responsible for himself, for his personal relationship with God.

The next temptation presented by Satan is also clearly identified, and again one which is valued by most men. He tempts Jesus with earthly glory. He questions Jesus

> These Godlike virtues wherefore dost thou hide?
> . . . . . .
> . . . wherefore deprive
> All Earth her wonder at thy acts, thyself
> The fame and glory (III, 21, 23-25)

Again, Jesus' reply is one which the reader must evaluate as to its validity, because again the focus is on the individual. Jesus is concerned not with how he stands with men or how much glory he might gain from them, but rather how he stands with God, which to Him constitutes real glory.

> This is true glory and renown, when God
> Looking on th' Earth, with approbation marks
> The just man, and divulges him through Heaven
> To all his angels. (III, 61-64)

It is more important, says Jesus, that one be approved by God than praised by men. Furthermore, Jesus says that "if there be in glory aught of good" (III, 88), it may be gained as a result of "deeds of peace," by "patience, temperance," by imitating the acts of Job who believed God and waited patiently on Him. These are spiritual values with which one is confronted and which one must choose for himself to believe.

The implicit temptation to kingship which Satan has suggested becomes explicit with Satan's next temptation, and it is a severe one because the end result of what is being offered is that which Jesus wants to accomplish, that is, to establish a kingdom. Satan begins his assault by reminding Jesus that He is indeed to have a kingdom:

> But to a Kingdom thou art born, ordain'd
> To sit upon thy Father David's Throne (III, 152-53)

Further, he reminds Jesus that His nation of Israel is now "Reduc't a Province under Roman yoke" (III, 158) and that Rome "will not part / Easily from possession won with arms" (III, 155-56). This must strike a responsive chord in Jesus for He has earlier indicated his desire to free his nation from Roman bondage:

> . . . victorious deeds
> Flam'd in my heart, heroic acts; one while
> To rescue Israel from the Roman yoke,
> Then to subdue and quell o'er all the earth
> Brute violence and proud Tyrannic pow'r,
> Till truth were freed, and equity restor'd (I, 215-20)

And Satan, with his knowledge of this desire, makes his appeal to Jesus as logical and tempting as he can. He suggests that if Jesus seizes the throne of Israel he will be fulfilling the prophets and beginning the reign which will be "happier the sooner it begins." Satan says, "Reign then, what canst thou better do the while?" (III, 180). Jesus' reply is

> All things are best fulfill'd in their due time,
> And time there is for all things (III, 182-83)

He is setting forth the principle which governs his choice to refuse Satan. He will get what is to be His -- a kingdom -- only in and through God's plan for him, and this includes in God's time. He is not in control of God's world or of God's kingdom. God is in control of that and of him, and as a man he is willing to wait. His role is that which is most difficult, but which is most necessary if one is to maintain his relationship with God. He is to wait and trust, and this requires the virtue of patience. The reader is seeing demonstrated the virtues which he himself will need to cultivate if he is to be successful in refusing like temptations.

Satan becomes condescending and contemptuous toward Jesus. He reminds Jesus of the provincial, restricted nature of his life up to this point, of the fact that his "life hath yet been private, most part spent / At home" (III, 232-33), and further implies that perhaps Jesus does not even know what he is refusing since "The world thou hast not seen, much less her glory, / Empires, and Monarchs, and thir radiant courts" (III, 236-37). Then he takes Jesus to a "mountain high" where he spreads out before Him a panoramic view of the mighty kingdoms of the world with "Huge Cities and high-tow'r'd, that well might seem / The seats of mightiest monarchs" (III, 261-62)

Assuming that these sights are impressive and to be desired by any man, Satan presses the temptation. He shows

Jesus the military might of Parthia and then the "great and glorious Rome, Queen of the Earth" (IV, 45), and suggests that these are the epitome of the greatness of kingdom which Jesus surely aspires to:

> . . . these two Thrones except,
> The rest are barbarous, and scarce worth the sight,
> Shar'd among petty Kings too far remov'd,
> These having shown thee, I have shown thee all
> The Kingdoms of the world, all thir glory. (IV, 85-89)

The kingdoms of the world, then, have been clearly identified, and what they represent --earthly power and glory-- is certainly portrayed as desirable. The reader is aware of the subtleties of this temptation. He knows what it is to desire to have "things" of the material world, and he knows the temptation to get what he wants regardless of the means he must use to get it. And as he watches the response of Jesus as he refuses "the expedient way" he learns the way by which he may also refuse this temptation, if he chooses to do so. Jesus says to Satan:

> Know therefore when my season comes to sit
> On David's throne, it shall be like a tree
> Spreading and overshadowing all the Earth,
> . . . . . .
> And of my Kingdom there shall be no end:
> Means there shall be to this, but what the means,
> Is not for thee to know, nor me to tell. (IV, 146-48, 151-53)

Jesus can say No to this genuine temptation to an earthly kingdom because he sees a greater value in a spiritual kingdom. And he is willing to trust God to use His means to accomplish the establishment of this kingdom. Again, Jesus

is accepting as his criterion for choice the spiritual rather than the material. Satan himself sums up Jesus' attitude: "thyself seem'st otherwise incline'd / Than to a worldly Crown" (IV, 212-13). Jesus is more desirous of maintaining a trusting relationship with God than he is with gaining a material kingdom.

Satan cannot understand "a kingdom that has no end," the spiritual kingdom of which Jesus speaks, and discountenancing the value of anything as ephemeral as this, he becomes "impudent" and boastful of the kingdoms over which he has control. Seeking to impress Jesus with his power and the value of his kingdom, he says that what he has offered Jesus is no trifle. It has a price.

> Nor what I part with mean to give for naught;
> All these which in a moment thou behold'st,
> The Kingdoms of the world to thee I give;
> For giv'n to me, I give to whom I please,
> No trifle; yet with this reserve, not else,
> On this condition, if thou wilt fall down,
> And worship me as thy superior Lord. (IV, 161-67)

Satan, in his fit of pique, has revealed a truth that up until now had been disguised, at least as far as the reader is concerned. It is made clear that there is a price tag on the kingdoms of the world. This temptation, then, involves much more than using expedient means to get what one wants out of life. It involves a bargain for one's soul. Jesus recognizes the seriousness of the temptation with the seriousness of his reply:

> . . . It is written,
> The first of all Commandments, thou shalt worship
> The Lord thy God, and only him shalt serve (IV, 175-77)

The confrontation has become very personal and very subjective. Jesus now is not just rejecting "things," such as riches, empire, power. He is rejecting a person, and a person who seeks to usurp God's rightful place in his life. It is being made clear to the reader that the struggle in which Jesus is engaged is a serious one, and "the abominable terms," offered by Satan have to do with soul surrender. Jesus, in rejecting Satan's lordship over him is affirming God's lordship over him. The reader is expected to see that one has to choose for himself one relationship or the other: it is God or Satan. The reader has been made clearly aware, then, of the cost to himself of the "kingdoms of the world," if he chooses Satan's offer rather than Jesus' example. Now he knows what is involved when he encounters the temptation to seek the kingdoms of the world. He has to make a choice, and whichever he chooses, it is a serious one for him. Milton would have him emulate Jesus, but the responsibility is his.

The next temptation of Jesus (and the reader) is subtle and insidious because it is basically an appeal to intellectual pride. Satan couples it with temptation to kingdom, but the emphasis is on the value of worldly learning to the denigration of spiritual knowledge. He suggests that Jesus

> . . . Be famous then
> By wisdom; as thy Empire must extend,
> So let extend thy mind o'er all the world,
> In knowledge, all things in it comprehend. (IV, 221-24)

He casts a slur on knowledge that is contained in the Hebrew scriptures, as he suggests that such knowledge is limited and inadequate.

> All knowledge is not couch't in Moses' Law,
> The Pentateuch or what the Prophets wrote;
> The Gentiles also know, and write, and teach
> To admiration, led by Nature's light (IV, 225-28)

His implication is that if one is to be the king of a kingdom, worldly knowledge such as that epitomized by Athens, the "eye of Greece," is essential. This is a subtle temptation for Jesus to look for human wisdom as a supplement to, or substitute for, the spiritual truth revealed in the Scriptures, as if somehow man's great learning is a necessity for complete truth. Further, the temptation is to depend on man's intellect as adequate to explain the mysteries of life that confront mankind. Jesus' reply is that pagan philosophers "talk much of the Soul" but it is "all awry" because they trust in man's ratiocination rather than God's revelation. They are like the fallen angels in Paradise Lost who sit on a hill and philosophize regarding man's condition, but who never come to the real truth because they have rejected the source of all truth--God. It is important to note that Milton is not rejecting classical learning so much as he is suggesting its limitations.[5]

A. S. P. Woodhouse expresses it this way:

> One must remember of course that all Satan's gifts and suggestions are offered with evil intent, to betray Christ, in one way or other, into disobedience to God. Even though what was offered were in itself a thing indifferent, like the apple in Eden, it would become evil in the circumstances as it came into competition with obedience to God; this fact alone would be sufficient to account for Christ's rejection of the proffered gift of knowledge . . . . Is Christ, then, rejecting all secular knowledge and art as in themselves worthless? Not necessarily . . . But there is an implied qualification: secular knowledge is of little worth when compared with divine revelation, and positively delusive when it trenches on questions that only revealed religion can answer.[6]

Northrup Frye discusses the danger inherent in the temptation:

> It is Greek philosophy in its context as part of Satan's kingdom that is being rejected. A Christian working outward from his faith might find the study of Plato and Aristotle profitable enough, but if he were to exchange the direct tradition of revelation for their doctrines, which is what Christ is tempted to do, he would find in them only the fine flower of a speculative tree with its roots in the demonic metaphysics and theology described in the second book of Paradise Lost.[7]

Jesus refuses this temptation and affirms that it is in God's revelation, not in classical myth, that one finds the truth about creation, about man's fall, about God's redemption, about God himself. The reader, if he imitates the action of Jesus at this point, must also reject worldly wisdom and his own intellectual pride in order to become "lowly wise," a most difficult task since it requires an humbling of oneself.

The next trial to which Jesus is subjected, the storm in the wilderness, is not found in the Biblical source, and its inclusion may be viewed as a further device on the

part of Milton to enable the reader to identify more completely with Jesus. The reader has watched Jesus as he has actively opposed Satan in his concrete and specific temptations. Now he will see Jesus enduring another difficult human experience --the experience of being left completely alone while beset by inward and outward terrors. Satan's inability to persuade Jesus to accept his temptations of the world leads him to return Jesus to the wilderness, which as Satan says, is fittest place for one who shows no interest in acquiring what the world deems to be of value. Before Satan takes Jesus into the wilderness, he reminds him that acceptance of Satan's offered aid would have set him on David's throne, or the throne of all the world. Now he is removed from the world of men and left alone to experience what to Jesus, as a man, must be a serious trial.[8] He is left alone in a hostile environment where both outward and inward pressures are focused on him. With Satan's prophetic warning that "Sorrows, and labors, opposition, hate" (385) await him, and ultimately "cruel death," he finds himself alone. The natural world becomes inimical and threatening to him.

> . . . Darkness now rose
> As daylight sunk, and brought in louring night
> Her shadowy offspring, unsubstantial both (IV, 397-99)

Jesus is hungry and cold and seeks for shelter from the dews and damps of night, but he is unable to sleep peacefully

> . . . for at his head
> The Tempter watch'd, and soon with ugly dreams
> Disturb'd his sleep; (IV, 407-09)

A terrible storm develops which beats around him:

> . . . and either Tropic now
> Gan thunder, and both ends of heav'n; the Clouds
> From many a horrid rift abortive pour'd
> Fierce rain with lightning mixt, water with fire
> In ruin reconcil'd: nor slept the winds
> Within thir stony caves, but rush'd abroad
> From the four hinges of the world, and fell
> on the vext Wilderness (IV, 409-16)

He is physically "hungry and cold" and "ill shrouded" in the midst of the storm. He is plagued in his sleep, and psychologically assaulted.

> Infernal Ghosts, and Hellish Furies, round
> Environ'd Thee, some howl'd, some yell'd, some shriek'd,
> Some bent at thee thir fiery darts (IV, 422-24)

All of this is done by Satan "To tempt the Son of God with terrors dire."

Throughout the epic Jesus has been a man alone encountering the powerful temptations of the Evil One, and here his loneliness is intensified. And in his aloneness one can well imagine that every human fear and doubt concerning God's goodness and the rightness of his choice to trust in God is brought into focus. If he is genuinely man, this situation must surely test his faith. The sensitive reader can identify with Jesus in this particular trial because it is when one is left alone that one is most often beset by fears and doubts which challenge one's values, which test one's faith or lack of faith.

When Satan approaches Jesus the next morning, he seeks to capitalize on the experiences that Jesus had endured to yet tempt him to follow his solicitations. He suggests that the storm "in all its fury" was directed at Jesus particularly -- "for only thou here dwellest" (466) and that the "ominous night" and all its terrors were sure signs of what adversities awaited him since he had rejected Satan's expedient way.[9] Jesus' answer is the key to how he was able to endure the night. He tells Satan that the terrors which beset him did him no harm because he knew that they came, not from God, but from Satan. He refuses to accept Satan's aid because he will not let Satan be his God. He has demonstrated for the reader that when one is completely alone, and beset on every side by that which would cause one to doubt and fear, one can still trust in God.

The final encounter in Paradise Regained has been said not to be a temptation at all,[10] but I believe it is a temptation much like the first one in that Satan urges Jesus to show how he is more than "mere man." In the first temptation he was trying to get Jesus to use supernatural means to acquire food which if Jesus had done so would have removed him from the condition of common humanity -- a man cannot turn stones into bread. And when Satan places Jesus on the highest pinnacle of the temple, he is urging him again to do what is essentially the same thing -- to use supernatural means to get himself down from this

precarious position. Satan says,

> Now show thy Progeny; if not to stand,
> Cast thyself down; safely if Son of God:
> For it is written, He will give command
> Concerning thee to his angels, in thir hands
> They shall lift thee, lest at any time
> Thou chance to dash thy foot against a stone (IV, 554-59)

If Jesus performs the miracle that Satan tempts him to do; that is, to jump from the pinnacle so that the angels will bear him in their hands safely to the ground, he will have as effectively removed himself from the human condition as if he had made bread of stones. Satan thinks that Jesus has only one alternative: either he will fall or he must jump. But there is another alternative to obeying Satan, as Jesus has demonstrated throughout the poem. This time the alternative is to trust God and stand, and this is what Jesus does. He says, "Tempt not the Lord thy God; he said and stood" (IV, 561). Jesus is doing what he has been doing through the whole of the poem. He is demonstrating how one can say No to Satan and maintain a trusting relationship with God. He can do so because that is what he chooses to do. A man is free, and he most clearly illustrates this freedom when he chooses what he will do and what he will not do.

It is at this point, the freedom of man to say No, that the action of Jesus so closely parallels what is one of the primary considerations of the existentialist thinker; the freedom of man to say No to the overpowering might of

outside forces. This parallelism can be illustrated from the writings of Jean-Paul Sartre, as he expresses convictions which grew out of his experience in the French Resistence. William Barrett in his Irrational Man says that

> The Resistance came to Sartre and his generation as a release from disgust into heroism. It was a call to action, an action that brought men to the very limits of their being, and in hearing this call man himself was not found wanting. He could even rediscover his own irreducible liberty in saying No to the overpowering might of the occupying forces.[11]

Sartre himself expresses his belief in two basic ideas which Milton is dramatizing in Paradise Regained: that evil is real and that man can say No to that which is evil; that man's essential and ultimate freedom lies in this ability to say No. The first idea is expressed in Sartre's What Is Literature (1947) in which he says,

> We have been taught to take Evil seriously. Chateaubriand, Oradour, the Rue des Saussaies, Dachau, and Auschwitz have all demonstrated to us that Evil is not an appearance, and that knowing its cause does not dispel it, that it is not opposed to Good as a confused idea is to a clear one, that it is not the effect of passions which might be cured, of a fear which might be overcome, of a passing aberration which might be excused, of an ignorance which might be enlightened, that it can in no way be diverted, brought back, reduced and incorporated into idealistic humanism . . . . In spite of ourselves, we came to this conclusion, which will seem shocking to lofty souls: Evil cannot be redeemed.[12]

For Sartre, the atheist, Evil is real and cannot be redeemed, and evidences itself in the actions of living men.

For Milton, and the Puritan, Evil is real and cannot be redeemed, and he represents this truth in the Biblical concept of a personal Devil who is irredeemably evil and who tempts men to acts of evil. Both views of life admit that man, in his human freedom, when confronted by Evil, can make a choice which is meaningful. He can say No. Sartre expresses this concept in The Republic of Silence in which he is describing the life of the French Resistance from 1940 to 1945.

> We were never more free than during the German occupation . . . . Exile, captivity, and especially death became for us the habitual objects of our concern. We learned that they were neither inevitable accidents, nor even constant and inevitable dangers, but they must be considered as our lot itself, our destiny, the profound source of our reality. At every instant we lived up to the full sense of this commonplace little phrase: "Man is mortal!" And the choice that each of us made of his life was an authentic choice because it was made face to face with death, because it could always have been expressed in these terms: "Rather death than . . ." And here I am not speaking of the elite among us who were real Resistants, but of all Frenchmen who, at every hour of the night and day throughout four years, answered No.[13]

Jesus, the man, is saying No to the temptations that confront him in an experiential life situation and by this action he is learning who he is and defining his relationship to God. He is acting as God would have each man act, responsibility and freely choosing a relationship with Him by saying No to Evil.

Jesus is existential man in that he has demonstrated by his action the existential position regarding freedom

and choice. In the context of the poem Jesus is free and he can choose, and with the Existentialist (and Milton) the possibility of choice is the central fact of human nature. As Existentialists develop this thesis --that choice is what determines the nature of man -- they are involved in at least three separate contentions,[14] all of which are illustrated by the actions of Jesus.

The first contention they set forth is that choice is ubitiquous, which means that all action that one takes implies choice. Even if one does not choose explicitly, as may be true in many cases, one's action testifies to an implicit choice. As a human being, one is constantly in the process of choosing, and in the action taken as a result of one's choice, one determines what he is, and indicates by this where his values are.

This emphasis on choice and choice-making is of paramount concern in the thinking of Soren Kierkegaard and Jean Paul Sartre.[15] The first contention, ubiquity of choice, was related by Kierkegaard to the most important thing in his life--his being a Christian. His one theme and one passion was Christianity and what it means concretely for the individual to be a Christian.[16] He had chosen to be a Christian, and he had constantly to renew that choice, with all the energy and passion of his being. Kierkegaard believed that the choices one makes determines one's action, and a person's actions form part of a coherent way of life.

To make this clear, Kierkegaard elaborated three levels of existence which an individual may choose: the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious.[17] In the aesthetic mode or level of existence, one chooses the immediacy of sensual pleasure for his way of life. In the ethical level, one chooses to commit himself to ethical ideals and so he begins to wrestle with the concept of responsibility with regard to other people. And finally, in the religious mode, one's supreme choice is obedience to God, at the cost of suspending the other two modes of living, if this is necessary. This mode of existence is most important for Kierkegaard for it has to do with the uniqueness of the single one and the calling of the religious man. Kierkegaard believed that between these modes of existence one must choose, and it is in this sense that behind any action there lies a choice. Jesus, in facing the temptations of Satan and in rejecting his solicitations, has, in a sense, rejected the first two modes of living -- the aesthetic and ethical -- and has chosen the religious existence, where one comes closest to the center of the self. He rejected, or moved beyond, the aesthetic mode of existence when he refused to turn the stones into bread or accept the lavish banquet, and when he refused the offer of great learning, which is considered to be a kind of intellectual aestheticism. He rejected the ethical mode of living as of primary importance when he refused the temptations of the kingdoms of the world,

with Satan's basic reminder that by accepting wealth, power, glory, he would be able to do great good for all men as he established his kingdom on earth. And finally, in his endurance of the storm and his stand on the pinnacle, he demonstrated that he is risking himself completely in his trust that in what he is doing, God is directing and supporting him. He has demonstrated throughout his encounter with Satan that the central fact of his existence is obedience to God, an existence which he freely chooses.

In Sartre the concept of choice, which for Kierkegaard was a decision between fundamentally different ways of life, has become a ubitiquitous presence behind every human action. This is to say that for Sartre it sometimes appears as if each separate action expresses an individual choice.[18] Moreover, it is with Sartre that the second contention of the Existentialist -- "that although in many of my actions my choices are governed by criteria, the criteria which I employ are themselves chosen"[19] -- is most explicitly enunciated. With reference to the incident of the French youth who came to him for advice concerning his decision to stay with his mother or fight for Free France, Sartre explains what this contention means:

> You may say that the youth did, at least, go to a professor to ask for advice. But if you seek counsel -- from a priest, for example -- you have selected that priest; and at bottom you already knew, more or less, what he would advise. In other words, to choose an adviser is nevertheless to commit oneself by that choice.[20]

In other words, Sartre says, many of one's actions are governed by criteria, but the criteria which one employs are themselves chosen. In the example of Jesus, the criteria for all of his choices was explicitly to reject Satan and implicity to trust God with his life.

The third contention which the Existentialist holds -- that no causal explanation of one's actions can be given -- is often treated as though it were entailed by the first two. If one's action can be causally explained, then determinism is true in a sense that excludes the possibility of human agents being responsible and free.[21] And that man is free and therefore responsible for his actions is one of the most important concepts held by Milton and the Existentialist alike.

This freedom of man and his responsibility for his choice when confronted with temptation has been perfectly demonstrated through the action of Jesus in Paradise Regained. Milton has completed that task he set for himself at the beginning of the epic with regard to the theological truth concerning the temptation experience of Jesus.

> I who erewhile the happy Garden sung,
> By one man's disobedience lost, now sing
> Recover'd Paradise to all mankind.
> By one man's firm obedience fully tried
> Through all temptation and the tempter foil'd
> In all his wiles, defeated and repuls't,
> And Eden rais'd in the waste Wilderness (I, 1-7)

He has dramatized the Biblical myth in order to show how paradise has been regained for all men through one man's

firm obedience to God. He has shown how Jesus has been tested and found adequate "to earn Salvation for the Sons of men" (I, 167). The text of the poem is the record of this testing.

But for the reader something else of equal significance has been happening. He has had clearly demonstrated for him that a man can, if he chooses, resist temptation regardless of the great appeal that it makes to him. He has had the opportunity to watch Jesus, to see what he does in a specific situation when a particular appeal is being made to him by Satan. He has had the opportunity to test his own reaction to temptation with Jesus' reaction; that is, if he in his mind had been tempted to accept the offer of great wealth, empire, glory, or whatever else Satan offered, he has been able to learn from Jesus why he should reject Satan's offer. But if he does, momentarily or permanently decide to accept Satan's offer, he also has learned that he gets it on Satan's terms.

The reader, then, has had the opportunity to learn wisdom from Jesus concerning questions of great importance for him. If he chooses to believe the answer that Jesus presents, and if he decides to accept for his standards the criteria that Jesus has used, then he can do what Jesus has done --or at least approach his example. The reader has had perfectly exemplified in the conduct of Jesus what man's responsibility toward temptation is. He has been

shown what man can do, and what man should do. Now the choice for his own personal conduct is left up to him. He may choose to imitate Jesus, or he may choose to yield to Satan. He is free. He is responsible. The choice is his.

NOTES

[1]Irene Samuel, "The Regaining of Paradise," in The Prison and the Pinnacle: Papers to Commemorate the Tercentary of Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes (Toronto, 1973), Balachandra Rajan, ed., p. 122.

[2]Mason Tung in "Pattern of Temptation in Paradise Regained, Seventeenth Century News, XXIV (1966), p. 58 says that the first temptation as well as the last is designed to encourage Jesus to prove that He is the Son of God. I agree that both temptations have basically the same purpose, but my emphasis is that the temptation is for Jesus to use supernatural means to meet ordinary human needs which would effectively remove him from the common condition of mankind. Therefore he would no longer be for the reader a model which he could try to emulate.

[3]The emphasis on distrust in the first temptation is noted by practically every critic of Paradise Regained since Allen H. Gilbert's "The Temptation in Paradise Regained," JEGP, XV (1916), 599-611.

[4]Jean Paul Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism," in Existentialism From Dostoevsky to Sartre, ed. Walter Kaufman (Cleveland, 1956), p. 300.

[5]E. M. W. Tillyard in Milton (London, 1939), suggests that Milton has come to doubt the wisdom of his great learning, and that this temptation, which is not in the Biblical account, grows out of this concern.

[6]A. S. P. Woodhouse, "Theme and Pattern in Paradise Regained," UTQ, XXV (1956), p. 178.

[7]Northrup Frye,"The Typology of Paradise Regained," MP,LIII (1956), p. 236.

[8]E. M. W. Tillyard has said in his Milton (London, 1930), 327, that after Jesus' refusal of learning, Satan in despair "turns from the subtle tempter of mind to a crude physical bully . . ." This seems to ignore the spiritual and psychological stress placed on Jesus in the storm.

[9]Dick Taylor, Jr., in "The Storm Scene in Paradise Regained: A Reinterpretation," UTQ, XXIV (1955), 359-60,

treats the storm scene as a genuine trial also. He believes the method of the trial in the storm does not involve violence and terror by Satan so much as the temptation for Christ to follow false portents and be deceived into reading false signs as evidence of God's will that He should assume power under Satan's auspices.

[10]*Paradise Regained* is viewed by some critics as centrally concerned with establishing the identity of the hero, and the pinnacle scene is thus interpreted as the crucial point when Satan finally discovers Christ's identity. In particular A. S. P. Woodhouse, "Theme and Pattern in *Paradise Regained*," *UTQ*, XXV (1956), p. 181; E. M. Pope, *Paradise Regained: The Tradition and the Poem* (Baltimore, 1947), 103-04, and Barbara K. Lewalski, *Milton's Brief Epic* (Providence, 1966), 304-05, 315-19.

[11]Quoted in William Barrett, *Irrational Man* (Garden City, New York, 1958), p. 241.

[12]Quoted in Barrett, p. 240.

[13]Quoted in Barrett, p. 240.

[14]Alasdair MacIntyre, "Existentialism," *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York, 1967), III, 149.

[15]I am using these two specific Existential philosophers because they are the two who deal most specifically with the concept of choice.

[16]Barrett, p. 150.

[17]Barrett, p. 163-68.

[18]*Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, III, pp. 149-50.

[19]*Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, III, p. 149.

[20]Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism," p. 297.

[21]*Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, p. 149.

CHAPTER V

SAMSON AGONISTES:
MAN'S RESPONSIBILITY FINALLY EXPERIENCED

In Samson Agonistes Milton comes to present the concept of the responsibility of man for his relationship to God as it relates to Samson, a man unlike Adam in that he was never innocent, unlike Jesus in that he was never perfect, but like the reader in that he is a decidedly fallen man. In Paradise Lost Milton was limited by the Biblical myth itself to show how Adam, the first man, innocent and free, and representative of the human race, was responsible for his choice which led to the fall. In Paradise Lost man's responsibility is clearly defined, but the story is of necessity the story of a fall. In the same manner, in Paradise Regained Milton was still limited by the myth itself to portray Jesus, the second Adam and perfect man, as exemplifying not only that a man is responsible for his choice but illustrating by the action of the man Jesus what one can and should do when presented with a choice which determines his relationship to God. But while Jesus the man is the pattern and guide of human conduct, he is, unlike Adam, and unlike the reader, not a fallen man. Therefore the full account of man's personal responsibility

for his relationship to God demanded another picture -- the representation of a fallen man, burdened with the evil consequences of his free choice, coming to accept his responsibility for his miserable condition, passing through genuinely painful trials in which he is tempted to deny such responsibility, and finally coming to the point of not only accepting responsibility, but moving to act in faith and trust toward God. This account Milton portrays in Samson Agonistes.

There is a sense in which the reader has been prepared by the reading of Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained for the significant truth of Samson Agonistes as it relates to him.[1] He has been taught in Paradise Lost (and he knows from his own experience) that one is responsible for his free choice which determines his relationship to God. As he sees the dramatization of Adam and Eve's choice to sin, he recognizes his kinship with them. He does not feel responsible for the disobedience of Adam and Eve, but he recognizes his own disobedience and sin as being like theirs. The question of God to Adam and Eve --"What have you done?" -- is pertinent to the reader. He is aware of what his own personal response to God's commands has been. Paradise Lost has made it abundantly clear that in his human freedom he is responsible for his choice -- for what he has done -- and for his personal relationship with God. In Paradise Regained the reader has had demonstrated for him

the choice he should have made when he encountered temptation. In the context of the poem, it has been demonstrated that one need not sin; that it is humanly possible to do as Jesus did and make a choice which will defeat Satan's temptations. But he is even more uncomfortably aware that while such choice of perfect obedience is portrayed as possible, in his own experience it has not been accomplished. What then, is the prospect for one who recognizes both his responsibility for his choice and his deficiency in choosing rightly? Milton, in Samson Agonistes, presents the reader with the experience of one most like him in his human weaknesses and strengths. Samson is a man like the reader who has chosen wrongly and disobeyed God's commands. He comes through a series of difficult trials to re-affirm his faith in God because that is what he chooses to do. And the reader, recognizing that Samson is a man like himself, finally comes to experience, at least in the context of the poem, his own unique responsibility for his own personal relationship with God. He does this in the sense that he experiences along with Samson Samson's human dilemma, and as he sees Samson making choices, he also is making decisions. He ultimately decides for himself if it was best for Samson to trust God as he did, and if he agrees that it was, he has come to experience, at least vicariously in the context of the poem, that "Just are the ways of God, / And justifiable to Men"

(293-94). He has come, at least to this degree and in this sense, to a personal expression of his faith in God. Thus the reader is involved in this poem to a degree that he was not in Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained. In Paradise Lost, he was instructed; in Paradise Regained he was shown, but in Samson Agonistes he is on his own to experience the lessons of the poem.

The reader is involved both because of the form and the content of the poem. The form is that of the drama, and there is no epic voice to intervene in the action and tell him, as it often did in Paradise Lost, and, less often, did in Paradise Regained what he should know. There is the Chorus, of course, which comments on the action,[2] but he still must rely on his own judgment as to the rightness, or wrongness, of their comments. He may, for example, agree with their judgment of Dalila -- "she's gone, a manifest Serpent by her sting / Discover'd in the end, till now concealed" (997-98), but he may not agree with their long comment (667-704) on the way God seems to deal so capriciously with men. The Chorus, then, is not always reliable as a moral guide. The reader is on his own to evaluate and judge the actions of the characters. And he is primarily concerned with evaluating the choices of Samson. Is Samson right to reject Manoa's plan for him? Is he wise to treat Dalila as he does? And ultimately he must decide if Samson's choice to respond to God in faith and die an

heroic warrior is a choice which he, the reader, can subscribe to. Thus the dramatic form of the poem enables the reader to experience along with Samson what happens to him. And because Samson is a man like himself, that is, a fallen man, he sees that the action that Samson takes is possible for him if he chooses to learn what Samson learns, and believe what Samson comes to believe. But, again, the choice is up to the reader. He is finally to the point that I believe Milton's didactic intent has led him; that is, he must make his choice if he will respond affirmatively to the choices that Samson makes, and if he does, he accepts the conclusion that Samson's life is "above heroic" and admits with the Chorus that with him who obeys and trusts God, finally, "all is best."

Moreover, it is possible to see in Samson's freedom (free even when captive of the Philistines), and in his choice-making an exemplification of the truth that the Existentialist holds as valid. That is to say, that Samson exemplifies by his action the existential position that man is free and therefore responsible for his acts; that until he assumes responsibility for his life he is an unauthentic person; that he can make a significant and meaningful choice, and that he can achieve a measure of personal dignity because he can choose what he is and what he will be. Both Milton and the Existentialist place the responsibility for man's being what he is squarely on the man and

his free choice.

Turning to Samson Agonistes, the reader is immediately involved in the predicament of Samson, and begins an identification with him which is more complete than his identification with Adam or Jesus. Samson is a man like the reader who has met and succumbed to a particular temptation in a particular time and place and who exhibits the normal human desire to evade responsibility for his present deplorable condition. The reader who knows the Biblical account of Samson knows that Samson is where he is --"Eyeless in Gaza at the Mill with Slaves" (41) because of an earlier choice that Samson made -- his choice to reveal the source of his strength to the Philistine woman, Dalila. More than this, the reader knows "how the story goes." He already knows what the outcome will be, and therefore the peculiar impact that this drama has on him is in the action of Samson as he sees Samson coming personally to accept his responsibility for his past actions, for his present tragic condition, and for his future, as he chooses to exercise, once again, his faith in God.

The first words of Samson, apparently insignificant, are really symbolically and thematically important. He is being led by the hand and says,

> A little onward lend thy guiding hand
> To these dark steps, a little further on;
> For yonder bank hath choice of Sun or shade (1-3)

One is aware that choice is an important word, and although

the immediate, literal choice is relatively unimportant -- "Sun or shade" -- the suggestiveness of "light" (sun) or "dark" (shade) alerts one to the possibility of larger, more important choices between good and evil which Samson may make in the future. If one wonders if it is the spirit of God who is directing this former champion of God, then one may envision the possibility of hope and change. Samson perhaps feels something of this:

> . . . here I feel amends,
> The breath of Heav'n fresh-blowing, pure and sweet,
> With day-spring born (9-11)

He may be faintly aware that the breath of Heaven may enable him to correct or change - "amend" - his present situation, but human-like he is more specifically concerned with the harsh reality of his immediate condition, "Eyeless in Gaza at the Mill with slaves" (41) than with pursuing these thoughts. His questioning is an attempt to rationalize his sin, to avoid acceptance of his responsibility for his condition by suggesting that some cosmic error must have been made in his affairs.

> Why was my breeding order'd and prescrib'd
> As of a person separate to God,
> Design'd for great exploits; if I must die
> Betray'd, Captiv'd, and both my Eyes put out,
> Made of my Enemies the scorn and gaze;
> To grind in Brazen Fetters under task
> With this Heav'n-gifted strength? (30-36)

Then he pulls himself up short to admit, momentarily, his own responsibility for his condition.

> Yet stay, let me not rashly call in doubt
> Divine Prediction; what if all foretold
> Had been fulfill'd but through mine own default,
> Whom have I to complain of but myself? (43-46)

Samson's acceptance of his responsibility for his condition is most like ours in his vacillation. He momentarily accepts the burden of human freedom and responsibility for choice, then almost immediately begins to chafe under the burden, and implies by his next question, "But what is strength without a double share / Of wisdom?" (53) that he has perhaps not been treated fairly by God. God should have given him wisdom (spiritual light) commensurate with his great physical strength; perhaps he is not wholly responsible. Then he changes his response once more: "I must not quarrel with the will / Of highest dispensation" (60-61) only to allow himself to become self-pitying in his blindness and petulantly ask, "Why am I thus bereav'd?" (85). This fluctation in Samson's acceptance of his responsibility for his condition is the mark of his humanity, but he cannot find any satisfactory solution to his human predicament until he firmly accepts, both intellectually and emotionally, the fact that because he is free he is personally and individually responsible for his past choices, for his present condition, and for whatever choice he makes concerning his future.

In the Existentialist view, Samson at this point in his life is like most men who desire to evade facing the

reality of what they are; who desire to avoid accepting their responsibility for themselves and their condition. But the Existentialist in the austerity of his philosophy says that such evasion and excuse-making are futile. One is the sum of his acts.

> Man is nothing else but what he purposes; he exists only insofar as he realizes himself, he is therefore nothing else but the sum of his actions, nothing else but what his life is.[3]

Samson, in his misery, would like to find some outside source (some causal reason) for his present condition. Sartre (and Milton in his portrayal of Samson) will not accept this as a valid condition of existence. Sartre, in discussing characterization in works of fiction with regard to human responsibility, suggests that if he portrayed characters whose behavior was caused by their heredity, their environment, or other determining factors, psychic or organic, people would be reassured. They would feel that one is what he is because of these causes and therefore one can do nothing about what he is. But Sartre refuses to evade the reality of human responsibility. He says,

> The Existentialist, when he portrays a coward, shows him as responsible for his cowardice. He is not like that on account of a cowardly heart or lungs or cerebrum, he has not become like that through his physiological organism; he is like that because he has made himself into a coward by his actions. . . . A coward is defined by the deed that he has done.[4]

Samson, like any man, must come to accept this painful

truth about life and about himself if he is to make his life ever again have significant meaning. In the poem Samson is confronted by temptation and trial coming to him through human instrumentality. These encounters are painful, but they are also potentially redemptive, if he can find within himself the courage to accept his human responsibility and the faith, once again, to express trust and faith in God. In Milton's world, life is a dynamic continuum, and in his concept of man's freedom of choice and responsibility for that choice there lies the possibility for great victory as well as tragic defeat. The Existentialist agrees with Milton in this. Sartre says,

> Whereas the existentialist says that the coward makes himself cowardly, the hero makes himself heroic, and there is always the possibility for the coward to give up cowardice, and for the hero to stop being a hero. What counts is the total commitment, and it is not by a particular case or particular action that you are committed altogether.[5]

One, having been tempted and having chosen wrongly, is not doomed forever by that choice; as long as he is living he may make other choices which may result in his redemption. Milton, one must remember, regards temptation as a part of God's providence. In his Christian Doctrine he says,

> Temptation is either for evil or for good . . . . A good temptation is that whereby God tempts even the righteous for the purpose of proving them, not as though he were ignorant of the dispositions of their hearts, but for the purpose of exercising or manifesting their faith and patience, as in the case of Abraham and Job; or of lessening their self-confidence, and reproving their weakness, that both they themselves may become wiser by experience and others may profit by their example. (Christian Doctrine, I, viii).

Temptation (or opportunity for choice, if one prefers) as it comes to Samson through Manoa, Dalila, Harapha and the Philistine Officer, is Samson's occasion for choice by which he moves from his first tenuous acceptance of responsibility to a firm acceptance of it, but beyond that to an exercise of patience and faith. These encounters enable him to clarify in his own mind his personal responsibility for choices he has made, but even more importantly, they enable him responsibly to choose whether his present and future actions will be an exercise in faith. And as the reader experiences along with Samson his choices, he is, in his value judgment of Samson's actions, making his own personal choice.

Samson's immediate condition illustrates the depth of despair and degradation that are the result of his past choice. The reader knows that Samson is where he is because he chose to reveal the source of his strength to a woman. The Chorus emphasizes the degree of his fall: "To lowest pitch of abject fortune thou are fallen" (169). His change is "beyond report, thought, or belief" (117). But the coming of these friends enables Samson to begin to analyze his condition. They are his sounding board. What he has considered to be his worst affliction, his physical blindness, is fading into insignificance as he acknowledges to them his responsibility for his spiritual condition, for his failure as a servant of God.

> Yet that which was the worst now least afflicts me,
> Blindness, for had I sight, confus'd with shame,
> How could I once look up, or heave the head,
> Who like a foolish Pilot have shipwreck't
> My Vessel trusted to me from above
> Gloriously rigged. (195-200)

But even as he tentatively accepts his responsibility, he is yet implicitly evasive of it as he questions again why his wisdom was not commensurate to his physical strength.

> Immeasurable strength they might behold
> In me, of wisdom nothing more than mean;
> This with the other should, at least, have pair'd,
> These two proportion'd ill drove me transverse. (206-09)

The Chorus reminds him of his responsibility for his choice. He is to "tax not divine disposal" (210) but remember that in all his previous actions, he was the author of his choices. He chose to wed "Philistian women" rather than those of the Hebrew people. This causes Samson to consider that he was indeed responsible for choosing both his Timnite wife and later Dalila, but he also remembers that he made the choice persuaded that he was "motion'd . . . of God." His remembrance of this past time when God's spirit moved him serves to prepare him to believe and act on his belief when he later feels "some rousing motions" to go with the Philistine Officer.

Finally Samson admits his personal responsibility for his present condition. Although Dalila was "that specious Monster," his "accomplish't snare," she is not responsible for his present condition. He admits that he

is because he chose to yield to her: "Of what I suffer / She was not the prime cause, but I myself" (233-34).

The comments and questions of the Chorus in this section serve to help Samson verbalize his thoughts and attitudes and admit that not only is his physical condition his responsibility because of his choice, but also to enable him to make his first tentative decision to accept responsibility for his present spiritual condition. Samson is recognizing that he is free to choose now as he was free when he chose before. He is beginning to accept the awesome burden of self-determination, and such acceptance of personal choice is never an easy task. He is about to face increasingly severe temptations from those with whom he has been most intimately related, his father and his wife, and the thrust of the temptation from each of them is that he not exercise his personal faith in God, but rather that he abdicate his self-hood by turning himself over to them so that he will not ever have to make difficult choices again. They will choose for him and will supply him with whatever is necessary for his future comfort and happiness. Implicit in such a temptation is the conviction on their part that there can be no further meaningful choice and action on Samson's part, and more insidiously, that there can be no redemptive act on God's part. One cannot doubt that in Samson's

present physical suffering and psychological and spiritual despair these temptations are appealing. Thus his encounters with Manoa and Dalila are crucial. He is forced to evaluate his condition, to sort out and clarify in his own mind where responsibility lies, and finally he has to choose again. Ultimately he must choose whether he will again exercise his faith in God or not.

Manoa's temptation of Samson begins as he suggests that God has been unfair in his dealings with Samson.

> Alas! methinks whom God hath chosen once
> To worthiest deeds, if he through frailty err,
> He should not so o'erwhelm, and as a thrall
> Subject him to so foul indignities,
> Be it but for honor's sake of former deeds. (367-72)

Samson chooses not to accept the idea that God is unjust or that man's "frailty" is excuse for his disobedience. He affirms his personal responsibility.

> Appoint not heavenly disposition, Father,
> Nothing of all these evils hath befall'n me
> But justly; I myself have brought them on,
> Sole Author I, sole cause (373-76)

Samson is beginning to accept his responsibility for his actions now without making excuses as he earlier did. He admits that he was neither deceived nor surprised into making his choice. Speaking of Dalila's attempt to find out the secret of his strength he says,

> Thrice she assay'd with flattering prayers and sighs
> And amorous reproaches to win from me
> My capital secret, in what part my strength
> Lay stor'd, in what part summ'd, that she might know:
> Thrice I deluded her, and turn'd to sport
> Her importunity, each time perceiving

> How openly, and with what impudence
> She purpos'd to betray me, and (which was worse
> Than undissembl'd hate) with what contempt
> She sought to make me Traitor to myself (392-401)

He was like Adam in that he clearly knew what he was doing; he himself was the only one who could betray his secret. His betrayal was really a self-betrayal: "She sought to make me Traitor to myself" (401). Dalila was only the instrument of temptation. He admits that he had within himself the power to refuse: "with a grain of manhood [I] / Might easily have shook off all her snares" (408-09). And as he evaluates his present condition of slavery, deplorable as it is, he realizes that in his former "degenerate service" when he was enslaved and unmanned by Dalila, he was in "true slavery." This is additional insight; he recognizes that slavery of the spirit is more abhorrent than slavery of the body.

Manoa's further accusation that Dagon is being honored above Jehovah because of Samson's earlier choice of conduct is accepted by Samson also.

> Father, I do acknowledge and confess
> That I this honor, I this pomp have brought
> To Dagon, and advanc'd his praises high
> Among the Heathen round; to God have brought
> Dishonor, obloquy, and op't the mouths
> Of Idolists, and Atheists; have brought scandal
> To Israel, diffidence of God, and doubt
> In feeble hearts, (448-55)

It is after verbalizing his acceptance of this responsibility that he experiences his first real glimmer of hope. He says,

> This only hope relieves me, that the strife
> With mee hath end; all the contest is now
> 'Twixt God and Dagon; Dagon hath presum'd,
> Mee overthrown, to enter lists with God,
> His Deity comparing and preferring
> Before the God of Abraham. He, be sure,
> Will not connive, or linger, thus provok'd,
> But will arise and his great name assert: (460-67)

He is beginning to reassert his trust in the power of God to accomplish His will and vindicate His name, and this without the service of Samson. There is spiritual growth in Samson when he admits that God is not limited by Samson's failure; that God can effect the redemption of Israel without Samson. He shows considerable maturity here as compared with his earlier querulous complaining cry of

> Why was my breeding order'd and prescrib'd
> As of a person separate to God,
> Design'd for great exploits; if I must die
> Betray'd, Captiv'd, and both my Eyes put out (30-34)

Manoa accepts Samson's statement of faith concerning God's future vindication of His name; but that he does not believe that God will be able to take care of his former servant Samson or ever use him again in His service is indicated by his attempts to intervene in Samson's present situation in such a way as to deny Samson the right to make his own choice as to what his future will be. He wants to arrange Samson's ransom so that he can take Samson home with him where Samson will, in effect, be dependent on Manoa for everything. Manoa says,

> . . . I already have made way
> To some Philistian Lords, with whom to treat
> About thy ransom (481-83)

Samson refuses this temptation. He does not choose to give up his responsibility for himself and his future, even though at this particular point he sees very little hope for himself. He urges his father to "spare the trouble / Of that solicitation" (487-88) and let him stay where he is. His sense of despair and defeat is great. He says that

> My hopes all flat, nature within me seems
> In all her functions weary of herself;
> My race of glory run, and race of shame,
> And I shall shortly be with them that rest. (495-98)

Samson is at a crucial point in his life. As James H. Hanford says,

> The conclusion [of his inner agony of soul] is one of unrelieved despair and marks the darkest moment of Samson's suffering, corresponding precisely to Adam's remorseful misery as he meditates on his sin.[6]

Samson further says,

> Hopeless are all my evils, all remediless;
> This one prayer yet remains, might I be heard,
> No long petition, speedy death,
> The close of all my miseries, and the balm (647-50)

He is in the position of Adam and Eve who were also in despair until they accepted personal responsibility for their sin and moved in faith to ask forgiveness of God.

Samson has been willing to accept his personal responsibility for his present physical and spiritual condition, and this is the first step toward renewal, toward a right relationship with God, but he has not yet learned that unless such acceptance leads to an inner commitment resulting in outward action that such acceptance is sterile and

meaningless and ends in despair. In Samson's case, that commitment must be made to God. He is at the point where he must once again choose to exercise his faith. In spite of his present deplorable condition, he must come to believe in the mercy and power of God, and he must once again exercise faith in the promise concerning his role as Israel's deliverer or he must finally despair of all hope. He cannot remain immobilized in his acceptance of his responsibility --in theological terms, "his conviction of sin." He must choose to act again, basing his action on his faith in God. His encounter with Manoa has enabled him to say aloud what he has been saying to himself: "I am responsible." It has given him the opportunity to refuse to let someone else assume the responsibility for his future: "here rather let me drudge and earn my bread" (573). It has allowed him to clarify and carefully analyze Dalila's previous conduct toward him so that when he personally encounters her again he will not be easily deceived or beguiled by her. Moreover, his encounter with Manoa has reminded him of his previous role as deliverer of Israel, and although Samson does not, at this point, see how he can reassume his role as deliverer, he is reminded of what in the past was his responsibility: "I was his nursling once and choice delight, / His destin'd from the womb" (633-34). Samson's rejection of Manoa's temptation has not been spectacular, but it has been definitive in

that he has chosen for himself what he will or will not be, limited and wounded though he is.

With the coming of Dalila, his action becomes more aggressive. Just the mention of her name arouses him from his personal Slough of Despond: "My Wife, my Traitress, let her not come near me" (725). The encounter between them is of great importance for him because Samson, in hearing Dalila's specious reasoning and her attempt to avoid assuming responsibility for her acts, comes to see even more clearly that he is responsible for his past actions because the excuses that she makes for her actions are the ones that Samson could have used to excuse himself had he wanted to shift his responsibility. This becomes clear as he talks to her.

In her approach to him, Dalila admits that she merits his displeasure for her "unfortunate misdeed," but she says that it was simply her womanly weakness of curiosity that made her want to find out the secret of his strength and her weakness of garrulity which caused her to betray his secret. She indicates that such weakness should be considered as partial excuse for her previous conduct. She is rationalizing her action, refusing to accept full responsibility for it. Moreover, she pleads that she wanted the secret of his strength so that Samson would not desert her as he had his Timnite wife, and that she had given this secret to the Philistines because she did not

want him to hazard his life on the field of battle. She makes the point that in what she did she simply followed his example. When one examines Samson's previous conduct which resulted in his being where he now is, one can see that in many respects his conduct was analogous to hers. He, too, was weak in that he betrayed his secret to her, as she betrayed his secret to the Philistines. He did so because of his inordinate love for her and his desire to keep her even as she acted out of a jealous love and desire to keep him for herself. Samson admits the truth of what she says:

> . . . I gave, thou says't, th' example,
> I led the way; bitter reproach, but true,
> I to myself was false ere thou to me (822-24)

But Samson accepts the responsibility of his action. He recognizes that she could not have influenced him had he not been willing to let her. He was betrayed by himself before he was betrayed by her. Dalila's attempt to excuse her conduct clarifies for him his responsibility for his action. Weakness is no excuse for the choice one makes. He tells her that "all wickedness is weakness: that plea therefore / With God or man will gain thee no remission" (834-35). One's weakness is no excuse for choosing wrongly. It would have been difficult, but not impossible, for Samson to have rejected Dalila's importunate pleadings with him.

Dalila's final excuse is also rejected by him. She

pleads that the priests of her country came to her and argued so convincingly that "to the public good / Private respects must yield" (867-68) that she was convinced that the highest claim on her was to her nation and, by inference, to the pagan gods of her nation. But Samson will not accept her rationale of placing public good above private integrity. It will not do, especially to a husband; one is responsible for his personal, individual integrity regardless of the cost. He refuses to believe her rationalizations for her conduct and places the responsibility squarely on her: "These false pretexts and varnish'd colors failing, / Bare in thy guilt how foul must thou appear?" (901-02)

Samson, in rejecting all of Dalila's excuses for her acts, has in effect rejected all excuses that he might have been tempted to offer for his own previous conduct. In so doing he is reiterating that he is personally responsible for what he has done in the past.

But Dalila is not yet through with Samson. Up until now she has only been trying to justify her past actions to Samson and to persuade him to accept her rationalizations. But now she approaches him with a real temptation for the immediate present. She wants Samson to let her assume the responsibility for his present and his future. She says,

> . . . though sight be lost,
> Life yet hath many solaces, enjoy'd
> Where other senses want not their delights
> At home in leisure and domestic ease,
> Exempt from many a care and chance to which
> Eyesight exposes daily men abroad.
> I to the Lords will intercede, not doubting
> Thir favorable ear, that I may fetch thee
> From forth this loathsome prison-house to abide
> With me, where my redoubl'd love and care
> With nursing diligence, to me glad office,
> May ever tend about thee to old age. (914-25)

And lest one think that this is not a real temptation, the Chorus tells the reader of the emotional impact that Dalila is still capable of making on Samson.

> Yet beauty, though injurious, hath strange power,
> After offense returning, to regain
> Love once possest, nor can be easily
> Repuls't, without much inward passion felt
> And secret sting of amorous remorse (1003-07)

She still has "strange power" to move him and her temptation is certainly appealing. It is the same temptation that Manoa made -- "turn yourself and your difficult decisions over to me," -- but with the added appeal of the sensuous delights which he has known with Dalila.

His answer is "Thou and I long since are twain" (929), indicating that the closeness of their former relationship is destroyed. He is now an individual who is personally responsible for his present action, and he emphasizes his personal choice: "This Gaol I count the house of Liberty / To thine whose doors my feet shall never enter" (949-50). He has asserted his individuality and has assumed responsibility for himself in the present, refusing to take the easy

way out. Thus Samson has moved from his earlier despairing position of accepting his personal responsibility for his past choices and the painful consequences of those choices through difficult trial and temptation to his present position of accepting responsibility for his present position. He is now what he is choosing to be -- a repentant man. A. S. P. Woodhouse indicates that this scene with Dalila serves to prove the completeness of Samson's repentance.

> The primary function of the scene is to demonstrate by Dalila's powerlessness to reassert her sway the completeness of Samson's repentance. Only obedience, Milton believes, can remit the sin of disobedience -- Christ's obedience for Adam's disobedience, Samson's for his own.[7]

If one defines repentance as "a turning around" this is true of Samson's condition at this point. Samson disobeyed God in doing what Dalila wanted; now in rejecting Dalila he is once again obeying God. And again it is his personal choice which determines his present condition.

The reader has experienced with Samson two of his severest temptations. As Samson has chosen not to give up his responsibility for himself, the reader has gained moral wisdom even as Samson has. He has learned, for example, that for Samson to reject the temptation to let someone else assume responsibility for him has required courage, but it also has brought to Samson a degree of dignity that is admirable. The choices that Samson has

made are understandable to the reader, and have elevated Samson in his eyes. He is a man of integrity in that he has refused to let others assume responsibility for him. But the crucial decision for Samson and for the reader is yet to be made. To this point, Samson's action has been primarily negative in the sense that he has been rejecting alternatives that have made their appeal to him. But life is not lived significantly in negative action. In Milton's world (and the reader's) it is important that one who is free accept responsibility for the choices that he makes, either past or present, but in Samson Agonistes Milton is presenting a larger truth: one's acceptance of personal responsibility leads finally to the point of a further decision -- one must finally decide if he will assert a positive faith in God. This is true in Samson's case, and it is the appearance of Harapha that causes Samson to move beyond mere acceptance of responsibility to his positive assertion of faith.

Harapha comes to taunt Samson, lamenting the fact that he never had opportunity to meet and overcome him on the battlefield. Surprisingly, Samson challenges him to single combat, and Harapha, disconcerted by such show of courage, attempts to discredit Samson by suggesting that his courage to defy him and "disparage glorious arms / Which greatest Heroes have in battle worn" (1130-31) comes from "some Magician's Art." This taunt brings from Samson

a positive statement of trust:

> I know no spells, use no forbidden Arts;
> My trust is in the living God who gave me
> At my nativity this strength (1139-41)

Furthermore, he offers to prove his trust by combatting Harapha. Harapha immediately tempts Samson to look once again at this present physical condition and blame God for his dilemma. He says,

> Presume not on thy God, whate'er he be,
> Thee he regards not, owns not, hath cut off
> Quite from his people, and delivered up
> Into thy Enemies' hand, permitted them
> To put out both thine eyes, and fetter'd sent thee
> Into the common Prison, there to grind
> Among the Slaves and Asses thy comrades,
> As good for nothing else (1156-63)

Samson's reply is most significant, for it shows that he has come not only to accept the truth of his responsibility, but that he has apprehended a greater truth: the God to whom one is responsible is just and He is also merciful, and one is free to exercise faith to trust Him if he will, knowing that his plea will be heard. Samson says

> . . . these evils I deserve and more,
> Acknowledge them from God inflicted on me
> Justly, yet despair not of his final pardon
> Whose ear is ever open, and his eye
> Gracious to re-admit the suppliant; (1169-73)

Samson has come to the same position that Adam and Eve came to after they acknowledged to themselves and to each other their responsibility for their sin and Adam said,

> What better can we do, than to the place
> Repairing where he judg'd us, prostrate fall
> Before him reverent, and there confess
> Humbly our faults, and pardon beg

. . . . . .
Undoubtedly he will relent and turn
From his displeasure; in whose look serene,
When angry most he seem'd and most severe,.
What else but favor, grace and mercy shone?
(PL, X, 1086-89, 1093-96)

Furthermore, Samson's encounter with the giant of Gath has enabled him to gain additional insight into himself which is a prelude to his acting in faith. Just as he came to see one part of himself in Dalila as he recognized in her weaknesses his own weaknesses, so he sees in Harapha what he once was, the proud and boastful bully, who "like a petty God / . . . Walked about admir'd of all and dreaded / On hostile ground? (529-31). But most importantly, his encounter with Harapha has been the occasion of his reasserting his faith in God. His relationship now is that of a trusting, waiting servant of God.

With the coming of the Philistine Officer, Samson faces his greatest trial, his moment of truth, for it is in this particular time and circumstance that he must act on his faith. With the demand of the Philistine Officer that Samson come to the feast of Dagon, Samson makes it clear that even though he is a blind prisoner of the Philistine lords, he is free to choose whether he will obey them or not. His immediate response is that he will not do as they ask. The Officer departs with Samson's refusal and the Chorus expresses their astonishment at Samson's action. Samson makes it very clear that he is free and that he

does what he does because he chooses to. He says

> . . . The Philistine Lords command,
> Commands are no constraints. If I obey them,
> I do it freely. (1371-73)

Even as an enslaved prisoner, he is free to choose and responsible for his choice. The Chorus is baffled by Samson's conduct. Their response is "how thou wilt here come off surmounts my reach" (1380). But they are not aware that the temptations that have come to Samson were "good" temptations in that they were for the purpose of exercising Samson's faith and patience, and that Samson has chosen at this time and under these temptations to trust and obey God. Even now Samson is exercising faith and patience as he waits for God's direction. When he feels "some rousing motions" within, he responds in faith and goes with the Philistine Officer, not knowing what will happen, but trusting in God whom he believes is directing him. With his departing words he rises to noble stature.

> Happ'n what may, of me expect to hear
> Nothing dishonorable, impure, unworthy
> Our God, our Law, my Nation, or myself;
> The last of me or no I cannot warrant. (1423-26)

Samson has freely chosen to be what he now is -- a trusting, obedient servant of God, walking by faith to accomplish a divine plan for his life. He has learned by experience what the first man Adam learned in Paradise Lost and what Jesus perfectly exemplified in Paradise Regained:

> Henceforth I learn, that to obey is best,
> And love with fear the only God, to walk

> As in his presence, ever to observe
> His providence, and on him sole depend. (PL, XII, 561-64)

In Samson's case his obedience leads to his death, but for him it is not a tragic and futile end to a frustrated life; it is rather an heroic act which Samson freely choses to accomplish. The messenger relates that Samson before he destroyed the temple stood "patient and undaunted" before the Philistine Lords

> . . . with head a while enclin'd,
> And eyes fast fix't . . . as one who pray'd,
> Or some great matter in his mind revolv'd. (1636-38)

He is fully aware of his choice and the spiritual significance of it. He is once again what he was before he made his earlier choice: a noble and trusting champion of his God, because this is what he now chooses to be. Samson has moved from his previous position of querulous doubting to this final position of positive affirmation of trust and faith. He has demonstrated in his life the truth of what the Existentialist says is possible for all men:

> There is always the possibility for the coward to give up cowardice and for the hero to stop being a hero . . . . Man makes himself; he is not found ready-made; he makes himself by the choice of his morality, and he cannot but choose a morality, such is the pressure of circumstances upon him. We define man only in relation to his commitments.[8]

Manoa also comes to see his son's death in an heroic light. He says,

> Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail
> Or knock the breast, no weakness, no contempt,
> Dispraise, or blame, nothing but well and fair,
> And what may quiet us in a death so noble. (1721-24)

The Chorus, too, has acquired new spiritual understanding of God's ways with men though observance of this experience of Samson, a man like themselves. They affirm that

> All is best, though we oft doubt
> What th' unsearchable dispose
> Of highest wisdom brings about,
> And ever best found in the close. (1745-48)

And what, finally, is the reader's response to this drama; what is his decision regarding "the ways of God with men?" As is always true in Milton's world, the answer to this question depends on the reader's personal choice. He may, or he may not, choose to see Samson Agonistes as a final vindication of the justice, love and mercy of God as He deals personally and individually with free and responsible men. But if he does so choose to respond affirmatively to the drama with its implicit lesson of the need of fallen man to choose to trust God, it is because he, the reader, has come also to believe and trust in God, at least in the context of the poem, and to accept as "Just are the ways of God, / And justifiable to Men" (293-94).

Milton has thus given to the reader through his development of this major theme of man's freedom and responsibility, a moral education. The reader of Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes has been clearly shown his responsibility for his relationship with God; he has had the example of how to maintain that relationship clearly demonstrated; and finally he has in

the drama of Samson come to see the pattern for Christian heroism which may be his if he chooses to appropriate it for his own life.

NOTES

[1]I am suggesting a progressive and cumulative experience on the part of the reader of Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes, but this does not mean that one cannot read each of the works separately or that he cannot invert the order of the reading and still obtain both benefit and pleasure from the experience. I am simply stressing the thematic unity of the poems which may edify the reader as he progresses through the three poems.

[2]A. S. P. Woodhouse in "Tragic Effect in Samson Agonistes," UTQ, LIII (1959), p. 208, comments on the fact that the Chorus is not the mouthpiece of the poet, and that it does not run ahead of events, but learns as the audience learns.

[3]Jean Paul Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism," in Existentialism From Dostoevsky to Sartre, ed. Walter Kaufmann (Cleveland, 1956), p. 300.

[4]Sartre, p. 301.

[5]Sartre, p. 302.

[6]James Holly Hanford, "Samson Agonistes and Milton in Old Age" in John Milton, Poet and Humanist (Cleveland, 1946), p. 272.

[7]Woodhouse, p. 211.

[8]Sartre, p. 302, 306.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Milton's three major poems have been admired for varying reasons during the three centuries since their first appearance. Sometimes, one feels, they have been admired for the wrong reasons, but if one criterion for the study of literature today is its relevancy and its immediate appeal to the reader to make his own decision, then one may concur that Milton's three major poems are of value to the twentieth century man.

Milton's poetry is relevant today because it faces up to hard questions and searches for and presents philosophical and moral truths that suggest viable answers. His poems do seek to instruct and lead his "fit audience . . . though few" to conclusions that in Milton's world view are not only valid but important. The important concepts of his philosophy of life which are embodied in Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes may be summed up in the words of Adam as he speaks in Book XII of Paradise Lost and says,

> Greatly instructed I shall hence depart,
> Greatly in peace of thought, and have my fill
> Of knowledge, what this Vessel can contain;
> Beyond which was my folly to aspire.
> Henceforth I learn, that to obey is best,

> And love with fear the only God, to walk
> As in his presence, ever to observe
> His providence, and on him sole depend.
> Merciful over all his works, with good
> Still overcoming evil, and by small
> Accomplishing great things, by things deem'd weak
> Subverting worldly strong, and worldly wise
> By simply meek; that suffering for Truth's sake
> Is fortitude to highest victory,
> And to the faithful Death the Gate of Life;
> Taught this by his example whom I now
> Acknowledge my Redeemer ever blest.
> (Paradise Lost, XII, 557-73)

Adam, in Paradise Lost, has been instructed and has learned that "to obey is best / And love with fear the only God." Jesus the man has demonstrated in Paradise Regained, the ability of God through the instrumentality of one obedient man to overcome evil with good; to subvert worldly wisdom and strength by simple meekness. Jesus is the guide for one who is willing to obey God. Samson in Samson Agonistes has learned and demonstrated that through suffering for Truth's sake, one can come to experience the "highest victory," a victory coming out of apparent defeat. These truths which Milton has presented for the perusal and judgment of the reader are based on the bedrock of human freedom and responsibility. And if there is any truth regarding the human condition that needs stressing in our world today it is this truth: man is free and man is responsible. It is at this point that Milton's thought so closely parallels that of the existential thinker who insists on the spiritual dignity of man, on the recognition that one is free and responsible for whatever he makes of

himself, and that to exist means to make moral choices.

One reason that Milton's vision of man's nature and experience transcends his age and remains in essence strongly relevant even in our apparently very different twentieth century world is, I believe, because of his insistence on the truth of this concept that man is free, that he has the power of choice, and that he is responsible for the choices he makes. This concept is important in the consideration of Milton's three major works, and if one views them from this perspective, they may speak significantly to any man of any age. Furthermore, if one is willing, he may come to a conclusion regarding the ways of God with men which is as personally satisfactory to him as it was to Milton. The reader of today who interprets Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes with this cardinal truth of man's freedom of choice and responsibility for that choice clearly in mind may come to acknowledge the justice of God's dealings with individual man. He sees portrayed in Paradise Lost the fall of Adam and Eve as they freely choose to disobey God, and he sees hope for them as they finally accept their individual responsibility for their rebellion as they freely repent and seek forgiveness. In Paradise Regained he sees in the person of Jesus one who freely chooses to stand firm against all the wiles of the devil and becomes what all men should become. In Samson Agonistes he sees in Samson one who chooses to

betray his trust from God, who suffers for his choice, but who chooses to come back to express his faith in God once again.

And one need not be of the Christian persuasion for these works to speak significantly to him. If he accepts this concept of the freedom of man to choose and his responsibility for his choice, these three works can be equally appreciated by the humanist who places his trust and confidence in mankind. In Paradise Lost he sees a mythic presentation of the great problems which have always puzzled mankind: the problem of the origin of evil, the consequences of choice as human beings have struggled with moral good and evil, the record of man's moral defeat and the promise of his ultimate victory. In Paradise Regained he sees the mythic presentation of the conflict of good and evil and the spiritual triumph of the man Jesus as he makes his choice. In Samson Agonistes he sees the confrontation of individual man with social forces which seek to destroy him and his nation, and his human courage as he rises from apparent defeat and chooses the way of self-sacrifice to rise to heights of human glory.

And if one is a philosopher, he may view Milton's poems as embodying philosophical truths which speak significantly to him. He sees demonstrated in Paradise Lost that if man is ever to have an authentic existence, he must

come to face himself in an existential moment -- as Adam and Eve did -- when he sloughs off all outward props and accepts the awesome responsibility for becoming what he chooses to become. In Paradise Regained he sees demonstrated that man's authentic existence is possible because man has the freedom to say No to evil embodied in whatever form he may find, or simply No to whatever forces, good or evil, which seek to mold and control him. His freedom and ability to say Yes or No constitutes the creative force within him. And in Samson Agonistes he sees man in the tragic situation which is his because of his choice, who faces the truth of his condition, and who comes to accept his responsibility for what he has been, for what he is, and finally, for what he will become.

And so the major works of John Milton are timeless in their appeal to the imagination of men. Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained, and Samson Agonistes continue to so engage the reader that he is moved to accept, or reject, the conclusions about life that Milton presents to him. That choice is his human prerogrative: he, the reader, is free and he is responsible.

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