

The Education of Adam, Samson, and Jesus:
A Critical Essay

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by

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Purpose of Thesis

The idea behind this thesis stemmed from an independent study of the works of the great John Milton. During this study, aspects of knowledge and how characters gained that insight began to fit together in a sort of mosaic. Adam, Samson, and Jesus each experienced different circumstances, yet there was a pattern to the outcomes of those circumstances and the men who withstood them. Each character appeared to learn about himself on three unique levels of learning, the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual. In the end of their stories, it was apparent that each character had discovered the design of his own learning and had integrated that self-knowledge into himself. In examining this self-knowledge, each character came to a greater and fuller understanding of God. This puzzle of reason, which, when solved, becomes a mirror of self-reflection, is the enigma of God. The solving of the puzzle in Milton's works is the inspiration for this journey through the minds, hearts, and souls of three men -- Adam, Samson, and Jesus.

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In Milton's works, the struggle to know God seems to be a recurring theme. Characters such as Adam, Samson, and even Jesus strive to gain knowledge in an attempt to fully comprehend God.¹ All men try to learn as much as they can in order to expand their mind to be able to understand God. However, according to Milton, learning by itself is insufficient for truly knowing God (Jacobus 197).

Thwarted by this misconception, these characters strive for knowledge of the heart and relationships with God. They learn to perceive themselves and their situation through the heart. Although not impossible or undesirable, this perception is not the only or most important way of gaining knowledge of God (197). In a third endeavor, these characters turn to their own souls for knowledge, the kind of knowledge which comes directly from God. Standing at the pinnacle of human knowledge, faith is the only step left to be taken (197). These men complete this third phase of education only to find themselves at the door of the hardest test yet, the merger of all knowledge.

¹ All textual references to the educational experiences of Adam, Samson, and Jesus are based on the following text: John Milton. Complete Poems and Major Prose. Ed. Merritt Y. Hughes. New York: The Odyssey Press, 1957.

This merger couples wisdom of mind, sensations of the heart, and trust of the soul in the final step toward knowing God by knowing oneself.

God is within man as well as external to him (Entzminger 95). As Calvin said, "The knowledge of ourselves not only arouses us to seek God, but also, as it were, leads us by the hand to find him" (95). Adam, Samson, and Jesus find God through the education of the mind, heart, and soul. All three men face internal and external challenges which force them to look inside themselves in order to find knowledge. This education leads them to self-knowledge which implies knowledge of God, since no one can consider himself without realizing he is a creature of God (Jacobus, "Self-knowledge" 106). Only by the merging of the mind, heart, and soul, however, do these characters begin to really understand themselves as creatures of God, and subsequently know God.

The first form of education Adam experiences in Paradise Lost is the education of his mind. Adam's first recollections are of sensory experiences but later he reflects on himself (Entzminger 95). Raphael's visit to the bower serves to inform Adam of that which has gone before (Paradise Lost VIII-59-65.). Adam learns of the revolt in heaven and the subsequent fall of Lucifer and his angelic followers. He learns how God made the earth and all therein. Adam's curiosity gets the better of him, and he urges Raphael to relate the details of the creation story. Raphael thus tells Adam all about the six days of creation of all that is of the earth. Adam then goes

days of creation of all that is of the earth. Adam then goes one step further in expanding his mind and questions Raphael as to the functions of the celestial bodies. Here, Raphael says that education is limited to that which God wants to convey; it is not a matter of speculation. Adam, who seems satisfied with this response, may still wonder why he even questioned it.

Christian tradition says appreciation of nature can help man get closer to God (Norford 13). And, if God is reflected in nature, then by examining himself in light of nature, Adam may come to better understand God (13). Adam's wonder at natural phenomenon serves to better acquaint him with God's external presence. This acquaintance leads Adam to contemplate his place in this vast presence. This contemplation and introspection achieves self-knowledge (13).

Adam's working mind leads him to wonder at nature and God's presence there. Adam's interaction with signs of divinity in nature allows him to grow in self-knowledge and knowledge of God (Entzminger 98). His mind is alert, and already questioning larger things of the universe, hungry for more knowledge. All the gracious knowledge of the revolt in heaven and the creation was not enough to satisfy that hunger. Adam seeks a firm contemplative place in the universe. Yet, upon receiving all this mindful knowledge, he is still dissatisfied. It is obvious from this start that Adam will seek further education. The pressure Adam's probing mind exerts in exploring the world around him, supplemented with divine guidance, leads

to fuller knowledge (98). And so, this search must continue for Adam.

The second form of education Adam undergoes is education in matters of the heart. Although his mind is greatly expanded, Adam's heart has much to learn. Eve's dream is first evidence of Adam's heart seeking further knowledge (Paradise Lost. V.- 98-100). He tries to rationalize her dream against his mind's judgment because he loves her and wants to comfort her. Adam deems her worthy of the highest praise even though she has experienced this first taste of sin. This first step toward laying his heart on the line indirectly exposes his heart's efforts to explain an irrational, unexplainable situation.

Later, after Eve has eaten of the forbidden fruit, Adam chooses to eat and fall with her, fully aware in his mind of the consequences but unable in his heart to refuse (George 76). His heart feels it knows enough to be followed. However, after he eats, his newly educated heart aches with the knowledge of his sin. His heart knows too much now of the pain of suffering, the price of uncontrolled love.

This education of the heart is an extension of the curiosity and zest for knowledge which earlier led to questions of celestial bodies. He realizes he cannot fully trust his heart even though he thinks he is in control of his newly acquired intellectual gifts. Adam's heart is foolish and tries to follow his mind, which is not entirely sure of itself. He thus reasons in his mind that God will not kill them, thereby

trying to persuade his aching heart of this intellectual conclusion. At this point, Adam is still absorbing his mind's and heart's knowledge and trying to understand himself in light of that. He thus pushes himself into another level of knowledge which he is not capable of handling -- the internal knowledge of himself by means of his soul.

Adam's education of the soul is the third and most significant of all knowledge. After Jesus intervenes, in Paradise Lost, Adam and Eve are given the special grace of God which allows them to repent and to believe in Him. This knowledge gives Adam hope, knowledge for his soul. Thus, God will enable Adam's soul to repent for his original sin and receive God's forgiveness. Therefore, through penitence and redemption, Adam has found grace which opens the way for a more resplendent future (George 88). Never before had Adam thought about the need to learn about God'd grace because before the Fall there had been no need for it. Till then, man needed guidance not grace. So, after the Fall, Adam's soul is pleasantly educated by God with the knowledge of forgiveness. This knowledge of God's grace expands Adam's view of God and himself. This maturation of self-knowledge as the result of sin enables Adam to find complete knowledge of himself through his soul.

Later, when Michael shows Adam the future, Adam's education comes full circle. Here, his mind, heart, and soul are educated to the full height of human education. Experience, the great teacher, leads Adam on this journey. The knowledge of future

generations tells Adam's mind that they too will be tempted and sin, and his heart learns the heavy labor of loving your offspring yet watching them fall. Finally, his soul learns of eternal salvation, Jesus' future gift.

All of these prophecies pull together to present Adam with the heart of education, true knowledge. The merger of Adam's knowledge of God in nature, love in the heart, and forgiveness for the soul provides Adam with a full knowledge of himself as a human being who is part of God. This full awareness of himself and development of self-knowledge provides Adam with the facilities to experience God. With his new experience of God, Adam begins a new journey to better himself in God's eyes. He takes his new knowledge coupled with God's grace, to provide the wisdom to use it and begins the journey of an educated man.

Like Adam, Samson Agonistes, in a poem by the same title, undergoes many educational changes as his story unfolds. Samson's mind begins to stretch by thinking itself worthy of deciding whether to trust Dalila with his secret. Samson laments, "Gave up my fort of silence to a Woman" (Samson Agonistes 236). This is where the education of his mind begins. Samson thought Dalila loved him and that he should trust her. So, he shared his secret. This disobedience to God seems to momentarily baffle Samson because he did not think of telling his wife as disobedience. He based his judgment on only what his limited mind knew: marriage makes two one. Thus, his mistaken mind leads him on a journey toward knowledge.

Samson's knowledge of his failure comes as new knowledge (Bennett 228). After intellectually confronting this new knowledge, Samson spends his separation from God in deep thought and contemplation. He tries to reason his way around his sin. This attempt to reason his way out of his position, Samson utilizes his limited mind. In all these ventures, his mind fails due to the lack of education. He must first sort through all this new found knowledge. This includes the paradox that while trying to honor his marital duty, he has dishonored his relations with God. Samson's intellectual struggle with this paradox is the result of his knowledge, and no one else has any answers for him.

Unlike Adam, he cannot ask Raphael for knowledge. After his horrid inner struggle, Samson does emerge an intellectual winner: "For I learn now of my own experience" (Samson Agonistes 187-88). Samson proves he is learning in his mind by outwitting three opponents who come to him during his imprisonment, Manoa, Dalila, and Harapha. Samson's father, Manoa, is the first obstacle Samson's growing mind must overcome if he is to continue his education. Manoa proposes that Samson let him bargain with those in charge to persuade them to free Samson. He says, "I have already made way to some Philistian Lords, with whom to treat about thy ransom" (Samson Agonsites 481-83). Samson, now smarter after his first mistake, intellectually realizes this is not God's plan and promptly refutes it. "Spare that proposal, Father, spare the trouble of that solicitation: let me here, as I deserve, pay on my punishment"

(Samson Agonistes 487-89). Samson is perfecting his new self-knowledge by using it to control himself during temptation.

Dalila is his second temptation and perhaps harder to overcome. She maintains that her own weakness led her to turn on him. "I was assured by those who tempted me" (Samson Agonistes 800-801). Then, Dalila says it was her patriotism which fed her sin. She was "adjured by the bonds of civil Duty" (Samson Agonistes 853). Samson's mind is no longer fooled by her nonsensical ideas, and he coldly dismisses her. "At distance I forgive thee, go with that" (Samson Agonsites 954). Samson is learning to trust his new intellectual knowledge more than ever. His last obstacle is Harapha, who has come to entreat him to fight. Samson barely lets him finish his sentence before outwardly refuting all he suggests. "Go baffled coward, lest I run upon thee" (Samson Agonistes 1237). Here, Samson raises himself above Harapha in mind because he considers the poor mislead soul as baffled in the mind. In not succumbing to sin again, Samson proves his advance in intellectual knowledge of the mind. His mind overcomes these experiences with the newly gained knowledge derived from past experiences. Thus, Samson completes his mental journey.

Samson's tour into the heart has been a result of mistaking need for knowledge. Samson needed to reach out to his wife and trust her. And, he had imparted his secret onto her. This act of the heart had led Samson into sin and away from God. And, this separation from God was more painful than this supposed separation he suffered from Dalila. This first

heartache leads only to more anguish when he learns he can not trust Dalila. Now, he has been betrayed and himself has betrayed God. His heart must learn not to trust others over God and not to mistake lust for love. This lesson of the heart is perhaps one of the hardest for Samson to face. He thought Dalila loved him and chose to trust her completely. He knew God loved him and chose to divulge His secret. This trap causes Samson much emotional strife as well as loss of emotion for his wife and himself. When again faced with Dalila's charm, Samson's new knowledge of heart provide him with victory. Dalila suggests that he come home to her. "From forth this loathesome prison house to abide with me, where my redoubled love and care with nursing diligence, to me glad office, may ever tend about thee" (Samson Agonistes 922-25). Dalila further pursues Samson's affection by utilizing sensuality. "Let me approach at least, and touch thy hand" (Samson Agonistes 951). At this implication, Samson's self-knowledge begins to function fully. He promptly denies her and any remaining affection for her. "My trust is in the living God who gave me at my nativity this strength" (Samson Agonistes 1140-41). His achievement over his enemies leads Samson to the summit of emotional knowledge. In matters of the heart, he is no longer naive and innocent. Samson now understands where his trust should lie. And, with this knowledge, he proceeds to follow God to the next lesson.

Samson has gone through the stages of self blame and now must go back to God (Stein 163). This entails further

personal reflection but on a level above arrogance and shame (180). Further personal reflection of his soul leads Samson to realize the consequences of this separation from God. He has lost his soul in sin and no longer realizes any purpose in his life. Samson is the picture of an immature soul who has lost faith and is ashamed of his sin. He does not comprehend how God could save him now. By assuming he is worthless to God now, Samson assumes he was once valuable (Miller 174). This despair, like Satan's in Paradise Lost, is the ultimate pride (174). Samson is aware of this sinful separation from God but has no idea how to remedy it. Upon more personal reflection, a discovery of God's grace begins to educate Samson's soul. All is not lost, only different now. He realizes he can gain grace and favor for his soul if he will act according to God's will. This realization is the pinnacle of Samson's success as student. Instead of continuing to question the teacher, he finally decides to do the homework. And, his work pays off. As Samson shifts allegiance from self to God, he relinquishes law and precedent in favor of revelation (173). Samson's spiritually blind eyes are opened through knowledge, and he sees God on his side again.

Samson's separate educations all lead to the crest of his climb, the merging of all this new knowledge. Samson's heart and mind couple to deny Dalila fully of any right to deceive him again. This denial of his former love is great evidence of his educational success. When Harapha comes, Samson has gone from a psychological low to high point (Stein

180). He has stood against temptation this time and triumphed. He is now sure of himself and his mission in life. However, he must still meet to form the full circle of wisdom (180). Only when Samson realizes he must give himself to fulfill God's wishes and decides to make the self-sacrifice has he sincerely achieved complete education. At the moment Samson is sure of his fate, he is truly accomplished. He has gained knowledge, emotion, and forgiveness. He has molded all of these into a complete form, self-sacrifice based on self-knowledge. And so, in keeping with God's will, he willingly walks into the arena. He is now an educated man who can clearly see God's way as the only way and is willing to follow that path.

In Paradise Regained, Jesus, like Adam and Samson, must become educated to comprehend his purpose in life. However, he begins a little better prepared. Jesus has always been aware in his mind that he is the Savior. Mary tells him of his place in the world: "For know, thou art no Son of mortal man though men esteem thee of low parentage, thy Father is the Eternal King" (Paradise Regained. I.- 234-36.). Also, God's voice descends on Jesus to pronounce him Saviour. "The spirit descended, while the Father's voice from Heaven pronounced him his beloved Son" (Paradise Regained. I.- 31-2.). "All my mind was set serious to learn and know" (Paradise Regained. I.- 202-03.). As Stein points out, Jesus sought to learn, know, and do (Stein 39). He followed an intuitive approach, then a discursive approach through the study of laws of God

to verify the intuitions he experienced (39). Jesus had a normal human curiosity about his history and job in this world (203).

Although he shares this with Adam and Samson, Jesus possessed one important characteristic, preparation. He knew he was to be educated and began to read and learn early on. But, Jesus has a different type of knowledge available to him (Jordan 265). For this reason, the intellectual education of his mind is almost fully developed by reading before he meets with any other adversity. The growth of this knowledge begins with the study of law (265). "The Law of God I read, and found it sweet, made it my whole delight" (Paradise Regained. I. - 207-08.). "I went into the Temple, there to hear the Teachers of our law, and to propose what might improve my knowledge or their own" (Paradise Regained. I. - 211-13.). Jesus has already augmented historical knowledge with divine intuition (Jordan 266). There is very little he has left to learn when he enters the wilderness (266). "And now by some strong motion I am led into this Wilderness, to what intent I learn not yet: perhaps I need not know; for what concerns my knowledge God reveals" (Paradise Regained. I. - 290-93.). This transition to a new order of knowledge develops Jesus' reception to God and meditation. All he is unsure about at this point is why he is drawn into the wilderness, but he trusts the answer to revealed knowledge (Jordan 266). For forty days he wanders and finds knowledge within which will help him defeat the curious one, Satan. Jesus' mind,

after meditation, is fully knowledgeable, and he effectively outsmarts Satan at every witty turn. Using his knowledge of Scripture, Jesus' mind expands to encompass internal knowledge through meditation and leads him to matters of the heart.

Jesus' knowledge of the heart has been addressed by the intuitive side before, in orientation matters both human and social (Stein 40). He has before linked his mind full of knowledge to what that may mean to his purpose and those around him. Jesus' heart is active already in many ways. He trusts because he has no reason to doubt his family or Heavenly Father. Neither Mary nor Scripture has let him down before. Jesus' heart is led by the scripture which is the pathway to God. Thus, when Jesus allows the scripture to guide him, he also allows God to guide him. This allowance is the perfection of the heart. Jesus' ability to fully trust himself to God is the peak of fulfillment for the heart. Jesus' heart is ready for any temptation because he has learned that trusting God is the only way.

The soul of Jesus is his original intuition supported by the fuller understanding of discipline, reason, intellectual and emotional experience offered by his mind and heart (40). Jesus' inner potential may be realized by coupling prior knowledge with inspiration (40). His soul is ready to realize this potential, and he believes in God and has extreme faith in the words of God. And, Jesus' soul has one important characteristic that Samson and Adam lack. Jesus' soul realizes that Satan and sin are dangers to avoid. Unlike Adam and

Samson, Jesus does not allow his knowledge to make him vain. He realizes he always needs God more than any kind of knowledge. This realization is the height of self-knowledge for Jesus who then moves on to perceiving God's plan for his life.

Jesus learns the mystery of His role in God's plan through intuition, his mother, the study of Scripture and all knowledge, and meditation (203). Using all of these instruments, Jesus must think his way back to original creation (203). He does this throughout the entire temptation sequence. His mind plays the part of outwitted who uses language and scripture to defeat Satan. His heart triumphs in the belief of that scripture. And, his soul, through the knowledge of mind and heart, finds itself growing and becoming knowledgeable about its potential. All of this knowledge leads Jesus to the one thing he needed to comprehend more fully, his divinity. When Jesus realizes that he is God and proclaims himself such, he is fully educated and ready to realize God's plan for his life: "Tempt not the Lord thy God; he said and stood" (Paradise Regained. IV. - 561.). This proclamation identifies Jesus as God to Satan and himself. Now, as God, Jesus can realize his full potential through the self-knowledge which has revealed God within him. Jesus' own education of mind and heart allow for a fuller education of his soul, which is the soul of God.

All of these men -- Adam, Samson, and Jesus -- share the common struggle to find God. Although driven by different actions and consequences, all three use knowledge in an attempt to find God. But, knowledge in one area does not constitute

knowing; it only provides a step up to the next level of knowing. Each level of knowing builds on the last to construct a framework of knowledge on which will hopefully rest the knowledge of God. The education of the mind provides the scholarly background of facts which opens the mind up to new ideas. It is the intellectual and reasoning faction of the man which pushes him to learn all he can about his past in an effort to control the future. The heart is the emotion linked to the intellect which serves as guide for the wandering student. The heart is focused on relations with other people and a necessary trust in God and his law. And, the soul serves as the spiritual bridge between man and God. The soul is the last guide on this tour of knowledge, and it brings man closer to God than any of the others. Grace for the soul is the final bridge of understanding between self and God. Each of these taken individually will not result in the knowledge of God, only in one part of a man. A merger between all three brings forth new knowledge which helps one to know oneself. And, within this knowledge rests the knowledge of God. As creatures of God, it is necessary to know oneself to subsequently know God. Through these processes, three characters, creatures of God, learn all about themselves and discover a deeper understanding and appreciation of God. Their self-knowledge leads to a knowledge of God.

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