

Institute for Christian Teaching
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**A THEMATIC APPROACH TO THE
TEACHING OF ENGLISH LITERATURE
TO FOREIGN STUDENTS:**
*Secular and Christian Values
contrasted*

by

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Introduction

This essay consists of a comparison between secular literary characters (XVI C.) and biblical characters. The literary passages have been chosen to be analyzed critically and contrasted with exemplary biblical texts and Ellen G. White's writings referring to the subjects. Students -who attend a teacher training course at University- will be asked to draw conclusions after the analysis. They will apply different techniques that will help them start enjoying reading literature. As a Christian educator I hope that students can take pleasure in reading the Bible, analyze the consequences of yielding to pride and ambition, and find answers to life's questions. Through the study of literature their understanding of human nature will grow and they will be able to sympathize with people's problems. At the same time they can improve their personal relationship with God. Arthur F. Holmes thinks that the humanities, especially literature and philosophy, demand the clear thinking, precise writing, and scrutiny of one's values that prepare one for any career requiring careful communication and continued self-examination, and the broadly integrative character of liberal learning moves the student beyond narrowly focused analytic techniques to see the overall picture.¹

Furthermore, when we consider how vastly literature may influence our aesthetic appreciation when reading the Scriptures, we can share James W.Sire's view on the subject:

"It is the literary character of the Old Testament that most helps us reconstruct the mindset of the ancient Hebrews. The Psalms not only provide texts for worship, but reveal the shape and feel of biblical faith in ways not possible in the more straightforward prose of the Law, for example. The prophets call us in ringing poetry to return to principles set down in the Law. The parables are powerful in large part because they are superb literary structures. And the Gospels likewise do their work in our minds and hearts because of their unique literary form."

¹- Joseph A. Pichler: Ibsen and the Business Schools. The Chronicle of Higher Education, 1977, p.32

Three themes will be examined in this study:

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF BIBLICAL AND SECULAR TEXTS	
Secular Texts	Biblical Texts
1- <i>The Consequences of Moral Choice</i>	
1.1- Dr. Faustus by Cristopher Marlowe 1.2- Paradise Lost by John Milton	1.3- <u>Fall of Lucifer</u> (Isa.14:12-14 Rev. 12:7-9,17; 20:10) 1.4- <u>King Saul</u> (1 Sam. 15:17- 28) 1.5- <u>Judas</u> (Matt. 26:14-16; 21-25, 46-49; Mark 14:18-21; John 3:21-30; 18:2-5)
2- <i>Making Decisions</i>	
2.1- Hamlet by William Shakespeare	2.2- <u>Queen Esther</u> (Esther 2 - 10) 2.3- <u>Daniel</u> (Dan. 1:8-17; 2:5- 8,13, 16-30; 3:9-30; 5:11-24; 6:2-28; 9:8-23; 10:1-12)
3- <i>Fall and Repentance</i>	
3.1- Samson Agonistes by John Milton	3.2- <u>Samson</u> (Judges 13:24; 14:1-3; 14:16-18; 15:18-20; 16:1-30)

Value of Studying Literature

While working on the project of integrating Christian and literary values, we may ask the following questions: What is good literature? Which are the criteria to be applied for literary selection? To this we may answer:

"Teaching Literature in a Christian College represents a great challenge to the professor and to the student. This discipline, that reflects the aesthetic values of mankind, should be always part of the academic curriculum... In literature there are many aesthetic values, beautiful figures and outstanding plots that would help the student to appreciate beauty and understand culture... In spite of any shortcomings, the beauty of the moral lessons should always be taught. It is the responsibility of the literature professor to make the student understand and appreciate beauty while he honors and glorifies God. The most outstanding norm for teaching literature in a Christian College is found in the Bible, which says: "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21) ²

The fact is that the Bible shows us clearly the results of the controversy between good

² Christ in the Classroom, Adventist Approaches to the Integration of Faith and Learning, Volume 1, p.9

and evil, man's transgression as a consequence of his tragic choice. That is to say that we can find stories in the Bible which depict the ugliness of sin and its terrible results. But all this has the purpose of leading us to the major theme found in the Scriptures: The story of salvation through Jesus Christ. According to Frye, a literary critic, the student of English literature who does not know the Bible does not understand a good deal of what is going on in what he reads, and adds:

"Since the narrative is the dominant form in the Bible, the more readers understand about how stories work, the more they will enjoy and understand vast portions of the Bible." ³

After comparing worldviews of different authors the student of Literature will broaden his view of reality and he will develop a more understanding attitude toward human problems. Another positive aspect we can mention in connection with reading is the fact that the student's linguistic structure will be enriched as well. He or she will be able to express his ideas more appropriately and accurately.

Regarding some aspects of form we can say that literature deals with the beauty of an artistic framework, the freshness of expression, outstanding rhythmical patterns. It produces an aesthetic pleasure in the reader. In Joseph Conrad's words:

"To arrest, for the space of a breath, the hands busy about the work of the earth, and compel men entranced by the sight of distant goals to glance for a moment at the surrounding vision of form and color, of sunshine and shadows; to make them pause for a look, for a sigh, for a smile - such is the aim of the serious writer, difficult and evanescent, and reserved only for a few to achieve." ⁴

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³ Ryken, How to Read the Bible as Literature. Grand Rapids, Mi:Academic Books, 1984. p.33

⁴ James W. Sire: Discipleship of the Mind. Learning to Love God in the Ways We Think. Downers Grove, Il. InterVarsity Press. 1990. p. 165

I- THE CONSEQUENCES OF MORAL CHOICE.

Dr. Faustus is the greatest of the plays written by Christopher Marlowe. We can say that he truly represents the spirit of the Renaissance man: He is a learned scholar who, unsatisfied with the sciences and arts he has studied at the University, is thirsty for knowledge. Unfortunately he makes a bad choice -a pact with the devil, who tricks him into getting all that a person can desire. He thinks he can obtain superhuman knowledge. However, at the end of his life, he realizes his mistake but thinks it is impossible for him to repent. Ignoring God's forgiving love, he walks slowly towards his own destruction. Like Icarus, whose waxen wings melted when he flew near the sun, his ambition blinds him.

"Marlowe's tragic idea implies the common human desire to have heaven on earth, but Marlowe hardly developed the idea beyond the elementary barrier to its fulfillment- that man is mortal. It was left to Shakespeare to develop the much more important obstacle- that man is spiritually unworthy. Dr. Faustus presents a dramatic dilemma: he is tempted by earthly pleasures which he considers real, while his prospective heavenly blessings are hypothetical. He questions everything and finally he is destroyed as a consequence of his own choice and despair.⁵

Marlowe divided the text into three parts. The musicality of the blank verse [Oh, thou art fairer than the evening air/Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars!'] in the opening and the conclusion is magnificent. He used the run-on line in order to link the lines in the poem:

"That shortly he was graced with doctor's name,

⁵- Christopher Gillie: Prelude to the Great Age. Longman. G.B. 1978.p.247

*Excelling all, and sweetly can dispute *
 In th' heavenly matters of theology;
 Till swoll'n with cunning, of a self-conceit,
 His waxen wings did mount above his reach *
 And melting, heavens conspired his overthrow!'*

The students might be asked questions such as these:

- . *What is the theme in Faustus?*
- . *Does he achieve his goals? Why/ Why not?*
- . *Do you think that Faustus is a type of the Renaissance man? Give reasons for your answer.*
- . *What parallelisms or differences do you find between the author and his character?*
- . *Would you call this play a tragedy, or does it illustrate the consequences of a fatal choice?*
- . *Is the play's treatment of the theme of sin allegorical?*
- . *Which is the manifest moral purport in this play?*

Faustus is blind to reality and that produces pathos in the play, in the same way as the notion of despair-his inner conviction that he is inevitably damned-becomes deeper as time goes by. Last and most telling of all we can say that "everything in Faustus's final monologue is intimately related to the whole of the drama, and the more Faustus is himself, the more is he *Everyman* as well." ⁶

When Marlowe wrote the epilogue to Faustus, 'Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight' probably he was remembering Psalm 80:15, 16: " *And the vineyard which thy right hand hath planted, and the branch that thou madest strong for thyself, it is burned with fire, it is cut down.* "

In some ways Faustus' behavior resembled that of Judas.

⁶— J.C. Maxwell: The Plays of Christopher Marlowe. The Pelican Guide to English Literature. Volume 2. Penguin. G.B. p.168

"[Judas] was not insensible to the beauty of the character of Christ; and often, as he listened to the Savior's words, conviction came to him, but he would not humble his heart or confess his sins. By resisting the divine influence he dishonored the Master whom he professed to love. Judas violated his conscience and yielded to temptation, fastening upon himself more securely his habits of evil... Instead of walking in the light, he chose to walk in darkness. Evil desires, covetousness, revengeful passions, dark and sullen thoughts, were cherished until Satan gained full control of him... By resisting the transforming power of grace and indulging selfish desires, was brought into bondage to Satan."⁷

There are other unfortunate examples in the Bible of men who were unable to make the correct choice and let themselves be destroyed by pride and ambition. King Saul is one of them. We can read the story of his rejection in 1 Sam. 15: 17-28.

"Saul had failed to bear the test of faith ...but the Lord sent His servant with another message to him. By obedience he might still prove his fidelity to God".⁸

However, after he defeated the Amalekites most brilliantly, this

"served to rekindle the pride of heart that was his greatest peril... Saul had now been subjected to the final test. His presumptuous disregard of the will of God, showing his determination to rule as an independent monarch, proved that he could no be trusted with royal power as the viceregent of the Lord...⁹

Saul persisted in blaming others for his sin instead of repenting. He tried to self-justify, really more concerned with maintaining his authority as a leader rather than obtaining forgiveness for his sins; until he walked so much apart from the Lord that he could not be rescued.

Let us now consider another work which deals with a tragic fall, but this time the consequences were terrible for us all:

⁷— Ellen G. White: Acts of the Apostles, Pacific Press Publishing Association. 1963. p.558

⁸— Ibid. p. 627

⁹— Ibid. p. 630

John Milton's Paradise Lost. The main source of the poem is the Bible, and it is divided into XII Books. The form is an epic written in unrhymed iambic pentameter, (i.e. five stressed syllables, five unstressed) the characters are symbolic of the struggle between good and evil, and the theme is the Fall of the Angels and the Fall of Man. Milton stresses the fact that suffering is the result of man's own actions and not God's.

John Wesley Taylor thinks that:

"perhaps the greatest Christian theme that can be integrated with nature is that of the great controversy between God and Satan, that cosmic conflict between good and evil... The Christian student may be led to trace the mileposts of this great controversy: the creation, the fall, redemption and restoration. God's sustaining power may be appreciated and the entire creation seen as dependent upon the Creator." ¹⁰

The poem starts with the subject of man's disobedience, the loss of Paradise and the causes of his fall. Satan and his angels, who were driven out of Heaven into the great Deep, are in a place of utter darkness called Chaos. They recover from their first astonishment and examine a plan to deceive human race, which Satan thinks that cannot fail. God in Heaven tells His Son about Satan's malice, and Jesus offers Himself as a ransom for man. Then the story of the Fall is presented. The consequences of sin are seen immediately afterwards, since the former innocent couple begin to quarrel and accuse each other. Gradually they start accepting what is inevitable and their faith in God is strengthened.

Some questions that could be asked on this work are included here:

- . *Compare the theme of the Fall of Man in the Bible and in Paradise Lost.*
- . *Would you give a different title to the poem? Why/Why not?*
- . *In what ways does sin affect the relationship of Adam and Eve? Do they overcome their problems?*
- . *Do you think the author is projecting his personal conflicts somehow in the poem?*
- . *Discuss the theme of temptation in the poem.*
- . *Find the verses in the Bible which tell the story of the fall of Lucifer.*

¹⁰— John Wesley Taylor: God, Nature, and Learning. An Integrational Approach. Christ in the Classroom. Volume 2. p. 269

. *Underline the lines in the poem which are Milton's addition to the story of the Fall of the Angels.*

. Ellen G. White speaks about the Fall of Lucifer in this way:

"Instead of seeking to make God supreme in the affections and allegiance of His creatures, it was Lucifer's endeavor to win their service and homage to himself. And coveting the honor which the infinite Father had bestowed upon His Son, this prince of angels aspired to power which it was the prerogative of Christ above to wield... The service and exaltation of self, contrary to the Creator's plan, awakened forebodings of evil in minds to whom God's glory was supreme. Lucifer allowed jealousy of Christ to prevail, and he became the more determined for supremacy. The high honors conferred upon Lucifer were not appreciated as the gift of God and called forth no gratitude to the Creator. He gloried in his brightness and exaltation and aspired to be equal with God." ¹¹

Analyze the steps which led to Satan's fall and write a summary of the rest of the chapter.

. *Read Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 48-61 and answer the following:*

. *What would have happened if a check on the desire for self-indulgence had not been placed?*

. *Which were the causes that led to man's fall?*

. *What made their sin exceedingly great?*

. *Find the lines in the poem that speak about Jesus' Second Coming.*

II- MAKING DECISIONS

William Shakespeare. Hamlet.

Hamlet is one of the most popular of Shakespeare's plays. In this work we will consider one aspect in particular, Hamlet's inability to make quick decisions. Jan Kott notes that Hamlet is relevant:

¹¹— Ellen G. White: The Great Controversy. Pacific Press Publishing Association, Mt. View, Ca. U.S.A. 1950. Ch. 29, p. 493.

"for the moralist, unable to draw a clear-cut line between good and evil' for the intellectual, unable to find a sufficient reason for action; for the philosopher, to whom the world's existence is a matter of doubt."¹²

According to J. C. Maxwell in *Hamlet* we find

"a man commanded to do what he has no assurance is right...situation of pure tragedy. Such a description gives precision to what has often been said about Hamlet from varying points of view: that he stands between two worlds, belonging fully to neither... That sense of incongruity between central figure and background remains,... the incongruity I have referred to is felt very specially in the contrast between action and soliloquy. The action of the whole play is notably varied and spectacular. It is in the soliloquies that we find practically all the evidence or the view of Hamlet as one who delays to act."¹³

L. G. Salingar adds this about Hamlet:

"Like sweet bells, jangled out of tune, and harsh, there is a profoundly suggestive disparity, or dualism, between the man and his mask."¹⁴

Considering the problem of indecision, Bernard Lott states:

"It has become customary for critics to refer to the problem of Hamlet, i.e. the reasons which lie behind his actions and his inaction...Many people have been puzzled by Hamlet's delay. He is constantly resolving to take action, but he never comes to it... But there is really nothing surprising about this. It is in the nature of all human beings, one would guess, to put off a searching ask or an impelling duty involving something disagreeable or worse... The delay is simple, not complex, and can be matched with a similar inclination in us all. As Coleridge said of him, he loses the power of action in the energy of resolve. Hamlet's human resources of passion and reason contend... His blood and judgment as he calls them, are often at variance."¹⁵

J.D. Wilson declares that

¹²— Jan Kott: Shakespeare Our Contemporary. Methuen & Co. Ltd. London. 1970. p.50

¹³— J.C. Maxwell: The Age of Shakespeare. The Pelican Guide to English Literature. p.210

¹⁴— L. G. Salingar: The Elizabethan Literary Renaissance, Ed. by Boris Ford. The Age of Shakespeare. Volume 2. p.89

¹⁵— Bernard Lott: Hamlet. New Swan Shakespeare. 1980. p.48

"Hamlet is more deeply interesting than any English tragedy that preceded it because it deals with the problem of how to recognize evil when it does not declare itself, and how to act effectively when it is recognized." ¹⁶

The questions Hamlet proposes in his famous soliloquy reflect the great crisis he is undergoing. When he asks 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer... or to take arms against a sea of troubles, and by opposing end them?' he wonders whether to take a passive or active attitude when facing trials and difficulties. We can see a man deeply hurt and unable to make decisions probably due to the fact that he was not sure of his mission; or perhaps his procrastination is typical of a melancholic personality. Tucker Brooke says that:

"For Shakespeare, at this period of devastating clarity, man stands between life and death as between two worlds, both of which elude his grasp and leave him nothing but the chimeras of thought. In the soliloquy, "To be or not to be," Hamlet hesitates...: to him these things are alike indifferent, for death and life are to him equally unreal." "In his psychology the external and internal are wholly blended. Thought, with its illusions and illuminations, is the only great reality; under its force the so-called facts of material and moral life are dissipated into impalpable fog."¹⁷

Questions that could be asked on Hamlet:

- . *Read the soliloquy (Act III.Sc.1) in detail.*
- . *Underline the words or phrases which suggest a hesitant attitude.*
- . *Do you think Hamlet had faith in God? Give reasons for your answer.*
- . *Mention examples of Hamlet's procrastination.*
- . *Why can we say that his moral convictions deteriorated throughout the play?*

We have mentioned a number of reasons which could explain Hamlet's vacillating behavior; still, there is something else we can say: his attitude is one of a person without a faith which can sustain him in critical moments. Such is not the case in the Christian warfare. Esther

¹⁶– J.D. Wilson:What Happens in Hamlet, p.248

¹⁷– Tucker Brooke and Matthias A. Shaaber:The Renaissance. A Literary History of England, Routledge & Kegan Paul. London. 1977. p.529

acted in quite a different way when confronting problems. The book of Esther is intriguing:

"With its fascinating plot, its psychologically interesting characters, its historically based setting, its omniscient third-person point of view, its craft-conscious style and its provocative themes, all have combined to make Esther the Old Testament book which "has occasioned more antipathy from some readers, and more enjoyment for others. The plot of Esther is consciously crafted, a craft "reflected in the fact that, like the story of Ruth, can be sketched in terms of the well-made plot. ... The plot unfolds in three stages...prelude, struggle and aftermath, around the "rising action of the story"¹⁸

Wilma McClarty thinks that "Of all the biblical heroines Esther has enjoyed greatest popularity among writers, artists and musicians, representing courage and self-sacrifice" ¹⁹

It is Esther's quick action which saves her people, after asking the Lord for help. The SDA Commentary characterizes Esther "as a woman of clear judgment, remarkable self-control, and noble self-sacrifice," projecting "the youthful queen to the heights of heroic action" "If I perish, I perish " (Esther 4:16)

Esther herself is a symbolic representation. She is "above all a national heroine."

"As any true follower of God would do in a time of crisis, Esther prayed for help and guidance. Of course, she must have been in touch with Heaven daily, or she would not have had the confidence to go to God for guidance" at a "time of emergency." ²⁰

When speaking about Esther, Ellen G. White declares:

"The crisis that Esther faced demanded quick, earnest action; but both she and Mordecai realized that unless God should work mightily in their behalf, their own efforts would be unavailing. So Esther took time for communion with God, the source of her strength... God wrought marvelously for His penitent people... and brought them "once more into favor at the Medo-Persian court making possible the carrying out of His purpose to restore them to

¹⁸— Ryken, Leland: The Literature of the Bible. Grand Rapids, Mi:Zondervan, 1974. p.75

¹⁹— McClarty,Wilma: An Analysis of the book of Esther as literature.Christ in the Classroom, vol.1, p.218

²⁰— Ibid. p. 222

their own land." ²¹

Another example of faith and courage is shown by Daniel and his friends.

"Among the children of Israel who were carried captive to Babylon at the beginning of the seventy years' captivity were Christian patriots, men who were as true as steel to principle, who would not be corrupted by selfishness, but who would honor God at the loss of all things."²²

Esther was challenged by an opportunity to deliver her people, while Daniel was challenged by temptation to compromise principle. Both required tough decisions and divinely-inspired courage.

"A noble character is not the result of accident; it is not due to special favors or endowments of Providence. It is the result of self-discipline, of subjection of the lower to the higher nature, of the surrender of self to the service of God and man... There is need of men who like Daniel will do and *dare* for the cause of right. Pure hearts, strong hands, fearless courage, are needed; for the warfare between vice and virtue calls for ceaseless vigilance... The spirit that possessed Daniel, the youth of today may have; they may draw from the same source of strength, possess the same power of self-control, and reveal the same grace in their lives, even under circumstances as unfavorable."²³

Daniel's friends also declared their faith without hesitation. They relied on God, they trusted in the promise found in Isaiah 43:2.

Once more Daniel's faith was tested, once more he trusted the Lord would save him. Neither the king nor his decree could alter his faith.

"In seasons of trial and gloom God's children should be just what they were when their prospects were bright with hope and their surroundings all that they could desire. A man whose heart is

21- Ellen G. White: The Story of Prophets and Kings. Pacific Press Publishing Association. U.S.A.p.
601

22- Ibid. p.479

23- Ibid.pp. 488, 489

stayed upon God will be the same in the hour of his greatest trial as he is in prosperity."²⁴

The difference between a person like Hamlet and one such as Daniel or Esther is remarkable. Having convictions and definite goals in life, knowing why we are doing something, strengthening our faith in the face of difficulties, will help us make correct decisions when so required.

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III- FALL AND REPENTANCE

To deal with the subject of Fall and Repentance the poem *Samson Agonistes* will be compared to the parallel story of Samson in the book of Judges.

When Emile Legouis discusses Milton he says that:

"His work is the product of a matchless art, the delicate rhymed poems of his youth being equalled, with a difference, by the mighty blank verse of his maturity".²⁵

The main source of this poem is Judges ch. 13-16. Probably Milton was self-identified with Samson's tragic story. There are many parallels: Designed for great exploits, and betrayed by a wife Samson lies blind and helpless unable to pursue his cause. Here we see Milton in his old age: blind, a survivor of the lost Republican cause among the triumphant Royalists, expressing his failure. Milton followed the classical unities of time and place. The action is limited to the last day in Samson's life. The versification is irregular, sometimes he uses blank verse, others, irregular meters. Following the theories of Greek drama, he believed that tragic emotions turned into positive feelings after reading an artistic tragedy. The poem ends with the lines "*the calm of mind, all passion spent.*"

²⁴- Ibid. p.545

²⁵- Emile Legouis: A Short History of English Literature. Oxford. 1980. p.170

The plot of the poem is as follows: After having been made captive by his enemies Samson was blinded, and now he is in the prison at Gaza, working as a slave for his enemies. As it is a holiday [the day of thanksgiving for being delivered from the hands of Samson] he happens to have finished work and sits outside to complain and express his woe and misery. He bemoans his blindness and suffering. He feels utterly hopeless reaching a climax in the lines:

"O dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon."

The chorus laments his fall and tries to comfort him. He is visited by some friends and his father, Manoa, who intensifies the grief in Samson when he says:

"O miserable change; is this the man, that invincible Samson...?"

Before leaving Manoa tells him he is trying to obtain Samson's freedom by paying ransom; but Samson objects to this. He cries in despair. When he is told that he is to blame for what has happened to Israel, he rebels and says that he has always been led by God. But he does not rebel against God, he reasserts his faith and trusts that things will be settled in future. When Delilah comes to test him again, he shows himself capable of resisting her. He has overcome the passions that subdued him. Then a Philistine giant comes and threatens him, but Samson is not afraid. He reiterates his faith in God. The chorus sings an ode praising God. Finally he is visited by an officer who tells him the Philistine noblemen have gathered to be entertained by Samson's feats. At first he refuses categorically and the Chorus tries to persuade him to go. Something makes him change his mind and he agrees to go along with the officer, leaving the scene. Manoa returns very moved for his probable success with the Philistines, when somebody comes with the news of the catastrophe that has taken place at the palace. After the first moments of grief, Samson's friends are comforted by the fact that Samson became God's champion again. The chorus closes the scene singing:

*"All is best, though we oft doubt
What the unsearchable dispose
Of Highest Wisdom brings about,
And ever best found in the close."*

Samson was not a perfect model, but we can learn lessons from his failure and recovery. He had been dedicated to the Lord even before his birth. What made him forget his mission?

"Just as he was entering upon manhood, the time he must execute his divine mission, Samson connected himself with the enemies of Israel. He did not ask whether he could better glorify God when united with the object of his choice, or whether he was placing himself in a position where he could not fulfill the

purpose to be accomplished by his life. To all who seek first to honor Him, God has promised wisdom; but *there is no promise to those who are bent upon self-pleasing.*"²⁶ [Italics added]

After his wife was murdered by her own people Samson fought against the Philistines and the Lord gave the Israelites victory.

"Samson ruled Israel for twenty years. But one wrong step prepares the way for another. Samson had transgressed the command of God...in the indulgence of unlawful passion. Trusting to his great strength, he went boldly to Gaza "²⁷

to satisfy his senses again. However, in spite of his weakness, God did not abandon him.

"but even this narrow escape [from his enemies] did not stay his evil course. He did not again venture among the Philistines, but he continued to seek those sensuous pleasures that were luring him to ruin. He loved a woman... her name was Delilah, the consumer. When he degraded himself by this new attachment, they determined, through Delilah, to accomplish his ruin."²⁸

Gradually he began to sacrifice his principles to please his senses. The Lord was very patient with Samson. He was physically strong, but his passions controlled him; so the Lord departed from him.

In some ways Solomon's story is similar to Samson's:

"In forming an alliance with a heathen nation, and sealing the compact by marriage with an idolatrous princess, Solomon rashly disregarded the wise provision that God had made for maintaining the purity of His people. The hope that his Egyptian wife might be converted was but a feeble excuse for the sin... As inclination gained the ascendancy over reason, self-confidence increased, and he sought to carry the Lord's purpose in his own way... and he entered into unholy alliance with nation after nation... In seeking to glorify himself before the world, he sold his honor and integrity." ²⁹

Both Solomon and Samson had public responsibilities; but these duties were put aside in pursuit

²⁶— Ellen G. White: Patriarchs and Prophets. Pacific Press Publishing Association. U.S.A. p.563

²⁷— Ibid. p.565

²⁸— Ibid.

²⁹— Ibid. p. 55

of hopeless pleasures. While the king degraded himself in this way, "the spiritual decline of Israel progressed steadily." ³⁰ But the Lord "forsook them not." Their stories do not end there. In the book of Ecclesiastes, the king recorded lessons of warning. He repented sincerely but his negative influence persisted; he was not the same after his transgression.

In the case of Samson he had to learn his lesson through deep affliction.

"In suffering and humiliation, a sport for the Philistines, Samson learned more of his own weakness than he had ever known before; and his afflictions led him to repentance... Had Samson been true to his divine calling, the purpose of God could have been accomplished in his honor and exaltation. But he yielded to temptation and proved untrue to his trust, and his mission was fulfilled in defeat, bondage, and death. Physically, Samson was the strongest man upon the earth; but in self-control, integrity and firmness, he was one of the weakest of men; if men willfully place themselves under the power of temptation, they will fall, sooner or later." ³¹

Both men fell but both repented and were forgiven. One was the strongest man physically; the other one was the wisest intellectually. But they were weak as all human beings are; and the Lord accepted them and pardoned them in His immense Love.

"Trials patiently borne, blessings gratefully received, temptations manfully resisted, meekness, kindness, mercy, and love habitually revealed, are the lights that shine forth in the character in contrast with the darkness of the selfish heart, into which the light of life has never shone." ³²

Sample questions on Samson Agonistes:

- . *Trace Samson's development as a character from his youth to his death.*
- . *Explain the parallelism existing between Milton and Samson.*
- . *Say which you think were the causes of Samson's weakness.*
- . *Which other biblical characters could you mention who acted like Samson?*
- . *Discuss whether you believe his parents were to blame for his failure.*
- . *Find the elements extrapolated in the story of Samson which are not in the Bible.*

³⁰— Ibid. p. 60

³¹— Ibid. p.568

³²— Ellen G. White: The Mount of Blessing. p.44

- . *Look for examples in the poem of the ways he overcame temptation.*
- . *Discuss Solomon's and Samson's influence on the people of Israel as their leaders.*
- . *Comment on the ending line of the poem.*
- . *Write an essay contrasting the causes that led to Faustus' failure and the factors that moved Samson to repentance.*

CONCLUSION

All of the preceding concepts outline just one approach to the study of literature and the integration of faith and learning, which may open up a whole new fan of possibilities when analyzing these or other texts.

We can plan learning strategies and values-integration activities which will help us motivate our students and achieve our objectives effectively.

The principle of integration stems from the application of moral and Christian views to the cultural values which secular writers intended to transmit when writing literary pieces or expressing their feelings in lyrical poetry.

As we lead our students to find the aesthetic beauty while reading a text, they will also learn to experience emotional sensitivity and refine their insight when reading the beautiful poetry that the Bible contains.

If we can develop an attitude of reflection when approaching a critical analysis of a literary text we may be able to relate it to our Christian faith while enhancing our academic appreciation.

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