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SATAN, ADAM AND EVE: ONE COMMON

SIN

(TITLE)

BY

Esther Herring Baker

PLAN B PAPER

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE MASTER OF SCIENCE IN EDUCATION
AND PREPARED IN COURSE

English 475

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY,
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1964
YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THIS PLAN B PAPER BE ACCEPTED AS
FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE DEGREE, M.S. IN ED.

April 24, 1964
DATE

ADVISER

April 24, 1964
DATE

DEPARTMENT HEAD

ERRATA

- pg. 3 Quote should be "...he...."
- pg. 4 Line 3 of text news;
Line 6 related should be relates
- pg. 5 Quote line 1 "...Return"
- pg. 6 1 quote 1. 1 "...Oh thou"
3 quote 1. 1 "...if"
- pg. 7 text 1. 6 goddess:
- pg. 8 quote 1 "...I"
quote 2 "...he"
- pg. 9 1. 3 "are" should be "were"

I propose to show that in John Milton's Paradise Lost, the sin for which Satan was driven from heaven is the same sin for which Adam and Eve were driven from the Garden of Eden.¹ It is difficult to give a name to the sin; it shows itself in excessive pride, but such pride is the result of the sin. It is the fundamental sin which, never committed, prohibits any other sin. In the doctrine of free will there is implied free choice; every being whom God created possesses free will. All are free to choose the service of God or of self, the love of God or self-love. In the poem, the importance of this statement is so great that it is delivered by God, Himself:

"I made him (man) just and right,
Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall.
Such I created all the ethereal powers
And spirits, both them who stood and them who failed;
Freely they stood who stood, and fell who fell.
Not free, what proof could they have given sincere
Of true allegiance, constant faith of love,
Where only what they needs must do, appeared,
Not what they would? What praise could they receive?
What pleasure I from such obedience paid,
When will and reason (reason also is choice)
Useless and vain, of freedom both despoiled,
Made passive both, had served necessity,
Not me."

(III, 98-111)

¹ Hereafter, the book number and line numbers quoted in the text refer to The Complete Poetical Works of John Milton, ed. Harris Francis Fletcher (Cambridge, 1941.)

It follows logically then, that any being facing temptation is also faced with a decision--to follow the will of God or his own will, to love God or the self. Choosing to submit to the will of God, no sin is possible; choosing to indulge one's own will is choosing to make the self God, and all sin is possible. That Satan realizes this is true is apparent in the confession of his guilt as he beholds the world for the first time. We see that he is momentarily crushed as he realizes what his choice has cost him:

"Hadst thou the same free will and power to stand?
 Thou hadst; whom hast thou then or what to accuse,
 But heaven's free love dealt equally to all?
 Be then his love accursed, since love or hate,
 To me alike, it deals eternal woe.
 Nay cursed be thou; since against his thy will
 Chose freely what it now so justly rues."

(IV, 66-72)

In the following lines Satan toys with the possibility of repentance, but through his own malice he is lost, for repentance he says is contrary to his indomitable will. Therefore, "as far from granting he, as I from begging peace."

To point out the sin of Satan is not so difficult; Milton tells us often that Satan is the archvillain of the piece:

"The first sort by their own suggestion fell,
 Self-tempted, self-depraved: Man falls deceived
 By the other first....."

(III, 129-131)

To discover the sin of Adam and Eve is more difficult, for

their characters are vastly different. Taken all in all, the character of Satan, his endless malice, his incorrigibility, by his own confession allows for no alternative but that God use him for the purpose of at last saving mankind through Christ. Adam and Eve, on the other hand, are not lost through their own malice alone. They are subjected to the power of Satan; they are deceived. But most important in differing from Satan they are capable in themselves of suing for peace, of begging redemption, which God will grant them.

In Book IV the reader learns gradually and dramatically what means Satan will use to induce the first man and woman to sin. Satan, lying close enough to Adam and Eve to reach out and take them both in his hands, overhears from them all he needs to know to assist them to ruin. He learns that God has placed on them the restriction of not eating from the tree of knowledge on pain of death:

"..... he 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 only that tree
 Of knowledge, planted by the tree of life,
 So near grows death to life, whate'er death is
 Some dreadful thing no doubt; for well thou knowest
 God hath pronounced it death to taste that tree,
 The only sign of our obedience left
 Among so many signs of power and rule
 Conferred upon us, and dominion given

Over all other creatures that possess
 Earth, air and sea. Then let us not think hard
 One easy prohibition, who enjoy
 Free leave so large to all things else, and choice
 Unlimited of manifold delights:"
 (IV, 419-435)

How like the former estate of Satan in heaven is the place of Adam and Eve on earth. We soon learn with what satisfaction Satan learns this news, but as if that information were not enough, the human pair reveal another gift of God--their ability to love. Eve unwittingly betrays that she is capable of self-love as she related how at first she innocently was attracted by her own beauty.

"As I bent down to look, just opposite,
 A shape within the watery gleam appeared
 Bending to look on me, I started back,
 It started back, but pleased I soon returned,
 Pleased it as soon with answering looks
 Of sympathy and love; there had I fixed
 Mine eyes till now, and pined with vain desire,
 Had not a voice thus warned me, "What thou seest,
 What there thou seest fair creature is thyself, ..."
 (IV, 459-467)

Satan learns further how Adam is captivated by Eve; but Adam's captivation is a bit more complicated than Eve's. You will recall that at the time of his creation, Adam is not happy alone. He makes bold to ask God for one who is his equal. He is not, he explains, like God, perfect in himself, nor infinite. He knows himself well enough to know that the beasts are too far below him to provide him with fit fellowship. All this is

pleasing to God, who creates Eve to be a helpmeet to Adam. But notice with what words Adam greets Eve. Notice that he considers her an extension of himself--literally of himself:

".....Return fair Eve,
Whom fliest thou? whom thou fliest, of him thou art,
His flesh, his bone; to give thee being I lent
Out of my side to thee, nearest my heart
Substantial life, to have thee by my side
Henceforth an individual solace dear;
Part of my soul I seek thee, and thee claim
My other half:"

(IV, 481-486)

I believe that it is this error--error, for there is as yet no sin--that proves to be Adam's downfall, and that assists Eve to hers. It is all this that Satan hears. It is this information he uses to formulate his plan to tempt the first couple so they, like him, must lose Paradise. As he goes over what he has heard, we discover how he will deceive them:

"Yet let me not forget what I have gained
From their own mouths; all is not theirs it seems;
One fatal tree there stands of knowledge called,
Forbidden them to taste: Knowledge forbidden?
Suspicious, reasonless. Why should their Lord
Envy them that? Can it be sin to know,
Can it be death? and do they only stand
By ignorance, is that their happy state,
The proof of their obedience and their faith?
O fair foundation laid whereon to build
Their ruin! Hence I will excite their minds
With more desire to know, and to reject
Envious commands, invented with design
To keep them low whom knowledge might exalt
Equal with gods; aspiring to be such,
They taste and die: what likelier can ensue?"

(IV, 515-527)

Wily Satan! Well we know, as he does, that it is not Knowledge in the sense of wisdom that has been denied Adam and Eve, but the knowledge of good and evil. Thus we see in Satan's monologue what reasoning he will apply to the weaker intellect of Eve to effect his evil purpose. He will tempt with equality with gods she who feels herself intellectually inferior to her own kind:

"..... Oh thou for whom
 And from whom I was formed flesh of thy flesh,
 And without whom am to no end, my guide,
 And head, what thou hast said is just and right."
 (IV, 440-444)

and again:

"I chiefly who enjoy
 So far the happier lot, enjoying thee
 Pre-eminent by so much odds, while thou
 Like consort to thyself canst nowhere find."
 (IV, 445-448)

In the actual temptation scene when Eve is led to make her fatal choice, Satan's enticements are fixed on the wisdom-giving power which he assures Eve is in the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. He always stresses that she will attain wisdom like God's, not that she will be brought to sin and death:

"..... if what is evil
 Be real, why not known, since easier shunned?
 God therefore cannot hurt ye, and be just;
 Not just, not God; not feared then, nor obeyed:
 Your fear itself of death removes the fear.
 Why then was this forbid? Why but to awe,
 Why but to keep ye low and ignorant,
 His worshipers; he knows that in the day
 Ye eat thereof, your eyes that seem so clear,

Yet are but dim, shall perfectly be then
 Opened and cleared, and ye shall be as gods,
 Knowing both good and evil as they know.
 That ye should be as gods, since I as man,
 Internal man, is but proportion meet,
 I of brute human, ye of human gods."
 (IX, 698-712)

To be fair to Eve, one must add that the appeal the fruit made to her senses was added to the intellectual appeals made by Satan. But what is most important to notice is her praise of the fruit after her appetite is satiated. Her first words are addressed to the tree as the source of her supposed new-found wisdom; and she expresses her belief that she will be a goddess.

"O sovereign, virtuous, precious of all trees
 In Paradise, of operation blessed
 To sapience, hitherto obscured, infamed,
 And Thy fair fruit let hang, as to no end
 Created; but henceforth my early care,
 Not without song, each morning, and due praise
 Shall tend thee, and the fertile burden ease
 Of thy full branches offered free to all;
 Till dieted by thee I grow mature
 In knowledge, as the gods who all things know;"
 (IX, 795-804)

When, having decided to share her source of wisdom with Adam rather than be superior to him, Eve returns bearing the fruit, Adam's reaction is as though he were already fallen. It is as though with her sin he is also condemned to death. He repeats again and again his conviction that he has no life apart from her:

"And me with thee hath ruined, for with thee
 Certain my resolution is to die;"
 (IX, 906-907)

He has in fact, at the moment of this observation made his choice--
not for God, but for self.

"..... I feel
The link of nature draw me: Flesh of flesh
Bone of my bone thou art, and from thy state
Mine never shall be parted, bliss or woe."
(IX, 913-916)

The self he has chosen is that which is to his mind (or will, for
reason is will) bound with Eve. But, Milton tells us:

".....he scrupled not to eat
Against his better knowledge, not deceived,
But fondly overcome with female charm."
(IX, 997-1000)

That Adam cannot use his love for Eve as an excuse for
having made the wrong choice is apparent in Gabriel's answer to
Adam's admission of guilt:

"Was she thy God, that her thou didst obey
Before his voice, or was she made thy guide,
Superior, or but equal, that to her
Thou didst resign thy manhood, and the place
Wherein God set thee above her made of thee,"
(X, 145-149)

Satan, Adam, and Eve were each guilty of having made a
wrong choice--freely made. Each possessed ~~of~~ free will, each
chose to act in accordance with his own will rather than the will
of God. Though all were guilty of this fundamental sin, without
which no other sin is possible, they were not equally guilty. Satan
fell by his own accord, untempted. He remained lost through his
own malice, his constant reassertion of his will against God's.

Adam and Eve were the victims, in part, of Satan's sin: he introduced to them the example of disobedience, of replacing God with the self. Furthermore, Adam and Eve are capable of repentance. For that reason God will not allow mankind to perish utterly; he will not abandon man to the chaos and folly which is the result of each man being a god.