

Hope and Anxiety  
in the  
Moral Writings  
of  
Samuel Johnson

by

David Dean  
English

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement of the  
University Undergraduate Fellows Program  
1982-1983

Approved by:

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dr. David Anderson". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Dr. David Anderson

April 1983

## Abstract

Samuel Johnson's view of the Atonement shifts over his lifetime, from the exemplary view with its emphasis on the strict rules of conduct which lead to salvation to the propitiatory view with its faith that Christ's death cleansed the Christian of his sin. Johnson adopts early in his life the exemplary view with all its emphasis on living a pious life. Johnson's moral writings in the period to 1750 show his emphasis on the right rules of conduct and devotion, while in his prayers he is confident that with effort and God's assistance, he can live a life which will lead to salvation. As he grows older, however, the confidence evident earlier in his prayers begins to slip. He suffers increasingly from guilt over his inability to act in a manner that will promote his salvation. In his moral writings from 1750 until 1760, we see a growing gulf between the requirements of a pious life and man's ability to live up to them. After 1759, Johnson writes very little of a moral nature, and so we must turn to his prayers and meditations. After 1760, a massive breakdown of confidence is evident in the prayers, with much guilt, self-recrimination, and despair. By 1770, the prayers become more controlled, with an emphasis no longer on strict rules of conduct but now on requests for hope, wisdom, and faith. By the late 1770's, Johnson has adopted the propitiatory view of the atonement. The cause of this shift in theology lies in Johnson's observations of the weakness of others as well as in his frustrations at living pious; he realizes that man is unable to live righteously enough to be saved. Man can only be saved through the propitiation of Christ.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the undying support and patience of my advisor, Professor David Anderson. Many thanks.

The sacrifice of Christ has traditionally been viewed in one of two ways, either as exemplary or propitiatory. The exemplary interpretation uses Christ's life and death as an example which sinful man is to follow, as well as he can, in order to be saved. The propitiatory interpretation contends that Christ, by suffering in mankind's place, cleanses the faithful of their sins. These two theologies translate into specific types of behavior, the exemplary requiring strict and vigilant adherence to the rules of a pious life, and the propitiatory requiring faith that Christ took upon Himself the burden of sin for all those who follow Him. Maurice Quinlan, in his book Samuel Johnson: A Layman's Religion, notes a shift in Johnson's interpretation of Christ's sacrifice from the exemplary view, which Johnson held for most of his life, to the propitiatory view, which Johnson seems to have adopted as he approached death.<sup>1</sup> After cataloging passages from Johnson which illustrate both the exemplary view and the propitiatory one, Quinlan concludes:

Ironically it was probably Samuel Clarke, the rationalist, who did most to convert (Johnson) to the more orthodox understanding of the Atonement...Clarke's most comforting message is that salvation is made relatively easy because Christ performed a propitiatory sacrifice that lifted the burden of guilt from mankind.<sup>2</sup>

That Johnson changed his view of the Atonement is obvious. But to imply, as Quinlan does, that Johnson was seduced by the comforts of a propitiatory sacrifice ignores the strength of Johnson's religious convictions and the comprehensiveness of his mind. Quinlan's discussion is reductive because it fails to take into consideration the chief tenet of Johnson's moral thought--the need for and uses of effort. Moreover, throughout Johnson's life and works a progressive frustration of effort is evident. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the

shift in Johnson's view of the Atonement in terms of his own perception of his ability to live up to the standards he sets for himself. His inability to conform his life to these standards, mostly derived from the writings of William Law, causes the shift in his view of Christ's sacrifice, the sermons of Samuel Clarke being merely a precipitating agent against a backdrop of frustration and self-doubt.

#### Law and the Hard Road to Salvation

Johnson's concept of a pious life was undoubtedly shaped by William Law, author of A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life (1729). An ethical rigorist in every sense of the word, Law required of every Christian the best he could do, which bordered on perfection. Law saw in moral relativism the beginnings of complacency and sloth. Many sincere Christians, however, thought that he was asking the impossible. Law's doctrine was too much even for the father of Methodism, who wrote his teacher in 1738--"For two years I have been preaching after the model of your two great practical treatises, and all that have heard have allowed, that the law is great, wonderful, and holy. But no longer did they attempt to fulfill it, but they found that it is too high for man."<sup>3</sup> For Law, devotion was nothing less than "a life given over, and devoted to God."<sup>4</sup> A life given over and regulated by the rules of religion was more joyous and sweet than a life governed by the age. Law would have us see Christ as the example and the representative which makes our salvation possible: "And we are to suffer, to be crucified, to die and rise with Christ; or else his Crucifixion, Death and Resurrection will profit us nothing" (Law, p.21).

The first half of Law's A Serious Call is devoted to patterns for living while the second gives the proper method and frequency of prayer. Law uses character sketches to intensify his points. For example, we have Cognatus, an orthodox and meticulous parson, who is quite knowledgeable about the markets for grain, and Calidas, a great merchant and trader, who is most prone to fervent prayer when the weather is stormy while his ships are at sea. The vigors of Law's precepts are best seen in his daily plan for prayers. The devout Christian is to pray six times a day, upon rising, at nine, noon, three, six, and at bedtime. One is to begin each session with psalms, putting the mind in the proper frame, moving then into formal prayers, and then finally, when the "heat is stirred," using one's own prayers and petitions. The subjects for each prayer respectively are praise and thanksgiving, humility, love and intercession for others, resignation, confession, and for bedtime, death.

Johnson's admiration for Law is well documented, the first mention being Johnson's well known statement to Boswell: "When at Oxford, I took up Law's Serious Call to a Holy Life, expecting to find it a dull book, (as such books generally are) and perhaps to laugh at it. But I found Law quite an over match for me; and this was the first occasion of my thinking in earnest of religion, after I became capable of rational inquiry."<sup>5</sup> Johnson also thought that the Serious Call was "the finest piece of hortatory theology in any language" (Life, II p. 122). Though Johnson seldom actually refers to the exemplary nature of Christ's sacrifice, it is apparent that he tried to live his life based on the example of Christ as translated by the practical theology of Law, and as such can be credited with an exemplary view of the

sacrifice.

Although Johnson did not completely absorb Law's tenets, it is obvious that he was deeply affected by them as is apparent throughout his prayers and meditations. The prayer for July, 1755 is a good example of Law's influence:

Having lived hitherto in perpetual neglect of publick worship & though for some years past not without an habitual reverence for the sabbath yet without that attention to its religious duties which Christianity requires-- I will once more form a scheme of life for that day such as alas I have often vainly formed which when my mind is capable of settled practice I hope to follow.

- 1 To rise early and in order to [do] it to go to sleep early on saturday.
- 2 To use some extraordinary devotion in the morning.
- 3 To examine the tenour of my life & particularly the last week & to mark my advances in religion or recession from it.
- 4 To read the Scripture methodically with such helps as are at hand.
- 5 To go to church twice.
- 6 To read books of divinity either speculative or practical.
- 7 To instruct my family.
- 8 To wear off by meditation any worldly soil contracted in the week. <sup>6</sup>

We see Johnson here attempting to regulate meticulously his conduct by forming "a scheme of life" and by trying "to wear off by meditation any worldly soil contracted in the week," both of which are highly reminiscent of Law. That Law was particularly hard on sloth explains Johnson's constant, and almost always unsuccessful, resolutions to "rise by eight" and avoid idleness. Johnson's sermons also show Law's influence as a moral rigorist and demonstrate Johnson's belief in the exemplary nature of the sacrifice. The first half of the sermon

written in 1745 and delivered by Henry Hervey Aston, attacks the per-versions of charity and urges effort and right intent as the highest virtues:

We are taught to exercise charity, such as is, at once, ardent and rational; not contracted by selfish or partial exclusions, nor sublimed into a total disregard of all private happiness; and this charity is inculcated in the most powerful manner, commanded by the most expressive precepts, enforced by the most inviting promises, and most dreadful threatenings; and recommended by the example of him, who, when he delivered this amiable doctrine, was himself always employed in healing the sick, or instructing the ignorant; in softening the miseries of the present state, or in pointing out the way to everlasting happiness.<sup>7</sup>

The phrase "recommended by the example of Him" shows that the notion of an exemplary sacrifice clearly lies behind Johnson's theology. Charity is a duty "on which our eternal happiness is thus declared to depend," making it necessary that it is practiced in the lawful manner (Sermons, p. 292-3). Johnson, like Law, gives specific instructions to perform this duty properly and without hinderance. Johnson sees, as does Law, that "the great impediment of charity, as of all other virtues, is 'love of the world'; that love which the Apostle has declared to be inconsistent with 'the love of the Father'" (Sermons, p. 293).

In Law's portrait of Miranda, a pious and charitable woman, there is a passage which summarizes Johnson's whole concept of a life governed by strict moral rules--

If any one is so wise as to think his time too precious to be disposed of by chance, and left to be devoured by anything that happens in his way; if he lays himself under a necessity of observing how every day goes through his hands, and obliges himself to a certain order of time in his business, his retirements, and devotions; it is hardly to be imagined how soon such a conduct would reform, improve, and perfect the whole course of his life. (Law, p. 75)



Law's constant admonishments to be exact and pious in all things, in order to grow perfect through vigilance, explains Johnson's constant, and at times desperate, attempts to regulate his life. Johnson's effort to live up to these standards, from the time he spent at Oxford in 1731 to just a few years before his death, causes almost all of his frustration and self-recrimination.

#### Johnson's Early View of Himself and Humanity

The Vision of Theodore, of which Johnson was heard to say "that he thought this was the best thing he ever wrote,"<sup>8</sup> clearly sets forth Johnson's view of life and the way to salvation. This allegory, addressed to "the Sons of Perseverance," shows humanity's hard climb up "the Mountain of Existence" to its salvation in "the Temples of Happiness."<sup>9</sup> The journey of life begins at the base of the mountain in the flower laden land of Innocence. Innocence, after a short time, leaves her charges "in the Hands of Education, a nymph more severe in her Aspect and imperious in her Commands" ("Theodore," p. 149). Education then hands her brood over to Reason, "of all subordinate Beings the noblest and the greatest"; Reason, in turn,

counselled them at their first Entrance upon her Province, to enlist themselves among the Votaries of Religion; and informed them, that if they trusted to her alone, they would find the same Fate with her other Admirers, whom she had not been able to secure against Appetites and Passions, and who having been seized by Habits in the Regions of Desire, had been dragged away to the Caverns of Despair. ("Theodore," p. 152)

These Habits are "a troop of Pygmies, which appeared to walk silently before those that were climbing the mountain, and each to smooth the way before her Follower...each of these petty beings held secretly a

Chain in her Hand, with which she prepared to bind those within her Power" ("Theodore," p. 150). Religion alone can bring man through the seductions of "Lust" and "Vanity", the "Whispers of Ambition," the fruits of "Intemperance," and the "Maze of Indolence" ("Theodore," pp. 153, 156, 157). Theodore finds that

the great Danger to the Followers of Religion was only from Habit; every other Power was easily resisted, nor did they find any Difficulty when they inadvertently quitted her, to find her again by the Direction of Conscience, unless they had given Time to Habit to draw her Chain behind them, and bar up the Way by which they had wandered. ("Theodore," p. 154).

Those captured are led in "sordid Bondage" to the "Caverns of Despair" ("Theodore," pp. 154, 152).

This allegory presents at once both the confidence and fear which characterize the steep climb of life: confident that Religion will assist the vigilant and prudent along the "true way" to salvation and fearful, a fear that is invaluable because it stimulates vigilance, that the chains of habit, at first insensibly, will undermine the protection of Religion. Johnson's description of habit shows why a strict daily schedule was so important to him, for only by such vigilance could he keep habit from chaining him in the ways of sin, and finally damnation. The road he lays out for himself is not a wide or easy one, but one which requires constant effort and self-appraisal.

As with the rest of Johnson's writings, excepting the few years before his death, there is little mention of the mysteries of Christianity on the Mountain of Existence or in his early prayers. One sees only God and man, with man deriving some assistance along the "true way" from Religion, but largely dependent upon his own abilities. The writings following "Theodore" will probe deeper into the minds

and hearts of the people striving for happiness on the "Mountain of Existence."<sup>10</sup> These writings will show a deepening awareness of human frailty and weakness. For the moment, though, we shall look into Johnson's own early struggles on the Mountain of Existence.

Johnson's early prayers, from 1738 to the mid-1750's, reveal his implicit confidence that with help from God, man can make his own way to Heaven.<sup>11</sup> The most characteristic feature of his early prayers is emotional control. Johnson appears as a confident suppliant, comfortable in God's hands, requesting the assistance necessary to gain his salvation. This control is most apparent in his formal, almost sterile, structure. The early prayers are dominated by parallel constructions and often contain paraphrases from the Book of Common Prayer.<sup>12</sup> The prayer for January 1, 1750 begins

Almighty God, by whose will I was created, and in whose Providence I have been sustained, by whose mercy I have been called to the knowledge of my Redeemer, and by whose Grace whatever I have thought or acted acceptable to thee has been inspired and directed... (Prayers, p. 42)

The repetition of the structure "by whose...", when compared with the depressed and wretched prayers of the 1760's, suggest a confidence in Johnson's exemplary orientation. These prayers imply an orderliness, almost a mechanism, by which a merciful God has allowed the redemption of his fallen children. When Johnson speaks of "our holy Father whose judgments terminate in mercy," he refers not to pardon but to the love of God which has created a means of salvation (Prayers, p. 61). He writes

Let the remembrance of thy Judgements by which my wife is taken away awaken me to repentance, and the sense of thy mercy by which I am spared, strengthen my hope and confidence in Thee, that by the assistance and comfort of thy holy spirit I may so pass through things temporal as finally to gain everlasting happiness. (Prayers, p. 55)

Johnson sees God's mercy as that which has made it possible, with the intervention and assistance of Grace, as seen in the Holy Spirit, for sinful man to raise himself so that he may "pass through things temporal" and gain his salvation by living a pious life.

God's grace is seen by Johnson as that assistance from God which enables one to overcome human frailty and live a pious life. This grace validates man's modest achievements, as seen in the "Prayer on the Rambler" (1750) where without God's grace "all wisdom is folly" and without God's help "all Labour is ineffectual" (Prayers, p. 43).

This grace is often invoked in the guise of the Holy Spirit; in the prayer for New Years Day, 1756, Johnson asks that "by the help of thy Holy Spirit I may use the means of Grace to my own salvation"

(Prayers, p. 59). Most importantly Johnson hopes that "the operation of Thy Grace may produce in me a new life pleasing to Thee"

(Prayers, p. 61). Grace for Johnson retains its traditional meaning, that by which one is saved, but only in so far as it strengthens frail man as he works towards his salvation; his exemplary premise causes this departure from the more common view of grace, as that which cleanses and therefore saves.

The last facet of Johnson's perception of salvation is judgment. Possessed both of the mechanism of salvation, God's mercy, and the assistance of grace, one must ultimately be "Called to Judgment" (Prayers, p. 41). Johnson uses legalistic terms in his approach to the moment of judgment at the decisive hour of death. In 1745, he asks that his life "may not be continued to increase my Guilt" (Prayers, p. 40); in 1757, he asks God "who has granted me now to begin another year of probation, vouchsafe me such assistance of thy Holy Spirit, that the

continuance of my life may not add to the measure of my guilt" (Prayers, p. 63). This legalistic view creates a picture of an Angry God, judging righteously and severely man's adherence to His laws. Although the presence of judgment in Johnson's theology might seem to contradict his apparent confidence in the exemplary model, judgment is another way in which God keeps humanity on the "true way."<sup>13</sup> At the end of his prayer on January 25, 1756, Johnson summarizes the use of fear--"that living in thy fear, I may die in thy favour" (Prayers, p. 60). This fear of judgment is another facet of God's mercy towards man because it is conducive to his salvation.

During this period, Johnson sees Christ's sacrifice in its exemplary sense, in great measure because of Law and his writings. He appears confident of his ability to conform to the vigorous and strict rules for conduct inculcated, via Law, by Christ's life and death; man, through the example of Christ, can with constant effort be perfected. It is the breakdown of this confidence, as seen in his meditations and in his publications, which leads to the shift in his perception of Christ's, from exemplary to propitiatory.

#### Johnson's First Great Look at Humanity

Johnson, in his famous poem "The Vanity of Human Wishes" (1749), surveys the "treachery of the human heart."<sup>14</sup> Like Law's Serious Call, "The Vanity" gives specific portraits of victims of that treachery and then generalizes about the human frailties which are both the cause and result of human misery. Amid images of rising and sinking, mist and fog, clutter, swelling, and crowds, Johnson shows "how hope and fear, desire and hate, / O'erspread with snares the clouded maze of fate."<sup>15</sup>

Johnson surveys the rise and tragic fall of humans pursuing false goals until "Delusive Fortune hears th' incessant call,/they mount, they shine, evaporate, and fall" ("Vanity", l. 73-76). Cardinal Wolsey begins with "Law in his voice, and fortune in his hand" but, at the end of his life, "with age, with cares, with ~~mal~~ ~~a~~ ~~d~~ ~~i~~ ~~e~~s oppress'd,/He seeks the refuge of monastic rest" ("Vanity", l. 100, 117-118). Walter Jackson Bate summarizes the poem in this way:

Almost from the beginning of the Vanity of Human Wishes, it is brought into focus by relating it to the reactions of the human heart. It is seen as both the accumulated, swarming product of the human heart, and also as the environment, in which the individual, as soon as he appears, suddenly finds himself, and to which he instinctively starts to contribute.<sup>16</sup>

Johnson, faced with this misery which feeds on itself, asks

Where then shall Hope and Fear their objects find?  
Must dull Suspence corrupt the stagnant mind?  
Must helpless man, in ignorance sedate,  
Roll darkling down the torrent of his fate? ("Vanity" l. 343-346)

He answers, after a vaguely Stoic and unconvincing eight lines

Pour forth thy fervours for a healthful mind,  
Obedient passions, and a will resign'd;  
For love, which scarce collective man can fill;  
For patience sov'reign o'er transmuted ill;  
For faith, that panting for a happier seat,  
Counts death kind Nature's signal of retreat:  
These goods for man the laws of heav'n ordain,  
These goods he grants, who grants the pow'r to gain;  
With these celestial wisdom calms the mind,  
And makes the happiness she does not find.  
("Vanity" l. 359-368)

In effect he asks for the traits necessary to make the journey on the "Mountain of Existence," outlined in "The Vision of Theodore"--"healthful mind/Obedient passions, and a will resign'd" These traits in turn will aid us in finding "love, which *scarce* collective man can fill," "patience, sov'reign o'er transmuted ill" and "faith, that panting for

a happier seat,/Counts death kind Nature's signal of retreat."

Although these traits are roughly analogous with I Corinthians 1:13, the modifying phrases which follow each trait imply a Christ-like transcendence, ie. love which is greater than all mankind, patience which soveriegn over all evil, and faith, confident of its place in Heaven.<sup>17</sup> These traits, love, patience, and hope, have capacities greater than temporal virtues. This transcendence reveals that Johnson is still striving for that perfection which brings comfort and salvation. Johnson states

These goods for man the laws of heav'n ordain,  
These goods he grants, who grants the pow'r to gain;  
With these celestial wisdom calms the mind,  
And makes the happiness she does not find.

This ending indicates that those who are disciplined and pious on the road of life will not only reach Heaven, but will also be perfected, coming to be more and more Christ-like. It is this perfection which comforts one in life and "makes the happiness she does not find."

In "The Vision of Theodore," Johnson admonishes humanity to be pious and vigilant. In "The Vanity of Human Wishes," he presents the ruin of these who stray from this admonishment and instructs humanity to call to God for help. In both, Johnson looks at the weakness of humanity and instructs it in the proper course. In the prayers, Johnson asks for the same thing he asked for in "The Vanity," "a healthful mind,/Obedient passions, and a will resign'd," confident of God's benevolence and of his own ability to move closer to perfection. Seeing the challenge, he confronts it and strives diligently for the perfection "the laws of Heav'n ordain."

### Deepening Insights

It has been said that The Rambler, Johnson's famous periodical, is the "prose explication" of "The Vanity of Human Wishes."<sup>18</sup> Appearing every Tuesday and Saturday from March, 1750 to March, 1752, The Rambler included among its 208 numbers over 60 "letters-to-the-editor" (though actually written by Johnson), eight oriental tales, eight allegories, and several satirical portraits, in addition to the moral and critical essays. The principal design of these essays being to "inculcate wisdom or piety," their tone was at times that of a "solemn, serious, dictatorial writer."<sup>19</sup> Johnson, understanding that his tone was necessarily heavy, pokes fun at himself by having one of his "correspondents" imagine Mr. Rambler "settling himself in his easy chair, that he may enjoy a new calamity without disturbance" (Rambler IV, 215). The Rambler is not, however, haughtily didactic. With The Rambler, a new attitude enters Johnson's moral writing which readers have here-to-fore not noticed. He is no longer simply an observer as in "The Vanity of Human Wishes." For the first time in his career, Johnson writes both as moralist and as man. What many readers have seen as vacillation and inconsistency is, in fact, as Patrick O'Flaherty states, "a mind seeking comprehensiveness and truth in an area of experience where such finality is elusive."<sup>20</sup> As Johnson enters into the struggles of humanity, besieged by passions, wandering amid temptations, and tossed on the treacherous ocean of fate, one notices a softening of the strictness evident in his earlier writings. He struggles between the neoclassic confidence in the existence and apprehensibility of general truth, and the reality of



human frailty and suffering. In The Rambler, contradictions and apparent vacillations are not the result of negligence or expedience; on the contrary, they are the result of Johnson's relentless probing of the human condition.

The "discrepancies" in The Rambler essays take two basic forms, the apparent vacillation of the argument as it is worked from premise to conclusion and the apparent contradictions between the essays dealing with principle and those dealing with practice. In both cases, there is a tension between the two levels on which Johnson is forced to work; Johnson the moralist is bound to Christian dogma while Johnson the man sees human inabilities and weaknesses. Rambler 203 is a good example of the process in Johnson's reasoning which tries to reconcile man and moralist. The essay begins "It seems to be the fate of man to seek all his consolations in futurity. The time present is seldom able to fill desire or imagination with immediate enjoyment, and we are forced to supply its deficiencies by recollection or anticipation" (Rambler, V 291). After "Every one has so often detected the fullness of hope," humanity turns to the past for entertainment; however, when

time has supplied us with events sufficient to employ our thoughts, it has mingled them with so many disasters, that we shrink from their remembrance, dread their intrusion upon our minds, and fly from them as from enemies that pursue us with torture. (Rambler V 291, 292).

"Thus every period of life is obliged to borrow its happiness from the time to come" (Rambler V 293-4). But since "the future also has its limits," Johnson begins to draw to a close by saying "It is not therefore from this world, that any ray of comfort can proceed, to clear the gloom of the last hour" (Rambler V 294-5). Thus, after

establishing the fallaciousness of hope, Johnson concludes in the last paragraph

there is yet happiness in reserve, which, if we transfer our attention to it, will support us in the pains of disease, and the languor of decay. This happiness we may expect with confidence, because it is out of the power of chance, and may be attained by all that sincerely desire and earnestly pursue it. On this therefore every mind ought finally to rest. Hope is the chief blessing of man, and that hope only is rational, of which we are certain that it cannot deceive us.

Through eleven paragraphs Johnson surveys experience, where hope ends almost always in frustration, and then, in the last paragraph, puts all that aside, looks to God, and proclaims "Hope is the chief blessing of man." Structurally the argument hinges on the two meanings of futurity, one temporal and the other transcendent; Johnson the moralist intrudes upon Johnson the man, reminding himself and his readers that there are two vastly different types of future.

"Discrepancies" between the essays are also common in The Rambler. These differences often take the form of a conflict between the precept of a didactic essay and reality of human behavior in the portraits and letters to the editor. For instance, in Rambler 17, Johnson instructs

A frequent and attentive prospect of that moment, which must put a period to all our schemes, and deprive us of all our acquisitions, is, indeed, of the utmost efficacy to the just and rational regulation of our lives; nor would ever any thing wicked, or often any thing absurd, be undertaken or prosecuted by him who should begin every day with a serious reflection, that he is born to die. (Rambler, III 92)

Contrast this stand with Rambler 126, in which one of Johnson's "correspondents" states

To be always afraid of losing life, is, indeed, scarcely to

enjoy a life than can deserve the care of preservation. He that once indulges idle fears will never be at rest. Our present state admits only of a kind of negative security; we must conclude ourselves safe when we see no danger, or none inadequate to our powers of opposition. Death indeed continually hovers about us, but hovers commonly unseen, unless we sharpen our sight by useless curiosity. (Rambler IV, 307-8)

Again, the tension between the effect of death in reality and the moral intent of death is great, and is reconciled only through fine distinctions. Throughout The Rambler, Johnson the moralist urges humanity towards the perfection of which they are in theory capable, while Johnson the man sees the extent of human weakness and frailty. He sees implicitly precepts which do not address human problems, and, by the same token, problems to which few precepts are applicable. At times he binds problem and precept with diffuse cords in order to pacify both halves of his intellect. The need for this binding implies a growing awareness of man's inefficacy; moral precept appears no longer as the organizing principle of human life.

After the death of his wife, which followed by three days the last number of The Rambler in 1752, Johnson's prayers reveal an emotional turbulence which will continue into the last half of the 1760's. The prayers between March 1752 and the publication of The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissina in April, 1759, abandon the parallel structure of his earlier prayers, and take on more emotional tone. There are also differences in theological content, most notably in his petitions for forgiveness. In the Prayer for Easter Eve, 1757 he asks God to "look down with mercy upon me depraved with vain imaginations, and entangled in long habits of Sin" (p. 63.); on April 25, 1752 he asks God to "look with mercy on the affliction of thy unworthy servant, turn away thine anger

from me, and speak peace to my troubled soul." (p. 45); and on Easter, 1758, he asks God to "purify my thoughts from pollutions" and then, two days later, to sanctify his "afflictions" (pp. 64-65). The emotional intensity of his wording, when coupled with the absence of parallel structure, the increasing mentions of sloth and idleness, and his on increasing references to death, indicate a less confident Johnson, but one who still struggles to improve.

The theological content of the prayers between 1752 and 1759 shows also a weakening in confidence; we see Johnson for the first time requesting forgiveness. His first mention of forgiveness is in the prayers on April 25, 26 1752 written just after the death of his wife--"Forgive me, O merciful Lord, all my sins, and enable me to begin and perfect the reformation which I promised her" (p. 46).<sup>22</sup> He almost always requests forgiveness in the context of time irreparably lost: in a prayer titled "After Time Negligently And Unprofitably Spent," November 1752, he asks God to "Forgive me, that I have this day neglected the duty which thou has assigned to it and suffered the hours of which I must give account, to pass away without (promoting) Salvation" (Prayers, p. 49). For Easter, 1753 he asks--"Grant that by true contrition I may obtain forgiveness of all the Sins committed and of all the duties neglected in my union with the wife whom thou hast taken from me." (p. 51) In 1757 he asks God to "Pardon my sins, remove the impediments that hinder my obedience. Enable me to shake off Sloth, and to redeem the time mispent in idleness and Sin" (Prayers, p. 63). On the death of his mother on January 23, 1759, he implores "Forgive me whatever I have done unkindly to my Mother, and whatever I have omitted to do kindly" (Prayers, p. 66).

The prayer for Easter, April 15, 1759, shows Johnson at his most wretched and desolate. I will include it in its entirety:

Almighty and most merciful Father, look down with pity upon my sins. I am a sinner, good Lord, but let not my sins burthen me for ever. Give me thy Grace to break the chain of evil custom. Enable me to shake off idleness and sloth; to will and to do what thou hast commanded, grant me to be chaste in thoughts, words, and actions; to love and frequent thy worship, to study and understand thy word; to be diligent in my calling, that I may support myself and relieve others.

Forgive me, O Lord, whatever my Mother has suffered by my fault, whatever I have done amiss, and whatever duty I have neglected. Let me not sink into useless dejection; but so sanctify my Affliction, O Lord, that I may be converted and healed; and that, by the help of thy Holy Spirit, I may obtain everlasting life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

And O Lord, so far as it may be lawful, I commend unto thy fatherly goodness my father, brother, wife and mother, beseeching thee to make them happy for Jesus Christs sake. Amen. (Prayers, p. 69)

This prayer, written nearly three months after his mother's death and within days of the publication Rasselas, shows a deeply disturbed Johnson, in danger of sinking "into useless dejection." In Johnson's diaries, this prayer follows just after the prayer written on March 24, when Johnson moved from Gough Square to Staple Inn, in which Johnson asks that "by the change of outward things which I am now to make, callest me to a change of inward affections and to a reformation of my thoughts words and practices." (Prayers, p. 68) In the April 15 prayer, Johnson appears to have been unsuccessful in his "reformation," though it has been only three weeks. He is unable, in his eyes, "to break the chain of evil custom" or "to shake off idleness and sloth." Here, Johnson feels trapped by the habits he warned us against 11 years ago in "The Vision of Theodore." This last prayer, and the sequence of prayers leading up to it beginning from March 1752, show a Johnson less confident and struggling, trying to live a pious life. Although he

does not abandon his theological precepts of an exemplary sacrifice and the behavior necessary to be saved under an exemplary view, and will not until the 1770's, he does appear to have a much greater awareness of his own weakness, as well as the weakness of others. This perception of weakness causes Johnson great depression and despair in his prayers and also appears in his writing. This awareness of the weakness and inability of people to guide their own destiny which was seen in The Rambler grows, in Rasselas (1759) into a full survey of humanity's complete inability to guide its own destiny and make a "choice of life."<sup>23</sup>

#### Humanity on Its Own

That Johnson used the proceeds of Rasselas to help defer the cost of his mother's funeral is well known; there are other facts, however, which indicate the Rasselas is more than the quickly written product of impoverished grief. From looking at the letters, we see, as George Irwin suggests, Johnson writing with the "jumbled feelings of a troubled child."<sup>24</sup> He writes her two days before her death:

Dear honoured Mother  
 Neither your condition nor your character make it fit for me to say much. You have been the best mother, and I believe the best woman in the world. I thank you for your indulgence to me, and beg forgiveness of all that I have done ill, and all that I have omitted to do well. God grant you his Holy Spirit, and receive you to everlasting happiness, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.  
 Lord Jesus receive your spirit. Amen.

And then to Lucy Porter, just after his mother's death.

If she were to live again, surely I should behave better to her. But she is happy, and what is past is nothing to her; and for me, since I cannot repair my faults to her, I hope repentance will efface them. (Letters, #125)

On March 1, he writes to Lucy "I shall take it very kindly, if you make it a rule to write me once at least every week, for I am now very desolate, and am loath to be universally forgotten" (Letters, #129).

A comparison of the last two prayers discussed in the last section with these last letters reveals the disheveled state of Johnson's mind. The letter for March 1, when compared with the prayer on April 15 in which Johnson is in danger of sinking "into useless dejection," show a man alone and confused in the world. When considered as a part of this mass of grief, loneliness, and guilt, Rasselas emerges in a tale of extraordinary complexity.<sup>26</sup> Johnson's decision to cast Rasselas in the form of an oriental tale frees Johnson from a rigid plot structure, and makes room for digression and comment.<sup>27</sup> Although it is very obviously a Johnsonian survey of life, Rasselas has one important difference: it surveys human activity in a sphere external to God. Even though there are references to a Creator, and the "Being who made the Beings," the travelers from Abissinia conduct their quest in purely human and temporal terms. The unifying image of the tale is the Nile, "the Father of waters," and it symbolically leads them from the Happy Valley, resplendent with "vertue and fertility," through a survey of life which ends in the catacombs, "the habitations of the dead" (Rasselas, pp. 391, 479). In like manner, the travelers mature along the way, as they pass from naive discussion in the Happy Valley, through the observation of various schemes of life in Cairo, to experience and activity in the world. This coming of age teaches them finally that of the wishes which "they had formed they well knew that none could be obtained" (Rasselas, p. 482).

Our first view of Rasselas is in the Happy Valley where "every blast shook spices from the rocks, and every month dropped fruits upon the ground" (Rasselas, p. 392). However, during the description of the valley, there quickly arise indications that it is perhaps not Paradise. Words like "imprisonment," "seclusion," "tediousness," and "suspicion" suggest something less than utopia, and when taken in consideration with the chapter titles "The discontent of Rasselas in the happy valley" and "The wants of him that wants nothing," transform paradise into another realm of dissatisfaction. (Rasselas, pp. 392-3, 395) Having resolved to escape, Rasselas, "having now known the blessings of hope, resolved never to despair; he passes years with the comforts of hope and the "visionary bustle" surrounding the plan of escape until he is finally able to leave with his sister Nekayah, her favorite Pekuah, and the philosopher Imlac (Rasselas, p. 399-400).

After their escape, the travelers go to Cairo to observe all modes of life in order to make a proper "choice of life" (Rasselas, p. 429). As naive observers, they are first prone to believe appearances; Rasselas, after congratulating a wealthy man upon his possessions and happiness, is told by the man that "My condition indeed has the appearance of happiness, but appearances are delusive. My prosperity puts my life in danger" (Rasselas, p. 428). After several other incidents where appearance is discovered to be vastly better than reality, Rasselas and Nekayah resolve to search separately. Again they observe nothing but discontent, Nekayah finally asking

Answer, said she, great father of waters, thou that rollest thy floods through eighty nations, to the invocations of the daughter of thy native king, Tell me if thou waterest, through all thy course, a single habitation from which thou dost not hear the murmurs



of complaint? (Rasselas, p. 435)

When the prince discovers no better alternatives than his sister had, both become "almost discouraged from further search." Imlac replies that "while you are making the choice of life, you neglect to live" (Rasselas, p. 435-36). At this point the travelers enter into life and begin to live, still hopeful.

Leaving Cairo, they resolve to visit the Pyramids. In the process Pekuah is kidnapped; Rasselas and Nekayah are thus forced into life. We see Nekayah living in earnest

While she was doing something she kept her hope alive. As one expedient failed, another was suggested; when one messenger returned unsuccessful, another was despatched to a different quarter. (Rasselas, p. 451)

We see her sink into "silent pensiveness and gloomy tranquility," a state which Johnson was no doubt familiar. However, Pekuah is restored, faith renewed, and the travelers are off again, wiser but still hopeful. They meet the astronomer, a man of whom Nekayah states, "Surely...this man is happy" (Rasselas, p. 465). Again, however, they discover that all is not as it appears, for the astronomer suffers from a vaguely schizophrenic disorder in which he believes that he controls the heavens and the weather. The irony of this incident is biting. We see the travelers' great joy at discovering a man whose "integrity and benevolence are equal to his learning," whose "deepest researches and most favorite studies are willingly interrupted for any opportunity of doing good by his counsel or his riches." "To his closest retreat, at his most busy moments, all are admitted that want assistance" (Rasselas, p. 464). But even this virtuous man had "some painful sentiment pressed upon his mind" (Rasselas, p. 464). By now the travelers should be wiser, but their

search is like the "visionary schemes" of the astronomer: "When we first form them we know them to be absurd, but familiarize them by degrees, and in time lose sight of their folly" (Rasselas, p. 420).

Johnson movingly summarizes the course of life through the words of an old man--

My retrospect of life recalls to my view many opportunities of good neglected, much time squandered upon trifles, and more lost in idleness and vacancy. I leave many great designs unattempted, and many great attempts unfinished. My mind is burthened with no heavy crime, and therefore I compose myself to tranquility; endeavour to abstract my thoughts from hopes and cares, which, though reason knows them to be vain, still try to keep their old possession of the heart; expect, with serene humility, that hour which nature cannot long delay; and hope to possess in a better state that happiness which here I could not find, and that virtue which here I have not attained (Rasselas, p. 471-72).

The self-deception of the travelers, apparent throughout the whole course of their travels, is here strikingly evident. After this narrative, Rasselas consoles himself that age has "never been considered the season of felicity;" Nekayah suspects that age is "querulous and malignant;" and Pekuah imputes his complaints to "delirious dejection" (Rasselas, p. 472). Imlac, however, smiles "at the comforts which they could so readily procure to themselves" (Rasselas, p. 472).

Carey McIntosh contends that Johnson sets up in the last three chapters an "eschatological seriousness" in which the "choice of life becomes the choice of eternity."<sup>28</sup> He finds "a quiet climax in this penultimate chapter," in which all turn to God.<sup>29</sup> That Johnson alludes to God throughout and in Chapter 48 offers God as an alternative is obvious; however, nowhere is there any extended discussion of the means of salvation or of a religiously based hope for futurity. They must conduct

their serach outside of God's sphere. Nekayah's allusion to God while in the catacombs serves to isolate the travelers in their worldly sphere; surrounded by decay, they see the hope of eternity but do not discover any course of action to achieve it. In the last chapter, they return to their old ways, "charmed" by the "various schemes of happiness"; they are, however, wiser, knowing fully that "none could be obtained" (Rasselas, p. 482).

The travelers began their journey with confidence that they could make a "choice of life"; when they enter life at Chapter 30, experiencing the loss of Pekuah and all the other trials along the way, they had hope. However, in the end, knowing that "Of these wishes that they had formed, none could be obtained," the travelers are reduced to a state with neither confidence nor hope. The only thing to do is return to Abissinia, having failed in their quest. Johnson shows here the absurd and completely self-defeating nature of human effort without a God and a religiously based hope in futurity. In this world, Johnson shows that rational hope is completely bound to "the choice of eternity" and that human efforts are useless without it.

#### Despair and Finally Triumph

The six years after the publication of Rasselas were the darkest of Johnson's life. Indeed, he is at times literally unable to function. In his private writings, he is greatly tormented by his inability to live up to his resolves, he resolving all the more. For the period 1760-1770, there are four times as many lists as occur either before or after this time span. The following prayer and list is typical--

Easter Eve. 1761. Since the Communion of last Easter

I have led a life so dissipated and useless, and my terrours and perplexities have so much increased, that I am under great depression and discouragement, yet I purpose to present myself before God tomorrow with humble hope that he will not break the bruised reed.

Come unto me all ye that travail.

I have resolved, I hope not presumptuously, till I am afraid to resolve again. Yet hoping in God I steadfastly purpose to lead a new life. O God, enable me, for Jesus Christs sake.

My Purpose is

To avoid Idleness.

To regulate my sleep as to length and choice of hours.

To set down every day what shall be done the day following.

To keep a Journal.

To worship God more diligently.

To go to Church every Sunday.

To study the Scriptures.

To read a certain portion every week.

(Prayers, p. 73).

Johnson here recognizes his past failings but attempts yet again to live in a way that will promote his salvation. Again in 1762 he asks God to

grant that I may not be preserved to add wickedness to wickedness, but may so repent of my sins, and so order my life to come that when I shall be called hence... I may die in peace and in thy favor" (Prayers, p. 75).

In 1764, we have the most depressed of Johnson's prayers-

My indolence, since my last reception of the Sacrament has sunk into grosser sluggishness, and my dissipation spread into wilder negligence. My thoughts have been clouded with sensuality, and, except that from the beginning of this year I have in some measure forborn excess of Strong Drink my appetites have predominated over my reason. A kind of strange oblivion has overspread me, so that I know not what has become of the last year, and perceive that incidents and intelligence pass over me without leaving any impression.

This is not the life to which Heaven is promised.

Later in 1764, Johnson uses an image from the Book of Common Prayer that

characterizes not only his own environment, but also the environment of all men: "I went to Church prayed to be loosened from the chain of my sins" (emphasis is Johnson's); he continues:

I have now spent fifty five years in resolving, having from the earliest time almost that I can remember been forming schemes of a better life. I have done nothing; the need of doing therefore is pressing, since the time of doing is short. O God grant me to resolve aright, and to keep my resolution for Jesus Christs Sake. (Prayers, pp. 81-2)

And, finally, from that same evening he asks, "grant that I may turn from my wickedness and live" (Prayers, p. 83).

In the first prayer reproduced for 1764, Johnson appears numbed by "a kind of strange oblivion." This oblivion, taken in the context of the "chain of my sins" (written four months after), indicates a numbness resulting from a trapped Johnson, beaten down by his sins until he is senseless "so that I know not what has become of the last year." The chain image used here heightens the sense of Johnson's inability to reform himself and make "the life to which Heaven is promised." Through out the rest of 1764, he suffers from "vain terrors," "habitual wickedness," and "corrupt desires" (Prayers, p. 80, 80, 74). However, Johnson is not beaten; although he is "dejected," he is "not hopeless" (Prayers, p. 81).

By 1765, Johnson seems to have begun to come out of the depression of the early 1760's. His "recovery," however, was not progressive but ocured by fits and starts. In two prayers written in 1765, titled "Before the Study of Law" and "Engaging in Politicks," Johnson has a positive forward-looking attitude that has been long missing; he asks for "knowledge as may qualify me to direct the doubtful and instruct the ignorant" and guidance "that no deceit may mislead me,

nor temptation corrupt me, that may always endeavour to do good, and to hinder evil" (Prayers, p. 97, 98). The prayer for January 1, 1766, however, is again very desolate:

I again appear in thy presence the wretched misspender of another year which thy mercy has allowed me. O Lord let me not sink into total depravity, look down upon me, and rescue me at last from the captivity of Sin" (Prayers, p. 99).

Again, Johnson feels trapped by sin, unable to raise himself. Two months later, Johnson writes a prayer for his moving to New Market-- "...grant that I may use thy gifts to thy glory. Forgive me the time misspent. Relieve my perplexities. Strengthen my resolution..." (Prayers, p. 103) A comparison of these last two prayers will show the range of Johnson's mood swings: confer "wretched misspender of another year" with "Forgive me the time misspent" or "let me not sink into total depravity" with "Relieve my perplexities." The availability of another chance to do his "duty with vigour and constancy" seems to lift his spirits greatly (Prayers, 103). On the other hand, opportunities wasted cause tremendous self-recrimination. The inability to live up to his resources again causes him great distress.

Although the prayers for the period 1765 to 1770 vacillate occasionally as demonstrated above, a common theme appears, Johnson's references to doubts. For March, 1766, "Grant that I may no longer be disturbed with doubts...Grant that I may no more linger in perplexity;" for September 1766, "Deliver me, gracious Lord from the bondage of doubt;" for August, 1767 "procure me freedom of thought, and quietness of mind;" for January, 1769, "If it shall please thee, give quiet to my later days" (Prayers, pp. 107, 110, 115, 121). In all these instances, the form and wording of the prayers do not indicate

a depressed or desolute Johnson. They all tend to work more or less towards a typical prayer like this one for January 1, 1770:

Almighty God by whose mercy I am permitted to behold the beginning of another year, succour with thy help, and bless with thy favour, the creature whom thou vouchsafest to preserve. Mitigate, if it shall seem best unto thee, the diseases of my body, and compose the disorders of my mind. Dispel my terrours and grant that the time which thou shalt yet allow me, may not pass unprofitably away. Let not pleasure seduce me, Idleness lull me, or misery depress me. Let my remaining days be innocent and useful. Let me perform to thy glory and the good of my fellow creatures the work which thou shalt yet appoint me and grant that as I draw nearer to my dissolution, I may by the help of thy Holy Spirit feel my knowledge of Thee encreased, my hope exalted, and my Faith strengthened, that when the hour which is coming shall come, I may pass by a holy death to everlasting joy for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Hora secunda mane. Beginning--year (Prayers, p. 125)

There does not appear to be a particular facet of his religious life which is causing him doubts; it seems rather to be an uneasiness which is probably related to his theological precepts and not to his salvation (because his mood is reasonably good). The decrease in Johnson's requests for assistance in doing coupled with these doubts indicate a rethinking of his theology which will end finally in his full acceptance of the propitiatory nature of Christ's sacrifice. Johnson is facing the frustration he has experienced over the last twenty years and will in time break with his old perceptions. Boswell summarizes:

His supposed orthodoxy here cramped the vigorous powers of his understanding. He was confined by a chain which early imagination and long habit made him think massy and strong, but which, had he ventured to try, he could at once have snapt assunder (Life II, 104).

Throughout the 1770's, Johnson's prayer record gives a many and

varied response as he moves closer to the propitiatory model and to the behavior requirements of this view. The most important theme of these prayers is Johnson's realization of his shortcomings without a massive outpouring of emotion. In 1772, April, he writes--"By sleepless or unquiet nights and short days, made short by late rising, the time passes away uncounted and unneeded. Life so spent is useless"

(Prayers, p. 147). The prayer for New Year's Day, 1773 reads

Jan 1. MANE 1.33'. Almighty God, by whose mercy my life has been yet prolonged to another year, grant that thy mercy may not be vain. Let not my years be multiplied to encrease my guilt, but as age advances, let me become more pure in my thoughts, more regular in my desires, & more obedient to thy laws. Let not the cares of the world distract me, nor the evils of age overwhelm me. But continue and encrease thy loving kindness towards me, and when thou shalt call me hence, receive me to everlasting happiness, for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. (Prayers, p. 152-3)

He still realizes his failures and shortcomings, while not being wretched over them. His supplication is meek and confident, not desolate and desperate. Instead of the self-recrimination seen in the past over sloth and idleness, Johnson asks simply to become "more pure in my thoughts, more regular in my desires, and more obedient to thy Laws." The prayers hence forth will not very often dwell on particular sins or shortcomings, but will concentrate predominantly on Johnson's request to be made more holy. In September of 1773 he writes, "My hope is, for resolution I dare no longer call it, to divide my time regularly, etc." He then prays first for "pity," then for "support...in my declining years," asking only that God deliver him "from evil thoughts and scruples, and preserve me from the dangers of sinful presumption. Give me, if it be best for me, stability of purposes and tranquility of mind" (Prayers, p. 160-1).



Johnson apparently is comfortable enough to be in danger of "sinful presumption" and so must guard against it. Throughout the prayers, he calls constantly for an increase in faith and obedience, and for attributes pleasing to the sight of God. In the prayers of 1775, he seems to have slipped back into old habits of self-recrimination, asking, "why do I yet resolve again? I try because Reformation is necessary and despair is criminal. I try in humble hope of the help of God" (Prayers, p. 225). But now, burdened again with the weight of past sins, he has a "humble hope" even when confronted with the remembrance of all things he was unable to do.

Quinlan has shown that the "moment" of transformation in Johnson's view of the Atonement came on Easter 1776, when as Johnson received Communion "Some tender images struck me. I was so mollified by the concluding address to our Savior that I could not utter it."<sup>30</sup> From this point forward, Johnson, with little exception, approaches his death more assured and comfortable. In his last prayer, written just a week before his death, show Johnson at last reposing on the mercy of heaven and supported "by the Grace of heaven"

Almighty and most merciful Father, I am now, as to human eyes it seems, about to commemorate for the last time, the death of thy son Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Redeemer. Grant, O Lord, that my whole hope and confidence may be in his merits and in thy mercy: forgive and accept my late conversion, enforce and accept my imperfect repentance; make this commemoration [of] him available to the confirmation of my Faith, the establishment of my hope, and the enlargement of my Charity, and make the Death of thy son Jesus effectual to my redemption. Have mercy upon me and pardon the multitude of my offences. Bless my Friends, have mercy upon all men. Support me by the Grace of thy Holy Spirit in the days of weakness, and at the hour of death, and receive me, at my death, to everlasting happiness, for the Sake of Jesus Christ. Amen. (Prayers, p. 417-8)

In the prayers from 1760 to 1784, he has come from bitter guilt and self-recrimination into an acceptance of the salvation offered by Christ's propitiation. That the frustration of his broken resolutions is brought to rest in the late 1770's is apparent in the record of his prayers.

### Conclusion

"What must I do to be saved?" is the important question, which it becomes every human being to study from the first hour of reason to the last: but which we, my fellow prisoners, ought to consider with particular diligence and intensesness of meditation. (Sermons, p. 302)

Although written specifically to urge repentance among condemned men in Newgate, this quotation summarizes the dominant force in Johnson's life. In early life, strictly regulated conduct, "recommended by the example of him" who lived and died on our behalf, was Johnson's answer; at the end of his life, the answer is in "death of the Messiah, who is called in Scripture, 'The Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world'" (Life, IV 124). A shift of this magnitude is not solely the result of Reverend Samuel Clarke's comforting message and logical explanation, as Quinlan states. This shift, as I have tried to show, is caused by Johnson's progressive realization of the inability of the human being, amid all the temptations and passions of life, to regulate and perfect its life in order to affect its own salvation. Johnson, imprisoned and condemned by sin, is forced by his own weakness to re-evaluate his theological precepts.

Stepping into fame as moralist, Johnson was confident early on that man could, with diligence, make the climb up the "Mountain of Existence" safely. With the death of his wife and mother, guilt and fears steal

upon him, weakening his confidence, until a "strange oblivion" of depression and inactivity overtakes him in the 1760's. After this point, all of Johnson's meditations are in a state of resolution, growing less concerned with failed goals and lost time, and more concerned with living a holy life pleasing to God. The end of his life is forward-looking and peaceful. Johnson, at first confident, gradually realizes his absolute inability to earn salvation; this realization, causing initially tremendous depression, leads Johnson back to his prayer for Kitty Chambers--"Grant that the sense of her weakness may add strength to her faith..." (Prayers, p. 117). Johnson, realizing his weakness, puts finally his whole faith in Christ's propitiation and is loosened from the imprisonment of his sins.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Maurice Quinlan, Samuel Johnson: A Layman's Religion (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), Chapter 3.

<sup>2</sup>Quinlan, pp. 60-61. Johnson, when asked whose sermons were best in the English language, responded "Why, Sir, bating a little heresy those of Samuel Clarke," (John Hawkins, The Life of Samuel Johnson LL.D., 2 ed., London, 1787. p. 601). It is strange that the extremely controversial views of Clarke (namely the view that since there is no biblical basis for the Trinity, a Christian could believe as he pleased.). Quinlan says "it was Clarke's explanation of the Atonement that created Johnson's esteem for this sometimes unorthodox clergyman" (p. 61).

<sup>3</sup>William Law, "introduction to his section," in Eighteenth Century English Literature, ed. Geoffrey Tilliotson, Paul Fussell, Marshall Waingrow (New York: Harcourt, Bruce, Jovanovich, 1969), p. 482.

<sup>4</sup>William Law, A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1906) p. 1. All further references will appear in the text.

<sup>5</sup>James Boswell, Life of Johnson, ed. G. B. Hill, rev. L. F. Powell, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934) I. 68. All further references will appear in the text.

<sup>6</sup>Samuel Johnson, Diaries, Prayers, Annals, Vol. I of The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958), p. 56. All further references will appear in the text.

<sup>7</sup>Samuel Johnson, Sermons, Vol. XIV of The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), pp. 291-2. All further references will appear in the text.

<sup>8</sup>Boswell, I. 192.

<sup>9</sup>Samuel Johnson, "The Vision of Theodore" in Johnson: Poetry and Prose ed. Mona Wilson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), pp. 147, 149, 152. All further references will appear in the text.

<sup>10</sup>Savage will be discussed in its relationship to The Rambler.

<sup>11</sup>The trend in Johnsonian Studies to view Johnson's moral and religious thought as a static whole is reductive because it fails to take into consideration the dynamic nature of Johnson's diaries and prayers. Quinlan anticipates what I hope to be a change in this trend by his treatment of Johnson's view of the Atonement in a dynamic way.

<sup>12</sup>The prayer of Johnson's birthday, in 1738, reproduces The Prayer for all Conditions of Men and paraphrases the first two sentences of the

General Thanksgiving from The Book of Common Prayer. This is the only mention of forgiveness prior to 1752.

<sup>13</sup>"But there is mercy in him, therefore he shall be feared." From Sermon 2, Sermons, p. 19.

<sup>14</sup>W. J. Bate, The Achievement of Samuel Johnson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961). I quote the title of Chapter III.

<sup>15</sup>Samuel Johnson, Poems, Vol. VI of The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), p. 92, l. 5-6. All further references will appear in the text.

<sup>16</sup>Bate, p. 20.

<sup>17</sup>I Corinthians 13:13--"So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love." Oxford Annotated Bible.

<sup>18</sup>Bate, p. 30.

<sup>19</sup>Samuel Johnson, The Ramblers, Vol III, IV, and V of The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), V. 319, III. 129. All further references appear in the text.

<sup>20</sup>Patrick O'Flaherty, "Towards an Understanding of Johnson's Rambler," Studies in English Literature, XVIII (1978), 527. O'Flaherty, in addition to stimulating my thought on this subject, uses three images which are useful in understanding Johnson's stance as moralist and man in The Ramblers: a fortress under seige, a wanderer, and a ship lost on a stormy ocean (p. 529).

<sup>21</sup>Virginia Davidson in her article "Johnson's Life of Savage: The Transformation of a Genre" (Studies in Biography ed. Daniel Aaron, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), suggests that "Johnson exhibits the richly various responses available to the chorus in an almost rhythmic regularity, accommodating to himself typical choric patterns of omniscience, severity, compassion, caution, and regret" (p. 64). The sympathetic identification which Johnson felt for Savage, the result of midnight walks, etc., is analogous with the sympathy seen in The Ramblers.

<sup>22</sup>See note 12 above. At this point Johnson is only 27 years old.

<sup>23</sup>Samuel Johnson, The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissimia in Johnson: Poetry and Prose ed. Mona Wilson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 482.

<sup>24</sup>George Irwin, Samuel Johnson: A Personality in Conflict (Auckland, NZ: Auckland University Press, 1971), p. 109.

<sup>25</sup>Samuel Johnson, The Letters of Samuel Johnson ed. R.W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), I no. 123.

<sup>26</sup>In addition to Hazlitt, who found Rasselas morally "debilitating" and Hawkins, who felt that it would "extinguish all hope, and consequently industry," the critical poles of Rasselas are worlds apart. W.K. Wimsat, ("In Praise of Rasselas: Four Notes (Converging)" Imagined Worlds, ed. M. Mack, London 1968, pp. 111-36), contends that Rasselas was written quickly and perhaps carelessly. Alvin Whitney ("The Comedy of Rasselas," ELH 23 [1956]) sees it as a "dark comedy." Charles Pierce ("The Conflict of Faith and Fear in Johnson's Moral Writing," ECS Vol. 15 (1982), 317-338) sees Rasselas as an absurdist view of life (p. 334).

<sup>27</sup>D. M. Lockhart, "'The Fourth Son of the Mighty Emperor': The Ethiopian Background of Johnson's Rasselas" (LMLA 78 (1963), 316-328 and Richard Eversole "Imlac and the Poets of Persia and Arabia" (Philological Quarterly 58 (1979), 155-170) both provide convincing proof of Johnson's familiarity with Eastern culture and art.

<sup>28</sup>Carey McIntosh, The Choice of Life (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), p. 192.

<sup>29</sup>McIntosh, p. 193.

<sup>30</sup>The concluding address which "mollified" Johnson is

O Lord, the only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ;  
O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,  
that takest away the sins of the world,  
have mercy upon us. Thou that takest away  
the sins of the world, have mercy upon us.  
Thou that takest away the sins of the world,  
receive our prayer. Thou that sittest at  
the right hand of God the Father, have  
mercy upon us.

For thou only art holy; thou only art  
the Lord; thou only O Christ, with the  
Holy Ghost art most high in the glory of  
God the Father.

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources

- Boswell, James. Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson. LL.D. Ed. R. W. Chapman. London: Oxford University Press, 1957.
- Boswell, James. Life of Johnson. 6 Vols. Ed. G. B. Hill. Revised L. F. Powell. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971.
- Johnson, Samuel. Diaries, Prayers, Annals. Vol. I of The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958.
- Johnson, Samuel. The Rambler. Vol. III, IV, and V of The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969.
- Johnson, Samuel. Poems. Vol. VI of The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964.
- Johnson, Samuel. Sermons. Vol. XIV of The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978.
- Johnson, Samuel. Johnson: Poetry and Prose. Select. Mona Wilson. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967.
- Johnson, Samuel. The Letters of Samuel Johnson. Ed. R. W. Chapman. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952.

### Secondary Sources

- Bate, Walter Jackson. The Achievement of Samuel Johnson. New York: Oxford University Press, 1961.
- Bate, Walter Jackson. Samuel Johnson. New York: Harcourt, Bruce, Jovanovich, 1977.
- Clifford, James. Dictionary Johnson. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979.
- Davidson, Virginia Spencer. "Johnson's Life of Savage: Transformation of a Genre." In Studies in Biography No. 8 in Harvard English Studies. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978.

- Folkenflik, Robert. Samuel Johnson, Biographer. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978.
- Green, Donald. Samuel Johnson. No. 95 in Twaynes English Authors Series. New York: Twayne, 1970.
- Hardy, J. P. Samuel Johnson: A Critical Study. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976.
- Knight, C. A. "The Writer as Hero in Johnson's Periodical Essays." Papers on Language and Literature, 13 (1977), 238-50.
- McCarthy, William. "The Moral Art of Johnson's Lives." SEL, 17 (1977), 503-17.
- McIntosh, Carey. The Choice of Life. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973.
- O'Flaherty, Patrick. "Towards an Understanding of Johnson's Rambler." SEL, XVIII (1978), 523-36.
- Pierce, Charles E. "The Conflict of Faith and Fear in Johnson's Moral Writing." ECS, 15 (1982), 317-338.
- Rader, Ralph W. "Literary Form in Factual Narrative: The Example of Boswell's Johnson." In Essays in Eighteenth-Century Biography. Ed. Philip B. Daghlican. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968, pp. 3-42.
- Tilliotson, Geoffrey. "William Law." In Eighteenth Century English Literature. Ed. Geoffrey Tilliotson, et al. New York: Harcourt, Bruce, Jovanovich, 1969.



## Vita

David Dean was born November 17, 1960 to Mr. and Mrs. Don Dean in Amarillo, Texas. He graduated from Amarillo High School in 1979 and entered Texas Christian University the following Fall. He transferred to Texas A&M for academic year 1980-81, majoring in Biology. He changed his major to English in Spring 1981. He will graduate in May of 1983, after which he will attend Southern Methodist University School of Law. His permanent address is 6620 Roxton, Amarillo, Texas 79109.