

The Poetry of John Milton:

Christ as Human

Milton portrays Christ in *Paradise Regained* as both intensely human and intensely divine. As a human, Jesus is not omniscient: he experiences confusion and asks hard questions of his plight. He wonders why he is fasting and when he can eat, and he questions where he is going since he has not kept track of his path through the wilderness. His “swarming thoughts” cause him to ponder what exactly his divine mission is and how best to fulfill it. He tries to find answers by reviewing the events of his life to discover subtle indications of God the Father’s guidance. His encounters with Satan seem to help him find his divine purpose by the process of negation. Satan’s subtle (and sometimes not too subtle) stratagems seem to illuminate the paths Jesus is meant not to follow. By the end Satan’s temptations, Jesus seems calmer in his spirit than before, and at least somewhat more certain of his divine calling. Satan, on the other hand, is obsessed throughout the poem with the epithet God the Father gave to Jesus at the moment of his baptism: “Son of God.” Satan continually speculates what this term might mean and how he might best induce Jesus to fall like Adam and Eve did. Satan keeps underestimating Jesus and steadily loses the war of words and wills. Only at the poem’s climax (literally) does Satan begin to understand that the term “Son of God” means that Jesus is fully Divine as well as fully Human. In that profound and ironic moment, it is Satan, not Jesus, who falls.