

# Adam and eve as "warfaring christians": paradise lost and areopagitica



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In his "Areopagitica," John Milton claims "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 virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat" (939). To be a true, strong Christian, one must face temptation and reject it in favor of faith in God. Milton's belief is furthered and exemplified in Book IX of Paradise Lost, since the characters of Paradise Lost represent different sides of Milton's claim.

The strengths and weaknesses of Milton's argument are best seen in conversation between Adam and Eve. In Book IX, Eve suggests to Adam that the two split up to accomplish more work in a shorter amount of time (214). In response to Eve's suggestion, Adam says, "The wife, where danger or dishonor lurks,/ safest and seemliest by her husband stays,/ who guards her, or with her the worst endures" (267-269). Adam's claim appears to juxtapose Milton's belief in the importance of facing temptation, but he justifies his position by saying he just wants to protect Eve. Adam believes the pair can better reject temptation together, thus ultimately maintaining their cloistered virtue. Eve takes the side of Milton. She questions Adam's views, asking, "What is faith, love, virtue unassayed/ alone, without exterior help sustained?" (335-356). Eve informs Adam that faith must be tested. If faith goes unchallenged, the two will never grow stronger in their loyalty to God. Eve has confidence in herself that her faith is strong enough to withstand any challenge. Eve further believes that God wants them to have their faith

challenged. He will reward them for their persistent loyalty. Eve believes that if she and Adam overcome Satan's challenge, they will "double honor gain/ from his surmise proved false, find peace within,/ favor from Heav'n" (332-334). Eve, indeed, does not fear Satan as Adam does.

Paradise Lost clearly establishes Adam and Eve as conflicting sides of Milton's argument. Eve represents Milton's belief that challenges can actually strengthen one's faith; Adam personifies the stance that challenges can be dangerous and avoiding them is in one's best interest. Ultimately, Eve's self-confidence proves to be her downfall (as well as the downfall of mankind). She chooses to go out on her own and gives in to the temptations of Satan. Eve's fall conflicts with Milton's argument in "Areopagitica." Eve represents Milton's belief in the importance of trials of one's faith, yet had Eve never left Adam, she and humanity would still be blessed in Paradise. Although Adam ultimately falls as well, he was initially correct in his preference to stay with Eve so that the two may be faithful together. Because she represents his belief, Eve's fall weakens Milton's argument. Milton would still consider Eve's actions admirable. She does go out to "[see] her adversary." Eve succumbed to temptation because she was weak and Satan "into her heart too easy entrance won" (734). Because she fell, her faith was not that strong to begin with. Eve personifies Milton's concept of a "warfaring Christian" who goes out and welcomes temptation; however, Eve lost her war with Satan. Even though Eve fell, Milton would consider her more admirable than Adam because she faced Satan and his temptation. Adam juxtaposes Milton and Eve, yet ultimately, he shares the same deadly fate as his female counterpart. Adam, although free of temptation, maintains

his "cloistered virtue" by refusing to take any risks that may challenge his belief system.

Adam's eventual fall shows that living a risk-free lifestyle will not keep one safe from temptation. One may try to avoid temptation, but it could ultimately challenge a person anyway, perhaps even in ways that are more tempting. For example, Adam's challenge came embodied by the person he cares most about, making it more difficult for him to refuse to eat the forbidden fruit. The fall of Adam redeems Milton's argument because even though he never sought out a challenge to his faith, Adam fell anyway. Further, Adam and Eve's fall builds upon their relationship with God. They begin to think of and see their creator in new ways that they never would have before had they not eaten the forbidden fruit. Adam claims, "Nor can I think that God, creator wise,/ though threat'ning, will in earnest so destroy/ us his prime creatures" (938-940). Eating the forbidden fruit changes their relationship with God and they begin to see him in new ways. Eating the forbidden fruit also changes Adam and Eve's views of each other. Adam valiantly eats the fruit with Eve so she does not have to suffer alone and speaking to Eve he says, "Much pleasure we have lost, while we abstained/ from this delightful fruit... For never did thy beauty since the day/ I saw thee first and wedded thee, adorned/ with all perfections, so inflame my sense" (1022-1031) and Eve sees Adam as "[perfect]" (964). Adam and Eve grow closer to each other because of their sin. As Milton predicted, those who face trials will become stronger in some way.

Milton's "Areopagitica" calls for true Christians to test their faith against trials and temptations. He condemns those with cloistered virtues that never  
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seek to better themselves. This sentiment is also seen in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The characters of Adam and Eve represent conflicting sides of the argument of the importance of trials. Although Eve falls, Milton would admire the courage she had to go out alone and face temptation. Milton's argument may appear weakened by Eve's sin, but it is reconciled by Adam's similar fall. Adam maintained his cloistered virtue, but even he was not able save himself from temptation. Eve admirably met the challenge head on whereas Adam waited and believed himself to be safe. *Paradise Lost* serves as a battleground for the opposing sides of Milton's argument from "*Areopagitica*" and this debate is best seen in the conversations between Adam and Eve.

## **Works Cited**

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