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**From the Garden of Eden to the new creation in Christ : A theological investigation into the significance and function of the Old Testament imagery of Eden within the New Testament**

James Cregan

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**FROM THE GARDEN OF EDEN TO THE NEW  
CREATION IN CHRIST: A THEOLOGICAL  
INVESTIGATION INTO THE SIGNIFICANCE  
AND FUNCTION OF OLD TESTAMENT  
IMAGERY OF EDEN WITHIN THE NEW  
TESTAMENT.**

**James M. Cregan**

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the  
University of Notre Dame, Australia.

School of Philosophy and Theology, Fremantle.

November 2017

“It is thus that the bridge of eternity does its spanning for us: from the starry heaven of the promise which arches over that moment of revelation whence sprang the river of our eternal life, into the limitless sands of the promise washed by the sea into which that river empties, the sea out of which will rise the Star of Redemption when once the earth froths over, like its flood tides, with the knowledge of the Lord.

- Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*.

“Once in his life a man ought to concentrate his mind upon the remembered earth, I believe. He ought to give himself up to a particular landscape in his experience; to look at it from as many angles as he can, to wonder upon it, to dwell upon it.”

- Navarre Scott Momaday, “The Earth.”

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## **Abstract**

The thesis is intended as an analytical and critical introduction to a developing theology of Eden. It compares a range of Old Testament understandings pertaining to the imagery of the Garden of Eden, as the basis for a study of the appropriation, integration and transformation of Edenic imagery in the New Testament. It does so in the context of Christian theology which, for a variety reasons, has been generally subdued, if not ambivalent, in articulating the relationship between the imagery of Eden and the representation of the New Creation in Christ. The purpose of the thesis, then, is not just to strengthen the theological imagination, but also to re-familiarise and educate contemporary audiences as to the appearance, function, and potency of the imagery of Eden in the New Testament. In this process of analysis and reflection, Eden is revealed as a primary organising, mediating, and meaning-generating motif through which the New Testament writers gave religious and cultural value to the accommodation of human experience to the revelation of God.

In considering the metaphor of hope and renewal at the heart of the imagery of Eden, the thesis argues for the reliability of the language of faith to reveal God's truth. It adopts a methodology of dialogical hermeneutics in recognition of the multivalent and multi-vocal aspects of Edenic imagery, characteristics that in themselves have been identified as a source of the suspicion towards Eden. This way of theological inquiry is informed by the hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur, which acknowledges and incorporates human experience into critical and analytical procedure. It also draws on the ethical metaphysics of Emmanuel Levinas, which underlines the movement of a subject towards God's otherness and transcendence within language, one of the fundamental functions of Eden. Informed on this basis the thesis asserts that figurative language, in this case the imagery of Eden, is deemed to be not merely ornamental to language but fundamentally formative and integrative of Christian faith and knowledge.

### **Signed Statement**

This research is the candidate's own work and contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution. To the best of my knowledge, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text.

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**James Cregan**

November 2017



# **INTRODUCTION**

## Overview.

The worship of God is disclosed in both the Old and New Testaments as both the purpose and assurance of human existence. To worship God is also to move in the knowledge of God.<sup>1</sup> In ancient Israel this fundamental reality was confirmed in *Torah*, the framework of law revealed by God which governed every aspect of Jewish life. In contrast, in the New Testament, the Incarnation set about revealing God's promise of salvation in Jesus the Christ.<sup>2</sup> To live in the Law, or in Christ, was to consolidate oneself and one's community not just in the eternal hope of redemption, but also in the memory of creation, and of revelation.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, it was the facility of Judaism and Christianity to articulate, "a viably transcendent hope for the human condition, the redemptive expectation of a world at once restored and new," which animated and informed the social, cultural, and intellectual life of their respective communities.<sup>4</sup>

Predominantly, this sense of hope and renewal was expressed through the eschatological themes prevalent in imagery pertaining to the Garden of Eden, at the intersection of the concrete reality of human experience and God's transcendent, overbrimming grace. That is to say, the elements of beauty, light, healing, peace, abundance, solidarity, and security found in the imagery of the Garden of Eden were offered as an idealised representation of God's loving predisposition towards the world, and as the abiding sign of human unity with God. To be sure, such is the enduring power of the image of the biblical Eden in the Western cultural imagination that the literary critic Northrop Fry declared that, "every act of the free intelligence, including the poetic intelligence, is an attempt to return to

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<sup>1</sup> Deut 6:4-9. cf. 1 Jn 2:3-6; 5:3.

<sup>2</sup> John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: Messianism in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2010), 2-3.

<sup>3</sup> Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, transl. W. Hallo (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 363.

<sup>4</sup> Guy G. Stroumsa, "Introduction: the paradise chronotope," in Markus Bockmuehl and Guy G. Stroumsa, eds., *Paradise in Antiquity: Jewish and Christian Views* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 2.

Eden, a world in the human form of a garden, where we may wander as we please but cannot lose our way.”<sup>5</sup>

It is conspicuous, then, as Terje Stordalen has observed, that given the anchoring role of Eden in western religious consciousness, “gardens should receive so little attention among biblical scholars.”<sup>6</sup> Walther Eichrodt, for example, in what is considered one of the classic texts on the prophet Ezekiel, affords just 6 pages out of over 600 to Ezekiel 47:1-12, that describes the re-creation of the Jerusalem temple through the use of a recognisable Eden typology.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Walther Zimmerli, “one of the exegetical giants of the mid-twentieth century,”<sup>8</sup> devotes just over 10 pages to that same passage, part of the climax to which the Book of Ezekiel builds, out of a double volume of commentary of nearly 1000 pages.<sup>9</sup>

Reflecting more broadly on Stordalen’s concerns, Joachim Schaper was equally puzzled that, “the main part of modern critical scholarship on Genesis 2-3 does not comment upon the term *Gan* (i.e. garden) or the presumed biblical Hebrew concept ‘garden/park.’”<sup>10</sup> David Brown’s extended examination of the importance of mediating the experience of God through a ‘sense of place’ arrives at a parallel view – that Christian attachment to the religious significance of gardens in general and, by inference, Eden in particular, is “subdued.”<sup>11</sup> It would appear that, despite the canonical status of the Garden of Eden ‘bookending’ the Bible, and its subsequent power to give material

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<sup>5</sup> Helen Wilcox, “Milton and Genesis: Interpretation as Persuasion,” in Gerard P. Luttikhuisen, ed., *Paradise Interpreted: Representations of Biblical Paradise in Judaism and Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 197.

<sup>6</sup> Joachim Schaper, “The messiah in the garden: John 19:38-41, (royal) gardens, and messianic concepts,” in Bockmuehl and Stroumsa, *Paradise in Antiquity*, 17.

<sup>7</sup> Walther Eichrodt, *Ezekiel: A Commentary*, transl. Coslett Quin (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970).

<sup>8</sup> See Ralph W. Klein, “Ezekiel at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century,” in Margaret S. Odell and John T. Strong, eds., *The Book of Ezekiel: Theological and Anthropological Perspectives* (Atlanta: Society for Biblical Literature, 2000), 1.

<sup>9</sup> Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Chapters 25-48*, transl. James D. Martin (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).

<sup>10</sup> Schaper, “The messiah in the garden,” 17.

<sup>11</sup> David Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place: Reclaiming Human Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 371.

form to the identity and aspirations of both Judaism and Christianity, there remains an apparent reticence towards, or suspicion of, engaging with Eden as a serious theological topic. A concomitant hiatus in Christian theology, in relation to the value and purpose of Edenic imagery, exists as a result.

The intention of this thesis is to address this perceived absence by using a range of Old Testament understandings of the Garden of Eden as a basis for recovering a broader appreciation of the presence and meaning of Edenic imagery in New Testament writings. In doing so it also seeks to challenge one of the presumptions on which this contraction of the theological status of Eden is justified – that the Garden of Eden, “had little significance to Jesus or his followers.”<sup>12</sup>

The “newly vibrant” interest in ancient eschatology<sup>13</sup> that has served as the catalyst for a variety of texts that reference ‘Paradise,’ the post-Septuagint Greek term for the mythical Garden of Eden,<sup>14</sup> points to an increasing awareness of the topic. Notable exceptions notwithstanding, this attention is frequently incidental, or secondary, to wider historical, environmental, aesthetic, philosophical, or socio-political concerns.<sup>15</sup> That is to say, the ‘theology’ of Eden, which presumes, within the Christian tradition, a degree of reflection upon both that tradition and our common human experience,<sup>16</sup> is subsumed within other discourses, leading to perceptions of Eden that can appear disparate or partial.

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<sup>12</sup> Stroumsa, “Introduction,” 8.

<sup>13</sup> Guy Stroumsa, “Introduction,” 2.

<sup>14</sup> Jean Delumeau, *History of Paradise: The Garden of Eden in Myth and Tradition*, transl. Matthew O’Connell (New York: Continuum, 1995), 3.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Rita Nakashima Brock & Rebecca Ann Parker, *Saving Paradise: How Christianity Traded Love of this World for Crucifixion and Empire* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2008); Ellen Davis, *Scripture, Culture & Agriculture: an Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Denis Edwards, *Jesus the Wisdom of God: An Ecological Theology* (Homebush: St. Pauls, 1995); and Norman Wirzba, *The Paradise of God: Renewing God in an Ecological Age* (New York: O.U.P., 2003).

<sup>16</sup> David Tracy, “Eschatological Perspectives on Aging,” *Pastoral Psychology*. 24/229 (Winter 1975): 119.

The fragmented reception of Eden can be attributed in some measure to the difficulty in apprehending meanings lost in antiquity. Margaret Barker, in the introduction to her study of the relationship between the narrative motifs of the New Testament and the symbolic dimension of the ancient Jerusalem Temple, comments on the challenge of trying to piece together a coherent and comprehensive understanding of the significance, function and context of material that is at once very old, fragmentary, and frequently located in texts that lie outside of the recognised canons.<sup>17</sup> A. Hilhorst, writing some ten years earlier, in relation to elaborating a history of the concept of ‘Paradise,’ similarly points out that, “The difficulties are formidable. We have to consult many texts, many of which are in a bad state of transmission and hard to date exactly.”<sup>18</sup> Experiencing the same challenges in his investigations of the relationship between the ‘flaming sword’ guarding Eden, and the Tree of Life, Menahem Kister simply quoted a more ancient source stating that, “The tree of life is five hundred years distance.”<sup>19</sup>

What Barker, Hilhorst, and Kister have each identified is the problem of trying to reach definitive understandings about ancient artefacts and practices that are acceptable to current standards of scholarship, and which can confidently be used to expand our current knowledge of the use and meaning of the imagery of Eden, rather than create more confusion. This is a problem previously encountered by Gerhard von Rad who, in relation to technical analysis of the story of “Paradise” and The Fall, concluded that, “The results of this research... were complex, to be sure, and often mutually contradictory.”<sup>20</sup>

Von Rad’s comment remains pertinent. In the context of New Testament theology, Guy Stroumsa’s assertion in relation to the

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<sup>17</sup> Margaret Baker, *On Earth as it is in Heaven: Temple Symbolism in the New Testament* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009), ix-xii.

<sup>18</sup> A. Hilhorst, “A Visit to Paradise: Apocalypse of Paul 45 and Its Background,” in Luttikhuisen, ed. *Paradise Interpreted*, 130.

<sup>19</sup> Menahem Kister, “The tree of life and the turning sword,” in Bockmuehl and Stroumsa, eds., *Paradise in Antiquity*, 140.

<sup>20</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary (Revised)* (London: SCM, 1973), 74.

diminished significance of Eden to Jesus and his followers can be contrasted with the view of Barker, who proposes that Jesus' theology was developed from what she believes was the eclipsed faith of First Temple Judaism, where the polyvalent qualities of the Garden of Eden were central organising principals.<sup>21</sup> In another example of the frequently contested understandings regarding the comprehension of the meaning of Eden, Grant Macaskill argues that the life sustaining reality of God, manifest through the Edenic images of water in Revelation 22, is equivalent to the presence of the Holy Spirit in the world. It is a notion that some contemporary scholars dismiss as "fanciful."<sup>22</sup> Whilst such differences in opinion are the stuff of scholarship it is also evident that a comprehensive, integrated, and relatively stable theology of Eden, against which deeper theological reflection can proceed, remains elusive.

### **Why is there Reticence to Approach a Theology of Eden?**

There are a variety of reasons as to why, and how, the apparent reticence about, suspicion of, ambivalence towards, and sometimes indifference to, the study of the symbolism of Eden developed, especially in Christian theology. The key reasons are frequently complex and detailed, nine of which can be summarised under the following areas:- i) the perceived isolated and marginal status of Genesis 2-3; ii) the perception of the Eden story as one of minor cosmological significance; iii) philological concerns; iv) historical issues; v) the perceived minor role of the Eden story in early Jewish and Christian literature; vi) a shift in emphasis in the New Testament from the terrestrial to the heavenly Eden; vii) the movement from a pastoral to an urbanised and institutional view of Eden; viii) the complex relationship between Eden and modernity, including the

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<sup>21</sup> Margaret Barker, *Temple Theology: An Introduction* (London: SPCK, 2004), 88-89.

<sup>22</sup> Grant Macaskill, "Paradise in the New Testament," in Bockmuehl and Stroumsa, eds, *Paradise in Antiquity*, 77.

Church's ambivalent perception of Eden; and ix) the ambiguity between Eden and wilderness, especially as expressed in the notion of the "wilderness state." Let us now proceed to examine these areas of concern.

Firstly, there exists the perception of some notable Old Testament scholars, for example von Rad and Brueggemann, amongst others, of Genesis 2-3 as a marginal text in biblical Hebrew literature.<sup>23</sup> These scholars, in Stordalen's view, make assumptions about the age of the Garden of Eden story in the canonical Bible that erroneously place the related passages later than the Edenic references in the Prophetic or Wisdom literature in the Old Testament. According to this interpretation, the passages referencing Eden in Genesis 2-3 are hence unable to reliably contribute to their interpretation. Indeed, it was one of Stordalen's explicit motivations to embark on his comprehensive analysis of the symbolism of the Garden of Eden in biblical Hebrew Literature to refute this,<sup>24</sup> arguing that the assumptions that inform the argument are unsustainable, mistaken, or simply unproductive in generating new knowledge or insights about meanings contained within these ancient texts.

The inherent layers of complexity in theological discourse about Eden is revealed in miniature in this debate. Stordalen is predominantly referring to what he regards as the erroneous assertions of Walter Brueggemann,<sup>25</sup> as exemplified in Brueggemann's commentary on the Book of Genesis. But Stordalen also cites von Rad who, Stordalen claims, argues that "no biblical prophet, psalmist or narrator made identifiable reference to this story."<sup>26</sup> This is a confusing comment by Stordalen, and one that is possibly based on a typographical error. Not only does von Rad's putative comment not appear on the page

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<sup>23</sup> Terje Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden: Genesis 2-3 and the Symbolism of the Eden Garden in Biblical Hebrew Literature* (Leven: Peeters, 2000), 21, 22, 456.

<sup>24</sup> Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 456.

<sup>25</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis: Interpretation Bible Commentary* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1982), 41.

<sup>26</sup> Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 21, 456.

referenced by Stordalen, it contrasts with von Rad's expressed view that the unity of the Eden story comes about through, "the assumption of various narrative contexts that were attracted to one another and united long *before* the present literary form took shape." Von Rad then asks rhetorically if the Israelite kingdom had no concrete or geographical conception of the Hebrew word *`ēden*, not because of a sense of marginalisation, but because of imprecision in the way the term is used. In answering his own question he then refers explicitly to the prophets referencing Eden, "as a quite definite term of mythically theological illustration... (Isa 51.3; Ezek 28.13; 31.9)."<sup>27</sup>

A second reason, identified by Stordalen, for the perceived marginal or isolated status of Genesis 2-3, is the view that the passages expressed a cosmology that was of minor importance in the Yahwist religion when compared with more important 'history theology.'<sup>28</sup> Stordalen rejects this position by asserting that creation motives did have significance in the Jerusalemite cult, both scripturally, as in in the doxologies of Amos,<sup>29</sup> and in the early title for God of Israel as *El Elyon*.<sup>30</sup> He also points to a growing appreciation of the social importance and function of cosmology in these ancient communities that must be acknowledged, analysed, and integrated into existing understandings in order to advance knowledge of these biblical texts.

Thirdly, there are philological concerns that, since the word *paradeisos*, or Paradise – the Eden of the Septuagint and Vulgate – was originally of Medean or Persian origin,<sup>31</sup> occurring only as a late loan word in biblical Hebrew,<sup>32</sup> there is little theological value in the

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<sup>27</sup> See von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 78.

<sup>28</sup> Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 23-24.

<sup>29</sup> Amos 5:8-9; 9:5-6.

<sup>30</sup> That is, 'God most high.' Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 24.

<sup>31</sup> For a detailed description and analysis of this see Jan N. Bremmer, "Paradise: from Persia, via Greece, into the *Septuagint*," in Gerard P. Luttikhuisen, ed. *Paradise Interpreted: Representations of Biblical Paradise in Judaism and Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 1-20.

<sup>32</sup> Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 84.



historical analysis of the concept, especially in Genesis 2.<sup>33</sup> That is to say, since historical philology had discovered that the Hebrew word פֶּרְדִּים (*pardes*)<sup>34</sup> was itself originally exotic, the reading of παράδεισος (*paradeisos*)<sup>35</sup> in the LXX (and Vulgate), from which it derived, was deemed irrelevant to historical interpretation of Genesis 2.<sup>36</sup> Consequently, the perceived invalid biblical status of the word ‘paradise’ gave impetus to the dismissal of the concept ‘garden,’ and concomitantly the Garden of Eden, as a topic of serious theological analysis.<sup>37</sup>

Fourthly, there were historical issues with what might be described as ‘the many voices of Eden.’ This suggests that another reason as to why the concept of the Garden of Eden received indifferent treatment by orthodox Christian and Jewish scholars, particularly in the early part of the first millennium, relates to the perceived difficulties with the concept’s polyvalent, or polysemic, characteristics. This centres on the understanding that Eden’s qualities cannot be constrained within a particular religious polemic, but rather the way Eden generates multiple meanings, frequently in play simultaneously, that are both material and transcendent. Stroumsa further develops this aspect of Eden’s polyvalency by adopting the term ‘*chronotope*’ from Bakhtinian poetics.<sup>38</sup> Most probably confusing the word with Bahktin’s original ‘*chronotope*’ (literally time/space), Stroumsa describes how Edenic imagery exists not just in the material present,

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<sup>33</sup> Stordalen, for example, cites a number of eminent Old Testament Scholars who, he feels, have neglected comment or analysis of ‘the garden’ despite the word’s strong presence in Hebrew biblical literature. These include Holzinger, Driver, König, Speiser, von Rad, Westermann, Brueggemann, Wenham, amongst others. See Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 84.

<sup>34</sup> Where the Hebrew term *pardes* refers to a park, or garden, or orchard.

<sup>35</sup> The Greek term referring to an enclosed garden, or orchard, or agricultural storeroom.

<sup>36</sup> Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 85. See also Schaper, “The messiah in the garden,” 19.

<sup>37</sup> Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 85.

<sup>38</sup> After the Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), Russian philosopher and literary critic. Bahktin argued for the fundamental interconnectedness between time and space, and the ‘dialogical’ generation of meaning in literary texts. See, for example, Nehama Aschkenasy, “Reading Ruth Through a Bakhtinian Lens: The Carnavalesque in a Biblical Tale,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 126, no. 3 (Fall, 2007): 437-453. Accordingly, the terms ‘*chronotope*’ and ‘*chronotopic*’ will be preferred in this thesis, unless where specifically using Stroumsa’s variation.

but also has the capacity to move backward and forward along the axis of time. It is also mobile in space, moreover, shifting between, or sometimes integrating, heaven and earth.<sup>39</sup> Stroumsa argues that this open comprehension of time and space developed from *ad hoc* post-Genesis perceptions in early Judaism, the result of Paradise imagery generating a range of dynamic meanings beyond those already in existence.<sup>40</sup> These alternative understandings were, in turn, appropriated by a variety of competing religious groups.

For Stroumsa, it was the uncontrollable variability of possible meanings generated within, and by, Edenic imagery which unsettled first century Jewish and Christian theologians. Endeavouring, as they were, to develop an acceptable orthodoxy that would “underline and reinforce the ecclesial structures they were building”<sup>41</sup> their response was a deliberate strategy against what they perceives as Gnostic myth-making. This involved putting, “less emphasis than their competitors on the interpretation of the first chapters of Genesis... to avoid discussing the same issues at great length and to move the focus elsewhere.”<sup>42</sup> The reception of the canonical representation of Eden, then, became a casualty of the religio-political circumstances of first century Palestine.

Fifthly, in light of the description of the attempted repression, censorship, and marginalisation of the Eden story in early Christianity and first century Judaism, it follows that the story of Adam and Eve is held to play a very minor role in Christian and Jewish literature of that time.<sup>43</sup> This situation, and the contraction in the power and status of the Eden story in the historical consciousness of Christian theology it engendered, is amplified, according to Stroumsa, by the inter-textual

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<sup>39</sup> Guy G. Stroumsa, “Introduction,” 2.

<sup>40</sup> Stroumsa, “Introduction,” 1.

<sup>41</sup> Stroumsa, “Introduction,” 3.

<sup>42</sup> Stroumsa, “Introduction,” 10.

<sup>43</sup> Stroumsa, “Introduction,” 8.

demands of early Christian texts.<sup>44</sup> That is to say, for early Christian communities the ancient Hebrew texts can only be properly understood through the lens of the Christ event, and vice versa.<sup>45</sup> Notwithstanding Paul's representation of Jesus as the New Adam, presiding over the New Temple,<sup>46</sup> the effect of this reading back into the Hebrew Scriptures of the Christ narrative, in the context of an environment of suspicion towards the Eden story and Edenic imagery, is a significant attenuation of the value of the original Eden narrative.

A sixth possible reason for the diminution of the importance of Eden in Christian theology lies in what is described as the shift in emphasis from the terrestrial Eden of Genesis 2-3 to the heavenly Jerusalem of Revelation 21-22. Perceived 'scriptural limitations' of the Garden of Eden, or its paradisiacal equivalent, are also frequently cited as potential reasons for its diminished status, and subsequent marginal treatment, in Christian theology. Broadly speaking, these limitations can be located under two sub-categories: a) that of the 'realised eschatology'<sup>47</sup> of Christ's incarnation, which is held to empty Eden of its temporal power; and b) the shift in emphasis from Eden as the terrestrial home of God to that of Eden manifest as the heavenly Jerusalem, and subsequently on earth in the form of the Christian Church, as evidenced in the textual movement from Genesis 2-3 to Revelation 21-22. In ecclesial terms the result of this shift is the displacement in the status of Eden from that of a serious theological topic to one largely of church ornamentation.

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<sup>44</sup> Stroumsa, "Introduction," 8. See also Hans Walter Wolf, "The Kerygma of the Yahwist," in Walter Brueggemann & Hans Walter Wolff, *The Vitality of the Old Testament Traditions* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1975), 42, 43.

<sup>45</sup> Steve Moyise, "Intertextuality and historical approaches to the use of Scripture in the New testament: A Review," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 26/2 (2005): 447-450.

<sup>46</sup> Rom 5:12-18; 1 Cor 15:45.

<sup>47</sup> For O'Callaghan, the distinction between the characteristics of a 'realised' eschatology and those pertaining to conventional eschatology is moot, insofar as, "it should be said that Christ in person is our *eschaton*. With the coming of Christ . . . God has said his last Word, and has no reason to 'come' anew to humanity until he comes again in glory. In Christ, John tells us, God's eschatological glory has been definitively revealed (Jn 1:14, 18)." See Paul O'Callaghan, *Christ Our Hope: An Introduction to Eschatology* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 330-331.

Seventh, and related to the themes identified immediately above, there is a substantial view that the original verdant Eden has been displaced and diminished in Christian thinking by a more urbanised and institutional understanding of the manifestation of God’s glory. The impetus for this shift came from a number of sources. Perhaps understanding more fully the theological implications of an unenclosed Eden of Genesis 2-3 as an expression of the uncontainable quality of God’s blessing and glory,<sup>48</sup> the notion of Eden as a walled garden was never adopted by the rabbinic texts of the Talmud.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, writers as diverse as Philo of Alexandria and Gregory of Nyssa use simple representations that emphasis Eden as a place of leafy abundance.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, and possibly drawing more explicitly on the Hebrew root *gmn*, which suggests ‘cover,’ or ‘defence,’<sup>51</sup> “exegetical tradition tended to eventually assimilate the distinctive but unenclosed garden of Genesis to the enclosed one of the Canticle (Song of Solomon) and both to the walled city of Revelation.”<sup>52</sup>

From the perspective of a dominant Augustinian tradition on the site of The Fall, the status of the original Eden within Christian theology was deemed an ambiguous one. This is because Eden was perceived to be, “marked by an early and irreversible loss and maintained by compromise made in the structure of the original model to accommodate it to the condition of a saved rather than an unfallen race.”<sup>53</sup> Accordingly, the provision of walls around ‘paradise,’ reflected in the architecture of Eden, is held not to signify loss or contraction but rather, divine intervention. It is a redemptive interruption of what was perceived as the ‘natural order,’ “pointing up

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<sup>48</sup> Cf. Zech 2:4-5.

<sup>49</sup> William Alexander McClung, *The Architecture of Paradise: Survivals of Eden and Jerusalem* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 3.

<sup>50</sup> McClung, *The Architecture of Paradise*, 3.

<sup>51</sup> Donald W. Parry, “The Cherubim, the Flaming Sword, the Path, and the Tree of Life,” in John W. Welch and Donald W. Parry, eds., *The Tree of Life: From Eden to Eternity* (Salt Lake City: Desert Books, 2011), 2-3.

<sup>52</sup> McClung, *The Architecture of Paradise*, 3.

<sup>53</sup> McClung, *The Architecture of Paradise*, 17.

the power of Grace to undo the natural propensities of human will and signifying life-giving separation between nature and Grace.”<sup>54</sup>

McClung argues that within the context of a previously corrupted natural world renewed through the presence of a New Jerusalem, the survival of Eden depended both scripturally and architecturally upon whatever accommodation could be reached with the city. Indeed, to survive at all, Eden had to become a garden-city,<sup>55</sup> with a surrounding wall, a notion that later found expression in the monastery, the cathedral,<sup>56</sup> and even in the utopian ideals of the modern city itself.<sup>57</sup> In doing so the Edenic characteristics familiar in Genesis 2-3 were transformed in a variety of ways, most of which led to the diminution of the pastoral Eden in favour of its urban counterpart.

An eighth identifiable theme, when considering what this thesis contends is the insufficient attention Eden has received in Christian theology, lies in the uneasy relationship between Eden and modernity. This suggests that the Garden of Eden appears to be naturally and ontologically at odds with modernity, insofar as Eden does not submit itself easily to the required certainties of an intellectual system - modernism - that is perceived to delimit both the range of participating values as well as the potential outcomes generated by rationalist processes. The progressive challenge to the ‘truth’ of Eden expressed in the Scriptures has been exacerbated by scientific discoveries in fields such as anthropology and palaeontology, the

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<sup>54</sup> McClung, *The Architecture of Paradise*, 20.

<sup>55</sup> McClung, *The Architecture of Paradise*, 19.

<sup>56</sup> See Denis R. McNamara, *Catholic Church Architecture and the Spirit of the Liturgy* (Chicago: Hillebrand, 2009), 37.

<sup>57</sup> This is the broad thesis of Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970). See, in particular pp 188-209. Ellul predominantly borrows the symbolism of Eden, and the theology of St. John and the writer of Revelation, to make a sociological point – that given the transference of the locus of human activity from the country to the city, there is a commensurate responsibility to transform cities, such that, “the detestable, gangrenous suburb I have to walk through, the workers’ shacks with their peeling paint and permanent layers of dirt, the tool sheds sinking into the sewers and streams that reek of washings and toilets ... all are gone, transformed into a wall of pure gold, a new enclosure for the city, pierced by the river of living water, as by an eternal crystal.” Ellul, *The Meaning of The City*, 209.

fossil records of the earth, which reduces the content of the creation stories to ‘mere myth.’<sup>58</sup> Paul Ricoeur, concerned with the technical characteristics of Western modernity, and the psychological symptoms it is held to produce, such as self-consciousness and its corollary, alienation, summarises its effects as those of ‘de-sacralisation.’ This can best be described as the situation that emerged from the dominating power of science and technology wherein nature is no longer perceived by modern persons as a ‘store of signs.’ Indeed, “its great correspondences have become mute to them.”<sup>59</sup> As a consequence, modern persons, “no longer have a sacred space, a templum, a holy mountain,<sup>60</sup> or an axis mundi.”<sup>61</sup> That is to say, the modern person has lost touch with Eden in anything other than its secular manifestations.

The Church itself has historically been supportive of ‘modernisation,’<sup>62</sup> but has perceived ‘modernity’ with difficulty where modernity is held to displace values concerning the dignity and integrity of the human person that are central to the Church’s identity and mission.<sup>63</sup> I would argue, in addition, that the force of attraction that the imagery of the Garden of Eden continues to hold within Western consciousness exacerbates and amplifies this ecclesial suspicion. The imagery of Eden, for example, maintains an enduring and significant presence in secular discourse because of its frequent reduction to a metaphor for sexual desire as a motivational impulse in fields as diverse as advertising, architecture, art, literature, theatre, music, and sport, where its powerfully individuating potential is exploited.<sup>64</sup> That is to say, the *chronotopic* attributes that allow Eden

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<sup>58</sup> Delumeau, *History of Paradise*, 211-228.

<sup>59</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, transl. David Pellauer (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 61.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Isa 11:9, 52:7, 56:6-7.

<sup>61</sup> Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 61.

<sup>62</sup> For a nuanced discussion on this topic see Robert P. Kraynak, “Pope Leo XIII and the Catholic Response to Modernity,” *Modern Age* (Fall, 2007): 529-530.

<sup>63</sup> A view historically expressed in Pope Leo XIII’s still influential encyclical, *Rerum Novarum* (1891).

<sup>64</sup> See Jean-Luc Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, transl. Stephen E. Lewis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 108-110.

to move in relation to both time and space, qualities that can be properly located under the notion of the sacred, also permit it to sit comfortably in the perceived relativist and multi-contextual world of post-modernism, a philosophy that some aspects of the Church regard as fundamentally anti-religious. Paradoxically, as this thesis reveals, it is within the capacity of Eden to generate multiple meanings, and occupy multiple contexts, where it also attains its greatest theological value, as a bridge between events that come from beyond every human horizon<sup>65</sup> and the manifest ideals of the human yearning for God.

A ninth theme expressive of the ambivalent reception of Eden in contemporary Christian theology can be identified in the inherently ambiguous relationship between Eden and what has become to be called the “Wilderness Tradition,” or “the “wilderness state.”<sup>66</sup> George Williams describes this as, “the formative wilderness experience of the people of Israel at Sinai that gave the term *wilderness* a historically and ethically positive meaning...”<sup>67</sup> Consequently, the ‘wilderness state’ has been appropriated by certain Christian traditions almost as a technical theological term, “to designate the recurrent fact that even in the life of the redeemed there are periods or phases of partial failure, depression, uncertainty, and even defection.”<sup>68</sup> Thus, according to Williams, the notion of ‘wilderness,’ as a term inclusive of both hope and existential ambivalence, more accurately reflects the lived experience of Christians today than Eden, or *paradise*, might. Indeed, for many, ‘wilderness’ is the primary and frequently exclusive place of spiritual encounter and transformation.<sup>69</sup> Under closer

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<sup>65</sup> Anthony J. Kelly, *The Resurrection Effect; Transforming Christian Life and Thought* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2008), 60.

<sup>66</sup> George H. Williams, *Wilderness and Paradise in Christian Thought: The Biblical Experience of the Desert in the History of Christianity, and the Paradise Theme in the Theological Idea of the University* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962), 5.

<sup>67</sup> Williams, *Wilderness and Paradise in Christian Thought*, 5.

<sup>68</sup> Williams, *Wilderness and Paradise in Christian Thought*, 5.

<sup>69</sup> See, for example, Terry Tempest Williams, *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Vintage, 2001), 148. See also, Heije Faber, *Above the Treeline: Towards a Contemporary Spirituality* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988); Belden C. Lane, *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes: Exploring Desert*

analysis, however, the Israelites exposure to the desert can be seen to be represented in the Bible as preparation, a necessary period of transition, or indeed of punishment, as part of the process of the restoration of Israel to its ideal setting, that is, the return to Eden.<sup>70</sup> The intimacy that is developed between the Israelites and God, and with each other, during this time, acquired through necessity, is the by-product of God's perception of the inherent limitations of Israel, not an end in and of itself. Nevertheless, the strength of the misplaced acceptance of the value of wilderness above the positive values of Eden must be acknowledged.

Viewed from each, or a combination of, the perspectives outlined above, the frequent restriction of Eden to the margins of Christian theological discussion can be appreciated. However, as revealed in the deeper analysis on which these summaries were drawn, the objections towards Eden that underpin the muted attention it has received in sections of Christian theology are substantially based on assumptions that are specific to quite limited contexts.

Of the negative or ambivalent attitudes towards Eden examined above, Stroumsa's assertion that the realised eschatology initiated through Christ's presence displaced the necessity for the Garden of Eden as a referential metaphor, such that Eden was concomitantly of little or no significance to Jesus and followers, is one that stands out. It suggests an amnesia towards Eden among the early Christian community, despite what this thesis shows are the numerous specific references to Eden and Edenic imagery in the Gospels and associated texts. This amnesia incorporates Stroumsa's claim that Jesus' assumption of the role of the 'New Adam' substantially displaced the original Eden narrative, since the reception of this transformed understanding of the

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*and Mountain Spirituality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); and Barry Lopez, *Arctic Dreams: Imagination and Desire in a Northern Landscape* (New York: Vintage, 1986).

<sup>70</sup> Shemaryahu Talmon, "The Desert Motif," in *Biblical Motifs: Origins and Transformation*, ed. by Alexander Altmann (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 31, 32.



Eden narrative demands an immediate familiarity of the New Testament audiences with the original story. Nor does Stroumsa's argument against the importance of Eden as a referential metaphor account for the importance of Edenic imagery in the writer of Revelation's apocalyptic vision that completes the New Testament canon, of the battle between the evil that persists in the world and the hope of the New Creation in Christ. Accordingly, Stroumsa's claim will be specifically tested in Part Two of this thesis, which looks directly at how the presence and function of Edenic imagery in the New Testament structures and gives meaning to its central narrative – the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

### **Arrangement of Chapters.**

This thesis is arranged in two parts. Part One, consisting of Chapters 1-5, explores how the imagery of the Garden of Eden is used in a range of Old Testament texts as a central organising motif that both structures and informs the reader's understanding of God's relationship with Israel, and through Israel with all of humanity. Part Two, consisting of Chapters 6-8, applies the knowledge and insights developed in the analysis of Edenic imagery in the Old Testament as a lens through which the presence, meaning, and value of Edenic imagery to an emerging New Testament faith is assessed.

Chapter One begins by contextualising the investigation into a theology of Eden. It does this by examining three contemporary understandings of figurative language, as presented by Jacques Derrida, Paul Ricoeur, and Emmanuel Levinas respectively. The chapter seeks not only to develop a relevant understanding of the use of figurative language in the context of religious faith, but also to try and determine a preferred model for interpreting religious imagery with which to proceed in this investigation.

Chapter Two describes the relationship between various aspects of ancient Israelite culture and its intersection with the imagery of Eden.

It argues that in a number of important ways, including geographically, culturally, and religiously, ancient Israelite identity was determined through this relationship.

Chapter Three develops the theme of Israelite identity further, but introduces a more affective dimension to the analysis. It does so by examining the relationship between God's 'emotional predisposition' towards Israel, as reflected in the Hebrew word *hesed*, and the representation of *hesed* in the Old Testament through the use of Edenic imagery. The chapter further explores the reciprocal human desire for God through an examination of the manifestation and use of Edenic imagery as an expression of that desire.

Chapter Four looks at both the affective and cultural dimension of the relationship between ancient Israel and Edenic imagery by examining the use of matrimonial symbolism in a range of Old Testament texts and comparing the purpose and meaning of that imagery to that of Eden.

Chapter Five concludes the exploration of the function and meaning of Edenic imagery in the Old Testament with an examination of the relationship between the imagery of Eden and that of its theological opposite, 'wilderness.' In particular it analyses and explains how these two sets of imagery are used in juxtaposition throughout the Old Testament (and subsequently in the New Testament), as a means of foregrounding both the message of God's eternal blessings, as well as the theme of the desirability, and the possibility, of a return to Eden. In the Old Testament this is achieved predominantly through adherence to *Torah*, or the Law of Moses; in the New Testament it is a life lived in Christ which brings the person of faith to the gates of the New Creation, frequently represented by the authors, as we shall see, through the symbols and images of Eden. Understood graphically, the adjacent images of Eden and wilderness intensify a reader's perception of both, above that which might be perceived if the entities were 'read' in isolation. From this perspective, the chapter argues that

in its oppositional form the notion of that which is ‘not-Eden’ emphasises the reality of that which ‘is-Eden.’ This ‘being of Eden’ extends beyond the immediate material forms apprehended by the human senses – water, beauty, light, leafy abundance – amplifying the power of that symbolism whilst pointing more emphatically to that which, “no eye has seen, nor ear has heard, nor the human heart conceived” (1 Cor 2:9).

Chapter Six, the beginning of Part Two of this thesis, initiates an examination of the degree to which Edenic imagery is appropriated by New Testament authors to convey their understanding of the New Creation in Christ. The understanding and application of Edenic imagery by the apostle Paul, as a bridge between Pharisaic Judaism and emergent Christian theology, is a key aspect of this introductory analysis. The chapter also examines Paul’s use of the metaphor of the Church as the Bride of Christ, to convey nascent Christianity’s understanding of the sacramental function of the Church, in the context of the subsuming of Old Testament uses of matrimonial symbolism within that of Eden. It concludes with an examination of the use of Edenic symbolism in Revelation 12:1-17, particularly the undoing of the ‘curse of the ground’ (initiated in Gen 3:15-20 and completed in Gen 4:10-11) as an example of that author’s central concern with the theme of the return to Eden through Christ in the context of persistent evil.

Chapter Seven examines the degree to which the imagery of Eden is used to express both John’s identification of Jesus as the Word, or Wisdom, of God, as well as to inform the core New Testament concept expressed in Matthew and Luke, of Jesus’ inauguration of the kingdom of God. It does so by examining the reliance of Luke on Edenic imagery to inform and deepen the various meanings embedded in the parable of the Prodigal Son, and in Matthew’s use of the Old Testament story of Jonah, to both structure his narrative, foreshadowing its climax in the death and resurrection of Christ, and to reveal his perception of the meaning of Jesus to his audience.

Chapter Eight, the final chapter of the thesis, draws together many of the understandings generated in earlier analysis to draw a picture of Christ at the climactic moment of his human life as one that is fundamentally constructed by the Gospel writers through use of the imagery of Eden. It begins by reasserting the importance of the Incarnation as the means by which the extraordinary reality of God amongst us is confirmed in human consciousness, and the power of Edenic imagery to orient and give shape to that truth. The chapter subsequently explores the presence of Edenic imagery in the Passion narratives, commencing with a substantial exploration of its presence and function in the scenes of Jesus' existential struggle in Gethsemane. Here, through a range of inter-textual references, notably to the Old Testament story of the *Aqedah*, or the 'Binding of Isaac,' and the earlier New Testament accounts of Jesus' 'temptation in the wilderness,'<sup>71</sup> the imagery of Eden is shown to both frame and anticipate Jesus' salvific death and resurrection, leading to the full realisation of the covenant, expressed in the New Creation.

The final chapter further explores the presence of Edenic imagery in the scenes of Jesus' death, as well as its implied presence in attempts to reveal the mystery of Easter Saturday. Using the information gathered in earlier analysis, it will be argued that Eden itself, in its oppositional relationship to wilderness, is offered as the blessing obtainable through Jesus' being-with-the-dead in Hell, to all those who accept Jesus' saving grace, as well as to anticipate new life gifted in the Spirit. The chapter concludes with an investigation of the post-resurrection encounter between Mary Magdalene and Jesus, described in John 20:1-18, whom she confuses with 'the gardener.' It argues that the passage is an amplification of one of John's overarching themes, expressed most notably in the earlier account of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob (Jn 4: 4-26) that draws

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<sup>71</sup> Mt 4:1-11; Mk 1:12; Lk 4:1-13.

explicitly on Edenic imagery to assert Jesus as the ‘water of life,’ and hence the source of all life.

In summary, this thesis investigates a range of Old Testament understandings pertaining to the imagery of Eden as the lens through which the embedded, ubiquitous, and discursive presence of Edenic imagery in the New Testament is revealed. The thesis further shows how these Old Testament understandings are appropriated, and reconfigured as necessary, by New Testament authors as a primary means of conveying their perception of the New Creation in Christ.

### **Research Question.**

The key question which this thesis seeks to answer, then, is as follows:

To what extent, and for what purpose, is the Old Testament imagery of the Garden of Eden integrated, appropriated, and transformed in the New Testament theology?

### **Methodology.**

The hermeneutical stance of this thesis is informed by the interpretive and analytical concepts of the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur, as well as the relational or ethical metaphysics of Emmanuel Levinas. Ricoeur’s ‘hermeneutical arc’ provides an effective general framework for commencing theological analysis, in that it can be used to apply the distinctive features of post-modernist interpretive paradigms, as they relate especially to experience, knowledge and language,<sup>72</sup> to much of the various phenomena of theology. Importantly, it does so without abandoning either the perceiving subject, that is to say, the person of faith, or rationalist rigour. Nevertheless, there are also recognisable limitations to Ricoeur’s philosophy, especially in relation to the use of figurative language,

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<sup>72</sup> Dan R. Stiver, *Theology after Ricoeur: New Direction in Hermeneutical Theology* (Louisville: John Knox, 2001), 11.

that necessitate the inclusion of Levinas' phenomenology, which underlines the movement of a subject towards God's otherness and transcendence, the fundamental function of Eden, within language.

Key to Ricoeur's philosophy is a notion that displaces 'dualistic intellectualism,' one of the defining features of rationalism,<sup>73</sup> with a process that identifies all knowledge, including knowledge born of God-given and God-directed love,<sup>74</sup> as hermeneutic.<sup>75</sup> Adopting Ricoeur's approach can also be seen to substantially accommodate the perceived instability, or mutability,<sup>76</sup> of the concept of Eden. My own research indicates not that the material about Eden cannot be apprehended, but that narrow conclusions about the material are elusive. Bearing this in mind it appears that the analytical paradigms of post-modernism, with their suspicion of overarching 'meta-narratives,'<sup>77</sup> offer opportunities to investigate the various dimensions of Eden with a flexibility that is appreciably absent from rationalism's univocal or conforming tendencies.

The following diagram provides a schematic view of Ricoeur's hermeneutical approach:

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<sup>73</sup> Stiver, *Theology after Ricoeur*, 5.

<sup>74</sup> Anthony J. Kelly, "Faith as Sight? Toward a Phenomenology of Revelation," *Australian ejournal of Theology* 19.3 (December 2012): 187.

<sup>75</sup> Stiver, *Theology after Ricoeur*, 8.

<sup>76</sup> Kevin Hart argues that the nature of the Fall of Adam and Eve from the grace of Eden, is also a fall from a mastery of knowledge to a distinct confusion, whereby all reality is subsequently interpreted through an array of signs. As such a totalising understanding of Eden is beyond the scope of any human interpretive system. See, Kevin Hart, *The Trespass of the Sign: Deconstruction, Theology and Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 3.

<sup>77</sup> Peter Phan, citing Jean-Francois Lyotard, in Peter. C. Phan, "The Wisdom of Holy Fools in Postmodernity," *Theological Studies* 62:4 (December 2001): 731.

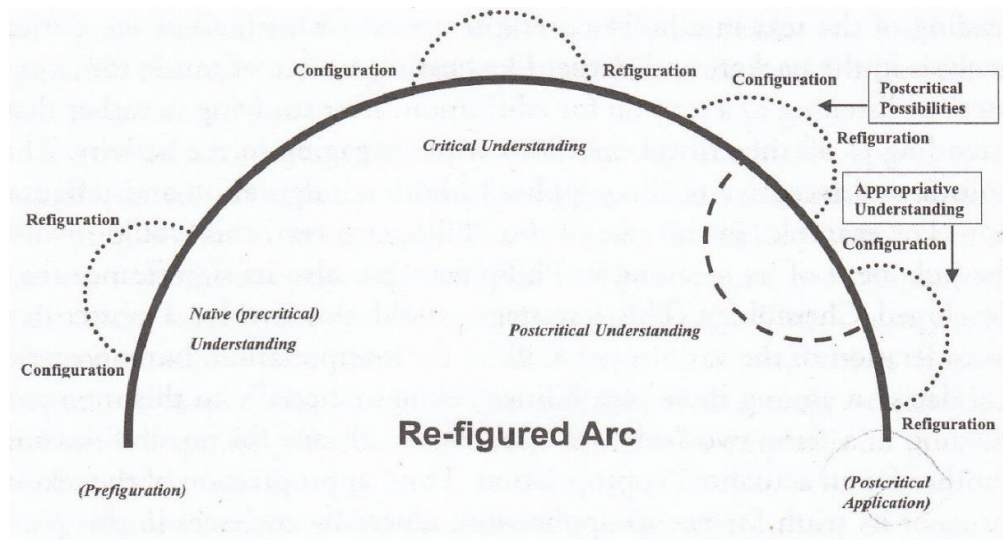


Fig. 1. Stiver's interpretation of Ricoeur's 'Hermeneutical arc.' Note that the developmental process of moving from 'Configuration' to 'Refiguration' i.e. the movement to increasing understanding, is not linear, nor is it static. Rather, it can occur a number of times as a subject moves from an initial 'naïve' understanding to the post-critical application of new understanding.<sup>78</sup>

The first stage of the hermeneutical arc acknowledges the 'real' world of human experience as the foundation point for analysis. That is to say, there is an existential fullness to the subject that must be taken account of in the analytical process. Christianity, after all, is lived first and foremost, before it is written or thought.<sup>79</sup> There is an inherent capacity for faith expressed through the person, as the 'rational' foundation for meaning, which is not diminished by the hermeneutical process. This phenomenological understanding is critical when considering the relationship between the imagery of the Garden of Eden and the construction of Christian identity. As Sandra Schneiders summarises:

If the locus of revelation is text, the event of revelation takes place in the interaction between text and reader, that is, in the reading or hearing by which one interprets the text. This interaction or encounter between the reader and text gives

<sup>78</sup> Stiver, *Theology after Ricoeur*, 75.

<sup>79</sup> Boyd Blundell, *Paul Ricoeur between Theology and Philosophy: Detour and Return* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 175.

rise to meaning, to understanding. And it is understanding that is transformative.<sup>80</sup>

The transformative process of the subject that Schneiders refers to becomes more apparent through analysis of Ricoeur's third stage of the 'hermeneutical arc,' where a more comprehensive understanding – also called 'application,' 'appropriation,' or 'post-critical naïveté' – is arrived at in response to previous encounters with the 'text,' but which has its origins in the primary, or pre-critical understanding.<sup>81</sup> In the context of this thesis we are talking of the expansion and strengthening of the theological or religious imagination, its capacity to increasingly assimilate the meaning of the Christ event, in response to exposure to the revealing power of Eden.

Answering criticism that the considerable room for subjective experience in Ricoeur's hermeneutic allows the accusation of relativism to be levelled against it, Stiver points out that whilst personal, existential appropriation is an *a priori* assumption of the derived understanding, it is, in and of itself, not a sufficient condition of that understanding.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, whilst Ricoeur refers to the notion of having a 'wager' on possible, or even preferred 'Absolute' outcomes, he includes the objective in a post-critical way: "Conviction is reached *through* critique, even suspicion, and not *in spite of* it."<sup>83</sup> That is to say, even if a person arrives at a post-critical understanding of an aspect of Eden through the application of Ricoeur's 'hermeneutical arc,' this does not lead, in and of itself, to a fideistic 'leap-in-the-dark,' "disconnected from extensive method, arguments, and evidence."<sup>84</sup> Be that as it may, 'objective 'facts,' by themselves, do not determine final meaning.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Schneiders, *Jesus Risen in Our Midst: Essays on the Resurrection of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2013), xvi.

<sup>81</sup> Stiver, *Ricoeur and Theology*, 43.

<sup>82</sup> Stiver, *Ricoeur and Theology*, 43.

<sup>83</sup> Stiver, *Ricoeur and Theology*, 44.

<sup>84</sup> Stiver, *Ricoeur and Theology*, 42.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. Lk 1:38.

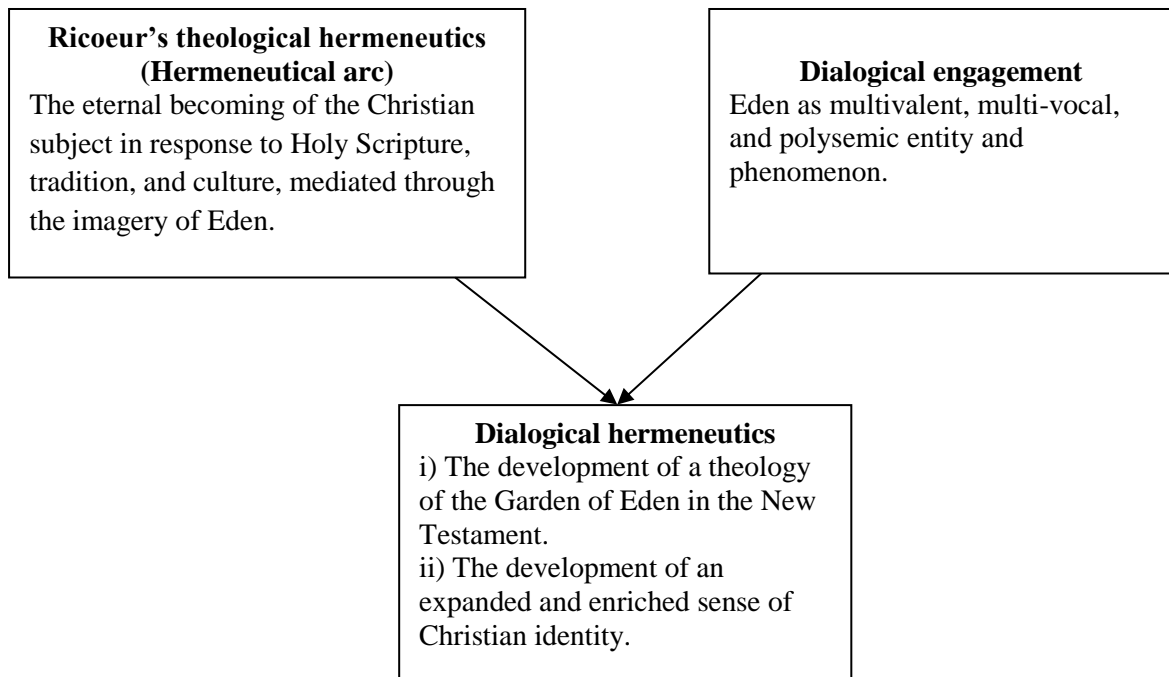


The changes in critical paradigms described above, then, can be seen to suggest to theology in general, and a developing theology of Eden in particular, a more subject-appropriate hermeneutic for dealing with the distinctive texture of theology, especially the frequency of, “multiple interpretation, of personal judgments, of convictions, argument but not proof.”<sup>86</sup> The phenomenological and poetic hermeneutics which facilitate accommodation with the multivalent and *chronotopic* qualities of Eden, qualities that have previously been deemed problematic in some Christian commentary, can also be located within the span of this general approach.

This leads to the important question of how Ricoeur’s ‘hermeneutical arc’ might lend itself to understanding more comprehensively the various symbolic dimensions of the Garden of Eden. It will be suggested that, for the purposes of this thesis, the movement towards a more integrated understanding of Eden primarily takes place methodologically through linking Ricoeur’s ‘hermeneutical arc’ to a dialogical process of text analysis that engages with a wide variety of authors and texts. The result is an approach which can subsequently be summarised as ‘*dialogical hermeneutics*,’ and which can be described in the following illustration (Fig. 2):

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<sup>86</sup> Stiver, *Theology after Ricoeur*, 14.



In the first place, this methodological combination recognises and allows for divergent and at times competing perspectives in relation to the presence and meaning of the imagery of the Garden of Eden in the Christian Bible. There is more than just a heightened sense of intertextuality at play here. The apprehension of the depth of possible meanings of Eden is not only dependent on, but can be seen to assume, a willingness on the part of the reader to enter into dialogue with a number of texts in a process that builds towards understanding from a variety of perspectives. At the same time, a dialogical hermeneutic maintains and supports the integrity of the subject as at once unique and intrinsically relational.<sup>87</sup>

A second way a dialogical approach to text analysis is judged effective in the proposed research pertains more explicitly to the postmodern understanding of textuality wherein, it is argued, *all*

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<sup>87</sup> That is to say, a dialogical approach to text analysis is one that acknowledges both the writer and reader, insofar as it, “both maintains distance between ... two persons engaged in it, and bridges that distance.” Importantly, it does not neutralise that distance. Rather, “... it brings that distance to life.” Gabriel Josipivici, *The Book of God: A Response to the Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 168.

knowledge has a hermeneutic dimension to it. Ricoeur's stance, then, does not suggest faith to be a form of cognitive blindness, irrationality, or psychosis,<sup>88</sup> but rather an aspect of human experience that has the potential to positively inform rational judgement. The world is not engaged with, in the first instance, "as bits of raw sense-data but in terms of meaningful wholes... Meaning comes with the experience, not as an 'add-on.'"<sup>89</sup> Experience, including the experience of faith, is seen as "integrally embodied and social." Concepts are embedded in practices and traditions, as well as personal experience, and meaning contextualised by these. Implicit in Ricoeur's analysis, then, is the hermeneutic necessity of a dialogical engagement with Scripture not so that any totalising tendencies in interpretation are avoided, but that the kingdom of God, which both informs and is informed by the language of faith, is also proclaimed in a 'polyphonic' manner.

In terms of this thesis, there are two key paradigm shifts that occur as a consequence of Ricoeur's approach to knowledge which integrates human experience and, concomitantly, deepens the reliability of the language of faith to reveal God's truth at the same time as it develops and strengthens the theological imagination.

First, the Garden of Eden should be interpreted phenomenologically if understandings of Eden are to move beyond superficial description. As a cultic artefact, with specific historical and cultural features, there is a significant amount of detail about the Garden of Eden that can be 'un-earthed' through what might be deemed 'scientific' or dialectical processes. But there is also an embodied faith dimension to the experience of the imagery of Eden, which speaks of the gifts of the Spirit, which also must also be accommodated within our overall understanding if a comprehensive theology of Eden is to be subsequently developed.

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<sup>88</sup> Anthony Kelly, "Faith as Sight?", 181.

<sup>89</sup> Stiver, *Theology after Ricoeur*, 11.

A second paradigm shift occurs in relation to the understanding of language as not simply descriptive or referential.<sup>90</sup> In particular the reader's attention is drawn to the way in which figurative language, the analogical affirmations of theology expressed through symbolic imagery, "is not merely ornamental to language but fundamentally cognitive."<sup>91</sup> Drawing out the language of faith, the Garden of Eden is a poetic concept which is intrinsically meaningful at an existential level, in and of itself, but which also points to things other than itself.

Theology, we are told, is "a public inquiry into the meaning of symbolic discourses,"<sup>92</sup> and nowhere is this more in evidence than in relation to understanding the Garden of Eden, where figurative language and mythopoetic forms structure narrative. A dialogical approach to text analysis, in conjunction with a hermeneutical process that foregrounds human subjectivity and becoming, can thus be seen to have significant potential to underpin a process of inquiry as to the value and extent of the imagery of the Garden of Eden in New Testament theology.

Nevertheless, and despite recognising the value of Ricoeur's hermeneutical structure, Chapter One of this thesis will argue that there are limitations in Ricoeur's philosophy that must be augmented in order for there to be a more complete basis for the theological investigation which follows. This limitation is in relation to the degree that Ricoeur's analysis of figurative language, whilst locating the source of linguistic meaning in what he refers to as "prior consciousness,"<sup>93</sup> and insisting that interpretation must take account of what is happening 'outside of' or 'in front of' a text,<sup>94</sup> is unable to move beyond ruled-governed "forms of communication."<sup>95</sup> That is to say, Ricoeur's phenomenology appears unable to move beyond the

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<sup>90</sup> Stiver, citing Austin, in *Theology after Ricoeur*, 12.

<sup>91</sup> Stiver, *Theology after Ricoeur*, 12.

<sup>92</sup> Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 4.

<sup>93</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, transl. Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 237.

<sup>94</sup> Ricoeur, as cited in Stiver, *Ricoeur and Theology*, 40.

<sup>95</sup> Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 35.

material constraints of language, and particularly the imposed boundaries of ‘genre.’ This is an approach that potentially limits the development of the religious or theological imagination, and hence what constitutes not only faith itself, but also notions of the ‘person of faith,’ to generic constructs.

By way of contrast, we can give a short note to Emmanuel Levinas’ use of figurative language in his phenomenology which introduces the possibility of a transformative encounter of the human person with God to occur as an integral aspect of being-for-the-other *within* language. Levinas’ philosophy, or ethical metaphysics, then, is an appropriate and powerful addition in the process of acquiring, and growing in, religious knowledge. The relational metaphysics which emerges from Levinas’ understanding of the nature and function of figurative language can give value to the accommodation of the human experience to revelation. This appears to be one of the key narrative and theological purposes served by what will be shown to be the recurring presence of Edenic imagery throughout the Old Testament, and its subsequent reappropriation, integration, and transformation by various New Testament authors.

At the same time, caution must be employed to curb the potentially reductive consequences of a cognitive overreliance on figurative language present, for example, in the popular typologies of early Christian commentary. Anthony Kelly, for example, suggests that the metaphor of the seed, as applied to Easter Saturday, may be “irresistible.”<sup>96</sup> The reductive power of too much reliance on symbolism can also be seen, for example, in relation to the various understandings pertaining to Christ’s ‘descent’ into Hell, as part of people coming to terms with the mystery of Easter Saturday. Von Balthasar notes that, “The dramatic portrait of the experience of

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<sup>96</sup> Kelly writes that “... in terms of what the Spirit actually wrought in Christ, the world has ceased to be a graveyard. It is more a garden in which the seeds of eternal life are sprouting.” Anthony Kelly, *Eschatology and Hope* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2006), 85.

triumph, of a joyful encounter between Jesus and the prisoners, and in particular between the New Adam and the old, is not prohibited as a form of pious contemplation.”<sup>97</sup> Nevertheless, despite the sincerity of faith, the confidence of tradition, and the profound biblical understanding of various authors, the use of such symbolism ultimately, “does go beyond what theology can affirm.”<sup>98</sup> Von Balthasar asks:

... who would want to understand the love of God in its folly and its weakness? Or who... would wish to lay claim to any other course of action than hanging on the lips of God, whose words remain inseparably connected with his historic Cross and Resurrection, and keeping silence, before the ‘love... which surpasses knowledge (Ephesians 3, 19), at that moment when the word of God falls silent in the hiatus, since there it takes away from every human logic the concept and the breath?’<sup>99</sup>

Such is the mystery of Christ’s saving death and resurrection that it is only through the use of symbols and metaphors that we can begin to speak of it.<sup>100</sup> And just as God is ‘always more,’ and ‘always new,’<sup>101</sup> so too there are sets of symbols and imagery separate from that of Eden which are deemed more amenable to mediating something of that mystery in each living moment of the historical community of faith.<sup>102</sup> Nevertheless, it is the contention of this thesis that it is through imagery of the Garden of Eden that the ancient biblical authors of both the Old and New Testaments were able to most confidently respond to the divinely given. The writers of the New Testament integrated, converted, and amplified those enduring symbols, metaphors, and motifs in the truth of the risen Christ, as host of the New Creation and Edenic Lord. It is the purpose of this thesis to reveal something of the scope of the application of that Edenic

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<sup>97</sup> von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 180.

<sup>98</sup> von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 181.

<sup>99</sup> von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 82-83.

<sup>100</sup> Kelly, *Eschatology and Hope*, 91.

<sup>101</sup> J. B. Webster, “Edward Schillebeeckx: God is ‘always absolutely new,’” *Evangelium* (Autumn, 1984), 8.

<sup>102</sup> Kelly, “Faith as sight?”, 190.

imagery in the New Testament in the context of what has otherwise been an apparent and enduring neglect.

**PART ONE: READING EDEN IN THE OLD  
TESTAMENT**



## CHAPTER ONE: EDEN AS SIGN, SYMBOL AND METAPHOR

To speak of the Garden of Eden is to speak indirectly of God. At the heart of this understanding is the recognition that, following the Fall, all of reality is to be interpreted semiotically, that is, as pointing to, or standing for, something other than itself. Adam and Eve's sin, as Kevin Hart describes, in its desire for unmediated knowledge, is not just moral but is also, "a trespass of the linguistic sign."<sup>1</sup> The result is a degeneration for Adam and Eve, and ultimately for all of humanity, from God's presence to a world of secondary impressions and interpretation over which they no longer have control.<sup>2</sup> Thus, Adam and Eve's travails after their expulsion from Eden are not just experienced physically, in the prick of thorns, or the intransigence of heavy soil, or the pain of childbirth, but also existentially, in the inarguable fact of their alienation from God.

The sign and consequence of this first sin, then, is "the mutability of all signs,"<sup>3</sup> a fracturing of the material world to such a degree that "man is no longer the master of signs but is frequently mastered by them."<sup>4</sup> To be sure, the Old Testament provides a catalogue of instances where such a lack of mastery results not just in anxiety or distress for the individuals concerned, but frequently in their damnation or destruction. The inability of Pharaoh, for example, to understand the significance of the ten plagues sent by God, which ultimately results in his downfall, indicates the shattering consequences than can occur for those who fail to respond appropriately to a world experienced predominantly as one of representation. Alternatively, the heroes of Old Testament narrative – the patriarchs, the prophets, the seers or other agents of God – are precisely those who are able to interpret, or at least respond

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<sup>1</sup> Hart, *The Trespass of the Sign*, 3.

<sup>2</sup> Hart, *The Trespass of the Sign*, 3.

<sup>3</sup> Hart, *The Trespass of the Sign*, 3.

<sup>4</sup> Hart, *The Trespass of the Sign*, 3.

appropriately to, the underlying meaning of the various and prolific signs encountered in the movement of the people of Israel back into full relationship with God. Solomon, the paradigm of the wise man in the Old Testament, requests not riches of God when he assumes the throne of David but, “an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil.”<sup>5</sup> That is to say, Solomon understood that his ability to rule God’s “great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted,”<sup>6</sup> was dependent not on a reductive reasoning but a capacity to ‘read the signs of the times,’<sup>7</sup> as they manifested in the events and instances which confronted him as king. The story of the two prostitutes who come before Solomon in dispute as to who is the true mother of the small child they hold between them<sup>8</sup> has become emblematic of this interpretative intuition, this feeling for the truth behind representation, which “emanates from the world and addresses man”<sup>9</sup> in the totality of lived experience.

For the Christian, the mediated relationship with God that humans experience as a result of the Fall can only be redeemed through Christ, the New Adam,<sup>10</sup> who, unlike all other signs, is held to be the perfect and faithful sign of God. Indeed, “without the presence of God, in Paradise or on earth, there can be no hope of understanding oneself, others, or texts. One would be lost in a maze of signs, with no possibility of distinguishing true from false.”<sup>11</sup> Such a perfect correspondence between the signifier (Christ) and the signified (the kingdom of God) is not present in the Old Testament except as Wisdom or prophetic vision. Instead it is *Torah*, the Law, which is provided as the means through which Israel can re-enter and maintain a relationship of unity with God; the discernment of what is true or

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<sup>5</sup> 1 Kings 3:5-9.

<sup>6</sup> 1 Kings 3:8. cf. Gen 13:16, 15:5.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Mt 16:3.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Kings 3:16-28.

<sup>9</sup> Luigi Gioia, O.S.B., “Taking History Seriously: The Sapiential Dimensions of Monastic Theology in the Light of the Vatican II Council.” A talk given at the Benedictine Monastery at New Norcia, Western Australia, Aug 8, 2015.

<sup>10</sup> Rom 5:12-21; 1 Cor 15:45.

<sup>11</sup> Hart, *The Trespass of the Sign*, 4.

real is a by-product of this graced association.<sup>12</sup> Even then, as Paul argues,<sup>13</sup> the problem of fundamental separation remains – it is only through the apprehension of the enduring love of God for Israel, and through Israel for all of humankind, of which the Garden of Eden is a sign, that the true potential of that relationship can be recognised, and made manifest in turn. Moreover, this thesis contends, it is Eden and its figurative components which frequently symbolise the blessings of that relationship as they are conveyed, in various forms and with varying emphasis, throughout the Old Testament.

### **1.1 Sign, Symbol and Metaphor.**

Before progressing further it is necessary to digress briefly in order to clarify how the terms ‘sign’ and ‘symbol’ are used in the context of this thesis. Some comments on the use of the term ‘metaphor’ are also required. At the outset it should be stated that the commonly accepted (some might argue *classical*) definitions of ‘sign’ (a word, or object, or event that points to something other than itself), and ‘symbol’ (a word, event, or object that does not just point to but stands for something other than itself) form the basis of the understanding of these terms as they are used here. Nevertheless, it is clear, upon examination of a range of influential texts on the use of figurative language in theological discourse, such as the one by Kevin Hart already cited, that fixed or shared understandings pertaining to these terms can by no means be assumed.<sup>14</sup>

In his treatment of the relationship between metaphysics and deconstruction, Hart, for example, appears to marginalise the term ‘symbol,’ in favour of ‘sign’ throughout the entirety of his encompassing text on the subject, *The Trespass of the Sign*. It is the

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Ps 119.

<sup>13</sup> Eph 2:15-16

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Norman Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976); Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, transl. Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969); Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).

‘sign’ that is the primary unit of signification, from which secondary modes of expression emanate, and it would appear that it is the ‘sign’ under which ‘symbol’ is subsumed. Conversely, for Paul Ricoeur, it is precisely in the extension of signs – that is to say, in the symbol – where the key to unlocking the mysteries of representation, particularly as they pertain to bridging the gap between ‘presence’ and ‘absence,’ can be found.<sup>15</sup> In a related debate, Anne Moore<sup>16</sup> responds vociferously and at length (332 pages) to Norman Perrin’s<sup>17</sup> contention that the term ‘Kingdom of God’ functions symbolically, arguing instead that ‘Kingdom of God,’ as the term is generally used, more properly belongs to the category of ‘metaphor,’ that is to say a figure of speech in which we speak of one thing in terms suggestive of another and which, by its relational and contextual nature, has the potential to generate a variety of meanings.<sup>18</sup>

In many respects the implicit and explicit debates between the ideas expressed by Hart and Ricoeur, and Moore and Perrin, and so on, can be seen as extensions of philosophical, theological and linguistic arguments that go back historically, via Augustine, at least as far as Aristotle.<sup>19</sup> R.A. Markus describes how, “From Aristotle onwards, the theme of ‘signs’ recurs regularly in Greek philosophy; indeed, Philodemus in his *de Signis*, and Sextus Empiricus suggest that the question of signs was one of the focal points of the Stoic-Epicurean debate.”<sup>20</sup> Markus summarises this debate succinctly in preparation for his subsequent and broader treatment of Augustine’s radical intervention in the theory of signs, that eventually shifts emphasis in the theory of signs from one of inference to more linguistic

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<sup>15</sup> Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (1969).

<sup>16</sup> Anne Moore, *Moving Beyond Symbol and Myth: Understanding the Kingship of God of the Hebrew Bible Through Metaphor* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom*, 29-69.

<sup>18</sup> Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 49-54; See also Mary L. Coloe, *God Dwells with Us: Temple Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2001), 4-7; and Kelly, *Eschatology and Hope*, 162-3.

<sup>19</sup> See R.A. Markus, “St Augustine on Signs,” *Phronesis* 2, no. 1 (1957): 60. See also Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 3-10.

<sup>20</sup> Markus, “St. Augustine on Signs,” 60.

concerns.<sup>21</sup> The point is that by its very nature there is a subjective component in the treatment of figurative language that predisposes that treatment to alternative, and sometimes competing, understandings. Consequently, not to try and examine how figurative language, especially the terms sign, symbol and metaphor are defined and, more importantly, how they might be used and understood in the analysis of the Garden of Eden, would risk being trapped in a web of volubility and contested ideas. Let us now move on towards the overarching concern of this thesis to reveal the depth, persistency, and structuring presence of Edenic imagery in both the Old and New Testaments.

### **1.2 Jacques Derrida and the Sign.**

It must be recognised that *The Trespass of the Sign* functions largely as an inventory of various accounts of the relationship between metaphysics and deconstruction in Continental philosophy, centring on the work of Jacques Derrida. Hart argues that, for Derrida, secondary meanings generated by signs, in the process of their repetition, lead to a potential instability in the way signs are understood. It follows that, since the possibility of repetition is integral to the definition of all signs, so too are secondary or alternative meanings when the original context changes from that in which the sign was first generated.<sup>22</sup>

These secondary meanings are not just alternative uses of particular markings – for example, in the manner that a cross can indicate a centre, a road intersection, or the Christian faith. For Derrida, the impact of differing contexts on the original meaning of a sign means that ‘alterity,’ or otherness, “is a structural feature of the sign.”<sup>23</sup> Accordingly, the sign, particularly as it attempts to describe the

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<sup>21</sup> Markus, “St. Augustine on Signs,” 64-82.

<sup>22</sup> Hart, *The Trespass of the Sign*, 12.

<sup>23</sup> Hart, *The Trespass of the Sign*, 12-13.

‘original presence,’ that is, God, is seen to be defective, in that the possibility always exists that it will ‘betray’ the primary concept it served. To put it into the particular language of this mode of analysis, “since it always functions in the absence of a presence, the sign has no self-presence by which its intelligible content can withstand the accidents of empirical difference.”<sup>24</sup> As a consequence signs should be understood as fundamentally ‘ironic,’ potentially capable of singularity of meaning but always multi-referential to the point that this singularity is rarely achieved. It is only in extended written expression, particularly through figurative language, such as allegory, that the sign is stabilised.<sup>25</sup> But by then the context in which signs are found overrides any transcendent meaning over which they might make a claim – indeed, according to Derrida, “there is nothing outside of the text”<sup>26</sup> – and the possibility of the subversion of meaning, in this case resulting in the invalidation of a notion of an ‘original presence,’ always exists.<sup>27</sup> The suspicion towards the Garden of Eden from orthodox Jewish and Christian authorities alike in the early part of the first century CE, referred to in the Introduction, due to Eden’s polyvalent and polysemic characteristics, would appear to have its roots in these inherent structural ‘weaknesses.’<sup>28</sup> That is, implicit in the range of symbols constitutive of the Garden of Eden is a perceived inherent instability of which early religious leaders were highly cautious.

In some respects Derrida’s analysis – assembled broadly under the term ‘deconstruction’ – is an evocation and elaboration, in the context of Continental philosophy, of what is frequently referred to as the “Linguistic Turn.”<sup>29</sup> This is the view of an influential aspect of

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<sup>24</sup> Hart, *The Trespass of the Sign*, 12.

<sup>25</sup> Thus, according to Jewish legend, “Yahweh looked into the Torah and created the heavens and the earth.” Hart, *The Trespass of the Sign*, 63, n.49.

<sup>26</sup> Hart, *The Trespass of the Sign*, 63.

<sup>27</sup> Hart, *The Trespass of the Sign*, 157-162.

<sup>28</sup> See Guy Stroumsa, “Introduction,” in Bockmuhl and Stroumsa, eds., *Paradise in Antiquity*, 1-2.

<sup>29</sup> Whilst frequently assumed in the history of philosophy the notion that there exists a singular entity properly referred to as the ‘Linguistic Turn’ is not an uncontested one. Judith Surkis, for example, in her ‘genealogical’ analysis of the use of the term

modern philosophy, articulated by Ludwig Wittgenstein, Bertrand Russell, Gustav Bergmann and others<sup>30</sup> which argued, in part, that the limits of social and personal reality are determined in and through language. Such a position, theologically speaking, permits only of atheism on the one hand – a logical result of Derrida’s “anti-theological gesture”<sup>31</sup> captured in the multiple possibilities of deconstruction<sup>32</sup> – or mysticism on the other, the “religion without religion” that became the *leitmotif* of Derrida’s later work.<sup>33</sup> According to this formulation, Eden is a sign of God’s steadfast love for humankind only insofar as the narrative (or narratives) concerning Eden conveys a specific understanding of God, one that is constrained within the linguistic boundaries of narrative itself. Effectively, this reduces the Garden of Eden to a myth that has little inherent meaning beyond these constraints.

There are, however, a number of other philosophers and theologians who have similarly wrestled with the problems of understanding how the experience of God might be expressed through language, particularly in the figurative elements of sign, symbol, and metaphor. Language, in their alternative analysis, is not so much the limit of understanding, but rather the membrane through which the

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suggests that its broad application in multiple domains – philosophical investigations of language, anthropological investigations of culture, psychoanalytic interrogations of subject formation, and radical questionings of the possibilities and limits of knowledge formation – renders the value of the term problematic. Nevertheless, what Surkis considers as a “minor historical sub-field” has, and continues to have, in its materialist assumptions, radical implications for the practice of theology. See Judith Surkis, “When Was the Linguistic Turn? A Genealogy,” *America Historical Review* June 2012: 700-722.

<sup>30</sup> For general discussion of how the understanding of the notion of the ‘Linguistic Turn’ has played out in the 20<sup>th</sup> C. see, for example, Oswald Hanfling, *Philosophy and Ordinary Language: The Bent and Genius of Our Tongue* (London: Routledge), 2000. See also Richard Rorty, ed., *The Linguistic Turn: Recent Essays in Philosophical Method* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967).

<sup>31</sup> Hart, *The Trespass of the Sign*, 38.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Levinas, who suggests that, “the multivocality of the meaning of being – this essential disorientation – is perhaps the modern expression of atheism.” See Emmanuel Levinas, “Meaning and Sense,” in Adrian T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi, eds., *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 44.

<sup>33</sup> For a general introduction to Derrida’s thought under this broad rubric see, John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

apprehension of God, always only partial, can be experienced and transmitted. Paul Ricoeur, for example, makes the point that, “whatever ultimately may be the nature of the so-called religious experience, it comes to language, it is articulated in a language, and the most appropriate place to interpret it on its own terms is to inquire into its linguistic expression.”<sup>34</sup>

Considered thus, in its functionality and its limitations, the capacity of language to facilitate a revelation of God is not dissimilar to the way that the great curtain or veil of the Temple was held to separate heaven from earth, the eternal from the historical,<sup>35</sup> and which continues to be present in the *ikonostasis* of Orthodox churches and the altar rails of their Western equivalents. That is to say, physical separation exists, but there is also an implicit awareness of the presence of the God of Israel behind that separation.

More pertinent, perhaps, is the comparison of the function of language generally with that of the symbolism of Eden, itself homologous to the Temple in many Old Testament texts, and which is similarly held to provide a point of conjunction between the temporal and the divine. Stordalen, for example, cites fifteen specific passages in the Old Testament where the Garden of Eden and its relationship to Israel in general, and the Temple in particular, is explicitly expressed.<sup>36</sup> He qualifies this relationship in a number of instances where the symbolism of Eden is connected to alien entities such as the King of Tyre (Ezek 28:11-19), or Egypt (Ezek 31:2-9). My own understanding is that even where Eden is connected to entities other than Israel, and

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<sup>34</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative and Imagination*, transl. David Pellauer, ed. by Mark I. Wallace (Minneapolis: Fortress press, 1995), 35.

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, Barker, *On Earth as it is in Heaven*, 7; *The Gate of Heaven: The History and Symbolism of the Temple in Jerusalem* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008), 104-111; *Temple Theology: An Introduction* (London: SPCK, 2004), 27-32. See also, Jean Hani, *The Symbolism of the Christian Temple*, transl. Robert Proctor (San Raphael: Sophia Perennis, 2007), 70-79. Hani substitutes the door of the Christian church for the curtain or veil of the Jewish Temple, but the relationship between the earthly and the divine is presented in a similar manner.

<sup>36</sup> Gen 13:10; Isa 51:3; Ezek 28:11-19; 31:2-9; 36:35; 41:17-25; 47:1-11; Joel 2:3; 4:8; Zech 14:8-11; Qoh 2:1-11.



by association with Zion and the Temple, the positive relationship between Eden and the Temple remains. That is to say, these passages emphasise the *loss* of God's blessing from these entities, as a result of arrogance or infidelity.<sup>37</sup>

Participation in the symbolism of Eden, then, and subsequently in its re-envisioned forms following the advent of Jesus, such as in the semiotics of the Church,<sup>38</sup> permits the person of faith to encounter the possibility of God through the narrative of Eden, as part of the totality of religious language. In this sense, one might say that religious language itself, insofar as it contains and articulates to both human and divine dimensions, functions sacramentally.<sup>39</sup>

### **1.3 Paul Ricoeur and the Symbol.**

According to Ricoeur, symbols are signs which stand for something other than themselves, and which proceed intentionally by analogy to deeper levels of meaning.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, the most significant text by Ricoeur in which these distinctions are discussed, *The Symbolism of Evil*, suggests that, in contrast to Derrida, it is the symbol which is the primary unit of meaning in general discourse, and in theology in particular.

Ricoeur arrives at this position by making a distinction between what he refers to the “pre-philosophical” and the “philosophical” – it is in the movement from the one to the other via symbols through which meaning emerges.<sup>41</sup> Thus, he is able to declare the aphorism, “The symbol gives rise to thought,” as the “guiding star” of his book.<sup>42</sup> Foundational to Ricoeur's understanding is the acceptance of the

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<sup>37</sup> See Torje Stordalen, “Heaven or Earth - Or Not?” in Konrad Schmid and Christoph Riedwig, eds., *Beyond Eden: The Biblical story of Paradise (Genesis 2-3) and Its Reception History*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 28-57.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Rev 21:1-4, 9-14; 22:1-5.

<sup>39</sup> Markus, “St. Augustine on Signs,” 65-69.

<sup>40</sup> Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom*, 30.

<sup>41</sup> Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 236.

<sup>42</sup> Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 237.

presence of archetypal or primordial symbols, which in turn inform the elements of myth, and the subsequent reinterpretation(s) of that myth. Ricoeur identifies three levels in what he calls the “re-handling” of the meaning of symbols in discourse. But there is also a fourth, foundational, level of signification which, Ricoeur argues, informs the primordial symbols themselves, one that he refers to as “prior consciousness,” which must be acknowledged and which is foundational to the meaning generated by symbols themselves. Indeed, it is this “prior consciousness,” something akin to Derrida’s notion of ‘presence,’ or the Levinasian notion of *illeity*,<sup>43</sup> which allows us to enter, in the first place, into a symbolic interpretation of the world. Drawing on the work of anthropologist Levi Strauss, who argued that, “The Universe... signified from the beginning the totality of what humanity might expect to know about it,”<sup>44</sup> Ricoeur describes how myth, as the formalisation of symbols, “anticipates speculation... because it is already an interpretation, a hermeneutics of the primordial symbols in which the prior consciousness of sin gave itself form.”<sup>45</sup> Referring specifically to the myth of the Fall, in his examination of the nature of evil, he elaborates on the function of ‘prior consciousness’ by describing how:

This way of understanding is supported by the historical experience of the Jewish people. So far is the Adamic myth from being the point of departure for their experience of sin and guilt that it presupposes that experience and marks its maturity. That is why it was possible to understand the experience and to interpret its fundamental symbols – deviation, revolt, going astray, perdition, captivity – without recourse to that myth.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> For Levinas, *illeity* is the marker of the transcendent being, “the presence of that which properly speaking has never been.” Levinas explains further by describing how: “That which preserves the specific signifyingness of the trace of an empirical passage, over and above the sign it can become, is possible only through its situation in the trace of this transcendence. This position in a trace, which we have called *illeity*, does not begin in things, which by themselves do not leave traces but produce effects, that is, remain in the world.” Levinas, “Meaning and Sense,” 63.

<sup>44</sup> Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 168.

<sup>45</sup> Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 237.

<sup>46</sup> Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 237.

Ricoeur's problem here, that he himself recognises, is that to understand what the Adamic myth itself adds to those first symbols necessitates its presentation in the creation stories of the Old Testament. We can therefore identify four levels to the interpretation of symbols in Ricoeur's thought: i) the level of prior consciousness inherent in humankind which gives rise to, or is expressed in, symbols; ii) the specific symbols themselves; iii) the original myth in which symbols are manifest and thereby interpreted in turn; and iv) the "speculative cipher," or reflection on the myths through which symbols are subsequently re-interpreted. Ricoeur, expressing the dynamics of the 'hermeneutical arc,' refers to levels iii) and iv) of interpretation, as forms of first and second-degree hermeneutics,<sup>47</sup> that is, facilitating and subject to additional, context specific, meaning.

Now, as will be shown in the following material, there is both a recognisable degree of continuity as well as subsequent change and development in the representation of the symbols of Eden in the canonically prescribed structure of the Old and New Testaments, as well as in the specific narrative understandings of Eden expressed through the writings of the individual authors of those texts. Consequently, and acknowledging the range of the possible levels of interpretation suggested above, we will shortly examine some of the key symbols and motifs concerning the Garden of Eden, mindful of the possibility of their successive 'rehandling' in different scriptural and post-scriptural contexts.

It must be said, however, in anticipation of this task, that to the degree that the model of symbolic representation described by Ricoeur, incorporating the notion of 'prior consciousness,' brings the archetypal or primordial within the parameters of a linguistically determined world, it still belongs taxonomically to the kind of constructivist understanding of religious belief as that held by Derrida. Nevertheless, there is an important point of departure between the two

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<sup>47</sup> Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 237.

modes of understanding the character and function of figurative language that turns, in the case of Ricoeur, on the notion of religious experience as potentially transcending language.

For the person of faith, then, the relationship to God is not only experienced personally but is also perceived within the expressive matrix of that faith. Most notably this occurs through figurative or poetic modes of expression. These are precisely the means through which, according to Ricoeur, the transcendent meanings expressive of ‘prior consciousness’ are manifest in the primordial or archetypal symbols, which are then reinterpreted in the textuality of religious belief. This occurs through the transmission of the Scriptures, the sacred texts at the heart of religious faith, but also in the performance of liturgy, in the singing of hymns, in the study of theological texts, in personal reflection and prayer, and generally in the linguistic forms that attempt to bridge the divide between the finite world of human experience and the infinite possibility of God.<sup>48</sup>

It should be also noted, that for Ricoeur the religious meaning generated in these expressions of faith is inseparable from, and therefore substantially dependent on, their *form*. Indeed, as Ricoeur himself declares, it is the “fundamental point” of his 1974 essay in which these themes are discussed. He writes:

The “confession of faith” that is expressed in the biblical documents is inseparable from the *forms* of discourse, by which I mean the narrative structure: for example the Pentateuch and the Gospels, the oracle structure of the prophecies, the parables, the hymn, and so forth. Not only does each form of discourse give rise to a style of confession of faith, but also the confrontation of these forms of discourse gives rise to tensions and contrasts, within the confession of faith itself that are theologically significant. The opposition between narration and prophecy, so fundamental for the mentality of the Old Testament, is perhaps only one of the pairs of structures whose opposition contributes to engendering the global shape of its meaning ... Perhaps we should even go so far as to consider the closing of the canon as a fundamental structural act that

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<sup>48</sup> Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 35.

delimits the space for the interplay of forms of discourse and determines the finite configuration within which each form and each pair of forms unfolds its signifying function.<sup>49</sup>

Once again, and despite the claim that Ricoeur's approach to the use of biblical language presents a world, "now refigured under the tutelage of the imaginary and the possible,"<sup>50</sup> we see in the above passage, where Ricoeur reduces all religious 'texts' to a delimiting form of discourse, totalising assumptions about the structure and function of language. More specifically the notion of language-in-discourse, as it is represented in this passage, appears to constrain the scope of possible meanings of figurative language in general and, by inference, the symbolism of the Garden of Eden in particular. Thus, the religious imagination, the origins of which Ricoeur argues emerges from 'prior consciousness,' remains embedded in the determining structures of narrative, and subject to its rules.<sup>51</sup> Certainly, there is a degree of self-evidence in what Ricoeur is saying. The rules on which language is dependant for coherence is a primary context of meaning in discourse. But there are other multiple contexts which must also be taken into account and which, in the context of faith, can be seen to transcend the limits of narrative form, and hence, according to Ricoeur's own assumptions, imaginative possibility.

A significant Biblical example, in the historical context of lived faith, of the traditional acceptance of the identifiable presence of God available to human apprehension through language, that might be said to transcend the rules of language, can be found in the account of Genesis 2:4a-14. Here it is revealed that Eden existed *prior to* any presumption of a separation between God and humankind. That is to say, the earth creature, Adam, was placed into a pre-existing Eden as a sign of God's love and blessing. The 'primordial' existence of Eden, then, is already a representation of something believed to exist prior

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<sup>49</sup> Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 39.

<sup>50</sup> Mark Wallace, "Introduction," in Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 8.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. the "language games" of Austin and most notably Wittgenstein. As referenced in Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 36, 144-149.

to, or perhaps exterior to, language. In this sense talk of Eden must be considered commensurate with, or at least part of, the divine *logos*, a notion that is explored more fully in Chapter Seven of this thesis in the context of John's equating the Word of God with God's Wisdom, a manifestation of God in the world shown to be is substantially expressed through Edenic imagery.<sup>52</sup> The reader can accordingly assume the capacity of language to be able to be able to render, in faith, sufficient meaning related to the experience of 'presence' to support, for example, Eden's enduring participation in the experience and transmission of Judaism and, subsequently, Christianity.

#### **1.4 Emmanuel Levinas, Metaphor and the Phenomenology of Eden.**

For those who reference the belief in the social construction of reality through language to dismiss the possibility of a determinate God existing on the other side of, or separate from, language, the notion of 'prior consciousness' is seen not just to be fatally flawed but incomprehensible.<sup>53</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, for example, simply asserted that, "what we cannot talk about we must consign to silence."<sup>54</sup> The phenomenon that remains unremarked upon is not just incidental to human activity but ultimately invisible to human apprehension.

Contrary to this view, regarding the impossibility of locating a determinate God rendered comprehensible through language, Emmanuel Levinas calls our attention to its opposite – the possibility of meeting God *within* language, through encounter with *the other* (the *tout autre*).<sup>55</sup> At the same time, Levinas is cautious, but not

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<sup>52</sup> See Ch. 7, "Jesus, Eden, and the Kingdom of God" 7.1, Eden and Jesus as the Wisdom of God in the Gospel of John.

<sup>53</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, transl. D.F.Pears and B.F. McGuinness (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961), 3.

<sup>54</sup> Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 3.

<sup>55</sup> Levinas distinguishes between *L'Autrui* (the personal other), and *L'Autre* (all others including humans and God). Peperzak, Levinas' translator in this instance, remarks on the difficulties Levinas' unsystematic application of the capital 'A' in

dismissive, of the claims for figurative language such as those made by Ricoeur. He argues that whilst the content of material reality is, “animated with meta-phors, receiving an overloading through which they are borne *beyond* the given,”<sup>56</sup> the quality or effect of that animation should be judged by the degree to which ...

... This *metaphor* can be taken to be due to a deficiency of perception or to its excellence, according as the *beyond* involved in a metaphor leads to other contents, which were simply absent from the limited field of the perception, or is transcendent with respect to the whole order of contents or of the given.<sup>57</sup>

Here, Levinas, is not so much having an each-way bet on the efficacy of figurative language to describe human experience. Rather he is recognising the capacity of language, when reduced to a medium of secondary signification, to potentially ‘sell short’ the fundamental reality of that experience, for the most part understood as spiritual experience, that transcends history.

This occurs in two ways. On the one hand Levinas recognises, concomitant with Derrida, that “language refers to the positions of the one that listens and the one that speaks, that is to the contingency of their history.”<sup>58</sup> In other words linguistic meaning is substantially determined by the context of the interlocutors. As such the elements of language, “signify on the basis of the ‘world’ and of the position of the one that looks at them.”<sup>59</sup> In this manner Levinas acknowledges how the historical or cultural specificity of human life can generate diverse and relative understandings of similar events. On the other hand Levinas decries the fracturing of meaning in human experience, expressive of the cultural pluralism he perceives as typical of modernism in which, “the sense, orientation, and unity of being – a primordial event in which all the other steps of thought and the whole

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regard to these terms poses for translators. See Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, xiv-xv, 5, 7, 12.

<sup>56</sup> Levinas, “Meaning and Sense,” 34.

<sup>57</sup> Levinas, “Meaning and Sense,” 34.

<sup>58</sup> Levinas, “Meaning and Sense,” 37.

<sup>59</sup> Levinas, “Meaning and Sense,” 37.

historical life of beings are situated,” is replaced by, “the isolation of innumerable meanings, in the absence of a sense that orients them.”<sup>60</sup> The effect of this loss of *univocity*, Levinas’ term for what he argues should be the unique identity of fundamental human phenomena, is not irony, as Derrida would have it, but rather, absurdity.<sup>61</sup> Levinas describes how:

Absurdity consists not in non-sense but in the isolation of innumerable meanings, in the absence of a sense that orients them. What is lacking is the sense of all, the Rome to which all roads lead, the symphony in which all meaning sings, the song of songs. The absurdity lies in the pure indifference of a multiplicity.<sup>62</sup>

That is to say, ‘absurdity’ is the consequence of an inability or unwillingness of contemporary discourse to reference itself to the foundational reality of human life. It is in the revelation of the truth of that reality, Levinas argues, where a transcendent intuition not only precedes the legible data of human experience but also illuminates them.<sup>63</sup> In contrast to this foundational reality:

... the content of external or psychological experience, lead toward a global situation in which the totality of experience is assembled and illuminated. The given is presented from the first qua this or that, that is, as a meaning. Experience is a reading, the understanding of meaning an exegesis, a hermeneutics, and not an intuition.<sup>64</sup>

Indeed, so powerful is the effect of this structural absurdity identifiable in contemporary discourse, which reduces everything to ‘text’ subject to exegesis, that it undermines the very substance of reality: “This loss of unity has been proclaimed – and consecrated against the grain – by the famous paradox, become commonplace, of the death of God.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Levinas, “Meaning and Sense,” 46-47.

<sup>61</sup> Levinas, “Meaning and Sense,” 46-47.

<sup>62</sup> Levinas, “Meaning and Sense,” 47.

<sup>63</sup> Levinas, “Meaning and Sense,” 37.

<sup>64</sup> Levinas, “Meaning and Sense,” 38.

<sup>65</sup> Levinas, “Meaning and Sense,” 47. Citing Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 343.



For Levinas, the antidote for this process of disorientation lies in the recognition that language is merely the ‘surface’ of being, for the kenotic desire for the other (*L’Autrui*)<sup>66</sup> must also be present, “in order to illuminate the given.”<sup>67</sup> Language, and figurative or poetic language in particular, must be treated as an outward sign of the totality of existence that ultimately expresses itself through relationship. Indeed, for Levinas, metaphor, often used as a term for the representational function of language in general,<sup>68</sup> effectively points to, “the gap between reality and intelligibility”<sup>69</sup> that language attempts to overcome. In the process language acquires for itself a “false prestige” that its inherent limitations suggest is not warranted.<sup>70</sup>

Levinas subsequently refers to the recognition of the totality of the person-in-relationship behind its partial manifestation in language as, “the gathering of being,” incarnation itself, which makes meaning possible.<sup>71</sup> As such the person is able to participate in the world as both subject and object. The creative act, “the ever new resources,”<sup>72</sup> in which the Garden of Eden must be included, and of which the poetics of language, including symbol and metaphor, are components, emerges at the interstices of these two aspects of being and as such are considered by Levinas, “as part of the ontological order itself.”<sup>73</sup> The problem lies not in the nature of creative expression but in the tendency to isolate that expression, as we have seen with Derrida, and to a lesser extent Ricoeur, “outside of the becoming which suggests it.”<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Levinas, “Meaning and Sense,” 51-2.

<sup>67</sup> Levinas, “Meaning and Sense,” 39.

<sup>68</sup> Levinas, “Meaning and Sense,” 35. See also Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre Nous: Thinking of the Other*, transl. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (London: Continuum, 2006), 61.

<sup>69</sup> Levinas, “Meaning and Sense,” 35.

<sup>70</sup> Levinas, “Meaning and Sense,” 35.

<sup>71</sup> Levinas, “Meaning and Sense,” 38-41

<sup>72</sup> Levinas, “Meaning and Sense,” 52.

<sup>73</sup> Levinas, “Meaning and Sense,” 41.

<sup>74</sup> Levinas, “Meaning and Sense,” 42.

Conversely, we can locate in human creativity, in the poetics of language, the free movement, “from the same to the Other” that Levinas calls a *Work*,<sup>75</sup> a “trace” of that Other which is the underpinning meaning found within figurative language. Most notably this movement can be found in metaphor, insofar as metaphor expresses in its referential structure, “the necessary conditions for a ‘beyond the given’ which dawns in every meaning, for the metaphor which animates it.”<sup>76</sup> It should be noted that for Levinas the human ‘other’ can never be a metaphor that is reducible to, and reduced by, representation, but in and of itself is the real presence of God:

In my relation to the other, I hear the Word of God. It is not a metaphor; it is not only extremely important, it is literally true. I’m not saying that the other is God, but that in his or her Face I hear the Word of God.<sup>77</sup>

The Triadic quality of Levinas’ structure of being and becoming, insofar as it articulates a ‘grammar’ of the relationship between God and humanity, will be addressed more fully in the second part of this thesis, which deals explicitly with the presence of Edenic imagery in the New Testament. For now, it is sufficient to recognise how his understanding of figurative language can be applied to the Garden of Eden. From this Levinasian perspective Eden can be understood as not just signifying the presence of God’s active and steadfast love in and for the world, on the one hand, or the blessings that accrue from that presence on the other. It can also be equally seen to be both descriptive of the relationship that exists between God and humanity, the creative movement towards the Other (*L’Autre*) of which the story of the Garden of Eden is a reflection, as well as constitutive of those who participate in that story. From a Levinasian perspective, then, the story of Eden, like all of creation, is fundamentally one of ethics. As such, the question, “Am I my brother’s keeper?”<sup>78</sup> becomes no longer incidental to the Eden narrative but central to the whole question of

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<sup>75</sup> Levinas, “Meaning and Sense,” 49.

<sup>76</sup> Levinas, “Meaning and Sense,” 56.

<sup>77</sup> Levinas, *Entre Nous*, 94.

<sup>78</sup> Gen 4:9

the meaning of Eden as a place of care, above and beyond simplified interpretations reducible to Eden as a ‘garden of delight.’

Levinas’s notion of figurative language as expressive of the language of *alterity* additionally introduces a messianic dimension in our consideration of Eden. To say that metaphor contains within its referential structure, “the necessary conditions for a ‘beyond the given,’”<sup>79</sup> calls our attention to the use of its symbolism to reference, as it does, not just existing realities, in particular the abundance of Eden over and above the deprivations of ‘wilderness’ in its various guises.<sup>80</sup> It also alerts the reader to the presence of Eden as the means through which we may come to understand that things do not come to us exclusively from past or current realities but also from a future that God, in God’s freedom, offers us.<sup>81</sup>

For Levinas the apprehension of this messianic dimension of reality is a precondition to full human understanding. Nevertheless, more often than not this trans-historical or *diachronic* dimension is assumed, or is otherwise left unexplained, in Levinas’ essay *Meaning and Sense* (1964), thus far the primary source for this analysis of his thinking on the function of figurative language. Elsewhere, however, Levinas is much more explicit on the question of messianism, especially as it pertains to Eden. In a 1963 commentary on messianic texts, for example, he draws the reader’s attention to a Talmudic passage reflecting on the notion of ‘what the eye cannot see’<sup>82</sup> that references the imagery of Eden<sup>83</sup> to suggest that whilst the “true mystery” of

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<sup>79</sup> Levinas, “Meaning and Sense,” 38.

<sup>80</sup> A dominant motif in Old Testament narrative discussed at length in Ch. 5 of this thesis.

<sup>81</sup> Levinas, “Meaning and Sense,” 37-38, 49-50, 53, 59-64.

<sup>82</sup> Isa 64:4 cf. 1 Cor 2:9.

<sup>83</sup> “R. Joshua b. Levi said: To the wine that has been kept (maturing) with its grapes since the six days of Creation. A famous vintage! An ancient wine that has not been bottled, or even harvested. A wine not given the least opportunity to become adulterated. Absolutely unaltered, absolutely pure. The future world is this wine. Let us admire the beauty of the image, but none the less question the meaning it might have.” From Emmanuel Levinas, “Messianic Texts” in *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, transl. Sean Hand (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997), 66.

Scripture is most fully present in its “original simplicity” it is in the future where the full meaning of that text will be revealed:

Only the original meaning, in its unaltered simplicity, will be practiced in a future world where history has already been covered. Time and history are therefore required. The first meaning, ‘older’ than the first, lies in the future. We must pass through interpretation to surpass interpretation.<sup>84</sup>

Levinas’ later work develops the notion of *diachrony* in the specific and unique sense of the ‘deformalization’ of time,<sup>85</sup> distinct from the conventional historiographical understanding of the term,<sup>86</sup> to describe the consummation of the meaning of the Scriptures in a time-out-of-time that is the holy future. Appreciating the potential ambiguity of an expression that brings with it the possible “retreat of transcendence and indeclinable authority,” but which at the same time offers the complete freedom - and the “difficult piety” that radical freedom engenders - of a “theology without theodicy,” even, for example, in the face of the horrors of the Shoah, Levinas appears to hesitate, if only momentarily, at the implications of a religion “impossible to propose to others, and consequently... impossible to preach.”<sup>87</sup> It would seem, then, that the only appropriate response to the uncontainable mystery of time is obedience to God, the “indeclinable authority” that Levinas fears may be displaced, betrayed even,<sup>88</sup> in the movement away from the constraints of human history in the reality of the face of the Other (*L’Autre*).<sup>89</sup>

The American writer, Marilynne Robinson, has also reflected on the challenge of obedience to God in the context of the mystery of time. In her 2014 novel *Lila* Robinson takes the themes of Ezekiel 16 to construct the life of a young woman, Lila, whose marriage to an elderly preacher brings her from the ‘wilderness’ of an impoverished

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<sup>84</sup> Levinas, “Messianic Texts,” 67.

<sup>85</sup> Levinas, *Entre Nous*, 151-153.

<sup>86</sup> That is, as pertaining to the mapping of the development of ideas or concepts through the examination and comparison of distinct historical periods.

<sup>87</sup> Levinas, *Entre Nous*, 152-153.

<sup>88</sup> Levinas, *Entre Nous*, 152.

<sup>89</sup> Levinas, *Entre Nous*, 153.

itinerant childhood to the 'Eden' of respectability and safety in the small Iowan town of Gilead, the fictional centre of the trilogy of novels concluded with this story. With great spiritual and psychological insight Robinson conveys Lila's restlessness and fear that she is not worthy of the blessings that have come to her through her relationship with the Reverend John Ames. More particularly, Lila is haunted by the thought that her past, especially the time when, in desperation, she worked in a St Louis brothel, might come back to tear her new life apart. Her response is to continually entertain in her own mind the thought of leaving, going back, as it were, to the literal and figurative wilderness of her previous life. Intuiting his wife's inner turmoil, Ames reads her the draft of a sermon he is developing that deals precisely with the notion of understanding one's past, and future, in the context of God's grace and mercy:

'Things happen for reasons that are hidden from us, utterly hidden for as long as we think they must proceed from what has come before, our guilt or our deserving, rather than coming to us from a future that God in his freedom offers to us... The only true knowledge of God is born of obedience,' that's Calvin, 'and obedience has to be constantly attentive to the demands that are made of it, to a circumstance that is always new and particular to its moment... Then the reasons that things happen are still hidden, but they are hidden in the mystery of God...Of course misfortunes have opened the way to blessings you would never have thought to hope for, that you would not have been ready to understand as blessings if they had come to you in your youth, when you were uninjured, innocent. The future always finds us changed.' So then it is part of the providence of God, as I see it, that blessing or happiness can have very different meanings from one time to another. 'This is not to say that joy is a compensation for loss, but that each of them, joy and loss, exists in its own right and must be recognized for what it is. Sorrow is very real, and loss feels very final to us... Our experience is fragmentary. Its parts don't add up...Nothing makes sense until we understand that experience does not accumulate like money, or memory, or like years and frailties. Instead it is presented to us by a God who is not

under any obligation to the past except in His eternal, freely given constancy.<sup>90</sup>

As with Levinas, then, for the Reverend John Ames the issue of the limitations of human understandings of time, as these limitations are manifest in the twin anxieties of memory on the one hand, and projections of the future on the other, must be given over to God not in an attitude of passivity but in the understanding that we are being called by God from a future that is ultimately an offer of Grace. To the degree that Eden moves in both time and space, partaking in and of the holy time of God that Robinson, and Levinas, describe, it must be seen as a reflection of this grace. As such the blessings of Eden, mediated through the range of its imagery, disclose not just the trace of God, or the yearning for the revelation of God in the present moment, but also the hope of a future lived in the eternal presence of God. Any examination of Eden must accordingly address this messianic component of its symbolism. That is, it must move beyond the perceived limitations of language and acknowledge the unconstrained possibilities of subjectivity that faith, expressed through figurative language, bears witness to.

### **Conclusion.**

It is precisely the ethical and messianic dimensions of Levinas' analysis of figurative language which distinguishes his thinking on the matter compared to that of both Derrida and Ricoeur. That is to say, whilst Derrida's and Ricoeur's analyses of sign and symbol are a helpful guide to the constructive and generative characteristics of figurative language, as applied to theological texts, neither seems able to contain or appropriately examine the multivalent and polysemic attributes of Eden, especially in the context of the plenitude of faith. Derrida's emphasis on deconstruction, for example, takes us to the edge of language, but what lies beyond is properly subsumed under

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<sup>90</sup> Marilynne Robinson, *Lila* (London: Virago Press, 2014), 222-223.

mysticism, and therefore ultimately not an appropriate focus for this thesis, which addresses the question of the proper place of Eden in Christian theology. Similarly Ricoeur, whilst locating the source of meaning in what he refers to as “prior consciousness,” is unable to shift his analysis beyond ruled-governed “forms of communication” which, in the final analysis, limit imagination to human constructs. Ultimately it is from God, Levinas’ “beyond,” that the meaning of Eden as a messianic and eschatological category comes, and any analysis must accommodate this. Bearing that in mind we will now examine in specific detail aspects of the symbolism of Eden as it is represented in the Old Testament in order to position ourselves to apprehend something of its meaning, as it may be understood biblically, narratively, and in the context of lived faith.

## CHAPTER TWO: EDEN AND ISRAEL

In the previous chapter some of the problems of analysing and interpreting figurative language, as it is used in the context of faith, were discussed. These difficulties are amplified in relation to the Garden of Eden, at once an earthly and divine entity,<sup>1</sup> existing both spatially and abstractly in the form of sign, symbol and metaphor, preceding the Creation,<sup>2</sup> transcendent of both time and space.

The understandings of three significant mid-to-late 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophers – Jacques Derrida, Paul Ricoeur, and Emmanuel Levinas – whose work, in part, addresses theological and biblical questions from the perspective of representation – were compared. It was concluded that the unique nature of religious experience requires us to treat language in general, and figurative language in particular, not so much as the core structural component of being,<sup>3</sup> that is, ontologically, but rather as the surface of being, expressive of a transcendent intuition, realised in a radical being-for-the-other, that not only exists in advance of the legible data of human existence, but which also illuminates and gives meaning to that existence.<sup>4</sup>

In accord with these understandings, I aim to show in this chapter that the Garden of Eden, inherently a part of ancient Jewish tradition, must be understood as something more than just a cultural artefact, where the meaning is reducible to a series of historical moments. More accurately, the Garden of Eden will be shown to express elements of the very essence of the ancient Jews themselves, as they existed in dynamic partnership with the Land (*eretz Yisrael*), with each other, with their neighbours, and with God.

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<sup>1</sup> Gen 3:8.

<sup>2</sup> Giulio Busi, “The Mystical Architecture of Eden,” in F. Regina Psaki, ed., *The Earthly Paradise: The Garden of Eden from Antiquity to Modernity* (Binghamton: Global Publications, 1992), 16-22.

<sup>3</sup> Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 35.

<sup>4</sup> Levinas, “Meaning and Sense,” 37.



The Garden of Eden, then, can be seen to inform the emotional, psychological, and spiritual life of ancient Israel, as much as it provided elements for cultic worship, such as motifs for the decoration of the Temple, or paradigms for myth and story. This is especially true in the context of the eschatological and messianic dimensions of the Garden of Eden, where the symbols of Eden, particularly in relation to its abundance, beauty, and healing power, gave shape not only to a national and theological ideal, but to a conceptualisation of the afterlife – *Olam Ha-Ba*.

These relationships must be examined in order to begin to appreciate the significance of the Garden of Eden in ancient Jewish life, as expressed in its sacred texts. From these understandings the significance of the imagery of the Garden of Eden in later writings, such as those found in the New Testament, can be more fully appreciated and understood. So we see Eden related to the land<sup>5</sup> of Israel, *Torah*,<sup>6</sup> the ancient Temple, and other primary images and motifs through which the great, underlying themes expressive of the bond between God and Israel, notably those of creation, revelation and redemption, are made apparent. The various meanings of Eden revealed in these relationships will be the subject of this chapter.

The relationship between Eden as an expression of God's steadfast, covenantal love, and the people of Israel, through the metaphor of the kingship of God, is an example of these inter-dependent primary images. The association between the imagery of the Garden of Eden and the matrimonial symbolism through which God's love for Israel and its people is brought to life in the Old Testament, particularly in the writings of the prophets, is also a recognisably recurring pattern of

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<sup>5</sup> Note: where the term 'the land,' references Israel as geographical entity, a lower case 'l' is used; in the instances where the term the Land (of Israel), refers to Israel as a theological concept, the upper case is used throughout this thesis.

<sup>6</sup> As a body of instruction, given to Israel by God, the Hebrew word *Torah* has a broader, and less juridical meaning than the Greek *Nomos*, or Law, which is its LXX translation, and is preferred here accordingly. The Latin word 'Pentateuch' is used to refer to the first five books of the canonical *Tanakh*, or Old Testament, rather than 'the Torah,' its other most common appellation.

this type. Similarly, the presence of the motif of ‘wilderness,’ in opposition to the abundance, fertility, and beauty of Eden, will be discussed as one of the key organising and structuring principles of the Old Testament. The characteristics of these relationships revealed in this, and the following chapters, will be reassessed in Part Two of this thesis, in the context of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and the faith and theology that grew from that event.

## **2.1 Locating Eden in the Land of Israel.**

In the first instance the unique relationship between the Garden of Eden and the land of Israel itself must be examined. The association between Eden and the Temple of Solomon is well established,<sup>7</sup> and has been comprehensively described.<sup>8</sup> It is not the intention of this thesis to replicate that information here. But it would appear that the demonstrably significant parallels between the land of Israel, as both physical entity and theological ideal, and the Garden of Eden, have received only incidental recognition. Paul Morris, for example, identifies that, “the Garden of Eden can be Israel, or the heavenly abode of the righteous after death, or the heavenly academy ‘yeshiva on high’.”<sup>9</sup> Whilst Morris provides excellent references on Jewish eschatology, none claim equivalence between Eden and Israel, suggesting that the belief is traditional. Thus, in the *Jewish Prayer*

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<sup>7</sup> Supporting the manifestation of a prophetic ideal wherein, “the future and the past were perpetually and potentially present.” See Barker, *The Gate of Heaven*, 68.

<sup>8</sup> Gen 3:8 cf. Ex 25:8-9; Wisd 9:8. For further explication of this theme see Gary Anderson, “Celibacy or Consummation in the Garden: Reflections on Early Jewish and Christian Interpretations of the Garden of Eden,” *The Harvard Theological Review*, 82:2 (April 1989): 121-148; Barker, *The Gate of Heaven*, 57-103; Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 369,370, 386; J.T.A.G.M. van Ruiten, “Eden and the Temple: The Rewriting of Genesis 2:4-3:24 in *The Book of Jubilees*,” in Luttikhuizen, ed., *Paradise Interpreted*, 63-94. See also Richard J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972). Clifford is more circumspect in his conclusions.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Morris, “Exiled from Eden,” in Paul Morris and Deborah Sawyer, eds., *A Walk in the Garden: Biblical, Iconographical, and Literary Images of Eden* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 118.

*Book*,<sup>10</sup> it is written that when the Torah Scroll is held up before the congregation, they exclaim, “*This*, is the Torah which Moses set before the children of Israel... She is a Tree of Life to those who grasp her.”<sup>11</sup> This is not to claim a perfect correspondence between Eden and Israel – each remains a distinct theological concept and, as a consequence, a separate organising principal across a range of biblical and theological themes.<sup>12</sup> As such, a correlation can only ever be partial. Rather, to make this comparison is to attempt to identify the degree to which the values expressed in Eden point to or support wider understandings pertaining to biblical Israel and the faith of her people, and vice versa.

In one sense the reason for this apparent absence of recognition of the relationship between Eden and Israel lies perhaps not so much in the obscurity of the connections between them but more obviously in common beliefs that can be recognised as occurring throughout the Ancient Near East (henceforth ANE). One of these, much older than that described in the biblical account of Eden, is particularly widespread. It describes a ‘ground-flow,’ or ‘sweet waters,’ that rise from subterranean springs to bring life to the face of the earth, and which has God, in various cultic forms, at its source.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Jonathan Sacks, transl. and commentary, *The Koren Siddur* (Jerusalem: Koren Publishers, 2015), 512.

<sup>11</sup> Morris, “Exiled from Eden,” 118. Cf. Proverbs 3:18.

<sup>12</sup> Bockmuehl identifies three interrelated and partially overlapping notions pertaining to Eden in ancient Jewish texts: i) the biblical Garden of Eden as related in Genesis; ii) a temporary abode of the righteous awaiting the world to come, possibly a location on earth; and iii) the eschatological and quite possibly heavenly home of the world to come. He concludes that, “the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* seems right to assert ‘that the boundary line between the earthly and heavenly Garden of Eden is barely discernible in rabbinic literature.’” See Markus Bockmuehl, “Locating paradise,” in Bockmuehl and Stroumsa, eds., *Paradise in Antiquity*, 196.

<sup>13</sup> James Dickie, for example, describes Edenic images, where the Spring of Life breaks surface at the centre of the world, found on Persian ceramics datable to 4000 B.C.E. See James Dickie, “The Hispano-Arab Garden: Its Philosophy & Function,” *The Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 31, no. 2 (1968): 238. See also Clifford who, in citing Gunkel, Speiser, von Rad, and Westermann, amongst others, recognises similar motifs in Ugaritic, Assyrian, Mesopotamian, and Babylonian stories and artefacts. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament*, 98-102.

But such parallels in the case of Genesis 2:10-14 are deceptive. The unique Israelite version, of what might otherwise be deemed an archetypal myth,<sup>14</sup> has the four rivers of Eden named in that passage appearing to position Israel within the boundaries roughly circumscribed by their location. Where the location is indeterminate, as in the case of the Pishon and Gihon rivers (Gen 2:11-13), we find that the symbolic qualities ascribed to these locations and their associated landforms attach to Israel. For example, the precious stones and minerals – gold and onyx – found in Havilah, the land circumscribed by the Pishon (Gen 2:11-12) are precisely those indicated by God to adorn the vestments to be worn by the Priesthood in the sanctuary God demanded to be built by the Israelites following the gift of *Torah*, so that He, “may dwell among them” (Ex 25: 7-9; 28: 9-14, 15-27). Similarly, an alternative, contested, but theologically plausible site of the Edenic river Gihon exists in the form of the Jerusalem spring, and was recognised as such at least from the time of the monarchy (Ps 46:4 cf. 1 Kings 1: 33, 38), from which historical period ‘J’ documents (that is, an earlier editor of the Genesis narratives) are dated. As such, as Wallace argues, it is conceivable that the ancient hearers of Genesis 2:10-14 would correspondingly make this connection.<sup>15</sup>

That is to say, and notwithstanding the exhaustive attempts of biblical scholars to pin-point what they presume to be the precise geographical location of Eden ‘in the East,’ or in the north<sup>16</sup> (consistent with waters of the Euphrates flowing from its source in Armenia), the emphasis, when regarding the relationship between Eden and Israel, must be on the meaning of these inclusions rather than any definitive or specific locative effect. This is a point emphasised by Nira Stone, who draws our attention to the fact that, among ancient people exposed to the

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<sup>14</sup> A position entirely consistent with Israel’s perception of itself as a land ‘set apart’ from the other nations, that is, ‘holy. Cf. Num. 23:9.

<sup>15</sup> Wallace *The Eden Narrative*, 2. 74, 75. Cf. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain*, 101 n.5.

<sup>16</sup> See Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan*, 100-101.

myth of Eden, concern was not for the existence of the four rivers, but the signification of the number four itself, and its various attributed meanings. For example, the four rivers were seen to correspond to the four letters of Adam's name in Greek, with the four winds, and the four directions. Another interpretation related them to the four essential elements, earth, air, fire, and water. Augustine of Hippo held that they corresponded with the four Evangelists. Additional Christian interpretations found in the four rivers the Cross, and the blood and water that flowed from Christ's pierced body.<sup>17</sup> From a related perspective Bruce Vawter, when considering that centuries of patient research, and at times extravagant exploration,<sup>18</sup> have been powerless to determine with any degree of satisfaction the identity of the Pishon and the Gihon rivers, argues that the "deliberate muddling" of things in this description, (that is, the four rivers) by the author/s of Genesis, was an intentional device in order to emphasise the mysterious, utopian aspect of Eden on the one hand,<sup>19</sup> while signifying, through the life-giving waters of the garden, the superabundant blessedness in which humankind now lived, on the other.<sup>20</sup>

The indeterminate nature of Eden as geographical entity can also be inferred by Richard Clifford's research, in spite of his argument that places the locus of Eden somewhere in the fertile delta region of the Tigris River at the head of the Persian Gulf. Clifford's claim for this location hinges on two unrelated notions. The first simply takes the expression referring to Eden as "in the East" (Gen 2:8; Gen 11:2, 9) literally, discounting the possibility that the qualitative dimension of this expression also supports an understanding of Eden being 'far off' in both time and location, that is, mysterious and unknowable, or

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<sup>17</sup> See Nira Stone, "The Four Rivers that Flowed from Eden," in Konrad Schmid and Christoph Riedweg, eds., *Beyond Eden: The Biblical Story of Paradise (Genesis 2-3) and Its Reception History* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 229.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Alessandro Scafi, *Mapping Paradise: A History of Heaven on Earth* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2006); and *Maps of Paradise* (London: The British Library, 2013).

<sup>19</sup> That is, as an eschatological category. See Bockmuehl, "Locating paradise," 195. See also Bruce Vawter, *A Path Through Genesis* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1956), 53.

<sup>20</sup> Vawter, *A Path Through Genesis* 56.

utopian. The second notion that Clifford uses to place Eden is an ancient Sumerian conception that it was from the Persian gulf that the Tigris and Euphrates rivers ‘drank,’ that is, had their ‘mouth,’ and hence received their annual overflow. Accordingly, the rivers of Eden flow from this source, not from the mountains of Armenia, their geological origin.<sup>21</sup> Clifford’s attempt to definitively locate Eden nevertheless stumbles on the interpretation of the two non-identifiable rivers of Eden which, as Vawter emphasises, fail to align with any degree of confidence or consistency to any stable geographical location. Indeed, Clifford’s own observation that the linguistic roots of the words Pishon and Gihon translate as “bubbler” and “gusher” respectively,<sup>22</sup> what Robert Alter would describe as ‘nonce words’ reflective of the ancient Jewish writers’ love of word-play,<sup>23</sup> gives support to Vawter’s, and subsequently Wallace’s<sup>24</sup> conclusions as to the likely impossibility of ever accurately determining an earthly location to Eden. The feasibility that the Gihon might also represent the Jerusalem spring, as suggested above, heightens this potential ambiguity.

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<sup>21</sup> Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain*, 100. This is an ambiguity that Islamic garden designers never entertained. Indeed, and despite being exposed in Islamic culture to as wide a range of interpretations of the sources and identities of the rivers of Eden as that found in Judaism and the Christian West, they appropriated the Garden of Eden, with the four rivers that flow *from* the centre, as the primary motif through which the presence God in this world, and the blessings available to the righteous in the next world, found its most complete expression. See Abdol Majid Hosseinizadeh, “The Four Rivers of Eden in Judaism and Islam,” *Al-Bayān Journal* 10, no. 2 (Dec. 2012), 40-47. See also, for example, John Brookes, *Gardens of Paradise: The History and Design of the Great Islamic Gardens* (New York: New Amsterdam Press, 1987); Emma Clark, *The Art of the Islamic Garden* (Ramsbury: Crowood Press: 2004).

<sup>22</sup> Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain*, 101 n.5.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Alter’s commentary on Genesis 1:2, where he translates *tohu wabohu* not as ‘chaos,’ a familiar interpretation, but as “welter and waste,” attempting to reflect in the English translation what Alter describes as the “Hebrew nonce words” expressive of this affection for linguistic puns and playfulness. See Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: Norton and Co., 2007), 17. In some Islamic texts a similar play on words occurs where the *Sayhān* and the *Jayhān* represent an unknown river and the Gihon River respectively, as part of the land divided by Noah among his sons. See Hosseinizadeh, “The Four Rivers of Eden,” 46.

<sup>24</sup> Howard N. Wallace, *The Eden Narrative*, 74.

Nili Wazana's comprehensive investigation of the meaning and interpretation of geographical boundaries in the ANE similarly positions us to reflect on the four rivers of Eden as potentially ascribing divine attributes to the land of Israel.<sup>25</sup> She draws our attention to the fact that in the ANE it was precisely through the means of natural features, symbolic though they often were, that regional boundaries were frequently asserted.<sup>26</sup> Wazana further concludes that, even when these boundaries do refer to a defined geographical unit the exact location is commonly unspecified, that is, lacking precise geographical definition.<sup>27</sup> This is no less true for Israel<sup>28</sup> for whom, "the majority of the promissory texts – in both P and J (as commonly accepted) – persistently refrain from giving any indication of the Land's dimensions."<sup>29</sup> For Wazana, echoing Vawter's conclusions relating to the non-specific location of Eden summarised above, this is a "deliberate and intentional ploy,"<sup>30</sup> even if the focus or subject of those intentions are unclear.

Nevertheless, the effect of that ploy *is* clear, especially when one considers that both Eden and Israel came into existence through divine bequest. As Wazana observes, in relation to the Land, "All the texts speak – in quasi-legal terminology linked to the transfer of estate performed by means of 'seeing' or 'walking' its length and breadth, or lying upon it – as that which God 'assigns' to the patriarchs and/or their offspring."<sup>31</sup> These two features – the stress on the Land as divine endowment, and its intimation as delimited – are consistent with one another, both reflecting the concept that God's relations with the Israelites are modelled on those of a monarch and his subjects,<sup>32</sup> a notion that finds fuller expression in the wider metaphor of the

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<sup>25</sup> See Nili Wazana, *All the Boundaries of the Land: The Promised Land in Biblical Thought in Light of the Ancient Near East*, transl. Liat Qeren (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 14, 45.

<sup>26</sup> Wazana, *All the Boundaries of the Land*, 14,15.

<sup>27</sup> Wazana, *All the Boundaries of the Land*, 96.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Gen 13:14-17.

<sup>29</sup> Wazana, *All the Boundaries of the Land*, 96.

<sup>30</sup> Wazana, *All the Boundaries of the Land*, 96.

<sup>31</sup> Wazana, *All the Boundaries of the Land*, 95.

<sup>32</sup> Wazana, *All the Boundaries of the Land*, 95.

kingship of God that informs significant parts of the Pentateuch, including the narrative of the Garden of Eden.

The four rivers of Eden also bear a socio-political context in which the final edits to, and possible redactions of, Genesis were undertaken.<sup>33</sup> We see this in the return of the Babylonian exiles to Israel, with the restored Jerusalem at its centre.<sup>34</sup> Here, the description of the four rivers of Eden provide a spatial context for Israel that is at once earthly and divine, reassuring the returnees of the ongoing maintenance of God's covenantal promise. This is over and above any cosmological, aetiological, theological, or paraenetic considerations that might have been the focus of the ascribed editors, or of subsequent exegetical endeavour following the emergence of Talmudic scholarship. Clifford gives greater weight to this consideration by describing how the narrative structure of the two identifiably distinct sections of Genesis, Gen 1:1-11:26 and Gen 11:27-50:26,

... are set in deliberate parallel ... in which the components of each segment artistically build up the major segments. Gen 1:1-11:26 describes the origin of the nations, showing how God created the world, a concept that in Genesis means the structured community of men and women, acting freely to fulfill their divine destiny to fill the world and possess their land. In parallel but in contrast to the nations, Gen 11:27-50:26 describes the origins of Israel (in the person of ancestors), showing how God created Israel, through fulfilling for the ancestors the human destiny of progeny and land.<sup>35</sup>

That is, the two separate sections of Genesis, 1-11 and 12-50,<sup>36</sup> were constructed not to be read lineally but to inform each other.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Richard J. Clifford, "Genesis," in Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy, eds., *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1990), 9.

<sup>34</sup> Ezra 1-3.

<sup>35</sup> Clifford, "Genesis," 9.

<sup>36</sup> That is, the primeval and the 'historical' sections of Genesis.

<sup>37</sup> Clifford, "Genesis," 9. See also Morris, who describes how midrashic commentary built on this convention, characterised by "fluidity and openness in interpretation." Indeed, Morris writes, that, "The limitless plurality of midrashic



Received in this manner the feature of the four rivers emanating from the centre of Eden can be seen to consolidate an understanding of Israel as not just blessed among the nations, where that blessing speaks of God's creative and vivifying presence in the heart of Israel itself. It is also functions as confirmation in advance of the full restoration of Israel following the Babylonian exile, of which Eden was obviously a profound yet familiar symbol of God's creativity, abundance and righteous justice.

## **2.2 Eden and Israel as the Centre of the World.**

The notion of Israel as the centre of the world appears in Scripture as well as in Jewish tradition. We find in both instances strong parallels between the status of Israel as the *omphalos*, or navel, of the world, and Eden, with which, accordingly, it shares a common identity.<sup>38</sup> The implication that Eden and Israel are equivalents of sorts, must therefore be acknowledged.

The author of Ezekiel, for example, when describing how, at the end of days, Gog, of the land of Magog, is to advance against the people of Israel, declares explicitly that, in the service of the Lord, Gog

... will fall upon the quiet people who live in safety, all of them living without walls, and having no bars or gates; to seize spoil and carry off plunder; to assail the waste places that are now inhabited, and the people who were gathered from the nations, who are acquiring cattle and goods, who live *at the centre of the earth*. (my italics)

Ezek 38:11-12.

Earlier (5:5), Ezekiel had revealed how God had set Jerusalem, "in the centre of the nations, with countries all around her," such that her

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meaning is based on the methodological certainty that 'one biblical statement may carry many meanings' (*b.Sanh.* 34a) and, in fact, most midrashic expositions do offer a number of parallel and alternative interpretations of each biblical unit." Morris, "Exiled from Eden," 119.

<sup>38</sup> W.D. Davies, *The Territorial Dimension of Judaism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 2.

behaviour would be observable to all.<sup>39</sup> The mention of the centre of the earth, as the location of Israel, references the place where creation began, and where, Boadt argues, contact with the divine is uniquely close.<sup>40</sup> Following the defeat of Gog the restored Israel, that is, Jerusalem, will live there.

More broadly the passage is expressive of understandings of holiness in Ancient Israel articulated to hierarchical arrangements such as height (the higher the more divine), and, more pertinently, distance from the Temple, that is, in terms of holiness emanating from the temple from most holy to least holy within the land of Israel, which itself was considered “holier than any other land.”<sup>41</sup> The passage, then, through its positioning of Israel at the centre of the world, implicitly references the Garden of Eden with which Israel is shown to share a similar status at the heart of Creation. This parallel centring of both Eden and Israel can also be found in other biblical texts, especially in the Psalms, wherein God is consistently described, either explicitly or implicitly, as having His earthly home in the *debir*, or Holy of Holies of the Temple, on Mount Zion, at the heart of Jerusalem, and thus at the heart of Israel itself.<sup>42</sup>

This relationship between Israel and Eden is reinforced in biblical narrative in other ways. The reader is told, for example, in the stories of the conquests of Joshua how the *town* of Debir, similarly referring to a place of sanctuary, south-west of Hebron, was an area, “where there was said to be an abundance of springs,”<sup>43</sup> or life-giving water

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<sup>39</sup> Davies, *The Territorial Dimension of Judaism*, 2.

<sup>40</sup> Lawrence Boadt, “Ezekiel,” in Brown, Fitzmyer, and Murphy, eds., *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 325.

<sup>41</sup> Thus, the order of holiness is as follows: i) The Holy of Holies, ii) The sanctuary, iii) Between the porch and the altar iv) The Court of the Priests, v) The Court of the Israelites, vi) The court of women, vii) The Rampart, viii) The Temple Mount, ix) Within the walls of Jerusalem, and x) The walled cities (of the Land of Israel). See Barker, *The Gate of Heaven*, 25. Citing Mishnah *Kelim* 1.6-9.

<sup>42</sup> See, for example Ps 43:3, 50:2, 63:2, 80:1-3, 84:10-11, and 132:1-13. See also 1 Chr 28:2, and Isa. 2:2-4, 66: 1; Mic 1:1-4.

<sup>43</sup> William L. Gage, *The Home of God's People* (Hartford: Worthington, Dustin, and Co., 1872), 155.

(cf. Joshua 15:15-19). Debir's previous name of *Kirjath-sannah*,<sup>44</sup> or place of the palm-tree, also evokes Edenic associations through the wide-spread ANE belief that the palm, through its revered capacity to regenerate, was related to the Tree of Life at the centre of Eden.<sup>45</sup>

The parable of the Valley of Dry Bones found in Ezekiel 37 (1-14), inasmuch as it functions as a narrative template for what follows in Ezekiel 38, similarly points to a New Creation. This is also true of Ezekiel 39 where, following the defeat of Gog, “the birds of every kind and . . . all the wild animals” (39:17) are told to assemble for a sacrificial feast, “on the mountains of Israel” – the table of the Lord (39:20) – where, with brutal irony, they will be fattened on temple sacrifices from the rich pastures of Bashan<sup>46</sup> and the bodies, both human and animal, of the enemies of Israel. In this instance, the suggested equivalence of the ‘mountains of Israel’<sup>47</sup> with the Temple of Jerusalem, which has its own associations with Eden, similarly points to an inherent notional equivalence between Eden and Israel. It is acknowledged that by themselves, such correlations between Israel and Eden might be deemed to be tenuous, or incidental. But the climax to which these preceding chapters of Ezekiel forcefully lead, described in Chapters 40-48, combine material evidence of the restoration of Israel formally and systematically expressed through dynamic images of the new temple of Jerusalem as Eden (Ezek 47:1-12), as it is to be constructed within the boundaries of a new Israel reconstituted to conform, in Ezekiel's mind at least, with the original boundaries within Canaan (47:15-20). As such the text functions as a radical renewal of the original promise of the land to the patriarchs,

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<sup>44</sup> Josh 15:49.

<sup>45</sup> See J. Andrew McDonald, “Botanical Determination of the Middle Eastern Tree of Life,” *Economic Botany* 56 (2), 2002: 113-129. Simon Schama reports that the word for ‘palm’ and ‘phoenix’ were interchangeable in both Greek and Egyptian Coptic. This was reflected in the early Christian convention to represent the cross in the form of a living palm tree. Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (Hammersmith: Harper Collins, 1995), 214-215.

<sup>46</sup> That is, of the land of Magog.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. “the mountains of Edom,” a form of shorthand for those who would deny Israel, and whose destruction is assured. See, for example, Jer 49:16, Ezek 35:2-3; Ob 1:3-4, 8, 9, 15-17.

the “Land of Milk and Honey,” revealed to Abraham west of the Jordan River.<sup>48</sup>

Davies relates how the idea of Israel at the centre of the world, recognisable in the Book of Ezekiel, persisted in both the Judaic and early Christian milieu, where the connection between Israel and Eden is similarly observed. In the Ethiopian Enoch, for example, Enoch’s visit to Jerusalem, is described as going to, “the middle of the earth” (26:1).<sup>49</sup> Similarly, in the Book of Jubilees, regarded as an early form of midrashic literature,<sup>50</sup> we read how Noah apportions to his son Shem “the middle of the earth,” (Jub 8:12) that is, Israel. Later, in Jubilees 8:21, the author makes explicit the significance of this gift as both “blessed portion and blessing.” Shem’s allocation of the known world, as gift from Noah to Shem and his sons for eternity, paralleling the portioning of the new Israel to the Twelve Tribes in Ezekiel 47: 13 – 48:29, is described as consisting of:

... he whole land of Eden and the whole land of the Red Sea, and the whole land of the east and India, and on the Red Sea and the mountains thereof, and all the land of Bashan, and all the land of Lebanon and the islands of Kaftur, and all the mountains of Sanir and Amana, and the mountains of Asshur in the north, and all the land of Elam, Asshur, and Babel, and Susan and Ma'edai, and all the mountains of Ararat, and all the region beyond the sea, which is beyond the mountains of Asshur towards the north, a blessed and spacious land, and all that is in it is very good.

Jubilees 8:21

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<sup>48</sup> Wazana makes the point that whilst the external territorial boundaries of Israel remain the same in Ezekiel as that contained in the earlier texts of Joshua and Numbers, Ezekiel makes significant changes to the internal divisions, “refusing to recognize the legitimacy of the Israelite settlements east of the Jordan, whether in its Priestly version (Numbers 32) or its most sympathetic Deuteronomistic description (Deuteronomy 3),” relocating all 12 of the tribes west of the Jordan. See, Wazana, *All the Boundaries of the Land*, 181-182.

<sup>49</sup> Davies, *The Territorial Dimension of Judaism*, 2.

<sup>50</sup> See Zvi Ron, “The Book of Jubilees and the Midrash on the Early Chapters of Genesis,” *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 41, no.3 (2013): 143. See also van Ruiten, “Eden and the Temple: The Rewriting of Genesis 2:4-3:24 in *The Book of Jubilees*,” 61-81.

Here, Eden is described as both adjacent to Israel, and contained geographically within greater Israel<sup>51</sup> itself, gracing the Land with its blessings. Previously (Jub 8:19), and partially overriding the systematic, hierarchical ordering of degrees of holiness referred to above, Enoch describes how, whilst “the Garden of Eden is the holy of holies, and the dwelling of the Lord, Mount Sinai is the centre of the desert, and Mount Zion - the centre of the navel of the earth: these three were created as holy places facing each other.” Despite the awkward geographical positioning of these three centres of holiness in Enoch’s text, the polemical emphasis is clear. That is, in making the claim for the centrality of Eden in the *debir*, or holy of holies, Enoch explicitly located Eden, and the blessings of which it is a sign, at the heart of Israel. The notion that Eden and Israel are partial equivalents, interchangeable depending on context, is once again asserted.

A more thorough understanding of the significance and centrality of Eden to Israel can be obtained when one considers how it is perceived in Jewish mystical tradition. Kabbalah scholar Giulio Busi observes that the notion of Eden as an “earthly paradise,” a common cultural perception in Western understandings of Eden, has no exact equivalent in biblical Hebrew.<sup>52</sup> That is to say, in Talmudic and Midrashic literature the expression *gan ‘eden*, in contrast with *pardes*, the Hebrew equivalent of the ‘paradise’ of Persian origin, refers explicitly to the garden of God, the divine garden into which Adam was placed. As such it has always existed as a theological entity, or construct, in the Hebrew biblical tradition, and participates in the identity of Israel accordingly. Indeed, as Busi relates, Eden was one of the seven things which preceded the creation of the world by two thousand years. These seven entities were: the Torah, the throne of glory, the Garden of Eden, Gehenna, Repentance, the Sanctuary in heaven, and the name of the Messiah.<sup>53</sup> Busi further describes how,

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<sup>51</sup> Cf. Josh 1:4.

<sup>52</sup> Busi, “The Mystical Architecture of Eden,” 15.

<sup>53</sup> Busi, “The Mystical Architecture of Eden,” 16. Citing Midrash *Tehillim XC 12*.

notwithstanding the fact that all seven symbolic images come from “the same divine space,” it is their differences that mark the diverse paths back to their original place, that is, the centre of creation. Of these different symbolic paths the one represented by the Garden of Eden, Busi believes, traces perhaps the most direct and general route back to this divine centre, where the knowledge of God can be found.<sup>54</sup> Busi writes:

It is no accident that in the symbolic chain of the seven entities Eden was preceded only by one more general and higher image: the throne of glory, which nevertheless, strictly pertains to God. Thus, while the throne belongs to God (being his regal emblem), and the other five symbols are related to Hebrew identity, only the garden – open to Adam – features the scene of a welcome originally prepared for everyman.<sup>55</sup>

To be placed within the Garden of Eden, then, signifies not just blessing in the form of super-abundance. Additionally, and in line with Levinas’ understanding of the functioning of figurative language discussed in Chapter One, it symbolises the possibility of humanity, “reaching a privileged vantage point from which a higher knowledge may be obtained.”<sup>56</sup> Only from the vantage point of the centre, and for the ancient Israelites this corresponded to the centre of the Temple on Mount Zion at the heart of Israel, could one fully understand the complexity of reality. Busi further argues that:

The divine perspective alone actually allows an order to the design of creation, while any other vantage point deforms it. This means also that to be banished from the garden means to be removed from the centre and to lose this vantage point.<sup>57</sup>

Bearing these observations in mind a couple of points need to be made. Firstly, there is a danger in transferring the mystical universalism that Busi describes relating to the Garden of Eden onto

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<sup>54</sup> Busi, “The Mystical Architecture of Eden,” 17.

<sup>55</sup> Busi, “The Mystical Architecture of Eden,” 17.

<sup>56</sup> Busi, “The Mystical Architecture of Eden,” 18.

<sup>57</sup> Busi, “The Mystical Architecture of Eden,” 18.

the socio-political realities concerning ancient Israel, however poetically those realities are expressed. As Katherine Darr reminds us, those, such as Eichrodt, who find in the book of Ezekiel, for example, evidence of a “a trans-global transformation”<sup>58</sup> are wise to remember that the Edenic river that flows from the restored Temple (Ezek 47:1-12) can be traced no further than the shore of the Dead Sea. Indeed, writes Darr, “we cannot avoid being struck by how precisely the regions transformed by the river’s healing waters are located within the boundaries of Israel’s homeland – according to Ezekiel’s perspective, land for which the western and eastern boundaries are the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River, respectively.”<sup>59</sup> Secondly, and mindful of the caution against universalism suggested by the previous point, there is, in the understandings of the pre-existence of Eden that Busi describes, a viable explanation within ancient Jewish tradition as to why the images that mediate the restoration of Israel can be seen to be subsumed, as this thesis argues, within Edenic imagery. These images include, for example the matrimonial symbolism we find in the writing of the Prophets, the subject of Chapter Four of this thesis, and the blessings that are obtained by Israel through adherence to *Torah*,<sup>60</sup> which will be examined shortly.

### **2.3 Eden and the Sacred Bounty of Israel.**

A further correlation between the Garden of Eden and Israel can be found in the divinisation of the seven species of plant produce mentioned first in Deuteronomy 8:7-8. The special recognition of these species – wheat, barley, grape, fig, pomegranate, olive, and date – which reflects the lived experience of the ancient Israelites, expresses more formally, and in more detail, the blessings of the Land into which the Lord has brought the Hebrew slaves following their

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<sup>58</sup> See Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 584-585.

<sup>59</sup> Kathryn Pfisterer Darr, “The Wall Around Paradise: Ezekielian Ideas about the Future,” *Vetus Testamentum* 37, fasc. 3 (July 1987): 276-279.

<sup>60</sup> Quantified most notably in Ps 1, 19, and 119, and expressed qualitatively throughout the Pentateuch and the Prophets.

exodus from Egypt (6:20-23). In this passage, Moses, as the mediator of God's will, exhorts Israel not to forget God in their soon-to-be-realised prosperity, to fear Him and to walk in His ways (8:6). Indeed, this is the entire commandment (8:1) that the Lord demands of the Hebrews in the moment prior to the crossing of the Jordan, where they will enter the "land of milk and honey"<sup>61</sup> promised to their ancestors:

<sup>7</sup>For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with flowing streams, with springs and underground waters welling up in valleys and hills,<sup>8</sup>a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey,<sup>9</sup>a land where you may eat bread without scarcity, where you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron and from whose hills you may mine copper.  
<sup>10</sup>You shall eat your fill and bless the LORD your God for the good land that he has given you.

#### Deuteronomy 8:7-10

As with the Garden of Eden, the value of the Seven Species - used as a synecdoche to represent the fecundity of Israel in its totality – can be recognised within a much broader cultural context. That is, representations of each can be found across the ANE in a range of artefacts such as pottery, textile, glassware, metalwork, various painted objects, as well as in textual representation and cultic activities.<sup>62</sup> Their presence in the life of ancient Israel, then, is not remarkable although the depth of the relationship between the Seven Species and Israel, insofar as it shaped the nature and quality of daily existence, is worth commenting on.

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<sup>61</sup> In relation to the Seven Species, and possibly in a wider association to the "land of milk and honey," the term 'honey,' as it is used in this context, is believed to refer to a nectar made from dates, figs, and grapes, but especially from ripe dates from which a syrup, date-honey, is squeezed. Westenholz reports that authority for this understanding relies on the assertion contained in the *Jerusalem Talmud (Tractate Bikkurim 1, 3)*, "And honey – it is dates." The explanation, reportedly favoured by many scholars and rabbis, is that honey would be "a strange exception in a list comprising only plants and their products." Joan Goodnick Westenholz, *Sacred Bounty Sacred Land: The Seven Species of the Land of Israel* (Jerusalem: Bible Lands Museum, 1998), 49.

<sup>62</sup> See Westenholz, *Sacred Bounty*, 13-50. See also, Dean Shanson, "Catalogue of Objects," in Westenholz, *Sacred Bounty*, 57.



Three central festivals of the Jewish year, namely, *Pesach*, *Shavuot*, and *Succoth*, interwove the history of Israel into its relationship with the abundance of the land: *Pesach* (Passover) celebrates the barley harvest, the beginning of the wheat harvest, and the flight out of Egypt; *Shavuot* (Pentecost) celebrates the offering of the ‘first-fruits’ and the gift of *Torah*; *Succoth* (Tabernacles, or the Festival of Booths) celebrates the final harvest of the year, and the wanderings in the wilderness,<sup>63</sup> when Israel learnt, “that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD” (Deut 8:1-3).

There are, however, through affiliation with the Garden of Eden, aspects to the relationship between Israel and the bounty of the land that are quite distinct. We know, for example, that reliefs of palm trees,<sup>64</sup> cherubim, gourds, and “open flowers,” frequently carved from olive wood, were used by Solomon to decorate the first temple (1 Kings 6:29-35). Similarly, the fig tree, most probably through its association with *Torah*,<sup>65</sup> became synonymous not just with the Temple but with Israel in its entirety. Grains were also iconic markers of the fullness and integrity of Israel’s relationship with God as the requirements in relation to burnt offerings (Lev 2:14), invocations against moral impurity (Num 5:16), and miracles of God’s generative power (2 Kings 4:42-44) described in the Old Testament indicate. We should also pause to consider how, in some ANE traditions, milk and honey were believed to be constitutive of two of the four rivers of Eden, the other elements being wine and water, all of which were considered life giving.<sup>66</sup> When understood in this manner the term

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<sup>63</sup> Westenholz, *Sacred Bounty*, 13, 14.

<sup>64</sup> See n.42.

<sup>65</sup> “Why are words of the Torah likened unto the fig tree? What is the fig tree? The more man searches in it, the more figs he finds. Thus are the words of the Torah, the more man studies them the more wisdom he finds in them.” (*Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Erubin*, 54a). Westenholz, *Sacred Bounty*, 30. One should also not discount more widely dispersed associations between the fig tree and fertility, the life promised in obedience to the Torah upon which the continuing presence of the Temple ultimately depends (cf. Mk 11:12-25; Matt 21:19).

<sup>66</sup> According to Hosseinizadeh, “there are some *hadiths* narrated from the Prophet who defined the Euphrates river as water, the Nile river as honey, the *Sayhān* river

“land of milk and honey” can, in and of itself, be seen to function metaphorically for Eden, and vice versa.

Notwithstanding the overall relationship between Eden and the temple, where various degrees of equivalence between the two can be recognised,<sup>67</sup> Biblical text, rabbinic commentary and Jewish tradition also link the Seven Species of Israel to Eden. On the holiday of *Shavuoth*, for example, Israelites are commanded to take, “the first of all the fruit of the ground” and offer it to the Lord (Deut 26:1-2). Rabbinic commentary subsequently declares that, “One does not bring offerings of these first-fruits except from the Seven Species” (Mishnah Bikkurim 1,3).<sup>68</sup> It would seem highly unlikely that produce would be used in these instances other than that where there is a recognised relationship between Israel and God, that is, partaking in the central motif of God’s abundance, the Garden of Eden. Kabbalistic tradition reinforces these perceptions by declaring that letters from the names of the four species of plant used in Succoth,<sup>69</sup> of which the date palm is one, form the letters of the Tetragrammaton, the sacred name of God. These understandings are also articulated in the broader narrative of Israel, where both its prosperity and its destruction are represented through the presence or absence of Edenic imagery.<sup>70</sup> This reaches its fullest expression in Ezekiel’s reprinted temple (Ezek 47:1-12), from which life-giving water flows such that along the banks of the river formed from its source within the temple grow plants sacralised by that relationship:

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as wine and the *Jayhān* river as milk.” Hosseinizadeh, “The Four Rivers of Eden in Judaism and Islam,” 42.

<sup>67</sup> See Barker, *The Gate of Heaven*, 57-103.

<sup>68</sup> Expanding on this *Tosefta Bikkurim* 2,8 describes how the worshipper performed their offering by presenting a basket arranged with layers of wheat, barley, olives, dates, pomegranates, and figs, and with clusters of grapes on the very top. See Westenholz, *Sacred Bounty*, 13, 14.

<sup>69</sup> That is, citron (*etrog*), date, myrtle and willows (Lev 23:40). The palm branch (*lulav*) is said to represent the Hebrew letter *vav* (ו), which channels the divine energy into the world. Westenholz, *Sacred Bounty*, 48.

<sup>70</sup> Isa 11:1-9, 61:10-11; Jer 31:3-4; Ezek. 17:22-24; etc. For images of desolation, frequently portrayed by that which is not-Eden, see, for example, Isa 1:7-8; 5:2-6; 6:11-13; Jer 4:23-27; 14:1-6; 22:6-7; 25:8-12; 26:18 etc.

On the banks, on both sides of the river there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing.

Ezekiel 47:10-12.

The sacred nature of the relationship is augmented by the provision of salt, traditionally used for purification,<sup>71</sup> from the swamps and marshes which are left unaffected by the fresh water which flows down in increasing volume from within the building (47:11).<sup>72</sup> Steven Tuell argues that, in a major reworking of priestly assumptions, the description Ezekiel provides to his readers substitutes cultic practices with text, a feature inherent in the shift from within ancient Israel from the privileging of images prevalent in pagan societies to the primary authority of *Torah*.<sup>73</sup> In fulfilling their obligation to *Torah*, then, descriptions of the Seven Species of Israel can be seen to partake in the divine relationship embedded in that Law, which, as shall now be described, has the blessings of Eden as a central, organising motif.

#### **2.4 Eden and *Torah*.**

The multidimensional relationship between biblical Israel and the Garden of Eden can also be observed in the way the imagery and symbolism of Eden is consistently used in the *Tanakh*, or Old Testament, to represent the blessings that flow from strict adherence to *Torah*. To the degree that *Torah* regulates the life of the People of God at all levels, the centrality of the Garden of Eden within the fabric of ancient Israel can therefore also be recognised. The legislative texts that constitute *Torah*, for example, are found spread throughout the

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<sup>71</sup> Cf. 2 Kings 2:19-22.

<sup>72</sup> Some have suggested this aspect of the passage as symbolising remnant bitterness in Israel, even after its restoration. However, as Van Zeller argues, such a conclusion, whilst possible, is not justified by Ezekiel's vision. Dom Hubert Van Zeller, *Ezekiel: Man of Signs* (London: Sands & Company, 1944), 125,126. See also Joseph Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 148.

<sup>73</sup> Steven S. Tuell, "Divine Presence and Absence in Ezekiel's Prophecy" in Odell and Strong, eds., *The Book of Ezekiel*, 97-120.

sacred history of God's plan for Israel and the world from the beginning to the death of Moses. They can be found within the framework of Creation (Gen 2:2f), the covenant of Noah (9:1-7), the covenant of Abraham (17:9-14), the Exodus (Ex 12:1-28, 43-51), the covenant of Sinai, and the sojourn in the desert (20:1-17, 20:22-23, 25-31, 35-40), the whole of Leviticus, Numbers (1:1-10:28; 15; 17-19; 26-30; 35), and almost all of Deuteronomy. As Pierre Grelot emphasises, "nothing is left to chance." Through its moral prescriptions, especially in the Decalogue but equally present at the very inception of life on earth,<sup>74</sup> *Torah* sums up the fundamental demands of the human conscience, controls various civil institutions (familial, social, economic, and judicial), and governs Israel's religious activities through regulations concerning rites, the priesthood, and the prerequisites of worship and other forms of participation in the Temple.<sup>75</sup> Its comprehensive scope thus also regulates the temporal domain, giving shape and structure to the lived experience of all who come under its influence. And although the statutes of *Torah* are found exclusively in the Pentateuch, the consequences of adherence to their precepts, or the failure to do so, provides the point of reference and the means, expressed throughout the entirety of the Old Testament, by which Israel can seek to obtain, maintain, or regain the blessings promised to it through its covenantal relationship with God.

The intentionality<sup>76</sup> behind this phenomenon can be understood in a variety of ways. But two particular approaches, contrasting yet related, are more amenable to the evidence presented in the biblical texts. The first approach, associated most notably with Julius Wellhausen, recognises the relationship between the imagery of Eden and *Torah* as

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<sup>74</sup> Cf. Augustine of Hippo, *The Confessions*, transl. Maria Boulding (New York: Vantage Books, 1998), 1.1.

<sup>75</sup> Pierre Grelot, "The law," in Xavier Léon-Dufour, ed. *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1973/1982), 302b.

<sup>76</sup> That is, the authorial intent of the individual/s responsible for the final form of any given biblical composition, whether an isolated text or group of texts. See Seth D. Postell, *Adam as Israel: Genesis 1-3 as the Introduction to the Torah and Tanakh* (Cambridge: James Clark and Co. 2012), 5.

expressive of the dominance of ‘P,’ or Priestly, sources in finalising the Pentateuch and hence giving authority to the agenda of Second Temple Judaism.<sup>77</sup> As such, “earlier prophetic sources (such as ‘J’ and ‘E’) were gradually supplemented by the intentions of the priestly writers... the Pentateuch evolved from earlier prophetic kernels to a document representing priestly intentions: namely, the legitimization of post-exilic Judaism.”<sup>78</sup> One of the consequences of these interventions, according to this theory, was “to suppress the primitive anthropology and hamartiology of Genesis 2-3” in favour of, “the more optimistic anthropology of Genesis 1 with respect to human ability to keep the law.”<sup>79</sup> One should add that, on reading and assessing this material in terms of the presence or absence of Edenic imagery, a reader can perceive an emphasis on not just maintaining *Torah* for ideological or cultic purposes, but on the benefits that flow from that graced relationship.

In following this heuristic thread we can make a quantitative analysis of textual examples where a direct association between Edenic imagery and the blessings of *Torah*, as possible evidence of Priestly theology, can be identified. The first such occurrence can be found in Genesis 2:15-17, where the blessing of Eden is made available to Adam subject to the command not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Adam and Eve’s decision to disobey God results not just in death entering the world, but their banishment into ‘wilderness,’ or ‘unsown land,’<sup>80</sup> a world of contraction and deprivation that is Eden’s opposite. By implication, wilderness in this context means not just, “an arid wasteland with poisonous snakes and scorpions” (Deut 8:15), but a place devoid of all aspects of human life

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<sup>77</sup> Postell, *Adam as Israel*, 19. Citing Wellhausen, *Prolegomena* (no other details provided.) See also, Roland T Boer, “Julius Wellhausen: Prolegomena to the History of Israel; with a reprint of the article ‘Israel’ from the Encyclopaedia Britannica.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 124/2 (2005): 349-388.

<sup>78</sup> Postell, *Adam as Israel*, 19.

<sup>79</sup> Postell, *Adam as Israel*, 19.

<sup>80</sup> David Toshio Tsumura, “The Earth in Genesis 1”, in Richard S. Hess and David Toshio Tsumura, eds., “*I Studied Inscriptions from before the Flood*”: *Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1-11* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 328.

including, one presumes, the life of cultic worship and other communal forms of ritual.

Once the reader is accustomed to the various ways Edenic symbolism is manifest in biblical narrative, then additional instances throughout the Pentateuch, and subsequently through the Writings and the Prophets, can be similarly identified. Depending on context, instances of this symbolism can be perceived in terms of the presence of images of light, of life giving water, of fertility, of fruitfulness, of abundance, of joy, of healing, and of peace. Yardin, for example, concludes, on the basis of both archaeological and anthropological texts, that the *menorah*, the great seven-branched lampstand beside the altar (Ex 25:31-40), “originated from a sacred tree, more specifically the Tree of Life of mythology – a primal image which can be glimpsed in the third millennium B.C. epic tale ‘Gilgamesh and the Land of the Living,’ and which played a decisive role in the tree cult of the ancient world.”<sup>81</sup>

This understanding was present in wider Jewish tradition. Enoch writes how, on his visionary journey in heaven, “... he saw a great tree by the throne, “whose fragrance was beyond all fragrance, and whose leaves and blossom and wood never wither or rot” (1 Enoch 24:4). No mortal could touch the tree until after the great judgement, when its fruits would be given to the chosen ones, and the tree itself transplanted *again* into the temple. Elsewhere, in Enoch’s account of God resting in the centre of Eden under the Tree of Life, the appearance of the Tree of Life is described as ‘gold and crimson and with the form of fire,’ that is, of light (2 Enoch 8:4).

Bearing associations such as these in mind, the presence of Edenic imagery in the Old Testament, and especially the relationship between the presence of Edenic imagery and the representation of *Torah*, is revealed as more widespread than might otherwise be perceived. In a

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<sup>81</sup> L. Yardin, *The Tree of Light: A Study of the Menora* (London: Horowitz Publishing, 1971), 35.

summative passage in Deuteronomy 8:6-9, for example, God, through Moses, reminds the Israelites as they prepare to enter the Promised Land that it is only by virtue of the “word of the LORD,” *Torah*, that the covenantal blessings that they are about to enjoy, frequently expressed through Edenic imagery, are made available. Later (Deut 30:6-10), and consistent with God’s obligations to the covenantal relationship God shares with Israel, God promises to restore Israel, “even if you are exiled to the ends of the world,” by purifying the Israelites’ hearts, so that they may partake once more of the blessings of Eden. Here, the people of Israel are urged to choose the substance of Eden, life and blessings, over death and curses. By loving God, walking in God’s ways, and observing God’s commandments, decrees, and ordinances, the Land of Milk and Honey, a notion shown previously in this chapter to be consistent with Edenic imagery, will remain their permanent possession.

In related passages in the book of Joshua (3:14; 5:15), in a scene that at once echoes and completes the narrative of the parting of the Red Sea, that permitted the Israelite slaves to escape from Egypt (Ex 14: 15-30), the manner by which the people of Israel must enter into Canaan by passing through the swollen Jordan River is described. The Jordan’s flow is stopped by the priests bearing the Ark of the Covenant putting their feet into the water (Josh 3:8-17), as God, through Joshua, had instructed them to. In doing so the integral relationship between the blessings of Eden, present in the synecdoche of the Land of Milk and Honey, promised to the ancestors of Joshua and their descendants, and *Torah* is once more made present to the reader.

The reader is also told how, in the first book of Kings, Solomon, who was gifted through his father David with the responsibility of building a home for God on earth, and wherein the religious precepts of *Torah* are to be expressed (1 Kings 6:11-13) so that God would “dwell among the children of Israel” in perpetuity, decorates the Temple with images of Eden. Most notable among these is the palm tree, a symbol

of eternal life and, in some traditions, itself the Tree of Life at the heart of Eden (1 Kings 6:29-35).<sup>82</sup>

A related but more succinct, and certainly more dramatic, account of the relationship between Eden and *Torah* can also be found in the second book of Kings (2 Kings 2:19-22) where Elisha, having inherited the mantle of Elijah as the prophet of the Lord, is asked to bring life back to barren land outside of the city of Jericho. Given the city's reputation as a place of palm trees and copious water,<sup>83</sup> this is an extraordinary situation. Nevertheless, it is only by Elisha's intervention, which brings *Torah* to the land, in the form of the metaphor of the purification practices of the Temple,<sup>84</sup> is fertility restored.

Evidence can also be found in the book of Psalms of the link between Eden and *Torah*. Psalms 1, 2, and 119, especially, are generally recognised as expressive of the primacy of *Torah* to the well-being of Israel, and each individual within it.<sup>85</sup> Psalm 119, for example, takes each of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet to begin eight lines of poetry – what Robert Alter calls ‘the Long Acrostic’ – resulting in the longest psalm in the collection, 176 verses, and consequently the longest chapter in the Tanakh. But it is the much briefer first psalm, in the context of this thesis, which is of most interest. On one level this is because it explicitly restates the relationship between the presence of *Torah* and the blessings of Eden:

<sup>1</sup>Happy are those  
who do not follow the advice of the wicked,  
or take the path that sinners tread,  
or sit in the seat of the scoffers;  
<sup>2</sup>but their delight is in the law of the LORD,

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<sup>82</sup> See n. 42.

<sup>83</sup> Deut 34:3; Josh 16:1.

<sup>84</sup> Dom Hubert Van Zeller, *Ezekiel: Man of Signs* (London: Sands & Company, 1944), 125, 126. See also Joseph Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 148.

<sup>85</sup> Alter draws the reader's attention to significant usage of synonyms for *Torah* in Psalm 119 – ‘precept,’ ‘utterance,’ ‘decrees,’ ‘words,’ ‘statute,’ and ‘law,’ suggesting both the didactic nature of the psalm, as well as the demands of the acrostic form on which the psalm is structured. Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: Norton and Co., 2007), 419.



and on his law they meditate day and night.  
<sup>3</sup>They are like trees  
planted by streams of water,  
which yield fruit in its season,  
and their leaves do not wither.  
In all that they do they prosper.

Psalm 1:1-3

Alter's interpretation of the image of the tree planted near water as a traditional pastoral metaphor equivalent to "perdurable success," fruitfulness, and blessing, is conceded. However, it misses the mark in the wider context of the demonstrated frequent association between *Torah* and Eden.<sup>86</sup> More importantly, however, is the determinative role of Psalm 1, in conjunction with Psalm 2, in introducing the themes of the Psalter in its entirety. Indeed, for Seth Postell, citing Robert Cole, "Understanding the meaning of the first two psalms is essential in any attempt to describe the message of the book as a whole."<sup>87</sup> This message is to assert the necessity of the 'wise man' to seek God's will in *Torah* until such time that prophecy is restored.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, Cole asserts, the links between Psalms 1 and 2 are manifestations of a specific overarching narrative theme that links each of the three sections of the Tanakh, that is, the Pentateuch, the Writings and the Prophets, through the figure of the "ideal kingly warrior," espoused for example in Deuteronomy 17:18-20, reprised in Joshua in sections such as 1:7-8 and 22:14-6, reiterated in Psalms 1 and 2, and restated in the writings of the Prophets in passages such as Isaiah 59:15b-20, and Malachi 4:4-6. Accordingly, "They serve as paradigmatic examples for every subsequent reader of the Tanakh who also must meditate day and night on the Torah until the coming of the prophet like Moses."<sup>89</sup>

Seth Postell extends the domain of this priestly king to include Adam, as presented in the broader context of Genesis 1-3, "as a wise, royal-

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<sup>86</sup> See Alter, *The Book of Psalms*, 4.

<sup>87</sup> Postell, *Adam as Israel*, 153.

<sup>88</sup> Postell, *Adam as Israel*, 156.

<sup>89</sup> Postell, *Adam as Israel*, 156. Cf. Deut 34:10.

priestly figure who has been given the mandate to conquer the Promised Land and to worship and enjoy God in an Edenic sanctuary.<sup>90</sup> Postell's thesis is expounded in the context of an integrated understanding of the Old Testament that asserts a discernible theological intentionality to the overall text, "as a unified book of sacred books."<sup>91</sup> Importantly, it also further contextualises Paul's New Testament theology of Jesus as the New Adam who, through his words and actions, does fulfil the ancient covenant.

This narrative intentionality, for Seth Postell, does not support a Second Temple priestly agenda, as argued by Wellhausen, nor is it linked to the Sinai Covenant, *per se*. Rather, Postell argues that there is a continuing theme, reproduced and integrated through "inner-textual" commonalities, such as those described above,<sup>92</sup> that, "in light of the certainties of covenant violation and exile is eschatological in nature."<sup>93</sup> Importantly, Postell concludes that the messianic hope which emerges concomitantly from this eschatology is not represented haphazardly or in an ad hoc fashion, but rather, is expressed purposefully in the images of Eden that accompany each story of Israel's loss and restoration. This is especially true in the writings of the Prophets where personal and national redemption is frequently presented explicitly and implicitly through the symbols of Eden.<sup>94</sup> In some instances of Jewish tradition *Torah* is also equated with Wisdom, the spirit of God itself, to the degree that, "She (*Torah*) is a Tree of Life to those who lay hold of her" (Prov 3:18).<sup>95</sup> This theme will be dealt with more explicitly in Chapter Seven, in the context of John's representation of Jesus as incarnate Wisdom through the use of Edenic imagery.

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<sup>90</sup> Postell, *Adam as Israel*, 163.

<sup>91</sup> Postell, *Adam as Israel*, 156.

<sup>92</sup> For a full explication see, Postell, *Adam as Israel*, 75-148.

<sup>93</sup> Postell, *Adam as Israel*, 76.

<sup>94</sup> Isa 4;5-6; 5:16-17;11:1-9; 27:6; 30:23-26; 35:1-2,5-7; 50:9-10; 55:10-12; 65:17-25. Jer. 2:13; 17:7-8; 23:3; 31:5; 51:19. Ezek 17:22-24; 36:8-12, 26-30; 47:1-12.

<sup>95</sup> As expressed in the *Jewish Prayer Book*, cited by Morris, "Exiled from Eden." 117. See n.7 above.

The systematic presence of Edenic images, then, such as light, water, fruitfulness, equanimity, solidarity, fertility and abundance, as evidence of the gifts of *Torah* in the context of eschatological hope, can be seen to offer an alternative understanding of the relationship between the Garden of Eden and Israel from that derived from Wellhausen's documentary hypothesis. That is, the relationship between Israel and Eden is based not just on the expedient application of a recognisable metaphor, the Garden of Eden, even allowing for the wide usage and cultural application of that metaphor. Rather, the symbolism and imagery of Eden can be seen to be integral to understanding, and expressive of, the inter-dependant relationship between biblical Israel and *Torah* that is the focus and concern of much of the Old Testament.

### **Conclusion.**

The imagery and symbolism of the Garden of Eden informs our understanding of ancient Israel as both geographical entity and theological ideal. By examining the relationship between the Garden of Eden and Israel as expressive of sacred place, as evidence of God's abundant provision, and in terms of evoking the blessings available to Israel through strict adherence to *Torah*, the reader can also come to appreciate something of the way that the people of ancient Israel understood themselves and the world of which they were part.

What is equally clear is that various current perspectives of the Garden of Eden must also be amended in light of the profound and comprehensive relationship they share with ancient Israel. The notion of the Eden as reducible to a 'garden of earthly delights,' for example, provided for the pleasure of humans, can be seen to be a delimiting, and immature, projection of human entitlement. As Giulio Busi observes, such an understanding was never entertained in ancient Israel.<sup>96</sup> Certainly, the compelling beauty and erotic power of Eden

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<sup>96</sup> Busi, "The Mystical Architecture of Eden," 15.

must be recognised, but in a context that moves beyond appreciating Eden solely as the locus of human desire, or a template for what constitutes a social and aesthetic ideal.

The imagery of biblical Eden should instead be understood as revelatory of the totality of the human potential for goodness expressed in, through, and as, relationship with God. The eschatological dimension of Eden expressed through messianic hope speaks equally of Eden's beauty and abundance but does so from the perspective of God calling from a future in which the prophetic ideal – the unveiling of the absolute<sup>97</sup> – is realised. Indeed, materialist understandings of Eden that reduce the transcendent longing expressed in the imagery of Eden to a set of parameters constrained by genre or history, such as that implied in Ricoeur's analysis of language, are rendered implausible through the dynamic interplay of Edenic imagery as it is found in the various and diverse elements ancient Israelite culture. Other imagery, such as matrimonial symbolism, is also used by Old Testament writers, especially in Prophetic texts, to support or convey these understandings. But, as will be shown later in Chapter Four, the degree to which this matrimonial imagery is subsumed within Edenic symbolism points to the dominance of the imagery of the Garden of Eden in the ancient Israelite imagination.

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<sup>97</sup> Derived from what Andre Neher refers to as “nostalgia” for the knowledge of God. Andre Neher, *The Prophetic Existence*, transl. William Wolf (Cranbury: A.S. Barnes & Co., 1969), 7.

### CHAPTER THREE: EDEN, *HESED*, AND THE DESIRE FOR GOD.

The account of creation revealed in the Genesis 1, implicitly phenomenological insofar as it describes fundamental human requirements, behaviours, and relational hierarchies,<sup>1</sup> nevertheless refers to a world dominated by God's will. Where the reader is brought to the story of the Garden of Eden, in Genesis 2:4b, the formalism evident in the first Creation story engages with more explicit and complex inter-personal dynamics, which speak more fully of what it means to be human. As already indicated in Chapter 1,<sup>2</sup> the function and purpose of the imagery of Eden at this point moves to support the moral trajectory of the Bible in its entirety. That is, and reflective of the fundamental narrative tension between the blessings of Eden on the one hand and the deprivation of wilderness on the other, the answer to the question that arises out of the loss of Eden, "Am I my brother's keeper?" is an emphatic "Yes!" Thus the imagery of Eden, its presence or absence, speaks to Levinas' description of human life and moral orientation as one of ethical transcendence, of being radically for the other, the dynamic that is later to be found in the New Testament at the heart of Trinitarian faith.

Some of the external components of that relational matrix introduced in the story of the Garden of Eden were examined in the previous chapter in the context of Eden *vis a vis* various constitutive elements of biblical Israel. This included spatial and geographical correlations between Eden and Israel (especially their shared position at the centre of the world), the sacred bounty of Israel manifest in the 'Seven Species,' commensurate with the abundance of the Garden of Eden, and the life-giving value of *Torah* expressed through the blessings of Eden.

In this chapter the emphasis of inquiry will fall on more affective or emotional aspects of the relationship between Eden and ancient Israel, necessarily given voice in the Old Testament analogously through

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<sup>1</sup> Leon R. Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 36.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 57-58.

relational symbols and metaphors.<sup>3</sup> Such symbols and metaphors are requisite, if imperfect, attempts to describe what is ultimately indescribable – the interior experience of our relationship with God – and which, reflecting the nature of God, appear to obscure as much as they reveal.<sup>4</sup> Even so, both the Old and New Testaments, through various literary conventions, symbols, metaphors and motifs, do attempt to bridge this existential divide. Hence the biblical context and content of religious faith provides not only some assurance in the face of the mystery that is God, but also a viable language for that faith.

Considered in this investigation, then, is the degree to which the Garden of Eden, in and of itself, can be seen to be symbolic of the *hesed* of God, translated in this instance as ‘covenantal love’<sup>5</sup> for Israel, and through Israel for the entire world. More broadly, the degree to which the relational symbols and metaphors of *eros*, the human desire for God in response to the ongoing newness of life, are expressed through the Garden of Eden will also be explored. Finally, the characteristics of Eden perceived as a locus of that human desire will be examined in the context of eschatological hope.

### **3.1 Eden and *Hesed*.**

The Hebrew term *hesed*, variously translated as ‘covenantal love,’ ‘kindness,’ ‘loving kindness,’ ‘steadfast love,’ ‘faithfulness,’ ‘grace,’ ‘mercy,’ or ‘righteousness,’ refers to a variety of positive actions and dispositions involving God and people.<sup>6</sup> It occurs in the Old

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<sup>3</sup> Pierre Grelot, *The Language of Symbolism: Biblical Theology, Semantics, and Exegesis*, transl. Christopher R. Smith (Peabody: Baker Academic, 2006), 149.

<sup>4</sup> Grelot, *The Language of Symbolism*, 149.

<sup>5</sup> I use the term ‘covenantal love’ as translation for *hesed* only insofar as it applies to the Garden of Eden in particular contexts, but especially the notion of Eden as blessing.

<sup>6</sup> For discussion of this see, for example, Brian Britt, “Unexpected Attachments: A Literary Approach to the Term חסד in the Hebrew Bible,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 27.3 (2003): 289-307; Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, transl. J.A. Baker (London: SCM Press, 1967), 232-239. John L. MacKenzie, “Aspects of Old Testament Thought,” in Brown, Fitzmyer, and Murphy, eds., *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 1300-1301; James A. Montgomery, “Hebrew *Hesed* and Greek *Charis*,” *The Harvard Theological Review*

Testament over two hundred and fifty times, across a variety of text genres within each of the major divisions of the Old Testament,<sup>7</sup> suggesting common cultural acceptance and understanding over a long period of time, in diverse cultural milieu.<sup>8</sup> Although originating as an extra-judicial or extra-legalistic term describing specific obligations between people,<sup>9</sup> which were later ascribed to the divine-human relationship, the majority of instances of its usage apply to the activity or disposition of God.<sup>10</sup>

Importantly, *hesed* is often found in association with other words that better define its capacity to indicate not just the love exhibited by virtue of a specific relationship but also the movement of the will that initiates that relationship.<sup>11</sup> This is especially true as the term applies to ‘covenantal love,’ which, in the context of dominant Old Testament themes of creation, revelation, and redemption, is at the heart of biblical narrative. Thus *hesed* is often found in conjunction with ‘fidelity,’<sup>12</sup> the attribute by which God fulfils His covenant and His promises (Ex 34:6, cf. John 1:14). By implication, then, the term *hesed*, when understood as covenantal love, is also strongly suggestive of ‘salvation,’ and hence bound to the blessings obtained in salvific experience. As has been shown in the previous chapter, and will be explored more thoroughly in the analysis that follows in both this chapter and subsequently, this experience is frequently expressed in

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32, no.2 (Apr. 1939): 97-102; Neher, *The Prophetic Existence*, 362-367; and Katherine Doob Sakenfeld, *The Meaning of Hesed in the Hebrew Bible: A New Inquiry* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1978/2002).

<sup>7</sup> That is, the Pentateuch, the Prophets, and the Writings (*Torah, Nevi'im, and Ketuvim*) that constitute the *Tanakh*, or Hebrew Bible.

<sup>8</sup> The reader can get a sense of the wide cultural dispersal of the concept of *hesed* in ancient Israel by considering the range of biblical texts in which the term can be found. For example: Gen 19:19; Lev 20:17; Josh 2:12, 14; Ruth 1:8; 1 Sam 15:6; 1 Chr 16:34; Ezra 3:11; Neh 1:5; Job 6:14; Ps 5:7; Prov 3:3; Isa 16:5; Jer 2:2; Lam 3:22; Mic 6:8.

<sup>9</sup> Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 232; Montgomery, “Hebrew Hesed and Greek Charis,” 99; Neher, *The Prophetic Existence*, 263.

<sup>10</sup> Gordon Clark reports that of the 250 instances in the Old Testament the agent of *hesed* is God 187 times and a human, or humans, 92 times. See Brian Britt, “Unexpected Attachments,” 289.

<sup>11</sup> McKenzie, “Aspects of Old Testament thought,” 1300.

<sup>12</sup> That is, the ‘steadfast love’ preferred as the NRSV translation for the term *hesed* *we’ šmet*, (literally ‘faithful steadfast loves’). See MacKenzie, “Aspects of Old Testament Thought,” 1301.

both the Old and New Testament through Edenic imagery, or its equivalents and correlatives. The link between *hesed* and salvation can be clearly seen in passages such as Exodus 15:13-18; Numbers 14:18-24; 1 Chronicles 16:23-36; and Nehemiah 9:16-25, but most notably in the Psalms, where the twin aspects of the Kingship of God - God's justice and mercy on the one hand, and God's creation on the other<sup>13</sup> - are praised through the single notion of *hesed* (Ps 5;7-8; 23; 33:4-9; 36, etc). As Katherine Sakenfeld summarises:

The term *hesed* thus proves to be one which throughout the tradition was remarkably rich in its theological meaning. Here the sovereign freedom of God and his strong commitment to his chosen people were held together in a single word. A single word expressed the utter dependence of the people upon Yahweh and his willingness and ability to deliver them. A single word communicated the promised faithfulness of God upon which the people could base their cry for help and the surprising faithfulness of God which transcended even his own declarations of judgement upon his people. God preserved the covenant community even in its failure, in accordance with his own commitment to the people – a sure and everlasting *hesed*, great beyond any human expectation.

And so Israel could proclaim in varied forms throughout her history:

Praise Yahweh,  
for he is good  
and his *hesed* endures forever (Ps 107:1).<sup>14</sup>

As the passage above emphasises, *hesed* is not a synonym for covenant but more accurately the emotional content of the covenantal relationship that exists above and beyond any specific obligations. Eichrodt argues it is precisely this emotional or affective content that

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<sup>13</sup> For example, Gen 14:19-20. Norman Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom: Symbol and Metaphor in New Testament Interpretation* (London: SCM Press, 1976), 19-22.

<sup>14</sup> Sakenfeld, *The Meaning of Hesed in the Hebrew Bible*, 238-239.



distinguishes Hebrew *hesed* from the succouring love of the God, or gods, found in other ANE religions.<sup>15</sup>

Andre Neher draws the reader's attention to this affective or emotional aspect of *hesed* by describing it as, "a sympathy witnessed spontaneously, without having become natural or necessary between two individuals by an earlier association."<sup>16</sup> The emotional content of *hesed*, then, insofar as it incorporates an intuitive component can be seen to equate more readily with *chen* (grace), and *ahavah* (love), a feeling rather than an obligation, even if that obligation is nominally present.<sup>17</sup>

To this degree the covenant between God and the people of Israel exhibits many of the same features as that between two people, or groups of people. However, a fundamental difference between the covenantal love of God, compared to that expressed between people, can be identified which lies in its unmerited and gratuitous nature. As such, as Neher further observes, "When God grants men a covenant, this fact is in itself grace, since it is somehow exorbitant and incomprehensible."<sup>18</sup> This fundamental difference becomes incomparable in the context of God's infinite love, insofar as, "He who is the object of God's *hesed* is so forever, since God's *hesed* is as infinite as God Himself."<sup>19</sup> The continuous forgiveness of Israel by God,<sup>20</sup> in the face of frequent infidelity, disobedience, and other provocations, can be understood in this light. Accordingly, God's *hesed*, made available to Israel through the covenantal promise to Abraham, subsequently re-established with Moses, and perceived as both unmerited gift and eternal blessing, finds expression in the

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<sup>15</sup> Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 235.

<sup>16</sup> Neher, *The Prophetic Existence*, 263.

<sup>17</sup> Neher, *The Prophetic Existence*, 264.

<sup>18</sup> Neher, *The Prophetic Existence*, 264.

<sup>19</sup> For which reason, Neher observes, *hesed* is often found in the Psalms side by side with the word, *olam*, that is, 'eternity'. Neher, *The Prophetic Existence*, 264-265.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Ex 34:5-7; Num 23:21; Ps 86:5; 130:4; Isa 43:25; Jer 31:34; 33:8; 50:20.

imagery of the Garden of Eden, which is frequently used as both the sign, symbol and enduring motif of God's blessing and forgiveness.

The extent to which these blessings may appear provisional, for example, subject to obeying God's edict not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (Gen 2:8-10), is nevertheless ameliorated by the ever-present opportunity to return to Eden. This is expressed specifically in the Psalms and the writings of the prophets, but also in the Pentateuch, through adherence to *Torah*. The Garden of Eden, and its related imagery, bears witness to the quality, and duration, and extent of God's love insofar as, on the one hand, it signifies God's *hesed*, or loving disposition towards Israel, whilst at the same time it points to the source of the unmerited grace that sustains and affirms Israel's covenant with God, and through Israel with all of humankind.

### **3.1.1. The Narrative Foundations of *Hesed* as Eden.**

The reader is introduced to the notion of Eden as an aspect of God's *hesed* in the second creation account of Genesis 2:4b-2:24, where the formal, liturgical elements of Genesis 1-2:4a are subsequently invested with emotional, psychological, and aesthetic content through the story of Adam and Eve.<sup>21</sup> Here, we are told how the first human is made from the "dust of the ground," *adamah*, and inspired by God (2:7); rain has not yet fallen, but "a stream would rise from the earth, to water the whole face of the ground" (2:6), conditions that are, as revealed when Adam and Eve are expelled from Eden, in and of themselves sufficient to sustain life. But in an act that is both

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<sup>21</sup> The division between these two sections is less acute than might be supposed, insofar as the two narratives of creation, placed immediately adjacent to each other, offer the reader multiple meanings that are mutually informative. Clifford argues that this is consistent with textual conventions of the time that were comfortable with multiple versions of the same event. See Clifford, "Genesis," 9. Morris further describes how midrashic commentary built on this convention, became characterised by "fluidity and openness in interpretation." See Morris, "Exiled from Eden," 119.

unmerited grace, as well as obligation (2:15),<sup>22</sup> God then takes the ‘earth-man’ and places him into His own garden, a special place wherein grows, “every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food” (2:9). At the centre of this divinely ordained world, moreover, grow both the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and the Tree of Life, under which, Enoch tell us, God rests.<sup>23</sup>

But more than just a “garden of delight,” a notion that finds equivalence in any number of parallel myths throughout the Mediterranean and ANE that tell of the loss of a perfected world,<sup>24</sup> we find in the imagery of Eden the traces not of human limitation and loss projected through myth, but expression of the emotional life of God turned towards humankind. Through the metaphor of the Garden of Eden, God’s love and desire for Israel is manifest as extravagant abundance, generosity, fertility, beauty, solidarity and well-being. As we shall see in Chapter Four, these are concepts that matrimonial symbolism - the preferred imagery of prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, and Amos, to describe the enduring faithfulness of God towards Israel - can approximate but never fully realise. That is to say, to the degree that the imperfect metaphor of marriage, whilst manifestly expressive of the infinite, irreducible mystery and enduring faithfulness of God, also contains, through its inherently human origins, aspects of infidelity, ambivalence, and even violence.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> That is to say, there is an obligation within the expectations of the cosmic covenant for God to care for that which He has brought into existence. Alternatively there is also the obligation of humankind to care for the world into which it has been placed insofar as, “such care is a real means of experiencing the presence of God.” Kristen M. Swenden, “Care and Keeping East of Eden: Gen. 16:1-16 in light of Gen. 2-3,” *Interpretation* (Oct, 2006): 374.

<sup>23</sup> 2 Enoch 8.4.

<sup>24</sup> Delumeau, *History of Paradise*, 6-15. See also, Alessandro Scafi, *Maps of Paradise* (London: The British Library, 2013), 8-21.

<sup>25</sup> Neher, *The Prophetic Existence*, 264. Grelot makes a similar assertion, but does so more circumspectly, by simply observing that using the analogy to human relationships to describe our relationship with God, “ultimately is insufficient because its appeal to various elements drawn from the experience of family and social relationships only serves to underscore the shaky nature of all comparisons between us creatures and our Creator.” Grelot, *The Language of Symbolism*, 148.

An implicit example of the pattern where the *hesed* of God is expressed through Edenic imagery can be found in the song of Moses (Ex 15:1-18), where Moses<sup>26</sup> gives praise to God for destroying the enemies of the Israelites, delivering them from the bondage of Egypt into the Promised Land. As an articulation of the kingship of God the passage speaks, in a combinatory form, not just of God's creative and salvific power, but also God's blessing, as it is experienced within a specific ethical framework that makes manifest the covenantal promise. That is, God's covenantal love, or *hesed*, makes available to Israel, both as theological ideal as well as physical reality through the gifting of the Land of Milk and Honey promised to Abraham and his descendants, the outward or material expression of that *hesed*. And it is the extravagant abundance Eden, shown in the previous chapter to share a further equivalence with God's 'holy mountain,' or abode on earth, and to which the Israelites are immediately led following their escape from Egypt, that provides the substantial imagery of that divine generosity.

In the first part of this cultic celebration the righteous power of God's disposition towards Israel is made clear:

<sup>4</sup>Pharaoh's chariots and his army he cast in to the sea;  
his picked officers were sunk in the Red Sea.  
<sup>5</sup>The floods covered them;  
they went down into the depths like a stone.  
<sup>6</sup>Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power –  
your right hand, O Lord, shattered the enemy,  
<sup>7</sup>In the greatness of your majesty you overthrew your  
adversaries;  
you sent out your fury, it consumed them like stubble.  
<sup>8</sup>At the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up,  
the floods stood up in a heap  
the deeps congealed in the heart of the sea.

Ex 15:4-8

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<sup>26</sup> And subsequently Miriam (Ex 15:20). Clifford, in fact, attributes the entire song of praise (Ex 15:1-12) celebrating YHWH's defeat of Israel's enemies to Miriam, an earlier attribution he argues was appropriated to Moses in light of his significance within this particular literary tradition. See Richard J. Clifford, "Exodus," in Brown et al, eds., *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 50a.

That is, God's righteous power, acting in the world, destroys the armies of Pharaoh, and by implication, the gods of the Egyptians. But God has not only brought His people out of slavery. He has, in a passage that anticipates entry to the Promised Land by over forty years according to the narrative that follows, also brought them to what will become known to the generations that follow as Mount Zion, to Jerusalem, and the site of temple that David will later establish there.<sup>27</sup> This conforms to the assertions made in the previous chapter concerning the boundaries of Israel and Eden, that the land promised by the Lord to the Israelites can be seen to be a theological concept *before* any geographical boundaries are established. This is a notion primarily articulated through the related symbolism of Eden and the temple, as well as associated imagery, in advance of any explicit historiographical understanding. In this instance, as with many others, Mount Zion, Jerusalem, and the Temple, are conflated as one entity equivalent to the mountain of God, or Eden, God's home on earth:

<sup>17</sup>You brought them in and planted them on the mountain  
of your own possession,  
The place, O LORD, that you made your abode,  
The sanctuary, O LORD, that your hands have established.  
<sup>18</sup>The LORD will reign forever and ever.

Ex 15:17-18

In the example cited above, which describes how the people of Israel are redeemed through the righteous and creative action of God, it is the emotional content of God's *hesed* towards Israel, which is the underlying force and motivation of that action. This emotional predisposition of God towards Israel, and through Israel for the entire world, is frequently symbolised by Edenic imagery, and its equivalents:

<sup>13</sup>In your steadfast love you led the people whom you  
redeemed;  
You guided them by your strength to your holy abode.

Ex 15:13

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<sup>27</sup> Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom*, 22. Cf 1 Chr 22:7; 2 Sam 7:1-17.

Similar examples of this relationship between the images of Eden and God's *hesed* towards Israel can be found dispersed across a range of Old Testament text genres. Many of the Psalms, for example, represent the quality of God's *hesed* through the blessings obtainable through strict adherence to *Torah*, a representation which, as previously shown, frequently calls on Edenic images for enrichment and affirmation. Notwithstanding the connection between the representation of God's *hesed* through the gift of *Torah*, there are also specific instances in Psalms that accord with the examples already offered, of the relationship between God's covenantal love for Israel and Edenic imagery:

<sup>7</sup>How precious is your steadfast love, O God!  
All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings.  
<sup>8</sup>They feast on the abundance of your house,  
and you give them drink from the river of your delights.  
<sup>9</sup>For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see  
light.

Ps 36:7-9

<sup>31</sup>Let them acclaim to the LORD his kindness  
and His wonders to humankind.  
<sup>32</sup>Let them exalt Him in the people's assembly  
and in the session of elders praise Him.  
<sup>33</sup>He turns rivers into wilderness  
and springs of water into thirsty ground,  
<sup>34</sup>fruitful land into salt flats,  
because of the evil of those that dwell there.  
<sup>35</sup>He turns wilderness to pools of water,  
and parched land to springs of water,  
<sup>36</sup>and settles there the hungry,  
firmly founds a settled town.  
<sup>37</sup>And they sow fields and they plant vineyards,  
which produce a fruitful yield.  
<sup>38</sup>And He blesses them and they multiply greatly,  
and their beasts He does not let dwindle.

Ps 107:31-38<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Robert Alter translation. Alter, *The Book of Psalm*, 387.

In both of these passages God's *hesed*, rendered as "steadfast love" in Ps 36, and as "kindness" in Ps 107, expresses the Kingship of God, in the first instance as creativity and in the second, reflecting the twin themes of the victory song of Moses (Ex 15) cited above, as both creativity and righteousness. Whilst recognising the covenantal obligations of God as King, we see in both psalms the emotional content of those obligations expressed through Edenic imagery. Psalm 36 elides the twin blessings of water and light through the symbol of the Tree of Life as representations both of God's abundance and divinity; Psalm 107 similarly uses the symbol of 'water as life' but applies it more generally in illustrating Israel's absolute dependency on God's grace and mercy, and the blessings that derive from that privileged relationship.

### 3.2 Eden and the Desire for God.

Through the active presence of God's *hesed* in covenantal Israel, represented in the Garden of Eden and its associated imagery as sacred memory, sign of hope, and eschatological ideal, the extravagant, superabundant quality of God's love for the world is substantially revealed. However, even in what is generally considered a 'self-less' act, the *agapic* love that Christian tradition asserts as love's purest expression (cf. Jn 21:15-17), there is both an outgoing as well as a receiving component.<sup>29</sup> We see this where the communion of the lover and the beloved is sustained and energised. Here, the beloved, borne by the constitutive and individuating power of the recognition of being loved by God,<sup>30</sup> moves imperatively toward God,<sup>31</sup> continuously seeking out and responding to the source of that divine attentiveness.

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<sup>29</sup> Jon D. Levenson, *The Love of God: Divine Gist, Human Gratitude, and Mutual Faithfulness in Judaism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), xiv. Thomas Vacek, *Love, Human and Divine: The Heart of Christian Ethics* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1994), 117.

<sup>30</sup> Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 108.

<sup>31</sup> Dimitru Staniloae, *The Experience of God - Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, Vol 2 – The World: Creation and Deification*, transl. and ed. Ioan Ionita and Robert Barringer (Brookline: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2000/2005), xi-xii, 192-193. See

For ancient Israel, the “priestly kingdom and . . . holy nation,”<sup>32</sup> this response was to be formalised through adherence to *Torah* as worship, where sacerdotal acts take the form of unconditional surrender. In this manner both the unquenchable desire for union with God expressed through prayer and worship, and the existential necessity to respond appropriately to God’s love, is made clear.

Indeed, numerous instances are attested in the Old Testament whereby the destiny of each and every person depended on the adequacy or otherwise of their response to God’s loving movement towards them.<sup>33</sup> When distorted by solipsistic vanity, or ignorance, or infidelity, the consequence of a self-referential, misjudged, or otherwise inappropriate response to God’s love is the inexorable onset of disaster. This ensuing calamity often takes the form of an inevitable and sometimes instantaneous contraction of life, most notably the removal of individuals, or covenantal Israel itself, from Eden, in its various symbolic representations, into a figurative or literal wilderness. Within this representation wilderness is characterised not just as a place of transformation or transition, but more frequently by deprivation, alienation, depopulation, and in its most extreme forms, death.<sup>34</sup>

Alternatively, there exists in the transformative power generated through God’s love and each person’s responsive desire, an ongoing creativity of which the beauty, abundance, and fertility of Eden are symbolic. For the writers of the Pentateuch this was to be found, to begin with, in the mythical Eden of Genesis 2:4b-25, and reflected subsequently in the metaphor of the kingship of God which sustained the Hebrews in their journey to freedom in the Land of Milk and Honey.<sup>35</sup> In the prophetic writers we see the imagery once more

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also, for example, Michael Casey, *Toward God: The Ancient Wisdom of Western Prayer* (Mulgrave: John Garratt publishing, 1995).

<sup>32</sup> Ex 19:6.

<sup>33</sup> Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, 2: xi-xii.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Ex 14:3, 11-12; 15:22; 16:3; Num 14:16, 29, 33; 21:5; 26:65; 32:15; Deut 1:19; 8:15; 32:10, etc.

<sup>35</sup> Ex 15:27; 16: 4, 10, 16, 31, 35; 17:5; etc.



foregrounded, in the first instance as the trace of God's universal covenant,<sup>36</sup> and then as post-exilic promise in the form of the New Jerusalem with the re-pristinated Temple, imaged in the likeness of Eden, at its centre.<sup>37</sup> As we shall see in the second part of this thesis, these understandings are appropriated in the New Testament to appear, in the first instance, in the metaphor of the kingdom of God, as expressed through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Subsequently the image draws the vision of the New Testament authors to a close, the Revelation of John concluding with the return to earth, in the form of the Church, of the heavenly Jerusalem as a mystical replication of Ezekiel's Edenic temple,<sup>38</sup> in which the Glory of God, through the Spirit, now resides.

By definition this ongoing creative and progressive activity differs from the original Creation which it uses as a foundation.<sup>39</sup>

Accordingly, within the Orthodox tradition in particular, but more recently in revised Catholic theologies of love, such as that developed by Edward Vacek, and observable also within Pope John Paul II's 'Theology of the Body,'<sup>40</sup> we find *eros*, the constant intense desiring of God in response to the newness of life,<sup>41</sup> as a significant marker and observable characteristic of Trinitarian communion.<sup>42</sup> Gregory of Nyssa writes of this reality, "... the true sight of God consists in this, that the one who looks up to God never ceases in that desire ... This truly is the vision of God: never to be satisfied in the desire to see him."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Isa 2:4; 11:6-9; 25:6-7; 30: 23-26; 32:15-20; Hos 2:18; 14: 5-7; etc.

<sup>37</sup> Ezek 47:1-12; Joel 4:18, etc.

<sup>38</sup> Rev 22:1-5.

<sup>39</sup> Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, 2:207.

<sup>40</sup> John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, transl., intro. and index Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1997/2006), 315-316.

<sup>41</sup> G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, Kallistos Ware, transl. and eds., *The Philokalia* vol.1 (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 362.

<sup>42</sup> See Palmer, *et als*, who describe *eros* as, "unitive love *par excellence*... not distinct from *agapi*, but (it) may be contrasted with *agapi* in that it expresses a greater degree of intensity and ecstasy." Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware, *The Philokalia*, 1:362.

<sup>43</sup> Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, 2:209.

Historically, such as in the accounts of the martyrdom of St Perpetua,<sup>44</sup> and the various writings of St John of the Cross, this desire was also often expressed through Edenic imagery.<sup>45</sup> In more concrete examples, such as in the early monastic movement of northern Egypt and the Sinai, and its evolution in medieval Europe, the imagery of the Garden of Eden provided establishing frameworks for worship on a number of levels. For example, the presence of Eden is immediately visible in the ‘Cloister garth,’ the central garden of a monastery based on the imagined appearance of the biblical Eden.<sup>46</sup> Aspects of religious architecture from the time of the First Temple (1 Kings 6:29-35) also reflect this recognition.<sup>47</sup> Numerous instances in art, music, and literature can also be identified, of which Milton’s *Paradise Lost* is a most obvious example. Speaking explicitly of the Christian context, the faithful, motivated by the desire for communion with God have, over time, responded to God’s ongoing creativity in the world using the imagery of Eden as a primary template through which their understanding of the Christ event is mediated.

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<sup>44</sup> See, for example, Perpetua’s idealisation of Christian heaven as a garden, possibly combining Jacob’s ladder of ascent (Gen 28:10-17) with understandings reflective of her own pagan origins. See 3.4 in *The Passion of the Holy Martyrs Perpetua and Felicity* at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0324.htm> (Accessed 17/01/2016). Jungian psychology describes how the huge Egyptian symbols manifest in this fourth and final vision, “represent the pagan spiritual attitude that Perpetua was able to trample down in her soul. The pagan inside Perpetua’s soul tried to pull her down and undermine her spiritual development, but failed. Perpetua is rewarded for her courage with a bough from the Tree of Life, which symbolizes the reward of eternal life.” Ann Walker, “A Review of: ‘The Passion Of Perpetua: A Psychological Interpretation Of Her Visions,’ ” *Psychological Perspectives* 48:1 (2004): 159-161.

<sup>45</sup> St John of the Cross references Eden much more explicitly in the form of his spiritualised reconstruction of the Song of Solomon as the primary metaphor for the soul’s unquenchable desire for union with God. See St John of the Cross, “The Spiritual Canticle,” in *The Collected Works of St John of the Cross*, transl. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington: ICS Publications, 1973), 411-415.

<sup>46</sup> More subtle influences can be recognised in the interrelationship between work in the monastic garden and prayer, as an expression of reverence for God, as well as the desire through gardening *as prayer*, to facilitate the return to Eden before the Fall. See Mick Hales, *Monastic Gardens* (New York: Stewart, Tabori and Chang, 2000), 10-29. See also Denise Le Dantec and Jean-Pierre Le Dantec, *Reading the French Garden: Story and History*, transl. Jessica Levine (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990).

<sup>47</sup> For Christian examples see McNamara, *Catholic Church Architecture*, 48-57. See also McNamara, *How To Read Churches: a crash course in ecclesial architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 2011).

It is further argued that, to the degree that the emotional and spiritual purity of the longing for God dispels and displaces any potentially contaminating self-love, this particular understanding of *eros* draws *agapic*, or self-less love, to unity with it.<sup>48</sup> Contemporary psychology would express that the contaminating narcissism associated with *eros* emanates from the ego, whilst more ancient observers recognise it as having its origins in ‘evil spirits.’ Nevertheless, as both St Hesychios the Priest (8<sup>th</sup> - 9<sup>th</sup> C.) and St Diadochos of Photiki (c440-486 CE), for example, recognise, the Holy Spirit, present both in the living core of the individual and in Holy Scripture, is able, “to uproot all passions and evils from our hearts,” such that all parts of the soul, “cleave ineffably and with utter simplicity to the delight of its love and longing for the divine.”<sup>49</sup> That is to say, Christ’s love, when brought to bear on the potentially damaging power that is *eros*, purifies *eros* such that the beauty of the imagery of Eden becomes an authentic expression of the existential human need to respond to that divine attentiveness.

### **3.3 Eden, *Eros*, and Ethos.**

Contemporary examinations of what Jean-Luc Marion calls the ‘erotic phenomenon’ have as one of their associated aims the intention of rehabilitating *eros*, with its attendant characterisation as a self-gratuitous, negative impulse, by comparing on the one hand the essential moral and ethical potential of properly constituted and exercised self-love with the perceived insufficiency of a purely

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<sup>48</sup> A notion present in both Vacek and Marion, but also identifiable in the writing of the Protestant theologian, Karl Barth, who, and notwithstanding the various tensions in his writing on *eros* and *agape* identified by Clough, asks, “whether what is called *agape* is not really a spiritualised, idealised, sublimated, and pious form of *eros*.” Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/2, 280 (337-8). As cited in David Clough, *Eros and Agape in Karl Barth’s Church Dogmatics*.” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 2, no. 2 (July 2000): 192.

<sup>49</sup> Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware, *The Philokalia*, 1:181, 263.

selfless *agape*.<sup>50</sup> Edward Vacek gives the example of self-responsibility, as a form of self-love, through which we achieve crucial moral tasks not present in love for a neighbour, such as taking personal responsibility for accepting and responding to God's love.<sup>51</sup> Notions such as self-sacrifice and self-gift, repentance and forgiveness, and the value of petitionary prayer are similarly gathered within this understanding. Conversely, "the advocates of self-forgetfulness rob love of its personal quality"<sup>52</sup> – their personhood shrinks accordingly, making it very difficult for others to help them. As Vacek comments, "The classical God who has no needs is a very difficult God to love."<sup>53</sup> For Marion, as with others, then, there is no essential distinction between *eros*, *agape*, and *philia*, except in relation to the object of the particular form of love and its intentions.<sup>54</sup> Thus Vacek distinguishes between *agape*, *eros*, and *philia* by application of the phrase, "for the sake of." That is, "the one for whose sake we love determines the kind of love we have."<sup>55</sup>

Applying this formula, deformed desire, alternatively understood as "the concupiscence 'that comes from the world,'"<sup>56</sup> limits the trinitarian potential of *eros* that properly seeks the other, by 'distorting, 'limiting,' or 'reducing' the "quality of the reciprocal relations that exist between a man and a woman."<sup>57</sup> Conversely, properly constituted desire that is not reduced simply to bodily or physical realities,<sup>58</sup> provides the foundation and preparation "for man's becoming the image of God through communion."<sup>59</sup> There must be present in *eros*, then, an indispensable ethical component

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<sup>50</sup> Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 5. Cf. Nygren, for example, who argues that it is impossible to reconcile *eros* and *agape*, between which, "... there is universal, all embracing opposition." See Vacek, *Love, Human and Divine*, 159.

<sup>51</sup> Vacek, *Love, Human and Divine*, 223.

<sup>52</sup> Vacek, *Love, Human and Divine*, 223.

<sup>53</sup> Vacek, *Love, Human and Divine*, 231.

<sup>54</sup> Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 220-221.

<sup>55</sup> Vacek, *Love, Human and Divine*, 157-158.

<sup>56</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Man & Woman He Created Them*, n.32-1, 257.

<sup>57</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Man & Woman He Created Them*, n.32-1, 257.

<sup>58</sup> Ailbe M. O'Reilly, *Conjugal Chastity in Pope Wojtyla* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2010), 47.

<sup>59</sup> O'Reilly, *Conjugal Chastity*, 47.

which facilitates, orientates, and guides this movement.<sup>60</sup> In this way, “what is ‘erotic’ also becomes true, good and beautiful.”<sup>61</sup> This is very much the substance of Psalm 119, one of the most complete expressions of the benefits of *Torah* in Judaism, the positive matrix of governance in ancient Israel that, as we have seen,<sup>62</sup> has equivalence with the blessings of Eden.<sup>63</sup>

However, over and against properly constituted *eros*, *agape*, and *\philia* there lies the ongoing tension between the unassailable perfection of creation, manifest in the imagery of Eden, and the experience of creation continually made new. That is to say, the Garden of Eden may well be eternal, but that ‘stability,’ as the Orthodox theologian Dimitru Staniloae observes in the context of the ascent towards God described by St. Gregory of Nyssa, is simultaneously experienced as motion.<sup>64</sup> For St Gregory the danger lies not in the movement of humanity towards God in response to God’s love. Indeed, that movement is seen as part of what might be deemed the natural order. Rather, it is the quality and nature of that response that determines whether the human remains within “continuous newness,” or, as a consequence of imperfect love, “falls.”<sup>65</sup>

Understood in this manner Adam and Eve’s expulsion from Eden following their solipsistic act of eating from the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, insofar as the act represents the transgression of God’s properly constituted *eros*, is the only possible outcome. God’s decision is not just ‘judicial’ but relates to the fundamental characteristic of the world as eternally becoming, in freedom, through

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<sup>60</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Man & Woman He Created Them*, n.48-1, 319.

<sup>61</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Man & Woman He Created Them*, n.48-1, 319.

<sup>62</sup> See p. 82.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Sir 24:7-23; Bar 3:9-4:4.

<sup>64</sup> Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, 2:209.

<sup>65</sup> Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, 2:209.

relationship;<sup>66</sup> Adam and Eve's self-focussed actions radically disrupt both the immediate integrity and the creative potential of that reality.

The challenge for the Israelite community subsequently, reduced to its essence in the question Cain asks of God,<sup>67</sup> is to reconnect with the divine desire at the heart of that eternal becoming through proper relationship with God, and with each other. This is a theme developed in Paul's theology of Christ as the New Adam, and further developed in Irenaeus' doctrine of recapitulation. It was subsequently rearticulated by others, including Ignatius, who exhorted the Christian retreatant to "apply his senses" to the mystery of faith as preparatory exercises intended to elaborate "the form, meaning, and training" for prayer.<sup>68</sup> According to Ignatius, the practice educates the retreatant, "to use our senses in the image of the senses of the New Adam and the new Eve... our surrender to the order of the incarnation." The blessings of that re-union, as a fundamental motif of Old Testament narrative, indicated in the writings of the prophets, and especially in the image of Ezekiel's repristinated Temple as Eden (Ezek 47:1-12), are a return to the Garden of Eden as a symbol of fundamental reconciliation.

Contemporary Orthodox theology supports this understanding. Kallistos Ware, for example, argues that, notwithstanding its foundation in the contemplation of the appearances and processes of the natural world, the legitimacy of *eros* as a theological category within Orthodoxy, supportive of salvation, is equally perceived as dependent on its moral underpinnings:

... the contemplation of nature requires a moral basis. We cannot make progress on the second stage of the Way unless we make progress on the first stage by practicing the virtues and fulfilling the commandments. Our natural

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<sup>66</sup> John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, Encyclical Letter, Vatican Website, 1995, [http://www.vatican.va/edocs/ENG0141/\\_INDEX.HTM](http://www.vatican.va/edocs/ENG0141/_INDEX.HTM), sec.19.

<sup>67</sup> Gen 4:9

<sup>68</sup> Ignatius, *Exercises*, Nos. 121, 133, 227, 238. As cited in Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics. Vol. 1. Seeing the Form*, transl. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 374.

contemplation, if it lacks a firm foundation in the ‘active life’, becomes merely aesthetic or romantic, and fails to rise to the level of the genuinely noetic or spiritual. There can be no perception of the world in God without radical repentance, without a continual change of mind.<sup>69</sup>

Within Orthodox theology, then, creation is not held to be ethical in and of itself. But, as with Roman Catholic theology, and assumed in the story of the Fall, there must be an ethical dimension to our desire for God if it is not to be distorted or displaced by ego-centric, or impure motives, or otherwise appropriated by third-parties. As we shall see in the next chapter matrimonial symbolism is enlisted by the both Old and New Testament writers to represent this fidelity but is itself ultimately subsumed within the encompassing, transcendent symbolism of Eden.

### **3.4 Eden, *Eros*, and Eschatology.**

Despite the recognisable similarity in Catholic and Orthodox approaches which argue for the dependency of properly constituted *eros* on ‘ethos,’<sup>70</sup> a significant difference in emphasis between the two on the constitution, apprehension and expression of that erotic impulse can be identified. Whilst a Catholic understanding of *eros* appears to focus substantially on the person, and especially the human body, as the locus of human desire, an Orthodox understanding identifies *eros* as the manifestation of desire for God in creation, and especially nature, more generally. Understood as the gift of God, through which the aspirations of both God and people for communion can be realised, it is creation in its totality that serves as both the means and the opportunity for the ‘erotic dialogue’ between the supreme Person and persons to be enacted.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way (Revised Edition)* (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1995), 118.

<sup>70</sup> Pope John Paul II’s word for ‘that which is ethical.’ See O’Reilly, *Conjugal Chastity*, 46. Citing Pope John Paul II (2006), 319.

<sup>71</sup> Charles Miller, *The Gift of the World: An Introduction to the Theology of Dumitru Staniloae* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), 33. Traditionally, within the monastic

Nevertheless, consistent with Catholicism, within Orthodox theology, it is the human being who is the axis around which this of creation experience takes place, and who responds to creation in desire accordingly. This view is expressed comprehensively in the writing of Maximus the Confessor, and explained by Lars Thunberg in the following manner:

Man is, first of all, presented here as a being in all respects *in the middle* between the extremes of creation, to which he has a natural relationship. He was brought into being as an all-containing workshop, binding all together in himself. As such he has been given the power of unification, thanks to his proper relationship to his own different parts. Man was further brought into being as the last of God's creatures, because he was a natural *link*... between all creation, mediating... between the extremes through the elements of his own nature. Man was thus called to bring into one unity in relation to God as Cause that which was naturally distinguished, starting with his own division... And from there he is in a position to go on and unite the world in itself and bring it into harmonious relationship with God.<sup>72</sup>

That is to say, the intersection of God with the world occurs within the generative heart of humankind from which, through the Spirit, the ongoing creation and transformation of the world is given shape. For the Christian, it is Christ, the “salvational inner structure of history”<sup>73</sup> revealed as man, who is the primary template for that unifying dialogue. This will be discussed more fully in Part Two of this thesis. But as the central Old Testament metaphor describing the idealised representation of the potential unity between God and the world, it is

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tradition of the Orthodox Church this dialogue occurs in the process of contemplation, which has two correlative aspects. First, reflecting its foundations in Greek philosophy, it means appreciating the ‘thusness’ or ‘thisness’ (*haecceity*) of particular things, persons and moments: “We are to see each stone, each leaf, each blade of grass, each frog, each human face, for what it truly is, in all the distinctness and intensity of its specific being...” Secondly, “... the contemplation of nature means we are to see all things, persons and moments as signs and sacraments of God.” Ware, *The Orthodox Way (Revised Edition)*, 119.

<sup>72</sup> Miller, *The Gift of the World*, 31.

<sup>73</sup> Jeffrey Cooper, “Mysticism in the Middle: The Mandorla as Interpretive Tool for Reading Meister Eckhart,” *Spiritus* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 4.



to the story of the Garden of Eden that we may also profitably look to find a partial understanding of that erotic phenomenon.

A dynamic of mediation can be readily identified in the responsibility given to Adam to name, and hence have power over, all living creatures found in Eden.<sup>74</sup> A second mediatory role can subsequently be identified in the requirement for Adam, and by implication all of humanity, to care for Eden and, through symbolic association, all of creation, as an aspect of humankind's *eros*, or desire for God. At its most literal this provides the foundational rationale for a biblical ecology that argues for the proper stewardship of creation as divinely ordained. This responsibility has been examined and articulated at length by many authors<sup>75</sup> and it is not my intention to restate those arguments here. But there is also a third identifiable mediatory role for humans in the story of Eden expressive of the desire for the re-establishment of the cosmic covenant in response to the separation initiated by the Fall. That is, there can be identified in the imagery of Eden as a lost ideal an eschatological dimension expressive of both human and divine hope and magnitude.<sup>76</sup> As such, the contemplation of nature in general, and Eden in particular, as an aspect of properly constituted *eros*, is not an end in itself but part of the ongoing salvation-history of the world.<sup>77</sup> To this degree the love of God for the world expressed through the imaginative force of Eden, and the human response to the loss of that gift, acting through *eros*, points not only to the immediate transformative presence of God in the world

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<sup>74</sup> Gen 2:15, 19-20.

<sup>75</sup> See, for example, Brock and Parker, *Saving Paradise*; Ellen Davis, *Scripture, Culture & Agriculture: an Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Denis Edwards, *Jesus the Wisdom of God: An Ecological Theology* (Homebush: St. Pauls, 1995); Lucas F. Johnston, *Religion and Sustainability: Social Movements and the Politics of the Environment* (New York: Routledge, 2013); Williams, *Refuge* (1991/2001); and Norman Wirzba, *The Paradise of God: Renewing God in an Ecological Age* (New York: O.U.P., 2003).

<sup>76</sup> O'Reilly, *Conjugal Chastity*, 46.

<sup>77</sup> von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, 639.

continuously ‘made new,’ it also speaks of hope in the times to come, “a hunger for the not-yet.”<sup>78</sup>

This third form of mediation, manifest in the desire for the eschatological Eden, can be identified in the Old Testament in a variety of forms. We see it evoked, for example, as sacred memory, such as in story of Eden before the Fall, and in the stories of the providence of God who offered partial glimpses of Eden in the blessings of the covenant offered to Abraham. Obtaining and securing the covenant subsequently becomes a primary motif of the Old Testament narrative. The memory of Eden is also alive in God’s life-saving provision to the Hebrews, newly freed from Egypt, as they journeyed through ‘wilderness’ to the Promised Land,<sup>79</sup> the basis of the metaphor of the kingship of God that later found expression in the New Testament in the form of the kingdom of God. It can also be found, predominantly in the writings of the early Prophets, as a paraenetic example, contrasting with the multiple instances of disaster and calamity that befall those who are either unfaithful to the God of Israel, or who choose not to respond to God’s offer of relationship with Him.<sup>80</sup> The imagery of Eden can also be identified in a cultic eschatology, of which the creation stories of Genesis 1-3, insofar as they underwent final redaction by priestly editors after the return of the Israelites from Babylonian exile, are examples.<sup>81</sup> It is also recognisable in the Old Testament, notably in the Prophets but also in the Psalms, in the expression of a personalised hope for ‘the true, the beautiful, and the good,’ that finds representation in the images of Eden.

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<sup>78</sup> Kelly, *Eschatology and Hope*, 4.

<sup>79</sup> The relationship between Israel and Eden has been discussed in the previous chapter. See also Gen15:18; 17:6; Ex 16:10-15; 17:5-6; Num 17:8; 20: 2-11; Deut 8:7-10; 26:1-10.

<sup>80</sup> Isa 1:19; 2:2; 11: 6-9; 27:6; 35:1-2; 51:3; 54:1-3; 55:1, 12-13; 60: 4-13, 65: 20-25.

<sup>81</sup> See, for example, Richard J. Clifford, “Genesis,” in Brown, Fitzmyer, and E. Murphy, eds., *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 9. Cf. Lev 26:3-9; Num. 17:1-9; Deut 30:15-20.

A key example of Eden as representative of this personalised hope can be found in the book of Ezekiel where, using the imagery of Eden, the construction of a re-pristinated Temple is offered as the theological and emotional climax of the prophet's encompassing vision of a reconstituted Zion (Ezek 47:1-12). We cannot presume to impose current psychological understandings of human perceptions and motivations onto the personalities of antiquity. But such instances, as they are related in the Old Testament, can nevertheless help a contemporary reader interpret and respond to these texts in the context of their own lived experience. Derek Daschke offers a psychoanalytical interpretation Ezekiel's story, recognising it as a plausible, narrative based response to the physical and spiritual loss of Zion/Jerusalem, "through a bridge of symbols between inner and social worlds through fantasy activity."<sup>82</sup> Ezekiel's Eden story, in which God returns to the temple from which Edenic blessings now flow is seen to be expressive of the resolution of Ezekiel's manifest grief, following various stages of mourning evident in the prophet's eccentric behaviour.<sup>83</sup> That is to say, the imagery of Eden evoked by Ezekiel draws the prophet, in hope, beyond the immediacy of his Babylonian exile towards an all-encompassing eschatological horizon.

We can also recognise in the physicality of the narration the externalisation and concretisation of that hope. Hence, as in many other instances where the prophets themselves have become the embodiment of their own visions, we see Ezekiel detailing his interpretation of, and desire for, a new Jerusalem in a variety of specific physical positions and activities including walking, eating, lying down, looking out, and so on,<sup>84</sup> that shifts the reader's reception of Ezekiel's Edenic world view from the abstract into one of flesh and blood, that is, of lived faith.

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<sup>82</sup> Dereck M. Daschke, "Desolate Among Them: Loss, Fantasy and Recovery in the Book of Ezekiel," *American Imago* 56.2 (1999): 105.

<sup>83</sup> Daschke, "Desolate Among Them," 105-132.

<sup>84</sup> Ezek. 1:1, 15, 28; 2:1; 3:1, 4, 22; 4: 1, 4, 3, etc.

A similar observation can be made of Hosea who, when instructed by God, took as a wife a woman, Gomer, who was manifestly unfaithful. As a living metaphor of Israel, Gomer's infidelity brings wilderness, 'unsown lands' and 'trackless wastes,'<sup>85</sup> upon herself, from which an ensuing chaos emerges:

<sup>3</sup>...I will strip her naked  
and expose her as in the day she was born,  
and make her like a wilderness,  
and turn her into a parched land,  
and kill her with thirst.  
Upon her children also I will have no pity  
because they are the children of whoredom.

<sup>6</sup>Therefore I will hedge her way with thorns;  
and I will build a wall against her,  
so that she cannot find her paths.

<sup>12</sup>I will lay waste her vines and her fig trees,  
of which she said,  
'These are my pay,  
which my lovers have given me.'  
I will make them a forest,  
and the wild animals shall devour them.

Hos 2: 3-4, 6, 12.

Conversely, as an extension of the harrowing realism through which he conveyed Israel's profound alienation from God, Hosea converts his despair into hope through the vision of reconciled relationship with his wife, for whom forgiveness is conveyed in images that are the opposite of wilderness, that is, in the blessings of Eden:

<sup>14</sup>Therefore, I will now allure her,  
and bring her into the wilderness,  
and speak tenderly to her,  
<sup>15</sup>From there I will give her her vineyards,  
and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.  
There she shall respond as in the days of her youth,  
as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt.

<sup>17</sup>For I will remove the names of the Baals from her  
mouth, and they shall be mentioned by name no more.<sup>18</sup>  
I will make for you a covenant on that day with the wild  
animals, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the

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<sup>85</sup> See Tsumura, "The Earth in Genesis 1," 328.

ground; and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land; and I will make you lie down in safety.<sup>19</sup> And I will take you for my wife forever; I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy.<sup>20</sup> I will take you for my wife in faithfulness; and you shall know the LORD.

Hos 2: 14-15, 17-20.

For both Ezekiel and Hosea, then, as inheritors and interpreters of a prophetic tradition that was active prior to the Babylonian exile, the hope of a restored Jerusalem, and through that restoration the hope of the world, is once more expressed in Edenic imagery of abundance, fertility, and peace. What is distinguishable in these visions, compared to those of their predecessors, is not only the arresting personal dimension into which the reader is invited but also the more precise definition and emphatic articulation of the prophets' imaginative response to their circumstances. We want to stress then that this personalised hope manifest in the blessings and imagery of Eden amplifies God's call from the future and accelerates the human desire, or *eros*, to be once more united with Him.

### **Conclusion**

It has been argued in this chapter that one of the important ways that the imposing will of God was shown to engage with human subjectivity was through the story of the Garden of Eden and its associated imagery. In the face of the mystery that is God, this representation enabled profound truths of human fallibility and creative potential to be described, developed, and responded to in turn.

In the first instance the concept of God's *hesed*, or covenantal love, for Israel, spoke of God as a righteous and creative King whose disposition was eternally desirous of a loving relationship with His subjects, despite their ongoing infidelities, unwise choices, and pride. This aspect of the 'emotional' life of God was shown to be substantially revealed through the imagery of Eden.

The second part of this chapter explored the creative response to this love through examination of the human desire, or *eros*, for God expressed as a longing of which the imagery of Eden was a manifestation. It was argued that such a response must be fundamentally ethical, that is, it must bring *agapic* love within it, so that it is not distorted or otherwise deflected from both its purpose and its object, which is full communion with God.

Finally, the role of Eden as a locus of human desire for God was explored in the context of eschatological hope. It was argued that, through the imagery of Eden, God calls to us from the future, bringing us to Him, and ourselves to the fullness of our being, through the responsive desire for ‘the true, good, and the beautiful.’

Methodologically we can see, in each of these representations of Eden, the hermeneutical arc of revelation through which not only the ancient Israelites, but all people who come to these texts in faith, begin to know the Lord.<sup>86</sup> It needs to be recognised, at the same time, that this process cannot be delimited by the structures of genre. The multivalent textual presence that is Eden engages with the religious person, now as always, in an experience of transcendence that orientates those searching for God to a reality beyond the text.

The next two chapters will explore the affective dimensions of the relationship between God and humanity further. Chapter Four will examine how the ancient Israelites perceived YHWH, and their relationship with Him, through consideration of matrimonial imagery, the preferred metaphor of the prophets to represent their specific understanding of the profound intimacy between God and Israel.

Chapter Five, the final chapter of the first part of this thesis, examines the dynamic association of the imagery of Eden and that of wilderness. It will be argued that through the juxtaposition of Eden and wilderness the ancient authors present in symbolic form the

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<sup>86</sup> Cf. Ezek 16:52.

ongoing exhortation of God to “choose life!”<sup>87</sup> over and against any human actions, attitudes or behaviours which might jeopardise the inherently loving relationship between of God and the world.

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<sup>87</sup> Deut 30:15-19.

## CHAPTER FOUR: EDEN AND MATRIMONIAL SYMBOLISM.

The nation of Israel, for the writers of the Old Testament, is nothing less than a vision of the world. In right relationship with God, it is also a reflection of the central order of that world.<sup>1</sup> According to both Isaiah and Jeremiah,<sup>2</sup> Israel “... is inscribed in the world like ... the law of the heavens and the stars and the earth.”<sup>3</sup> The Garden of Eden, then, both as the promise and the trace of Israel justified before God, can be understood as evidence of God’s creative and righteous activity in human history. The ancient authors who harnessed their particular theological and ethical vision to the symbolism of Eden did so because they believed that theological modes of truth, such as abundance, peace, faithfulness, justice, mercy, kenosis, expiation, and humility,<sup>4</sup> can be effectively mediated through the use of this imagery.

The power of Eden, however, does not lie solely in its capacity to point in the direction of, anticipate, or express, human perception of the transcendent. It also functions to anchor that encounter within the lived experience of those for whom its blessings become a reference point in their lives.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, the symbolism of Eden acts as a bridge in the Old Testament between the historical and the eternal. It does not rely exclusively on the abstract formulae of ritual to do so, even when that ritual and associated liturgy may reflect accepted understandings about the nature of the lives of the participants. In addition, the meaning of Eden is also apprehended and appreciated existentially and phenomenologically, through concrete relations with the material and social world, in a manner that may well be deemed

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), *The God of Jesus Christ: Meditations on the Triune God*, transl. Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 39-40

<sup>2</sup> Isa 30:26; Jer 31:34.

<sup>3</sup> Neher, *The Prophetic Existence*, 343.

<sup>4</sup> Glenn Morrison, “Walter Kasper’s religious Quest for Jesus Christ,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 72 (Autumn 2007): 278.

<sup>5</sup> See, Neher, *The Prophetic Existence*, 345. See also Tsumura, “The Earth in Genesis 1,” 328.



fundamental or archetypal, but which is reiterated and renewed through everyday experiences and events.

The belief in the primacy of Edenic imagery to inform human understandings of the nature and purpose of God's relationship with Israel, however, is not automatically accepted by Old Testament scholars. As part of a comprehensive examination of prophetism, Andre Neher offers a related, but different viewpoint. He argues that the nexus of relationship, history, and place, which constitutes the nation of Israel, find its clearest expression not in the imagery of Eden, but in matrimonial symbolism.<sup>6</sup> Neher contends that it is through the various positive aspects of matrimonial symbolism present in the writing of the prophets – God's delight in Creation, the love between God and His chosen people, human knowledge of God, the experience and expression of joy, the experience of fertility, as well as the possibility of a deep and unique knowledge of another – that the covenantal blessings of Israel are most fully realised, understood, and recalled. As in the language of Eden, which offers representations of 'wilderness' as markers of the rejection by Israel of Eden's plenitude, the denial or corruption of God's blessing of Israel expressed through infidelity to the marriage bond, is shown to similarly lead to catastrophic outcomes.

Certainly, given the degree to which the lives of the prophets themselves are put forward as the embodiment of their own vision, their choice of matrimonial imagery to convey that vision may be considered natural. Invested with the task of bringing Israel back into unity with God, as well as articulating the unavoidable changes required to assert Israel as God's elected people,<sup>7</sup> their personal relations become both illustrative and rhetorical. Neher, in fact, considers the matrimonial symbolism explicitly present in the lives of

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<sup>6</sup> Neher, *The Prophetic Existence*, 247-259.

<sup>7</sup> Jer 2:3; Num 23:9.

the prophets to be *the* shining meaning of Old Testament prophecy, insofar as it expresses the essential intimacy of the relationship between the prophets and the destiny of the people of Israel. As such, in the context of the tumult and drama of that relationship, it can also be considered the greatest security the prophets could hope to obtain.<sup>8</sup>

The ‘language of love,’ then, allows the relationship between Israel and God to persist, notwithstanding Israel’s frequent periods of spiritual lassitude, disharmony, indifference, and infidelity.<sup>9</sup> In this manner matrimonial symbolism, as it is expressed in these Old Testament texts, is not just descriptive of the covenantal life but can also be seen as dialectical, maintaining connection within that relationship whilst at the same time educating, inspiriting, and enlivening it.<sup>10</sup>

Clearly, there are fundamental differences in the nature and scope of Edenic and matrimonial imagery, as well as aspects of each that potentially inform the other. As argued in Chapter Three of this thesis,<sup>11</sup> Edenic imagery substantially represents God’s predisposition towards, and hope for, the world and each person in it. At its most ideal, matrimonial symbolism similarly gives voice to the infinite irreducible mystery and enduring faithfulness of God. However, drawn from the experience of family and social relationships,<sup>12</sup> matrimonial symbolism, as the prophets themselves explicitly acknowledge, can be also seen to represent the negative extremes of a human institution that is, at critical moments, fundamentally limited. Jeremiah, for example, contrasts committed married life with violent, unfaithful love. Hence the stages of normal love are presented through images of birth (Jer 2:5), youth (2:15), marriage and consummation (2:19-20). Conversely, marital disaster is described through images of

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<sup>8</sup> Neher, *The Prophetic Existence*, 245.

<sup>9</sup> Neher, *The Prophetic Existence*, 250.

<sup>10</sup> Neher, *The Prophetic Existence*, 251.

<sup>11</sup> Ch. 3. “Eden, Hesed, and the Desire for God,” 3.1, Eden and Hesed.

<sup>12</sup> See Ch. 3. “Eden, Hesed, and the Desire for God,” 3.1, Eden and Hesed, n. 25.

prostitution (2:7), seduction and violence (2:12-13), and repentance (2:7).<sup>13</sup>

In light of these two competing claims for symbolic primacy, between the imagery of Eden on the one hand and matrimonial symbolism on the other, and the different character of those two forms of representation, an obvious question presents itself: What precisely is the relationship between Edenic and matrimonial symbolism to the covenantal life, and what is the significance of that relationship? This is the focus of this chapter. By considering a range of texts where these two different sets of imagery are featured together it will be argued that whilst the use of matrimonial symbolism in the Old Testament powerfully informs ancient Jewish understandings of God, and God's relationship to Israel, that imagery is substantially subsumed within the irreducibly positive dimensions of Eden which offers an abiding vision of integration, fullness, beauty, and love.

#### **4.1 Eden, Matrimonial Symbolism, and Genesis 2-4.**

As the first instance of marriage in the canonical Bible, the relationship between Adam and Eve (Genesis 2:20-25) warrants close examination. The reader's attention is drawn to the passage in Genesis 2:21 where God caused Eve to come into being through the grafting of Adam's rib. Here, we encounter a scene that echoes marriage rituals across diverse cultures, wherein God brings Eve to Adam, who delights in her presence before him (2:22-23). In doing so it can be inferred that marriage is offered in ancient Israel as the primary and foundational human relationship (2:24). However, as it is presented in that narrative, marriage is not delimited to a sociological or anthropological concept. The marriage of Adam and Eve can additionally be seen as part of the Creation itself, a status it shares ontologically with Eden. In the intimacy with which God enters Adam's body to remove the rib-bone from which He then

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<sup>13</sup> Neher, *The Prophetic Existence*, 48.

‘manufactures’ Eve (2:21-22) we also discover, in this foundational biblical text, marriage presented as the primary relational quality between God and humans. Thus, the union of Adam and Eve, in both its spiritual and physical aspects, is both naturalised and reflected in the physical encounter of God with Adam, and with the essential, complimentary human form that is the product of that union – the woman, Eve. From this the reader is given to understand that whilst, following The Fall, (re)union with God can be seen to be an ideal to which humankind can, and must, aspire if it is to flourish, they must also accept that ontologically that union, between God and humankind, is also an unassailable reality that accompanies us regardless of the immediate circumstances of that relationship. Thus, the covenantal faithfulness of God is founded not just in ‘mere words,’ but more deeply, in the material reality of the procreative act.

The marital intimacy of God with humankind, as part of the Creation, is expressed again in Genesis 4:1, after Adam and Eve have been expelled from Eden, where “the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, “I have produced a man with the help of the LORD.”” The exegetical emphasis in this passage tends to be on Eve’s exultation in her procreative powers, and the concrete, sexual nature through which that occurs.<sup>14</sup> However, a view also exists that, rather than being no more than the proud boast of a new mother, the passage once again reiterates and prioritises the marital status of God and humanity, as it is expressed through the birth of Eve’s child, Cain. This is the view developed in an article by David Bokovoy wherein, after an extensive linguistic survey and analysis of Eve’s exclamation, he concludes that of the three possible translations of יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אִישׁ אֲנִי יוֹלְדָה *qaniti ish et Yarweh* (4:1), that is,

1. “I have acquired a man with Yahweh.” *or*
2. “I have created a man with Yahweh.” *or*

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<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Clifford, in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 13a; Alter, *The Five Books of Moses*, 29; and Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom*, 125-126.

3. “I have procreated a man with Yahweh,”

it is the third interpretation that is the most compelling. Having thus considered the material Bokovoy summarises that:

Even though Yahweh himself obviously did not engage in sexual relations with Eve, from a theological perspective the deity certainly had a mysterious, albeit direct divine role to play in the first act of human procreation. Eve’s declaration in Genesis 4:1 may suggest that she sees herself as a link from divine creation to successive human births; she becomes progenitor of man “with Yahweh.” If correct, this reading would explain why Eve makes the unusual statement that she created אִישׁ “man” instead of the expected “child” or “son.”<sup>15</sup>

This conforms, for Bokovoy, to a matriarchal child-birth tradition, prominent in a number of ANE cultures, which reflects a theological view of YHWH as a direct and active participant in the process of procreation. It is a view that is echoed later in the Bible in the tradition of Isaac’s conception in Genesis 21:1-3, and articulated more generally in Psalm 139:13.

The converse of the above, however, must also be considered – that Eve’s exclamation drawing attention to her procreative powers is an echo of, or allusion to, her possible status as an Israelite version of the Canaanite fertility goddess Asherah, or related deities, such as the Akkadian goddess Mami.<sup>16</sup> That is to say, Eve, whose name in itself is held to be a wordplay on, or referential to, notions of life and fertility<sup>17</sup> is a powerful creative and controlling force in her own right.

Be that as it may, what is of interest, in the context of the consideration of Eden and matrimonial symbolism, is not that these parallels between Eve and ANE fertility gods might exist – they are

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<sup>15</sup> David E. Bokovoy, “Did Eve Acquire, Create, or Procreate with Yahweh? A Grammatical and Contextual Reassessment of אִישׁ in Genesis 4:1,” *Vetus Testamentum* 63, Fasc. 1 (2013): 19-35.

<sup>16</sup> For an extended analysis of this see “Chapter V – Fertility and Sexual Motifs in Gen 2-3,” in Wallace, *The Eden Narrative*, 143-181.

<sup>17</sup> That is, ‘mother of all living.’ See Wallace, *The Eden Narrative*, 147-150.

still contested. Rather, it is that in the temptation of Adam and Eve by the serpent, their expulsion from the Garden of Eden, and the subsequent travails of humankind as a result of that expulsion, the reader's narrative expectations are reversed. That is:

Rather than the productivity and fertility associated with the mother-goddess, we see death, sterility, and hardship. Eve, the "mother of all living," is designated to suffer in childbirth. The interaction between Eve and the serpent, also a symbol of fertility ... ultimately leads to death. The man's toil with the ground will yield little for his pains, and humankind is excluded from the garden of God, the place of fertility par excellence.<sup>18</sup>

Engnell declares this to be, "an Israelite interpretation of Canaanite tradition without equal."<sup>19</sup> As such, whilst the reversal of expectations supports the identification of Eve and Asherah, it also suggests that the confounding of cultural expectations points to a polemic purpose or trend in the narrative that takes the reader back to the marriage of God and humankind in Eden.<sup>20</sup> This concerns the circumstances whereby, against the prohibition of God, Adam and Eve have attempted to become godlike in themselves. Indeed, "What produces life and fertility in Canaan, in Israel is rebellion against God and causes death and drought, since it is impiety and sacrilege."<sup>21</sup>

It is the nature of that impiety that is problematic here, insofar as it occurs *within* the confines of the sacred marriage between God and humankind. This is a theme repeated in Chapter 16 of Ezekiel, the longest chapter in the book, suggesting the importance of this theme to ancient Israelite culture. Adam and Eve are tempted by the pagan serpent, which leads in turn to them being expelled from Eden, from what might be termed the marriage bed<sup>22</sup> of God and humankind.

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<sup>18</sup> Wallace, *The Eden Narrative*, 159.

<sup>19</sup> As cited in Wallace, *The Eden Narrative*, 162.

<sup>20</sup> Wallace, *The Eden Narrative*, 159, 161, 163.

<sup>21</sup> Soggin (1975a), as cited in Wallace, *The Eden Narrative*, 163.

<sup>22</sup> In some Kabbalistic and Rabbinic literature the Holy of Holies is pictured as the bed chamber, or place of communion, of the Holy One and His *Shekinah*, or bride. See Moshe Weinfeld, "Feminine Features in the Imagery of God in Israel: The

Subsequently, Eve conceives through Adam, but procreates in relationship with God. It is possible, then, to see this event as the beginning of the reconciliation in the marriage between God and humankind that finds its fulfilment,<sup>23</sup> according to Christian tradition, in the birth of Christ, the New Creation.

In relation to the question of the comparison between Edenic and matrimonial imagery, it can be seen that whilst matrimonial symbolism, in this account, potentially represents a social and religious ideal, it is compromised through human infidelity, pride, and ignorance. By way of contrast, the imagery of Eden remains a constant reminder of the loving predisposition of God towards his creation, a homing signal, as it were, guiding us back into reconciliation with God, under which the potential blessings of marriage, including joy and fertility, are subsumed.

#### **4.2 Eden, Matrimonial Symbolism, and the Song of Solomon.**

The degree to which matrimonial symbolism is subsumed within Edenic symbolism can be seen more clearly in The Song of Solomon,<sup>24</sup> which provides, after Genesis 2-3, perhaps the next most accessible Old Testament text through which to appraise these associations. Both Jewish and Christian commentators, for example, from the earliest times, recognised God and Israel in the Song of Solomon wherever a beloved or a betrothed one is mentioned.<sup>25</sup>

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Sacred Marriage and the Sacred Tree,” *Vetus Testamentum* 46, fasc. 4 (Oct., 1996): 518.

<sup>23</sup> Allowing that notions of hardship and infertility that are also important issues in this and other related stories, e.g. Gen 3:17-18; 5:29, are tentatively resolved in Gen 8:21-22.

<sup>24</sup> As the book is designated in the NRSV Bible cf. alternative nomenclature, such as ‘The Song of Songs,’ ‘Canticle of Canticle,’ ‘The Sublime Song,’ etc.

<sup>25</sup> Christian commentators amplified this relationship through typological analysis that overlaid the relationship of God and Israel with that of Christ and the Church. Commenting on the exegetical writings of Origen of Alexandria (184/185 CE – 253/254 CE) Drobner describes how Origen, in relation to his commentary on *The Song of Solomon*, “interprets the bride as the Church, on the one hand, and as the soul of the person uniting with God, on the other – the two fundamental interpretations of the entire patristic era.” See Herbertus H. Drobner, *The Fathers of the Church: A Comprehensive Introduction*, transl. Siegfried S. Schatzmann (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 143-144. See also the writings of St Ambrose

In making this recognition, the identification of the Song of Solomon as a sacred poem must be acknowledged. As the French Protestant theologian Daniel Lys observed, “Of all the amorous literature which must have flourished among the Israelites, as among all people, the Canticle is the only text chosen for canonization, and for what reason ... if not because the natural sense of the text has theological import.”<sup>26</sup> Lys’s comments came in the context of a debate as to the status of the Song of Solomon as both sexual and profane on the one hand, or spiritualised allegory on the other. Although Lys’ emphatic conclusion, that it was both, was made largely without substantiation,<sup>27</sup> it is now generally accepted that the Song of Solomon, despite its refractory character, functions primarily as a comprehensive commentary on the Eden narrative through both its sexual and sacred aspects.<sup>28</sup>

Lys’s insights are important insofar as they reorientate the debate about the theological status of the Song of Solomon away from seeing it as an anomalous intrusion in the Old Testament that must necessarily be harmonised through sacred allegory or secular

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on the same subject in St. Ambrose, *Select Works and Letters*, transl. Rev. H. De Romestin, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Volume X* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), 321-322, 325, 370-371, 38-381. A more recent commentary can also be found in Aidan Nichols, *Lovely, Like Jerusalem: The Fulfillment of the Old Testament in Christ and the Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007), 235-263.

<sup>26</sup> Marvin H. Pope, *Song of Songs* (New York: Doubleday/Anchor Bible, 1977), 202. Nichols describes how a similar conclusion was reached by earlier Christian commentators, most notably Origen, who argued that of the six ‘songs’ present in the Old Testament which most notably express the journey of ‘The Bride’ towards her ‘Spouse’ it is the Song of Solomon that is deemed *the* song i.e. the most sublime. See Nichols, *Lovely Like Jerusalem*, 249-251.

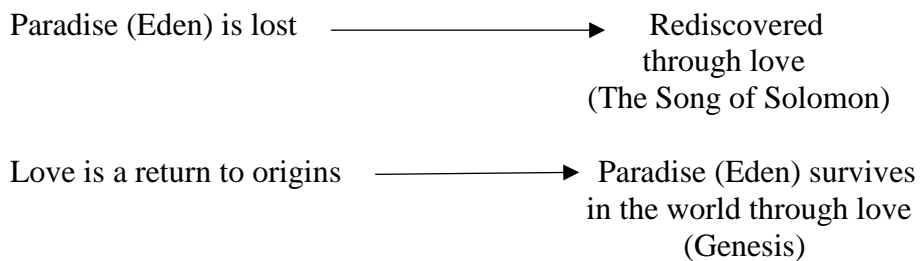
<sup>27</sup> Francis Landy, “The Song of Songs and the Garden of Eden,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 98, no. 4 (Dec. 1997): 513; Pope, *Song of Songs*, 202.

<sup>28</sup> Karl Barth, for example, holds that both Genesis 2-3 and The Song of Songs sanctify human sexual love, over and above “the repressive attitude towards eroticism in the rest of the OT.” Daniel Lys declares that, “Le Cantique n’est rien d’autre qu’un commentaire de Gen. 2” (“The Canticle is nothing less than a commentary on Genesis 2.” As cited in Landy, “Song of Songs,” 513. See also Phyllis Trible, “Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 41/1 (1973): 47, who also recognises the Song of Songs as commentary on Gen 2-3.



reduction. Instead the text can now be read holistically, in the context of the action of God, as love, at the centre of the most intimate of human activity. To the degree that the text functions as an inversion of the Eden narrative, whereby a love “as strong as death” (Song 8:6) is reasserted, the divine love intrinsic to the symbolism of Eden must also be recognised in the characters of the Lover and the Beloved central to the text.

But the Edenic associations are not simply imagistic, they are also structural. Landy describes in detail how The Song transforms and inverts the story of the Garden of Eden. There is a “secret correspondence” between the texts (Gen 2-3 and The Song), whereby “the narrative of the loss of Eden anticipates its survival in the union of man and woman, while in the Song of Songs love is protected from society and returns to origins.”<sup>29</sup> This can be represented graphically in the following manner:



Thus the extended imagery of the garden in the Song of Solomon, of which the most important can be found in 4:12-5:1, reiterates not just the equivalence between uncorrupted nature and blessing, at the heart of Eden. Insofar that it stands for the generative force that is proposed as the supreme value of the lovers’ society, above and beyond any material riches, it also represents humanity restored to its fullest potential, in faithful relationship with itself and with God. Even though the human and natural orders are tightly woven throughout The Song, such that the ‘fawn,’ the ‘King,’ and the Lover all feed off ‘the lilies’ (where fawn = Lover, and lilies = all women), suggestive of

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<sup>29</sup> Landy, “The Song of Songs,” 513.

a patriarchal society, the reader is told that the lovers relationship is perfect and reciprocal: “I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine” (Song 6:3).<sup>30</sup> In holding to faithfulness the Lovers, moreover, emerge from the limitations of Adam and Eve’s sin-imposed wilderness (8:5) to become a divine flame (8.6).<sup>31</sup> They are literally transfigured through love. As Landy concludes, through love, humankind, in the form of the Lovers, become once more Kings of Creation,<sup>32</sup> as originally were Adam and Eve.<sup>33</sup>

Notwithstanding the above, Landy qualifies the relationship between the Song of Songs and the Eden narrative, recognising that it is not simply oppositional, nor is there a perfect correspondence in the use of imagery. She describes how:

In the Song, Paradise is limited by the fallen world. Death is undefeated, society imposes shame on the lovers, time inevitably separates them. Thus the garden is enclosed;<sup>34</sup> the lovers, while re-enacting the primordial situation, playing the parts of brother and sister, mother, son, and daughter, can never actually be so; language separates them as well as unites them. Similarly, the ideal harmony of “I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine” disappears on the last appearance of the formula: “I am my beloved’s and his desire is for me.” (7:10) It is clear that the verse indicates more than mere reciprocity. The echo of God’s word to Eve: “And to your husband shall be your desire, and he shall rule over you” (Gen 3:16) is very striking; it both parallels that

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<sup>30</sup> The Torah does not disallow polygamy – we know that Solomon, the supposed author of The Song, had many wives, as did his father, David. Nevertheless, and allowing for their kingly status, monogamy was the rule rather than the exception in Ancient Israel. We can detect this in the symbolism preferred by the prophets to describe the ideal relationship between God and Israel; we also see it evident in, for example, the poem dedicated to the ‘industrious wife’ in Proverbs 31:10-31. See also Proverbs 5, as well as Malachi 2:14, where God decries divorce, declaring the first wife the “wife of the covenant.” This seems to have been an enduring understanding. Implicit in Josephus’ apologetic for Herod, who had nine wives, for example, is the understanding that, whilst polygamy was permitted by law, it was not normal or desirable practice. See Meyer Waxman, *Judaism: Religion and Ethics* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1960), 114.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. St John of the Cross, “The Living Flame of Love,” in *The Collected Works of St John of the Cross*, 569-649.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Ps 8.6.

<sup>33</sup> Landy, “The Song of Songs,” 524. Cf Gen.2:15.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. McClung, who compares the openness of the Garden of Eden in its original form with the ‘closed’ nature of the city, which, for some, is deemed to have replaced it. McClung, *The Architecture of Paradise*, 3.

imbalance and inverts it, since it is now man whose *tesuqa*<sup>35</sup> is for the woman.<sup>36</sup>

Landy also analyses the different understanding pertaining to the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge in Gen 2-3 compared with the Song of Solomon. This need not concern us here. The real point is that full reconciliation between Israel and God, represented in the lovers' desire for each other, manifest in The Song of Solomon, is still to be achieved. Nevertheless, that reconciliation is initiated here through a declaration of faithfulness and commitment of the lovers to the exclusion of all others. As suggested by the final statement of allegiance (7:10), with its inherent ambiguity, this remains a challenging task.

It should also be noted that in the imagery of the Song of Solomon there are several instances which, it is argued, equate to the aspects of the Temple; these in turn also find equivalence in the imagery of Eden. Landy, for example, draws the reader's attention to the passage cited above which proclaims that love is, "as strong as death, passion fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a raging flame" (8.6).<sup>37</sup> Acknowledging that the divine connection here is not uncontroverted, the recognisably sacred status of the poem overall, and its stable place in the Old Testament canon, when combined with a range of references in this passage to explicit instances of royal binding<sup>38</sup> and unbinding,<sup>39</sup> supports this suggestion of the equivalence between the Temple and Eden. Bearing these features in mind the connection between the lovers as divine flame and the fire of the altar, the *menora*, that is never extinguished, and through which Israel communes with God, must be considered.

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<sup>35</sup> That is, the man's *desire* is for the woman. Citing Chaim Rabim, Landy offers an alternative interpretation where *tesuqa* might also mean loyalty or fealty. Either way, the implication of a structural reversal from the Eden narrative remains the same. Landy, "The Song of Songs," 524, n.41.

<sup>36</sup> Landy, "The Song of Songs," 524-525.

<sup>37</sup> Landy, "The Song of Songs," 523-4.

<sup>38</sup> Isa 49:16; Hag 2:23.

<sup>39</sup> Jer 22:24.

Also contested is the notion of the entire text of the Song of Solomon as an expression of the *hieros gamos*, or sacred marriage, between God and his Bride, or *Shekinah*, the universal feminine principal which, in combination with the male, brings harmony to the universe. This is the underlying principle of Kabbalistic mysticism<sup>40</sup> in which the Holy of Holies, of which the Tree of Life at the heart of Eden is also a manifestation, represents the bedchamber.<sup>41</sup> Certainly, in Rabbinic sources, the poles of the Ark of the Covenant were seen as two breasts of a woman, and the Holy of Holies itself appears as a place of communion between God and his Bride. The passage in Song of Solomon where the beloved, as myrrh, lies between the breasts of the lover, is deemed to be an instance of this:<sup>42</sup>

<sup>12</sup> While the king was on his couch,  
my nard gave forth its fragrance.

<sup>13</sup> My beloved is to me a bag of myrrh  
that lies between my breasts.

<sup>14</sup> My beloved is to me a cluster of henna blossoms  
in the vineyards of En-gedi.

<sup>15</sup> Ah, you are beautiful, my love;  
ah, you are beautiful;

<sup>16</sup> Ah, you are beautiful, my beloved,  
Truly lovely.

Our couch is green;  
<sup>17</sup> the beams of our house are cedar,  
Our rafters are pine.

Song of Solomon 1:12-17.

The imagery referencing the surroundings of the royal couch is of equal interest. Weinfeld, citing various Rabbinic and Kabbalistic sources, contends that the notion of ‘rows of vines,’ present in both Assyrian and Jewish texts, finds semantic equivalence with a curtain or screen behind which secret councils, as well as the union of the

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<sup>40</sup> Zohar II 231b-237a. As cited in Weinfeld, “Feminine Features in the Imagery of God in Israel,” 518.

<sup>41</sup> See Wallace, *The Eden Narrative*, 159, 161, and 153.

<sup>42</sup> Weinfeld, “Feminine Features in the Imagery of God in Israel,” 518.

king and queen, took place.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, remaining in that place was deemed to be equivalent to ‘Paradise,’ that is, Eden, which itself found meaning in Rabbinic literature as the place where the king stayed with the queen.<sup>44</sup> Additionally, we read in the NRSV translation above (1:16) that, “our couch is green,” that is, verdant. Alternative translations (LXX) provide “our couch is shaded with branches” for the same verse. Either way, we read of this verse in Rabbinic interpretation that, “Just as a bed is for fecundity, so is the Temple.”<sup>45</sup> Again, the relationship between Edenic imagery, the Temple, and the matrimonial imagery of the Song of Solomon can be identified, where the matrimonial symbolism is subsumed within that of Eden.

Bearing the above in mind, and despite increasing recognition of The Song of Solomon as a manifestation or representation of the *hieros gamos*, or sacred marriage motif,<sup>46</sup> present in various forms across many ANE cultures, attention should also be drawn to the limits to the interpretation of that same motif in The Song of Solomon, and the Old Testament more generally. As suggested earlier, the outcomes of the relationship between Adam and Eve and the Serpent, which results in calamity for all concerned, are demonstrably opposite to that which would normally be expected within ANE traditions that celebrate various fertility gods. Clearly The Song of Solomon also seeks to contain the range of possible meanings, particularly any residual pagan interpretations.

It is inconceivable, notwithstanding its wider cultural context and history, that an Old Testament text within the accepted canon might seek to incorporate paganism, except tangentially, or paraenetically. The reader, for example, is told in Chronicles that the Lord established

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<sup>43</sup> Weinfeld, “Feminine Features in the Imagery of God in Israel,” 518.

<sup>44</sup> Weinfeld, “Feminine Features in the Imagery of God in Israel,” 519.

<sup>45</sup> Weinfeld, “Feminine Features in the Imagery of God in Israel,” 519.

<sup>46</sup> Compare, for example, Helmer Ringgren, *Israelite Religion*, transl. David E. Green (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 12, 188, with Wallace, *The Eden Narrative*, 161-170, and Weinfeld, “Feminine Features in the Imagery of God in Israel,” 515-529.

the kingdom of Israel “in the hand” of Jehoshaphat precisely because he, “did not seek the Baals, but sought the God of his father and walked in his commandments” (2 Chr 17:3). Moreover, “His heart was courageous in the ways of the LORD; he removed the high places and the sacred poles from Judah” (17:6). As a consequence Jehoshaphat was rewarded with “great riches and honour” (17:5). The value of this act in the eyes of God is repeated in other places (2 Chr. 19:3; 31:1; 32:12; 34:4); conversely the unwillingness to destroy, or indeed the move to reinstate, the ‘sacred poles,’ that is, the Trees of Asherah, is deemed a sign of his failure to honour God (Cf. 2 Chr 20:33; 21:11; 24:17; 28: 23,25; 33:3), a synecdoche for the broader corruption of Israel. Again, the reader is reminded that the matrimonial symbolism evident in various texts in the Old Testament is founded on an understanding of real human relationships, supportive of an enduring knowledge of God’s love for Israel, and how Israel might respond to that love. Nevertheless, the limitations of that symbolism, subsequently subsumed within the overarching ideal of Edenic perfection, are also exposed in the Song.

#### **4.3 Matrimonial Imagery in Prophetic Writing and its Edenic Associations.**

The relationship between the symbols of Eden and matrimonial imagery in key passages in the Prophetic writings, where matrimonial imagery in the Old Testament is predominantly found, will now be examined. The primary focus will be to compare the use of matrimonial imagery against the active presence of Edenic symbols in these same texts.

The first example comes from Ezekiel 16 where, in a powerful double allegory, the imagery of Jerusalem (and by implication the whole of Israel) as the unfaithful and ungrateful bride of God is most comprehensively developed. In this passage the reader first meets the bride as a newborn infant whose abject condition as the discarded offspring of pagan ‘parents’ is most forcefully and brutally described

(Ezek 16:3-5). It is God's compassion that saves the infant in her abandonment; in doing so God's tenderness and mercy towards the child is also evident (16:6-8). God subsequently marries the girl and, in words that combine both the pledges of marriage with covenantal language (16:8), makes her not only his bride but his queen (16:10-13).

The reader is subsequently told, in what could be taken as a case study of narcissism, how the bride, as an indicator not just of her vanity but also of idolatry in its most basic form, "trusted" in her own perfect beauty<sup>47</sup> (16:14-15). Thus she makes "colourful shrines" (16:6, 18) from the very garments that God had bestowed on her, on which she "played the whore" (16:16) with such impropriety that, "nothing like this has ever been or ever shall be" (16:16). The bride's iniquity is then compounded by her decision to take the jewels and the gold and silver that God had given her, to make "male images" (16:17).<sup>48</sup> These pagan images she not only worshipped, but also used to "play the whore" (16:17), suggesting an intended equivalence in Ezekiel's use of matrimonial symbolism between sexual infidelity and infidelity to God. The "male images" themselves she covers with beautiful cloth, another indicator of idolatry.<sup>49</sup> The children which she had previously conceived with God,<sup>50</sup> she had "slaughtered" to offer up to these same deities (16:22).

As observed in various commentaries, the book of Ezekiel does not replicate or analyse every detail of Jerusalem's history.<sup>51</sup> It is enough that the prophet alludes to the care provided by God to Jerusalem during the early years of the Israelite settlement of Canaan.<sup>52</sup> In making the case against his bride, God further asserts that, "you did

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<sup>47</sup> Cf. Ezek 27.

<sup>48</sup> Possible the Serpent god, that is, indicating phallic worship, "as large statues are unknown in Canaanite worship." See Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 207.

<sup>49</sup> Eichrodt comments that the passage parallels that of 2 Kings 23:7, where the temple prostitutes weave garments for Astarte/Asherah. See Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 207.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Gen 4:1.

<sup>51</sup> See Lawrence Boadt, C.S.P, "Ezekiel," in Brown, Fitzmyer, and Murphy, eds., *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 317; Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 207.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Judges 2:16.

not remember the days of your youth, when you were naked and bare, flailing about in your blood” (16:22). Thus, within the confines of the narrative the bride’s monstrous lack of gratitude to her benefactor is foregrounded. It is, by way of contrast with God’s graciousness, almost sufficient proof of her sinfulness.

In the context of the wider allegory of Jerusalem’s infidelity, however, the Deuteronomic exhortation not to forget God, to remember the divine mercy and goodness of God at the heart of the covenant,<sup>53</sup> rings out above the specific details of the text. Lest readers are themselves distracted by the dramatic power of the story they are reminded that it is with the specific enemies of Israel – Egyptians, Philistines, the Assyrians, and with Chaldea – that the bride prostitutes herself, magnifying her disgrace by not even seeking money for her services (16:33-34). Rather, she gives gifts to her lovers simply in exchange for having her own sexual appetite satisfied.

The second half of the allegory is then presented through the unlikely positive comparison with the bride’s ‘sisters,’ Sodom and Samaria (sic), who themselves had previously been subject to God’s punishment for various crimes including sexual assault and idolatry (Gen 18, and 2 Kings 17:7-18). Nevertheless, we are told that, as a consequence of her deplorable actions, and in the context of the proverb “like mother like daughter” (Ezek. 16:44), the bride herself had placed these two previously ill-regarded entities in a new light, wherein “your sisters appear righteous by all the abominations that you have committed” (16:51). Indeed, the bride had become a “consolation” to her ‘sisters,’ whose actions paled in comparison to that of Ezekiel’s Bride.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> See Deut. 1-11 but especially Chapter 8, in which the blessings of God mirror the gifts showered by God onto his bride in Ezek 16: 9-13.

<sup>54</sup> A notion reiterated in the ‘mission’ narrative of Luke 10:12, where once again Sodom is considered favourably in light of the recalcitrance of Jewish towns towards accepting the coming of kingdom of God. See Henk Jan de Jonge, “Sodom in Q 10:12 and Ezekiel 16:48-52,” in Henk Jan de Jonge and Johannes Tromp, eds., *The Book of Ezekiel and its Influence* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 79-86.



Now, I have provided a relatively detailed overview of this passage because it is here, in the longest chapter in Ezekiel, that the most comprehensive portrait of Jerusalem/ Israel as God's bride, symbol of God's intimacy with Israel, is provided to the reader of the Old Testament. However, notwithstanding the inherent human interest invested in this matrimonial symbolism, what is of real significance overall is not the depth and range of the bride's transgressions, astonishing and disturbing as they are, but the comprehensive statement of forgiveness offered by God in the verses that immediately follow the extensive descriptions of the bride's transgressions and failings.

Using the recognition formula, "that you shall know I am the LORD" (16:52), God offers restoration to Jerusalem, where divine mercy is utterly unmerited, replacing the Mosaic covenant obtained "from the days of your youth" (16: 59), with an everlasting covenant of such grace and blessing that it will shock the bride to "remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth again because of your shame, when I forgive you all that you have done ..." (16:63). The contrast between the human limitations of Jerusalem and the expansiveness of God could not be greater.

It is noted that no specific detail of the blessings of the covenant are provided at this point. In some respects the simplicity and brevity of God's offer of reconciliation and restoration – that God and his bride will simply speak no more of the matter – accentuates and amplifies its generosity. But the presence of the imagery of Eden as indicative of that blessing is not far away. There is, in the preceding chapter of Ezekiel (Chapter 15), a parable about a "useless vine" which, stripped of fruit and half-charred, is not even suitable as firewood.

Remembering the grapevine as one of the seven Sacred Species of Israel (Deut. 8:7-8, Amos 9:13-14) synonymous with, and symbolic of, both Eden and the Temple,<sup>55</sup> it is clear that Israel, so profoundly

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<sup>55</sup> See Westenholz, *Sacred Bounty Sacred Land*, 10, 23-26.

delinquent in its duty towards God, is judged by Ezekiel as next to worthless.

Similarly, in the chapter immediately following the allegory of the faithless bride, there is another multifaceted allegory, of three or four parts depending on interpretation,<sup>56</sup> that also has the image of the 'vine' at its heart. In this passage Zedekiah, uncle of the deposed king of Judah, Jehoiachin, is compared to a vine which flourishes under Babylonian annexation (Ezek 17: 5-6); in the second part of the narrative Zedekiah subsequently reaches out to Egypt for support against the Babylonians. Bearing in mind that the subjugation of Israel by Babylon occurs as a result of God's actions in response to the apostasy and other crimes of Manasseh (2 King 21: 3-5; 24:3-4), and that Zedekiah had signed a covenant with Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon, witnessed before God, and established precisely against this kind of action, God visits upon the vine a withering wind from the East (17:10), a recurring metaphor, in its life-killing potential, for God's anger.<sup>57</sup>

As in Ezekiel 16 the reader's focus in chapter 17 now also turns to the last part where, in spite of the transgressions of Israel, God as both righteous King and Creator once more promises to exalt Israel. Here, the terms of God's forgiveness, both in relation to the infidelity of the Kings of Judah, and the unfaithful bride of the preceding chapter, are made explicit not in matrimonial symbolism but through images of Eden:

<sup>22</sup>Thus says the LORD GOD:  
I myself will take a sprig  
from the lofty top of a cedar;  
I will set it out...  
I myself will plant it  
on a high and lofty mountain.  
<sup>23</sup>On the mountain height of Israel

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<sup>56</sup> See Boadt, "Ezekiel," 317.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Ezek 19:12-14; Hos 13:15.

I will plant it,  
in order that it may produce boughs  
and bear fruit,  
and become a noble cedar.  
Under it every kind of bird will live;  
in the shade of its branches will nest  
winged creatures of every kind.  
<sup>24</sup>All the trees of the of the field shall know  
that I am the LORD.  
I bring low the high tree,  
I make high the low tree;  
I dry up the green tree  
And make the dry tree flourish.  
I the LORD have spoken;  
I will accomplish it.

#### Ezekiel 17:22-24

Given what this thesis argues is a perceived lack of attention given to the theology of Eden by both Old and New Testament theologians,<sup>58</sup> it does not surprise that the main focus of commentary on this particular passage tends to be on v.20, the restoration of a Davidic king to Judah,<sup>59</sup> and associated issues. Be that as it may, the use of Edenic imagery in the passage, supportive of the overarching themes of creation, revelation, and redemption as they are found in the Old Testament, is notable. To this end the commentary of Eichrodt is particularly relevant, arguing that the reference to the “high and lofty mountain” (17:22) ... “is probably no other than Yahweh’s holy mountain with the temple of Zion.”<sup>60</sup> Equally pertinent are Eichrodt’s subsequent observations that, “as in Hos 14:9, the evergreen cypress is identified with the tree of life in the garden of Paradise, the cedar becomes a miraculous tree full of life giving fruit.”<sup>61</sup>

Eichrodt might well have also referred to Ezekiel 31 where Pharaoh’s hubris is mocked by comparing him to a mighty cedar, made by God,

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<sup>58</sup> Zimmerli, for example, refers to the use of vegetative imagery here as, “a straightforward plant fable.” Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, transl. Ronald E. Clement (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 367.

<sup>59</sup> See, for example, Boadt, “Ezekiel,” 317. Paul M Joyce, *Ezekiel: A Commentary* (NY: T & T Clark, 2008), 137; Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 367.

<sup>60</sup> Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 228.

<sup>61</sup> Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 228.

of such beauty and majesty, “such that the cedars in the garden of God could not rival it ... the envy of all the trees of Eden that were in the garden of God” (Ezek 31:8-9). Nevertheless, despite the elaborate portrait of its beauty and grandeur, the reader is told almost immediately thereafter that, in the hands of its enemies, the lofty cedar was cut down and left to rot in abject desolation, such that, “all the peoples of the earth went away from its shade and left it. On its fallen trunk settle all the birds of the air, and among its boughs lodge all the wild animals” (31: 12-13), until God finally brought it down “into Sheol’ and “closed the deep over it and covered it” (31:15).

Echoing the story of Genesis 2-3, the hubris of the mighty tree, and that of all who might similarly aspire to its greatness is checked, “For all of them are handed over to death, to the world below along with all mortals” (31: 14). The obvious point, that it is God who, through graciousness, is confirmed as ultimate ruler and creator, is made conclusively through the use of Edenic symbolism in the concluding verse, where God asks:

Which of you among the trees of Eden was like you in glory and greatness? Now you shall be brought down with the trees of Eden to the world below; you shall lie among the uncircumcised, with those who are killed by the sword. This is Pharaoh and all his horde, says the LORD.

Ezekiel 31:18

A similar pattern of the subsuming of matrimonial imagery within that of Eden can be found in Jeremiah 31, where matrimonial imagery is used to give shape to another salvation oracle. Recognising the encompassing bitterness and images of fragmentation of much of the Book of Jeremiah, the locating of the bulk of any promissory material within Chapter 31, and the preceding Chapter 30, has led to these being described collectively as, “The Book of Comfort,” or “The

Book of Consolation.”<sup>62</sup> The comfort or consolation spoken of is, of course, the restoration of “the fortunes” of Israel and Judah<sup>63</sup> through re-establishing the covenant between God and Israel. As in Ezekiel 16:59-63 the terms by which the covenant is re-established is described in matter-of-fact language evocative of the *hesed*, or ‘loving kindness,’ that underpins the covenantal relationship between God and Israel in general. Thus God declares:

<sup>31</sup>The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. <sup>32</sup>It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt – a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. <sup>33</sup>But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. <sup>34</sup>No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the LORD,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquities, and remember their sin no more.

Jeremiah 31:31-34.

It can be seen that, as with the declaration of forgiveness and restoration in Ezekiel 16:59-63, the means by which the bride of God, who is Israel (Jer 31:32), will come to know the law of God in the very pith of her being is not through intellectual assent, *per se*, but through the apprehension of the creative power of God’s forgiveness, as it is inscribed, “on their hearts” (Jer 31:33), that is, in the totality of their being. It is in this manner that the purity of Israel will be restored, just as through God’s redemptive acts the status of Israel as ‘virgin’ will also be reinstated (31:4, 21 cf. 2:2).<sup>64</sup> Unlike Ezekiel 16

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<sup>62</sup> As widely understood and expressed in rabbinic literature. See Walter Brueggemann, *To Build, To Plant: A Commentary on Jeremiah 26-52* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 45.

<sup>63</sup> Jer 3:20.

<sup>64</sup> A problematic notion to some commentators but consistent with a God who is able to create life *ex nihilo*. Fretheim, for example, remarks that the situation is “surprising,” without further qualification. Terence E. Fretheim, *Jeremiah* (Smyth and Helwys Publishing, 2002), 427.

the full indictment of Israel's infidelities<sup>65</sup> is not portrayed here, except by implication. Nevertheless, the simplicity of this salvation oracle is similarly contrasted with the numerous instances of Israel's infidelities described in earlier passages in Jeremiah, and can be judged to have achieved increased impact as a result.

Examples of Edenic symbolism that provides qualitative evidence of the extent of the blessing inherent in the restored covenant, and which contextualise the matrimonial imagery as it is used in Jeremiah, are especially numerous in the early verses of the chapter. In the first instance the reader is told how, as in the first exile in the wilderness,<sup>66</sup> God's faithfulness to Israel continued throughout their most recent travails in Babylon.

<sup>2</sup> Thus says the LORD:  
The people who survived the sword  
found grace in the wilderness;  
when Israel sought for rest,  
<sup>3</sup>the LORD appeared to him from far away.

#### Jeremiah 31:2-3

As will be discussed further in the next chapter of this thesis, the grace of God mentioned in 31:2 does not occur as a natural aspect of wilderness, except in opposition to wilderness' negative connotations. Wilderness, properly understood, is a place of death and evil spirits – the “unsown land” of Jeremiah 2:2 through which, in faith, God leads his beloved in order to enter the Promised Land (2:6-7). To this extent the presence of “grace in the wilderness” implies the manifestation of that which is not wilderness, that is, Eden.<sup>67</sup> These Edenic features become more apparent as the passage develops. We are told in the next verse, for example, in language that at once introduces and inverts what might be considered the progression of a normal marriage (insofar as the ‘purity’ of the bride increases through her marriage to the Lord), that the Lord loved Israel,

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<sup>65</sup> Cf. Jer 3:1-5.

<sup>66</sup> Ex 15:25; 16:13-18; 17: 5-6; Num 14:20; Josh 1:13.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Mt 4:11; Mk 1:11-12; Lk 4:1.

... with an everlasting love;  
Therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.  
Again, I will build you, and you shall be built,  
O virgin Israel.

Jeremiah 31: 3-4

In contrast with the earlier chapters of Jeremiah, where God has “pulled down and overthrown, plucked up and destroyed,”<sup>68</sup> the emphasis here becomes one of building and planting.<sup>69</sup> It is a creational image that is presented, not a sociological one as some commentators would have it,<sup>70</sup> and as a result the matrimonial symbolism that is present is overlaid with a sense of the fecundity at the heart of Eden.<sup>71</sup> Should the reader miss this point, the creational priority is made explicit in v. 27 where, in a passage echoing the original Creation, God says, “The days are surely coming ... when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of human and the seed of animals.”<sup>72</sup>

In the context of matrimonial symbolism, the “building” of the bride referred to in this passage, as in Ruth 4:11, must surely refer to the begetting of children and family,<sup>73</sup> such that the covenantal promise<sup>74</sup> will be fulfilled. Moreover, the repetition of the adverb “again” is not just a statement of intent but also contextualises this passage within the eternal actions of God. As such, the connection to Genesis 2:22, where God ‘builds’ Eve from the rib of man, cannot be discounted. The image of “everlasting love” also points the reader away from

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<sup>68</sup> Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 429.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Jer 1:10; 31:28.

<sup>70</sup> Brueggemann, for example, comments how the poem “effectively holds together the theological, socio-economic, and political dimensions of communal life,” emblematic of how, “everything begins anew.” This is true, but the real emphasis remains on the restoration of the covenantal relationship between God and Israel – every other blessing flows from this. See Brueggemann, *To Build, To Plant*, 60.

<sup>71</sup> Ironically, Carroll identifies a degree of “eroticism” in the notion of God’s ardour for Israel, but fails to connect this with matrimonial symbolism. See Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, vol. 2 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 1986), 590.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Jer 32:43, where the absence of people and animals signifies “a desolation” i.e. the conditions of ‘welter and waste’ prior to the Creation.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Isa 54:1-3.

<sup>74</sup> Gen 15:5; 22:17.

understanding this passage “in terms drawn from simple rural life,”<sup>75</sup> where such terms reduce comprehension of the passage to that of a Breughel-esque rural idyll. The passage restates the eternal love of God for his bride, Israel, and it is the eternal, transcendent power of Edenic imagery, in which the discreet images of rural life presented in the passage are only a sub-set, that overrides any isolated or historically specific understandings.

The imagery of Eden is also presented in the verses that immediately follow, where the joy of covenantal Israel redeemed and renewed through God’s grace is described through images of a dancer who “adorns herself” with tambourines (Jer 31:4) in celebration of the return of the exiles from Babylon to the Promised Land, and the blessings which flow to God’s people as a result. These celebrations may echo those of military victory (Jg 11:34; 1 Sam 18:6) or harvest rituals. In any case the emphasis is on “joy” and “gladness” which, existing in opposition to mourning and grief (vv. 9, 13), frequently points to the fertility associated with wedding rituals and marriage. The notion of fertility, as it is understood in the context of Edenic imagery, is immediately linked in the next verse where, within their newfound freedom, “virgin Israel” is told that she will not only plant vineyards, a plant symbolic of both Eden and the Temple, but will enjoy the fruit of that harvest without having it predated upon by foreign masters and other oppressors:<sup>76</sup>

<sup>6</sup>... there shall be a day when sentinels will call  
in the hill country of Ephraim:  
“Come, let us go up to Zion,  
To the LORD our God.”

Jeremiah 31:6

In this passage, worship in the Temple and the restoration of God’s full blessing are connected, bearing in mind that it was Israel’s

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<sup>75</sup> Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 590.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Isa 65:21-22. See also Amos 9:14, where the people of Israel are compared to a vineyard, “plucked up.”



unfaithfulness to God that caused the calamity of Israel's abandonment in the first place. Israel will plant vineyards, and enjoy their produce, not just as a consequence of the restored covenant, but also as an indicator of the fidelity of that resumed relationship fundamentally expressed through worship of the Lord.

This fidelity will be observed not just in the temple, that is, Zion, but also, insofar as Ephraim represents the rest of Israel which is not Zion, throughout the land. To this extent the use of Ephraim cannot be simply ascribed the status of a poetic parallel to the Mountains of Samaria (31:5),<sup>77</sup> but is used, through its own connotations to fertility and abundance,<sup>78</sup> as a synecdoche for Israel as Eden. The imagery of Ephraim, a land of wooded hills and flowing streams, where Israel's "hunger shall be satisfied" (Jer. 50:19), is subsequently reinforced by images of "brooks of water" (v.9) besides which God will lead the returning exiles. This is in marked contrast with the weeping and disconsolation that accompanied their departure. Indeed, as Holliday notes, the images of "brooks of water" is only otherwise found in in Deuteronomy 8:7 and 10:7, introducing a glowing and idealistic description of Canaan. "One must assume," he writes, "...that Jeremiah intended the phrase ...to be shorthand for the lovely land to which they would return,"<sup>79</sup> that is, the covenantal land 'of Milk and Honey,' which in itself can be considered a metaphor for Eden as Israel.<sup>80</sup> The verse should also be read in the context of an earlier passage in Jeremiah that uses matrimonial imagery, specifically that of Israel as unfaithful bride (Jer 3:1) who abandons God, "the fountain of living water" (Jer 2:13), "to play the whore." Having thus "polluted the land with your whoring and wickedness ... the showers have been withheld, and the spring rain has not come" (Jer 3:2-3).<sup>81</sup> Once again

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<sup>77</sup> See William L Holliday *A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah: Chapter 26-52* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 180.

<sup>78</sup> That is, Ephraim meaning 'double fruitfulness.'

<sup>79</sup> Holliday *A Commentary*, 185.

<sup>80</sup> For a full explication of this see Ch. 2, "Eden and the Land of Israel," 2.1 Eden and Israel.

<sup>81</sup> See also Jer 14:1-9)

we have an instance where the redemption and restoration of covenantal Israel, following her ‘marital’ infidelity and the ensuing disaster that precipitates, is offered to the reader through the presence of the symbols of Eden. Understood in this manner the view that matrimonial symbolism is generally subsumed within Edenic imagery must again be asserted.

### **Conclusion.**

It has been shown in the examples above how matrimonial symbolism has been used in prophetic writing, and in the Old Testament more generally, to further illuminate ancient Israelite understandings of the profound dimensions of the relationship between God and Israel. As Andre Neher and others contend, in the unparalleled intimacy of marriage these writers found a compelling and relatable image to describe the enduring love of God for His people, in the face of persistent Israelite provocation, obstinacy, infidelity, incomprehension, hesitation and doubt.

What is also apparent, through this analysis, is the degree to which the matrimonial imagery used by the Old Testament authors, which gives shape to their understandings about the nature of the relationship between God and Israel, is by necessity contextualised through the incontrovertibly positive imagery of the Garden of Eden. The symbolism of marriage may have been enlisted by the prophets, and other Old Testament writers, to describe the infinite yet unmerited regard of God for His chosen people, plucked from obscurity in the midst of pagan hostility and indifference. But as the Old Testament makes clear, even in the prophets’ yearning hope for an Israel reconciled to God, conveyed in the use of matrimonial symbolism, Israel consistently falls short of the theological and national ideals predicated on its use in these texts.

The 'living flame' God's love, present in the Temple in the form of the *menora* that illuminated the altar, may have also found expression in the context of lived human experience through the intimacy of matrimonial symbolism. But in light of the limitations of human institutions and human fallibility the imagery remains, in and of itself, a persistent challenge. Instead, we find in the Old Testament that it is through the symbolism of Eden, mobilising notions of sustenance, fertility, healing, beauty, and abundance, that the fullness and abiding integrity of God's blessing of Israel is most comprehensively realised.

## CHAPTER FIVE: EDEN AND WILDERNESS – TOWARDS THE RESTORATION OF HOPE.

The conflict between the covenantal requirements of the ancient Israelites, to live “solely as the witnesses for Yahweh,”<sup>1</sup> points to their relationship with God as a “difficult freedom.”<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the actions of the ‘sons of Jacob’ contrary to their universal acceptance of the terms of God’s offer, to be their God in perpetuity,<sup>3</sup> provides theological and narrative tension, and hence forward momentum, to a significant proportion of the Old Testament. In numerous instances the contrast is drawn between the beliefs, behaviours, events, and practices which manifest and reflect “true life, real life, God’s life and all creation’s life in God,”<sup>4</sup> and that which represents “not-life, or lesser life, or life gone wrong.”<sup>5</sup> This tension can be seen to oscillate unequivocally between what can be summarised as themes of intimacy with God on the one hand, and alienation from God on the other.<sup>6</sup>

For a people as rooted in concrete reality as the ancient Israelites,<sup>7</sup> this intimacy with God, the “difficult adoration” that is at once an exaltation of humanity,<sup>8</sup> is revealed in His promises to Abraham, to make of him a great nation,<sup>9</sup> subsequently finding consummation through Moses in the delivery of the Israelites into Canaan, a land “flowing with milk and honey.”<sup>10</sup> As consistently revealed in Exodus and Deuteronomy, the land of greater Israel that developed from the nucleus of that first possession, then,<sup>11</sup> – *eretz Yisrael hashlemah* – is a theological entity as much as it is geographical. As such it fulfils not only God’s corollary pledge of nationhood, heirs, and descendants, but also blessings.

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<sup>1</sup> Rosenberg, “Yahweh Becomes King,” 303. See also Acts 7:44-46.

<sup>2</sup> Levinas, “Education and Prayer,” in *Difficult Freedom*, 272.

<sup>3</sup> Ex 19:6 cf. Isa 43:10-13.

<sup>4</sup> Nicholas Lash, *Believing Three Ways in One God: A Reading of the Apostles’ Creed* (London: SCM Press, 1992), 85. Cf. 2 Chr 7:12-15.

<sup>5</sup> Lash, *Believing Three Ways in One God*, 85.

<sup>6</sup> Alan John Hauser, “Genesis 2-3: The Theme of Intimacy and Alienation,” in Hess and Tsumura, eds., *I Studied Inscriptions from before the Flood*, 383-398.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. W.D. Davies, *The Gospel and the Land: Early Christianity and Jewish Territorial Doctrine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 161.

<sup>8</sup> Levinas, “Loving the Torah More Than God,” in *Difficult Freedom*, 145.

<sup>9</sup> Gen 12:2-3, 7; 13:14-17; 15:1-5, 17-20; 17:2-8, 19-22; 22:15-19.

<sup>10</sup> Ex 3:8; 33:3; Deut 26:9.

<sup>11</sup> Josh 1-24.

Moreover, as previously shown in this thesis, ancient Israel's understanding of its relationship to the Land is consistently expressed in the transcendent yet material perfection of Eden.<sup>12</sup> In the imagery of Eden not only God's Spirit, but also God's glory, is substantially and consistently made present to the people of Israel in the Old Testament.<sup>13</sup> In this form, the blessings of Eden function both as a symbolic representation of the realisable ideal of a life lived in *Torah*, as well as a sign of God's loving predisposition towards Israel, and through Israel, to all of humanity.

By way of contrast, the imagery of wilderness, the trackless deserts and uninhabitable wastelands, symbols of desolation, darkness, and death,<sup>14</sup> where the worship of God is unable to take place, is regularly used by the Old Testament authors to illustrate that which is "not-life."<sup>15</sup> As we shall see, the frequent juxtaposition of these two sets of images, of Eden on the one hand, and wilderness on the other, serves not only to present to the ancient audiences the hellish consequences of broken relationship with God and with each other, it also functions to announce, define and amplify the blessings of Eden. In the process this active comparison drives both the narrative and the explication of the overarching biblical themes of creation, revelation, and redemption not only of the Old Testament, but of the New Testament as well. This tension, between the imagery of Eden on the one hand, and wilderness on the other, is the subject of the analysis that follows.

### **5.1 Contextualising Eden – Desolation and Chaos in Genesis 1-3.**

It has already been described, in the story of Eve and the serpent, how the cost of not accepting YHWH as Lord to the exclusion of all other gods<sup>16</sup> results in the expulsion of the first humans from the Garden of Eden. For Adam and Eve this exclusion not only manifests the reality of physical death, but also death of a more poignant kind - the unavailability to humanity of the fullness of God's

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<sup>12</sup> See, Ch. 2, "Eden and Israel," 2.3, Eden and the Sacred Bounty of Israel.

<sup>13</sup> Sir 24:12-21. Cf. Isa 31:1-2; 41:19; 51:3; Ezek 31:1-9.

<sup>14</sup> Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, transl. John J. Scullion (London: SPCK, 1984), 104.

<sup>15</sup> Eg. Gen 16:7; 37:22; Ex 16:3; Lev 16:22; Deut 32:10; Isa 27:10; Hos 2:3.

<sup>16</sup> See Wallace, *The Eden Narrative*, 159. See also Ch. 4, "Eden and Matrimonial Symbolism," Matrimonial Symbolism, Eden, and Genesis 2-4.

blessings. Following the Fall, Adam and Eve now participate in a world that is ‘not-Eden.’ In short, it is a world characterised by absence, rather than presence. Thus, for humanity, not only is there death and hardship, there is a contraction in all of life’s possibilities, a drying up of the access to God’s abundance, until such time as the divine covenant is reestablished, and YHWH is once more united with His people.

For the Yahwist, recounting the story of humanity’s fall from grace, the absence of God’s blessing is expressed through the symbolism of wilderness, both explicit and implied. Conventionally, it would appear that the ‘wilderness’ into which Adam and Eve are driven, immediately adjacent to Eden (Gen 3:22-23), is the first evidence of a narrative motif that structures and energises the Old Testament more generally. This motif is the oscillation, already referred to above, between the blessings available to the Israelites when in right relationship with God, and the catastrophic events which befall them when that loving relationship is fractured or diminished.<sup>17</sup>

Further analysis of these introductory chapters of the Bible suggests, however, that this narrative tension, between intimacy and alienation, can be first identified prior to the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. That is, it is introduced in the second of the opening verses of Genesis: “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters” (Gen 1:1-2).

For the most part the notion of “formless void,” *tohu wabohu*, is taken by contemporary translators as indicating the primordial ‘chaos,’ that stands in direct opposition to ‘the Creation.’<sup>18</sup> This understanding expands on earlier translations which drew on Arabic and Ugaritic etymologies that rendered the term to mean a ‘desert’ or ‘waste.’<sup>19</sup> Yet, wider analysis of etymology and Biblical usage,

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<sup>17</sup> Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, vol. 2, transl. J.A. Baker (London: SCM Press, 1967), 32. See also Gordon J. Wenham, “Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story,” in Hess and Tsumura, eds., *I Studied Inscriptions From Before the Flood*,” 399.

<sup>18</sup> Tsumura, “The Earth in Genesis 1,” in Hess and Tsumura, eds., *I Studied Inscriptions from before the Flood*,” 313.

<sup>19</sup> Tsumura, “The Earth in Genesis 1,” 310.

especially in passages such as Isaiah 34:11 and 45:18, and Jeremiah 4:23, points to a more accurate reading of *tohu wabohu* rendering something like ‘uninhabited space,’ or ‘unproductive land.’<sup>20</sup> That is, as it is presented in Genesis 1:2, the term refers to a world that is neither inhabited nor characterised by the productivity and fertility revealed in the story of the Six Days of Creation that immediately follows. In this sense *tohu wabohu* refers to a world that is ‘not yet,’ but it does so in concrete ways, in terms that are familiar to the audience for whom the texts were originally intended.

To the extent that the descriptions of the Creation constructs an anticipated world through a contrasting set of images, “to be understood always from the viewpoint of, or in the context of, human existence,”<sup>21</sup> the notion of *tohu wabohu*, then, can more properly be understood as a world that is ‘not yet known’ to the subsequent readers of the text. This world of absence particularly references, and contrasts with, the images of Days 3 and 6 of Creation that follow – the creation of vegetation and living creatures, including ‘man,’ which together culminate in viable human life. Whilst Gen 1:1-2:3 tells the reader that God created humankind “in his image,” it is through experiential language familiar to the intended audiences that the meaning of the passage is developed. “In the beginning” not only are there no people, but there are also no kinship systems, or tribal alliances, or other human connections that are at the heart of the lived experience of the ancient Israelites. Understanding the phrase *tohu wabohu* in this manner gives greater emphasis to the debilitating effects of depopulation as a consequence of estrangement from God, as experienced both by the Israelites themselves, as well as their enemies.<sup>22</sup> As such it becomes a significant metaphor, in and of itself, for wilderness. Nor is there agriculture, the means to provide sustenance; consequently, one of its corollaries, the various cultic festivals that celebrated the rhythm of the seasons in which the Lord’s Creation and its blessings were seen to be maintained, is also absent.

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<sup>20</sup> Tsumura, “The Earth in Genesis 1,” 328.

<sup>21</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 104.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Ezek 21:31-2; 25:13; 26:11; 27:27, 34; 28:23; 29:8-11; and 30:6,11.

That is to say, the provisional nature of human existence, as contingent on God's grace, is presented from the very first verse of the Old Testament as an existential reality through the immediate introduction of the concrete, familiar imagery of what can be understood as 'wilderness.' The defining desolation of *tohu wabohu* is subsequently contrasted with the implicit and explicit blessings of the Creation, initially presented through the "remarkably rich, and remarkably apt" details of the Seven Days account (Gen 1:3-2:4a),<sup>23</sup> then in the narrative of the extravagant plenitude, beauty and harmony of Eden (2:4b-25).

A number of points can be drawn from this, which address: i) the oscillation between the imagery of Eden and Wilderness, as the means through which the Old Testament authors presented the contrast between intimacy with God on the one hand, and alienation from God on the other; ii) the national survival of Israel, as that imperative was presented within its own cultural milieu; and iii) the creation of a scaffold of Edenic symbolism in the Old Testament through which the extent of the restoration of Israel, and of each individual within it, is measured. More broadly these points can be seen to relate to the restoration and reinstatement of the Covenant. In doing so they reveal an abiding hope, expressed by the Old Testament prophets in the idea of the New Jerusalem, and in the New Testament in the manifestation of the New Creation in Christ. Let us now look at each of these points in more detail.

Firstly, it would appear that the 'uninhabited space' or 'unproductive land,' that precedes the Creation, as it is described in Genesis 1:1-2:4a, has narrative equivalence with the 'wilderness' into which Adam and Eve were cast following their disobedience towards God. Here, unimpeded human access to God does not exist. It is the threat or actual experience of this wilderness, or "desolation," presented in what is frequently a direct contrast with the blessings of Eden and its derivatives in various texts that follow, which challenges, coerces, provokes, and inspires the Israelites back into proper relationship with their Creator, and with themselves.

This is not a direct equivalence but a cultural and literary one. This is apparent when considering passages such as Jeremiah 4:23-26 which, in describing a

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<sup>23</sup> Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom*, 36.



return to a primeval chaos in response to the perceived rejection of God by the Israelites, is held to articulate a “recovered use of the creation pattern.”<sup>24</sup> Thus:

<sup>23</sup>I looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void;  
and to the heavens and they had no light.

<sup>24</sup>I looked on the mountains, and lo,  
they were quaking,  
and all the hills moved to and fro.

<sup>25</sup>I looked, and lo, there was no one at all,  
and all the birds of the air had fled.

<sup>26</sup>I looked, and lo, the fruitful land was a desert,  
and all its cities were laid in ruins  
before the LORD,  
before his fierce anger.

Jeremiah 4:23-26

Against the notion of the direct equivalence, Tsumura argues that, apart from v.23, it is not so certain that Jeremiah 4:23-26 is patterned after Genesis 2:1ff. Tsumura believes that such beliefs are based precisely on the wrong interpretation of *tohu wabohu* as ‘chaos,’ the same problem, he believes, encountered by translators of Gen 1:2 more generally.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, whilst his argument against a direct equivalence is strong linguistically, Tsumura recognises that, at a cultural level, the two passages share a common literary tradition which does equate *tohu wabohu* to a “desert like” state of the earth. In other words, whilst there is not an inclusive etymological equivalence recognisable in the two passages, there exists a cultural one that would have been readily identifiable to the immediate audiences of the texts.

The degree to which the term *tohu wabohu* references ‘wilderness,’ as it is more broadly understood in the Old Testament, is given additional weight in the commentary to a contemporary translation of the *Book of Genesis* by Robert Alter, where he renders *tohu wabohu* as “welter and waste.”<sup>26</sup> In doing so Alter attempts to approximate, through the English alliteration, what he describes in relation to the second word

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<sup>24</sup> Tsumura, “The Earth in Genesis 1,” 322.

<sup>25</sup> Tsumura, “The Earth in Genesis 1,” 322, 325.

<sup>26</sup> Alter, *The Five Books of Moses*, 17, n.2.

of the pairing (*bohu*) as a Hebrew “nonce term,”<sup>27</sup> coined to rhyme with the first and subsequently reinforce it.<sup>28</sup> At the same time, Alter argues, the term is used to indicate the generally accepted understanding of *tohu* as “emptiness” or “futility” which “in some contexts is associated with the trackless vacancy of the desert.”<sup>29</sup> From this it can be taken that both Genesis 1:2 and Jeremiah 4:23 share with, and participate in, a common cultural understanding that locates the blessings of Creation, as they are presented in both the Six Days and the Garden of Eden accounts, between two separate but related instances of ‘wilderness,’ that is, unproductive or ‘unsown’ land, devoid of recognisable life and human habitation.

Given the distinctive nature of the contrast between the fecundity and goodness of Creation, and the ‘wilderness’ that both precedes and follows Adam and Eve’s transgressions, this instance of juxtaposition of contrasting imagery can accordingly be seen to be the earliest example, as well as the template, in the Old Testament of the narrative motif of the oscillation between the privations and challenges of ‘wilderness’ on the one hand, and the plenitude of God’s blessings, as they are regularly and fundamentally expressed through the symbolism of Eden, on the other.

Secondly, this ‘sandwiching’ of Edenic imagery between two instances of ‘wilderness’ must also give cause to rethink the relationship between the Creation passage in Genesis 1:1-2:4a and that presented in 2:4b-3:24. Notwithstanding the profound truths about the relationship between God and humans these passages in combination reveal, the evident juxtaposition of Edenic imagery with that of ‘wilderness’ also suggest a more concrete intention on the part of the redactors. This is, that rather than being seen as non-contiguous texts from two historically separate cultural traditions, the redacted placement of the Creation stories can instead be viewed as deliberately

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<sup>27</sup> That is, a term coined once to express a specific or unique meaning.

<sup>28</sup> Alter, *The Five Books of Moses*, 17, n.2.

<sup>29</sup> Alter, *The Five Books of Moses*, 17, n.2.

working together towards a literary objective supportive of larger theological and national purposes. These include the assertion of Israel and its people as the preferred recipients of God's grace and blessing; the illustration, in real and concrete terms, of the catastrophic consequences of the loss of that divine preferment; and the strategic placement of irreducible images of God's blessing of Israel as Eden, on the one hand, and the corollary images reflecting the curse of exile, and the accompanying sense of alienation that comes with it, on the other.

This notion, of the strategic use of the creation stories in Genesis working in combination, is given historical and cultural credence by research conducted by Isaac Kikawada who argues that the twin stories of creation presented in Gen 1-3 reflect a wider ANE tradition of telling the story of the origin of humankind in a doublet. In evidence, Kikawada compares the twin creation stories of Genesis with those of the Sumerian tale of *Enki and Ninmah*, as well as that of the Akkadian epic *Atrahasis*. Each of these, Kikawada argues, complies with a recognisable literary tradition that precedes the compilation of the Biblical narrative by over a thousand years.<sup>30</sup> Within this tradition, the first part of the creation of humankind is presented in abstract and more general terms, whereas the second aspect of the story is presented through more concrete and specific images. In each instance the double creation story is used to preface the early history of humankind which climaxes in a great flood. *Prima facie* the inference is that the twin creation accounts of Genesis 1:1-2:4a and 2:4b-3:24 participate in a wider cultural milieu than one reducible through appropriation, editing and redaction to the specific cultic demands of ancient Israel. But the unique features of each account – the priestly and liturgical characteristics of 1:1-2:4a, coupled with the subversive elements of 2:4b-3:24, wherein traditional ANE creation motifs, such as the worship of the sacred tree or the

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<sup>30</sup> Isaac M. Kikawada, "The Double Creation of Mankind in 'Enki and Ninmah,' 'Atrahasis' I 1-351, and 'Genesis' 1-2," *Iraq* 45, no.1 (1983): 43-45.

serpent, are inverted<sup>31</sup> – point to the unique application of the twin creation accounts in this instance, in the context of the oppositional images of Eden and wilderness. That is to say, the redactors of the Old Testament accounts of creation presented in Genesis provide a culturally specific interpretation of these accounts, through the use of contrasting images of Eden and wilderness, so as to reinforce a belief in the divine preferment of Israel by God, to the exclusion of all other cultural and religious influences.

Thirdly, the juxtaposition of creation and wilderness motifs in the immediate beginning of the Old Testament gives structural emphasis to the primacy of Edenic symbolism in the Old Testament. This juxtaposition foregrounds the use of Edenic imagery in the Old Testament more widely, providing context and referential meanings for its use. This is in addition to any status already obtained through the canonical placement of the story of the Garden of Eden in the Old Testament, as well as in the New Testament, most notably through its representation as the New Jerusalem.<sup>32</sup>

This structural emphasis, wherein Eden is contrasted with wilderness, is supported by an anthropological perspective articulated by Mircea Eliade, who argued that the separation of sacred space from non-sacred space was of such significance to ancient people that it constituted the means by which ‘the real’ was apprehended, over and against existential meaninglessness.<sup>33</sup> For Eliade the conscious separation of sacred space from non-sacred space was so powerful, and so necessary, that it was, “homologizable to a founding of the world... not a matter of theoretical speculation, but of primary religious experience that precedes all reflection on the world.”<sup>34</sup> As

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<sup>31</sup> Wallace, *The Eden Narrative*, 162.

<sup>32</sup> Rev 21-22.

<sup>33</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, transl. William R. Trask (New York: Harvest, 1959/1987), 20.

<sup>34</sup> Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 21.

Eliade further explains, the separation of the sacred from the non-sacred (in this case Eden with that which is ‘not-Eden’):

... allows the world to be constituted because it reveals the fixed point, the central axis for all future orientation. When the sacred manifests itself in any heirophany, there is not only a break in the homogeneity of space; there is also revelation of an absolute reality, opposed to the non-reality of the vast surrounding expanse.<sup>35</sup>

That is, it is through a sense of the sacred, of the holy, that the mundane world obtains its definition, and not the other way around, as a desacralised modern world view might have it. Indeed, Eliade’s comments might be perceived as universally relevant in the context of a contemporary generalised worry or anxiety, induced by relativised truths, where “the centre cannot hold.”<sup>36</sup> It appears that the Old Testament authors also understood, and took account of in their writing, what Eliade later observed.

It can be seen then, in each of the points analysed above, how the oscillation between images of Eden and wilderness represent an attempt to reconcile serious theological and national concerns in ancient Israel, of the consequences of intimacy with God on the one hand, and alienation from God on the other. The intentional articulation of Eden from that which is ‘not-Eden,’ through readily recognisable symbols and motifs such as ‘wilderness,’ provides what might be deemed if not an archetypal narrative structure, then one that enjoyed widespread cultural recognition in ancient Israel. Moreover, it is a narrative structure on which other thematic elements of the Old Testament (and subsequently the New Testament), particularly that of Covenant, are supported and sustained. That is, for the Old Testament authors, it is in *Torah*, that the hope for the restoration of Israel, and by implication the return to Eden, will be achieved. In the New

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<sup>35</sup> Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 21.

<sup>36</sup> William Butler Yeats, “The Second Coming,” in *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* (New York: Macmillan, 1953), 184.

Testament, as we shall see, that hope lies in the New Creation in Christ.

## **5.2 Eden and the Wilderness Motif – Affirmation and Negation.**

Holding to the above suggests that *apophatic*, or negative theology, has its textual foundations not in Isaiah 55:9 (“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”) as commonly accepted.<sup>37</sup> Rather, its presence has more pragmatic origins in the Creation stories of Genesis 1-3, marked by the contrast between the symbolic manifestations of that which is held to be like God on the one hand, and that which is represented as the absence of God, or, more accurately, the manifestation of the limitations of humankind, on the other.

When considering the contrast between Edenic imagery and that of wilderness, against accepted notions of what constitutes *apophatic* theology, it is helpful to reflect on comments of Paul Rorem, who argues for the interconnectedness between scriptural negations, such as wilderness, and the positive dimensions of God-for-us they illuminate. Rorem neatly summarises, in a general way, the concerns of this chapter, and accordingly he is worth quoting at length:

All types of Christian negative theology keep negations *connected*; they do not isolate some apophatic principle of God’s transcendence as if it were an independent epistemological truth. Negations remain connected, first of all, to affirmations, for there must be something to be negated, some content to work with; even negative prefixes negate some specific positive quality. Secondly, the negations are closely connected to biblical texts, since both the negations and the words that are negated are originally scriptural. Indeed, biblical symbols and metaphors reveal the interplay of affirmation and negation: the symbol is both like and *unlike* God. Finally these biblical negations remain connected to liturgical communities. The Christian apophatic grows out of worshipping communities, not abstract inquiry. It is a misconstrual of negative theology to regard the apophatic as a free-floating epistemological principle for individuals, isolated from the cataphatic, from

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<sup>37</sup> Paul Rorem, “Negative Theologies of the Cross,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 101, no. 3/4, Centennial Issue (July - Oct, 2008): 451.

its biblical origins, and from liturgical communities of faith.<sup>38</sup>

That is to say, negative theology is not simply about the rejection of some names for the experience of God in favour of others. But neither is it so abstract, or disconnected from the lived experience of the faith community in which it exists, that it has no reference in the real world. In responding to Rorem's remarks, it has already been argued that the symbolism of Eden, as both theological and national ideal, provides the positive affirmation against which to understand the devastating loss experienced by the first humans through the events of the Fall. Further, those events, which have both universal theological as well as specific national meaning (in the context of ancient Israelite forfeiture and becoming), are emphatically embedded in the Scriptures where they serve to provide a framework, and an underpinning logic, for subsequent related narratives. Rorem's third point, of the explicit connection between the symbols of negation (and by implication, affirmation) and liturgical communities, echoes the observations of Westermann, that scriptural imagery should always be analysed from the perspective of that which was culturally familiar.<sup>39</sup> Despite its abstract nature, and limited accordingly by the principle of analogy, apophatic theology still depends for its power on understandings derived from the lived experience of its users and the faith community of which they are part. As discussed above, the images through which God's people can begin to know Him are graspable only by comparison with circumstances and values that have already been encountered. God's ecstatic love and generosity towards Israel is real, as is the "howling wilderness waste" (Deut 32:10) that is the destination of those experiencing a sense alienation from God. In a similar manner, the exhortation of God to turn to Him, "with all your heart and all your soul" (Deut 6:4), is not considered by God to be "too hard" or "too far away," but rather, is in the 'mouth' and in the

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<sup>38</sup> Rorem, "Negative Theologies of the Cross," 451-452.

<sup>39</sup> Tsumura, "The Earth in Genesis 1," 328.

‘heart,’ that is, in the perceptible reality, of the believer (Deut 30:11-14).

The understanding that God can be known through meditating on His absence, or that which is ‘not-God,’ then, lies in concrete familiarity with the elements that might be deemed to constitute that absence. Just as Eden, with its life giving elements of viridity, water, light, community, fertility, peace, and abundance, points to the nature of God through evidence of the blessings of God, so too, it is through notions of wilderness that the writers of the Old Testament express the characteristics and consequences of God’s absence. The trackless wastes of waterless desert, the ‘unsown land’ incapable of sustaining neither vegetation nor, concomitantly, community, except by the graced intervention of God,<sup>40</sup> are thus presented either as punishment or transitional stages in the journey towards covenantal reunion.<sup>41</sup>

As with most instances of juxtaposition, the effect of contrasting Eden with wilderness lies in its capacity to inform and amplify imagistic power, in this case the representation of Israel’s relationship with God. On the one hand God’s creativity and righteousness are represented by overt symbols of fertility, sustenance, abundance, beauty, light, healing, and harmony – affirmations of the Covenant which are substantially expressed, throughout the Old Testament, in the form of Edenic imagery. The life giving force of these elements is brought into stark contrast with those elements that are their opposite - infertility, shortage, confusion, alienation, anomie, stagnation, depopulation, dislocation, darkness and death – analogous as it may be, of the consequences of the absence of God in their lives.

The final exhortation of the Lord, through Moses, to the Hebrews, for example, before they crossed the Jordan into the land “promised on oath to their ancestors” (Deut 31:20), to turn to the Lord with “all your heart and with all your soul” (Deut 6:4, 30:6), is presented in a

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<sup>40</sup> Ex 16:1-34; 17:5-7.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Josh 5:6.



series of contrasting images that are summarised as a simple choice between life and blessings on the one hand, and death and curses on the other (Deut 30:19). That is, the imagery of wilderness is ubiquitously present as the manifestation of the absence – the negation of the affirmation – of the covenantal life. But it is the ineluctably positive imagery of Eden that signifies and ultimately discloses the fullness of God’s blessing.

Using imagery that is manifestly Edenic in its combination of references to antiquity, to God’s delight, and to fertility, the rewards of loving the Lord by observing His commandments, decrees, and ordinances (Deut 30:16), are revealed:

God will make you abundantly prosperous in all your undertakings, in the fruit of your body, in the fruit of your livestock, and in the fruit of your soil. For the LORD will take delight in prospering you, just as he delighted in prospering your ancestors...

Deuteronomy 30:9.

Alternatively:

... if your hearts turn away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to her gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess...

Deuteronomy 30:17-18.

As the climax of the covenantal narratives concerning God and Israel this particular scene, in its structure and symbolic language, is such that its ultimate declaration, that the Israelites should perennially and instinctively, “choose life so that you and your descendants may live,” (Deut 30:19) could well be considered the abiding theme and motto of the Old Testament in its entirety.<sup>42</sup>

At the heart of this exhortation, effectively a summary of the blessings and responsibilities of the Covenant, is a notion at once emblematic of

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. Lash, *Believing Three Ways in One God*, 85.

the potential abundance and human flourishing promised through union with God. It is also a theme, frequently expressed through Edenic imagery, which characterises and, in many places, dominates the books that follow, including in the Psalms and Wisdom texts, and in the writing of the prophets.

### **5.3 Isaiah 60-62: The Restoration of Israel as Eden.**

Matthew Lynch argues that Isaiah 60-62 is of particular significance to understand Israel's destiny, for these chapters offer the most sustained portrait of Zion's redemption and salvation.<sup>43</sup> That is, Isaiah 60-62 are presented in the context of the eschatological renewal that lies at the heart of Isaiah in its totality.<sup>44</sup> These chapters are framed by two distinct 'divine-warrior' panels (59: 15b-21, and 63:1-6), which form an *inclusio* and are textually joined to chapters 60-62. When considered inclusive of Isaiah 59:2-15a, which describes the dire material, spiritual, and moral circumstances of Israel that lead to God's intervention, the texts as a whole provide a strong, formal example of how the imagery of Eden is arranged in juxtaposition with its opposite to illustrate a clear distinction between the choices that lead to life lived in God on the one hand, and those that result in alienation and death on the other, and the blessings or deprivations that fall from those choices. Specifically, this structure provides a contrast between the grace experienced in the covenantal life, reinstated in this instance through the Lord's direct military intervention, and vivid and at times harrowing descriptions of the dire consequences of not adhering to the precepts of *Torah*.

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<sup>43</sup> Matthew Lynch, "Zion's Warrior and the Nations: Isaiah 59:15b – 63:6 in Isaiah's Zion Traditions." *Catholic Bible Quarterly* 70 (2008): 244-245.

<sup>44</sup> That is, structurally at the centre of the Trito-Isaian literary distinction. Lynch, "Zion's Warrior and the Nations," 244. See also John W. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 534; and Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*, 352-3.

As Lynch describes, the divine warrior panels correlate with chapters 60-62, in a “Zion-traditioned”<sup>45</sup> sequence of divine war, followed by the victorious return of YHWH to his mountain abode, followed by the praise/convergence of the nations. The panels are narratively interwoven with several related Zion traditions (covenant treaty, inaugural proclamation, payment of tribute, theophanic appearance, pilgrimage).<sup>46</sup> The military intervention of YHWH occurs as a necessary response of God of not being able to find a human agent adequately equipped to justly intervene (59:16) so as to overcome the corruption and inequities the Lord perceived in Israel, and the desolation of Israel that occurs as a result of her infidelity to God (59:2, 12). Against this background, YHWH...

... put on righteousness as a breastplate,  
and a helmet of salvation on his head;  
he put on garments of vengeance for clothing,  
and wrapped himself in fury as in a mantle.

Isaiah 59:17.

Thus, the future of Israel is secured only through the intervention and return of Zion’s warrior king.<sup>47</sup> It was the Lord’s “own arm” that brought Him victory, and His own righteousness that “upheld him” (59:16). Nevertheless, despite the rebelliousness and faithlessness of Israel, and Israel’s inability to transcend its own limitations, described in Isa 59:2-15a, God’s love for Jerusalem and her people remains steadfast, coming to Zion, “as Redeemer, to those in Jacob who turn from transgression” (Isa 59:20). That is, the ‘wilderness’ of Israel’s transgressions, described through a series of graphic metaphors of corruption, alienation, deprivation, darkness, emptiness and confusion, is displaced through the righteous actions of God as king, returning Israel to Edenic harmony and prosperity founded in worship of the Lord (59:20-21; 60:13, 16, 20). Reflecting the pre-existing covenantal

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<sup>45</sup> By ‘Zion traditions’ Lynch is referring to key stories, symbols, theology, and eschatological beliefs “most vividly (but not exclusively) expressed in Psalms, Isaiah, and Chronicles.” Lynch, “Zion’s Warrior and the Nations,” 245.

<sup>46</sup> Lynch, “Zion’s Warrior and the Nations,” 263.

<sup>47</sup> Lynch, “Zion’s Warrior and the Nations,” 263.

dimension of God's relationship with Israel, having rescued Jerusalem through His own actions, the positive effect of the Lord's intervention is deemed permanent:

<sup>21</sup>And as for me, this is my covenant with them, says the LORD: my spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouths of your children, or out of the mouths of your children's children, says the LORD, from now on and forever.

Isaiah 59:17.

What follows in chapters 60-62 is a detailed description of the extent of the blessings that the righteous actions of Israel's divine warrior King bring to the redeemed Israel. As such, there is an explicit contrast between those blessings and the images of wilderness that motivated God's actions, against which those blessings are compared.

### **5.3.1 Displacing Wilderness through Righteousness – Eden Revealed to the Nations in Israel.**

The three chapters of Isaiah (60-62) enclosed by the two warrior panels (59:15b-21, and 63:1-6), describe the restoration of Jerusalem using an assemblage of three separate yet related sets of images: i) the Glory of God; ii) the blessings of God; and iii) the intimate relationship between Jerusalem and God. Each of these three themes, as we will see, are expressed through, or are expressive of, the overarching symbolism of Eden, wherein God's loving predisposition towards Israel is revealed. Moreover, the specific concerns of the exile that are a feature of the first two sections of Isaiah<sup>48</sup> – judgment, alienation, and restoration – have been replaced in this third Trito-Isaian part by more universal concerns – “the significance of Israel's experience with God for all of human history”<sup>49</sup> – that are

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<sup>48</sup> That is, Isa 1-39 and 40-55 respectively.

<sup>49</sup> Oswalt, *Isaiah*, 535. cf. Ps 119.

reflected in the use by the author of the encompassing imagery of Eden. Indeed, the numerous references to “the nations” worshipfully responding to Jerusalem’s vindication by God (60:3, 6, 7) itself points to a more global theme of salvation expressed here,<sup>50</sup> available to all who commit to a life prescribed, and supported, by the principals of *Torah*.<sup>51</sup> In summary, the wilderness that Israel had become, described in Isaiah 59:2-15a, is supplanted in chapters 60-62 by an integrated vision of Israel as Eden achieved through the actions of God as righteous and creative king. Let us now look at the three interrelated sets of images through which this restoration is unveiled.

Firstly, and central to the overall image of restoration presented in Isaiah 60, is the return of the *kabod*, or the Glory of the Lord, once more within the sanctuary of the temple.<sup>52</sup> It is from here, the Lord declares, “I will glorify where my feet rest” (60:13). Beautified by the cypress, the plane, and the pine trees of Lebanon (60:13), trees that elsewhere in Isaiah (and the writings of other prophets where Isaiah’s influence is discernible) are recognised as partaking of the imagery of Eden,<sup>53</sup> the Temple will once more be the home of God on earth. As a result the Glory of God, will once more appear over the people of Jacob (60:2), that is, Israel in its totality, and through Jacob be a source of inspiration to the entire world (60:30). The urgency and intensity of God’s promise is arresting:

<sup>21</sup>Your people shall all be righteous;  
they shall possess the land forever.  
They are the shoot that I planted,  
the work of my hands,  
so that I might be glorified.

<sup>22</sup>The least of them shall become a clan,  
and the smallest one a might nation;  
I am the LORD;  
in its time I will accomplish it quickly.

Isaiah 60:21-22.

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<sup>50</sup> Cf. Ezek 47:1-12.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Isa 56: 1-8.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. 2 Chr 7:19-22.

<sup>53</sup> For example, Isa 35:1-2; 41:19; 51:3 cf. Ezek 31:1-9.

Eichrodt considers the relationship between the *kabod*, or Glory of God, manifest through the theophanic appearances that are the central images of Isaiah 60, and the abundance of Eden, an emphatic one: “... the revelation of the *kabod* of Yahweh throughout the whole world is equated with the reconciliation of God and Man by means of which Paradise, and with it life in the presence of God, is restored.”<sup>54</sup> That is to say, whereas Isaiah 59:2-15a paints a picture of Israel as one of desolation, violence and injustice, commensurate with a wilderness, wherein, “we all growl like bears” (59:11); and where petitions of justice are conceived with such dishonesty they are equated with “adders’ eggs” that poison whoever eats them (59:5); and where darkness prevails such that, “we stumble at noon as in the twilight... as though we were dead” (59:10), Isaiah 60 presents an opposite view through images that convey, in Edenic terms, the reinstatement of the Covenant.

Secondly, implicit associations to Eden in Isaiah 60, that relate the presence of God’s glory to the extravagant blessing of Israel must also be acknowledged. Of these, the re-population of the Land (60:9, 22), commensurate with the promise of the covenant that the descendants of Abraham would not just be “as numerous as the stars” but a mighty nation, is offered as the first material sign that God’s glory is once more amongst them. Indeed, the ingathering of God’s people can be seen to be not just a symbol of Eden, insofar as it represents fertility at the physical, social and cultic level, it is also equated with the other riches that aggregate to Israel through God’s righteous actions and creative power. Importantly, the image also functions in opposition to the de-population and infertility that is characteristic of the desolation commensurate with Eden’s opposite, that is, wilderness.<sup>55</sup>

In the light of God’s glory, so powerful as to draw other nations and kings to it (60:3), the people of Israel are told to lift up their eyes and

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<sup>54</sup> Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 2:32.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Isa 59:7.

to look around (60:4). No longer an abject people they will then see the ‘sons and daughters’ of Israel returning from the material and spiritual wilderness of captivity to once more be among them: “...they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far away, and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses’ arms” (60:4).

Lest the reader of these passages miss the point of the relationship between repopulation and Edenic plenitude, the images of return in Isaiah 60 are immediately followed by parallel images of abundance and prosperity that act as the signifier in the relationship between the presence of God’s glory in Zion and the joy of Israel in the fulfilment of the covenant:

<sup>5</sup>Then you shall see and be radiant;  
your heart shall thrill and rejoice,  
because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you,  
the wealth of the nations shall come to you.  
Isaiah 60:4-5.

Indeed, in a cascading series of images of superlatives, the reader is told of the blessings that accrue to Israel through God’s return to the Temple at the heart of the nation:

<sup>17</sup>Instead of bronze I will bring gold,  
instead of iron I will bring silver;  
instead of wood, bronze,  
instead of stones, iron.  
I will appoint Peace as your overseer  
and Righteousness as your taskmaster.  
<sup>18</sup>Violence shall no more be heard in your land,  
devastation or destruction within your borders;  
you shall call your walls Salvation,  
and your gates Praise.  
Isaiah 60: 17-18.

Implicit Edenic references through the emphasis on light as the means by which not just Israel but all the people of the world know that the Glory of God has returned to Israel, and that the darkness of the wilderness brought by Israel’s transgressions and sins (59:12) has now dissipated, should also be noted. As previously discussed in Chapter Two, the relationship between the *menora*, the seven-branched

lampstand which stood beside the altar of the Temple, as a manifestation of the Glory of God, and the Tree of Life, is well established.<sup>56</sup> And whereas the precise understanding of this relationship in ancient Israel is beyond our full understanding, its subsequent use by writers as diverse as the authors of the *Book of Enoch*,<sup>57</sup> the *Exodus Rabbah*,<sup>58</sup> and Philo of Alexandria, point to a widespread acceptance of this relationship. Accordingly:

<sup>19</sup>The sun shall no longer be our light by day,  
 nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you by  
 night;  
 but the LORD will be your everlasting light,  
 and your God will be your glory.  
<sup>20</sup>Your sun shall no more go down,  
 or your moon withdraw into itself;  
 for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your  
 days of mourning shall be ended.

Isaiah 60: 19-20

It is an image that the writer of Revelation later draws upon in the New Testament to describe the New Jerusalem, redeemed through Christ, in the form of the Church (Rev 21:11, 22-15). In Revelation, however, articulating a universalism only hinted at in these passages of Isaiah, the temple is no longer in Zion, but takes its shape from the universal presence of “the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb” (21:22) amongst “the nations,” who “will walk by its light.” (21:24). As in Isaiah, “the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light” (21:23). But in the New Creation, “its lamp is the Lamb” (21:23). The relationship between the new Temple, and its associated imagery, and Eden is consolidated in Revelation 22 where the comparison, through particular reference to Ezekiel 47:1-

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<sup>56</sup> See Barker, *The Gate of Heaven*, 90-91, 94; *Temple Theology* (London: SPCK, 2004), 88-89. See also Yardin, *The Tree of Light*, 35.

<sup>57</sup> In Enoch’s account of God resting under the Tree of Life, for example, the appearance of the Tree of Life is described, “in the form gold-looking and vermilion and fire-like and covers all...” (2 Enoch 8.4), that is, of light. Rutherford H. Platt (ed), “The Secrets of Enoch,” in *The Lost Books of the Bible and The Forgotten Books of Eden* (Cleveland, Ohio: World Publishing Company, 1926), 85.

<sup>58</sup> For example, within the *Exodus Rabbah* (XXXVI.16) are quoted, “some who remember that the lamp was ‘God who gives light and the Torah.’” Barker, *The Gate of Heaven*, 91.



12, is made explicit (22:1-5). Here, the lifting of the curse of the ground, an aspect of the totality of the wilderness into which Adam and Eve were driven as a consequence of the Fall, is finally redeemed in the form of the New Creation in Christ.

Isaiah 61 develops further the theme of the resurrection of Jerusalem and, by association, the nation of Israel promised in the covenant, by also framing that picture of restoration in Edenic imagery. In this chapter, the Edenic relationship is implicitly present both in the plenitude of the new Zion, already a feature of Isaiah 60, as well as in the cultural references to the story of Eden and its loss that inform the text. In a return to the idealised world of Israel as Eden before the Fall the reader is told that the physical hardship and alienation from both God and the Land, that became the experience of the descendants of Adam and Eve following their disobedience towards God, is now a thing of the past for “the people whom the LORD has blessed” (Isa 61:9). Implicit, too, is the acknowledgement, in the context of Israel as Eden, of the privileged role for the sons of Jacob as priests of the rebuilt temple:

<sup>5</sup>Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks,  
foreigners shall till your land and dress your vines;  
<sup>6</sup>but you shall be called priests of the LORD,  
you shall be named ministers of our God;  
you shall enjoy the wealth of the nations,  
and in their riches you shall glory.

Isaiah 61:5-6

Thirdly, the prophet’s use of matrimonial symbolism also reveals God’s reconciliation with Israel. With its emphasis not just on intimacy but also on joy and fertility, the use of matrimonial symbolism has previously been shown, in Chapter Four of this thesis, to have strong links to Edenic symbolism. As we have seen, the comparison with the blessings of Eden informs and empowers the symbolism of the bride and bridegroom, reinforcing the understanding of the relationship between the presence of God’s glory in the temple, fertility, abundance, and joy:

<sup>10</sup>I will greatly rejoice in the LORD,  
my whole being shall exult in my God;  
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,  
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,  
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,  
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

<sup>11</sup>For as the earth brings forth its shoots,  
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,  
so the LORD GOD will cause righteousness and praise  
to spring up before all the nations.

Isaiah 61:10-11.

In this instance the application of garden imagery in the passage appears to have little connection to Eden except in their shared status as ‘gardens.’ Understood in the context of other Isaiah passages,<sup>59</sup> however, and in the wider context of the total renewal of Israel before the Lord, and the subsequent displacement of the wilderness described in Isaiah 59: 2-15a by Edenic imagery, the presence of the garden metaphor in the context of the matrimonial symbolism used here can also be argued as implicitly referencing Eden.

Isaiah 62 similarly emphasises the restoration and resurrection of Jerusalem through the reconciliation of the marriage relationship between the Lord and Jerusalem that in Chapter 60, and elsewhere in Isaiah and other prophetic writings,<sup>60</sup> had been shown to be invalidated through sin. This includes the ‘sin’ of infertility as a sign of comprehensive estrangement from God, also an extension of the symbolism of wilderness, That is, and as suggested in relation to Isaiah 60, it is not the degree of intimacy between Jerusalem and God indicated by the use of matrimonial symbolism that directly draws the connection to Eden, although that is also implied, but the explicit fertility and fecundity that the “joy” of marriage brings, concomitant with “knowledge” of the Lord.<sup>61</sup> This understanding is central both to

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<sup>59</sup> Cf. Isa 4:2-4; 5:1-7; 11:6-9; 27:2-3,6; 35:1-2,5-7; and 55:1,12-13.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Isa 54: 4-6; Jer 2:2-25, 32-37; Ezek 16:15-34; Hos 2:2-5.

<sup>61</sup> See a full discussion see Neher, *The Prophetic Existence*, 251. See also Ch. 4, “Eden and Matrimonial Symbolism.”

the meaning of Eden and the promise of the covenant. Additional verses (62:8, 9) contextualise and consolidate these understandings:

<sup>8</sup>The LORD has sworn by his right hand and by his mighty arm:  
I will not again give your food to be food for your enemies,  
and foreigners shall not drink the wine for which you have labored;  
<sup>9</sup>but those who garner it shall eat it and praise the LORD,  
and those who gather it shall drink it in my holy court.  
Isaiah 62:8-9.

God's declaration, that the sacred produce of Israel, will be enjoyed by the righteous in His 'holy courts' (62:9), that is, within the Temple, draws our attention to the third set of related images through which the restoration of Israel is illustrated. Concomitantly, through these images of a reaffirmed intimacy between God and Jerusalem, the displacement of wilderness is further emphasised. That is, the image of the righteous partaking of a sacred meal with God, points to the intimacy of the relationship between God and Jerusalem, and hence Israel in its entirety, which Isaiah had previously so graphically and poignantly demonstrated to be absent: "... your iniquities have been barriers between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear" (59:2).

Indeed, Isaiah 62:8-9 has a double Edenic association. On the one hand there is the direct relationship between the Temple and Eden, which is established throughout the Old Testament in a variety of texts.<sup>62</sup> There is also the cultic association between the imagery of Eden and the Festival of *Shavuoth*, or First Fruits, in which the blessings of Eden, commensurate with the covenantal land 'of Milk and Honey' into which the Hebrews were delivered by God, are ritually brought to the Temple each year as a sign of gratitude for

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<sup>62</sup> Ex 25:8-9; Ps 46:4; Wisd 9:8. For further explication of this theme see Anderson, "Celibacy or Consummation in the Garden," 121-148; Barker, *The Gate of Heaven*, 57-103; Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, 369, 370, 386; and McNamara, *Catholic Church Architecture*, 72-73.

God's blessing and mercy.<sup>63</sup> In a related manner, intimacy with God, as both a sign and a feature of the restoration of Israel can also be identified in the return of the Glory of God to the Temple, and by implication to Israel in its entirety. That is, the return of God's glory, insofar as it is declared eight times across Isaiah 60-62, points to the return of an Edenic world, where the first humans, prior to their disobedience of God, enjoyed God's unmediated presence. The inclusion of matrimonial symbolism in these passages, already referred to above, also points to the degree of intimacy enjoyed by Jerusalem as sign of the restoration of Israel, represented through the overarching symbolism of Eden, and with it the displacement of wilderness against which it is contrasted.

### **Conclusion.**

The regular repetition and juxtaposition of the contrasting imagery of Eden and 'wilderness,' which can be found throughout the Old Testament, indicates the presence of a structural motif that binds the overarching themes of creation, revelation, and redemption. This effect has been achieved through the inclusion of multiple voices, in a manner that facilitates a unified reading of the Old Testament, of the existential imperative of the Israelites to return to covenantal intimacy with God. The text further supports an unequivocal understanding of the blessings that are obtainable from that relationship, as well as the terrible risks that estrangement from the God of Israel entails, over and above the specific concerns and emphases of each individual book or section. It offers these insights within the parameters of the lived experience of its audience, but recognizes the relational, transcendent, and eschatological dimensions of that experience. The frequency and prominence of this juxtaposition, along with the wide variety of cultural and historical settings, suggests that the imagery of Eden, when used either in isolation or in conjunction with its opposite, that

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<sup>63</sup> Cf. Deut 8:7-8; 26:1-2. For a full explication see Ch. 2, "Eden and Israel," 2.3 Eden and the Sacred Bounty of Israel.

is 'wilderness,' was both highly regarded as a means of conveying important theological and national truths by the writers of these texts, and broadly understood and accepted by the audiences for whom they were intended.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Cf. Berry, for example, who argues that the combined effect of the difficulty in interpretation of the Garden of Eden story, coupled with "its lack of mention in the rest of the Old Testament" (!) has encouraged its downplaying. R.J. Berry, "Eden and Ecology: Evolution and Eschatology," *Science and Christian Belief* 19, no. 1 (2007): 15-35.

**PART TWO: READING EDEN IN THE NEW  
TESTAMENT**

## CHAPTER SIX: JESUS AND THE RETURN TO EDEN.

Part One of this thesis reveals the Garden of Eden, with its associated symbols, metaphors, and motifs, to be a primary means through which the blessings of God's Creation, and God's hope for that creation, are communicated in the Old Testament. The Trinitarian structuring of the world at the heart of the New Testament invites its readers to consider new or different ways Edenic imagery might be recognisable in the Gospels and associated texts. Indeed, a number of scholars argue that it is precisely through the representation and treatment of Edenic images and related motifs in the New Testament where the cultural and theological transitions between the Old and New Testaments can be seen to be integrated with the story of Christ.<sup>1</sup> The examination and analysis of these representations is the focus of this second part of this thesis.

The recognisable presence of this imagery in the New Testament is not simply a matter of narrative. To have theological and religious validity, the imagery of Eden must support and help to convey the inherently relational structuring of reality in the analogy of the Trinity that asserts three ways of believing in the one God. Ratzinger argues that for Christians, "... it is decisively important that the Creator and the Redeemer, the God of the Origin and the God of the end, be one and the same."<sup>2</sup> Where there is disunity in relation to this understanding, heresy, and its concomitant, idolatry,<sup>3</sup> emerges, "and the basic form of the faith itself disintegrates."<sup>4</sup> English theologian

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, W.D. Davies, *The Gospel and the Land*; Edwards, *Jesus the Wisdom of God*, 33; Paul Sevier Minear, *Christians and the New Creation: Genesis Motifs in the New Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, transl. Brian McNeil, *The God of Jesus Christ: Meditations on the Triune God* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 42.

<sup>3</sup> In the sense of giving to anything created the value of God. Gunton argues that it (idolatry) "is the essential cause of the misdirectedness (sic), the directedness of the creation to dissolution that... is the heart of the defacing of the image." Colin E. Gunton, *Christ and Creation: The Didsbury Lectures, 1990* (Carlisle: The Paternoster Press, 1992), 104.

<sup>4</sup> Ratzinger, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 42.

Colin Gunton provides some reassurance against Ratzinger's concerns by noting that the 'cosmic Christologies' identifiable in the New Testament<sup>5</sup> led, soon after the death of Christ, to "a widespread Christian confession to the effect that the one through whom God had acted to save the world was the agent of its creation."<sup>6</sup> In early Christian communities, then, the presence of Edenic images in New Testament writings was recognised as indications of both the separation from, and continuation with, Old Testament traditions and understandings, and were vital in helping to comprehend and articulate these differences.<sup>7</sup>

Along with the broader concerns of this thesis responding to the perceived limitations in existing Christian theology relating to Eden, particularly in contemporary Christian thought, the question remains as to how Old Testament imagery of Eden is reconciled, integrated, or transformed in New Testament documents. That is, how might the understandings pertaining to Eden found in the Hebrew Scriptures be used to describe, interpret, and represent, the meaning of the New Creation in Christ, to the newly emerging Christian faith?

This analysis can be performed from a variety of perspectives, ten of which are identified below:

- i) the relationship between the imagery of the Garden of Eden and the events related to the suffering, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, as variously described in the Gospels, at the heart of the Christian faith;
- ii) the relationship in the New Testament between Eden and Israel, manifest in notions of 'the Land,' (*eretz Yisrael hashlemah*) of which,

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<sup>5</sup> For example, Rom 5:12-21; 8:19-23, 38-39; 1 Cor 8:6; 15:21-22, 45; Eph 1:3-4, 10; Phil 2:6-11; Col 1:15-20, and which, according to Gunton, have "received much attention over the years." See Gunton, *Christ and Creation*, 22.

<sup>6</sup> Gunton, *Christ and Creation*, 22, 23. See also, Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 41-42.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Minear, *Christians and the New Creation*, 3-6, 104-129.



in the Old Testament, the presence of the imagery of Eden is a primary symbol of reconciliation and justification;

iii) the relationship in the New Testament between the motif of the ‘New Creation,’ indicative of the transition from one age to another,<sup>8</sup> that some scholars argue is evident across a range of New Testament texts, and the imagery of Eden;<sup>9</sup>

iv) the predominantly Pauline Christology of Jesus as the New Adam, in order to ascertain the degree to which associated Edenic imagery might be understood or used by Paul to articulate that understanding; the degree to which Paul’s theology of Jesus as the New Adam has been appropriated by, or integrated with, the theology of the Gospel writers;

v) the *hieros gamos* or ‘sacred marriage’ motif, evidenced in the Old Testament through a variety of relationships, in light of its recognised presence in the New Testament through the notion of the Church as the Bride of Christ, arguably present in texts such as John 4:4-42, Ephesian 5:25b-27, and Revelation 12:1-17. The motif of Mary as the new Eve can also be examined in this context;

vi) the predominantly Johannine notion equating Jesus as the Logos of God with the Old Testament theology of the Wisdom of God – developed through reference to Old Testament texts such as Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), or the Psalms, in light of the previously identified relationship between the observance of *Torah*, of which Wisdom is seen as an equivalent, and the blessings of Eden;

vii) the extent to which Edenic imagery and associated motifs are used to illustrate the notion of the kingdom of God (the kingdom of Heaven) in the Gospels of Luke and Matthew respectively. The associated Lukan use of the word

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<sup>8</sup> Minear, *Christians and the New Creation*, 112.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Minear offers twelve text-based examples where the ‘creation’ related in Genesis is reinterpreted in New Testament texts, drawing on Edenic imagery in the process:- Matt 3:1-8; Matt 23:33; Acts 13:39-41; Mk 8:31; Mk 8:34; Gal 2:19b-20; Heb 6:4-6; Matt 10:16; 1 Jn 3:11-12; 1 Peter 2:9-10; Matt 5:5; and Matt: 9-10. Minear, *Christians and the New Creation*, 105-124.

*paradise* (Lk 23:43) and its possible Pauline connections can also be examined here;

viii) the direct relationship between instances of the use of Edenic imagery in the Old Testament, such as in Ezekiel 47:1-12, and the re-presentation of that imagery in the New Testament in passages such as John 4:4-42 and Revelation 22:1-17;

ix) the relationship between Jesus' bodily presence and the corollary notion of place to locate potential instances of the use of Edenic imagery that might give meaning to that relationship; and

x) the relationship in the New Testament between Edenic imagery and that of its opposite, wilderness, in the context of the story of Christ.

In regards to the hermeneutical categories and themes outlined above there will be considerable 'crossing over,' 'bleeding into,' or integration of topics with each other.<sup>10</sup> For example, the relationship between Jesus and the Land, the Adamic Christology of Paul, and the relationship between Jesus as the 'New Creation' all draw on related understandings. Similarly, discussion concerning Jesus' prayerful plea in Gethsemane *vis a vis* his temptation in the wilderness, both of which can be referenced under the juxtaposition of the images of Eden and wilderness, can be also be considered when examining the use of Edenic images in the Passion narratives. Also, the motif of the *hieros gamos*, or sacred marriage, with its Edenic associations<sup>11</sup> can be identified in relation to Paul's understanding of the Church as the Bride of Christ (Eph 5:25b-27), as it can equally be found in images pertaining to Mary as the New Eve (Rev 12: 1-6, 13-17), and in John's Gospel narrative commonly referred to as "the Samaritan Woman at the Well" (Jn 4: 7-42).

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<sup>10</sup> Markus Bockmuehl, "Locating paradise," in Bockmuehl and Stroumsa, eds., *Paradise in Antiquity*, 196.

<sup>11</sup> For a preceding analysis in this thesis see Chapter 4, "Eden and Matrimonial Symbolism."

Notwithstanding the preceding cautionary note, and in light of the recognisable complexities that such high degrees of interrelationship engender, the following headings have been chosen under which to organise the analysis that follows, insofar as they are judged to offer the most compelling and productive way forward: i) Eden and the Land of Israel in Paul's writing; ii) Jesus as the New Adam in the theology of Paul; iii) The *hieros gamos* and the New Creation; Paul, Eden, and the Bride of Christ; iv) Eden and Mary as the Second Eve; v) Eden and Jesus as the Wisdom of God in the Gospel of John; and vi) Eden and the kingdom of God in Matthew and Luke. It is the first four of these themes, which emerge from the writings of Paul, that are the focus of this chapter.

Accepting Hans Urs von Balthasar's contention that the Passion Narrative describes a continuous event, albeit consisting of distinct parts with features unique to each,<sup>12</sup> we will examine the presence, or otherwise, of Edenic imagery in the story at the heart of the Christian faith separately in Chapter Eight. In preparation for that analysis the examination of key aspects of the relationship between Eden and its manifestation elsewhere in the New Testament, identified above, which locate Jesus theologically, culturally, and spatially in the Gospels and associated texts through the use of Edenic imagery and related motifs, will be undertaken separately in the pages that immediately follow.

### **6.1 Eden and the Land of Israel in the Writings of Paul.**

W.D. Davies argues that Christian theology, in its appropriate search to unravel the nuances and complexities of early Christianity, has neglected to consider the encounter between it, and what he describes as the concrete realities (*realia*) of Judaism. In particular, he asserts

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<sup>12</sup> David Lauber, *Barth on the Descent into Hell: God, Atonement, and the Christian Life* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2004) 45, 69. See also Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, transl. and intro. Aidan Nichols (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 169.

that theologians have failed to inquire after the place of the Land, that is, *eretz Yisrael hashlemah*,<sup>13</sup> in the thought and lives of early Christians.<sup>14</sup> Given the importance of the gift of land as the underpinning event of God's covenantal promise to Israel,<sup>15</sup> of which the incarnation of Jesus is held in the New Testament to be the fulfilment,<sup>16</sup> Davies' attention to this perceived neglect is appropriate. Indeed, as shown in Chapter Two of this thesis, the quality of the relationship between the people of Israel and the Land, as expressed through the imagery of the Garden of Eden as a place where the ecstatic, limitless generosity of God is manifest, becomes a central point of orientation for the nation of Israel in its quest for permanent reconciliation with God.<sup>17</sup> Davies attributes this apparent anomaly to what he argues is the distinctly abstract character of Christian theology, in contrast with the discernible concreteness of the Judaic world, of which 'the Land' was, and remains, a significant constitutive element.

Davies offers as an initial explanation an observation made by the Canadian literary theorist, futurist, semiotician, and Catholic intellectual Marshall McLuhan, that "thingness<sup>18</sup> is a scandal to conceptualists."<sup>19</sup> That is to say, by its abstract nature there is a tendency in Christian theology to sometimes over-spiritualise matters that are inherently of this world. Davies tests this notion in relation to an emerging first century Christian theology by examining the story of Paul, a Pharisaic Jew who, despite his conversion to a life in Christ,

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<sup>13</sup> The "entire land of Israel," as it was understood as a biblical and theological concept. Cf. Gen 15:18-21. Other definitions that recast the original Abrahamic entity according to other considerations can be found in Deut 1:7; 11:24; Num 34:1-15; and Ezek 47:13-20. See also Ex 23:29, and Deut 7:27, which describe a provisional gifting of the land. For a thorough discussion see, Wazana, *All the Boundaries of the Land*.

<sup>14</sup> W.D. Davies, *The Gospel and the Land: Early Christianity and Jewish Territorial Doctrine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 161.

<sup>15</sup> Gen 13:14-15; 15:16-21; 17:18; 24:7.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Matt 5:17; Lk 22:20; Heb 8:6-13; 9:13-14; 1 Jn 1:7-8.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Josh 4:1-9.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. the medieval concept of *haecceitas*, the inherent qualitative character or 'thisness' of an object.

<sup>19</sup> Davies, *The Gospel and the Land*, 161.

remained nonetheless strongly connected to his Jewish heritage,<sup>20</sup> especially that aspect which expressed a millennial belief in the arrival of the messianic age.<sup>21</sup> As such, the writings of Paul, the enthusiastic former persecutor of Christians employed by the Jewish authorities, offer a distinct body of material through which previously concrete perceptions of the Land, and related imagery of Eden, might be assessed in the context of the transitional theology of Christianity as it emerged from its Jewish foundations.

In the first instance, it must be acknowledged that despite Paul's Jewishness, with its inherent links to *eretz Yisrael*, the context of Paul's geography was essentially urban, a characteristic of Roman Palestine, and even ancient Israel more broadly.<sup>22</sup> The implications of this, which relate equally to the style and tone of Paul's writing as it does to his themes, do not nullify the influence of the pastoral Eden on perceptions of the presence of God's grace in the Land.

Nevertheless, it comes as a shock to realise that there appears to be no inherent interest in geography, or a theology of the Land as it might be understood in Judaism, in the writings of Paul, despite the many references made in various New Testament texts to his conversion *outside* of Israel on the road to Damascus.<sup>23</sup> On the contrary, Paul appears to make a distinct claim against a specific understanding of the theology of *eretz Yisrael* when he describes how he consciously avoided Jerusalem, portrayed as Eden's equivalent in a number of texts<sup>24</sup> and the epicentre of holiness in Israel, and from which holiness

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. Rom 3:1-3; Gal 1:11-17; Heb 3:4-6.

<sup>21</sup> Deborah F. Sawyer, "The New Adam in the Theology of Paul" in Paul Morris and Deborah Sawyer, eds., *A Walk in the Garden: Biblical, Iconographical and Literary Images of Eden* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 105. See also, Moyer V. Hubbard, *New Creation in Paul's Letters and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 4-6.

<sup>22</sup> Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 9. For an imaginative narrative representation of this urbanised ancient Jewish world see György Spiró, *Captivity* (New York: Regan Arts Publishing, 2015).

<sup>23</sup> Acts 9:3-9, 13-19; 22: 6-11, 12-18; 1 Cor 9:1; 15: 3-8; Gal 1:11-16.

<sup>24</sup> Ezek 5:5 cf. 32:1-14; 39:17-20. See also, Lifsa Schacter, "The Garden of Eden as God's First Sanctuary," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (2013): 73-77; Lawrence E. Stager, "Jerusalem as Eden," *Biblical Archaeological Review* 26/3 (May/June 2000): 33-66.

is believed to emanate with diminishing presence the further an observant Jew travels from Jerusalem,<sup>25</sup> in the immediate aftermath of his dramatic encounter with the Risen Christ:

But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me,<sup>26</sup> so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with any human being, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me, but I went away at once into Arabia, and afterwards I returned to Damascus.

Galatians 1:15-17

Paul subsequently reveals that he only returned to Jerusalem three years later “to visit Cephas,” that is, Peter (Gal 1:18), where he stayed for just fifteen days, before leaving once again, only returning after fourteen further years have passed. Elsewhere, in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 for example, where Paul presents Jesus’ life and message, there is neither mention of Galilee, Jerusalem, nor of Damascus, despite the unique, unrepeatability, and historically specific nature of the occurrences that frame those events, and Paul’s response to them.<sup>27</sup> As Davies remarks:

It might be argued that, since in Judaism the activity of the Holy Spirit was often deemed to be confined to the land, it was of theological significance to Luke that Paul should have seen the Risen Lord outside the land in Damascus, ‘a haven for heretics,’ and there received the Spirit (Acts 9:17). If so Paul did not think the same way. The question of whether the Lord had appeared to him within or outside the land did not, apparently, occur to him, or was brushed aside as insignificant.<sup>28</sup>

This apparent insignificance of the Land to Paul can also be identified in Romans 9:4 where the Apostle does not mention it among the

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<sup>25</sup> For a full discussion on this see Ch. 2, “Eden and Israel,” 2.1. Eden and the Land of Israel.

<sup>26</sup> Here, the distinction of the literal Greek translation, ‘in me,’ is important as it accentuates the interiorised quality of God’s revelation of the Son to Paul.

<sup>27</sup> Davies, *The Gospel and the Land*, 166.

<sup>28</sup> Davies, *The Gospel and the Land*, 166-167.

advantages enjoyed by the people of Israel. In the context for which the Epistle to the Romans was written, that is, in preparation for a visit to a Christian community of which, at that point, Paul had no personal knowledge,<sup>29</sup> the omission seems remarkable in light of Paul's perceived role not just as proselytiser and witness to Christ, but as mediator and peacemaker.<sup>30</sup> The verse reads: "They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises ..." (Rom 9:4). That is, there is no mention of the Land, with its implicit significance, in Paul's address. Davies argues that a tenuous link can be made through the verse that follows, which refers to the Davidic Messiahship of which Jesus is a descendant (Rom 9:5) and, by inference, to the land of Israel.<sup>31</sup> But an opposite argument can also be presented by noting Paul's use of plural "promises" in this passage rather than the Hebrew "promise" of the covenant in which the maintenance of, and reconciliation with, the Land, in the context of the certainty and reliability of God, is implicit.<sup>32</sup> Once again, it would appear that Paul is making a deliberate choice to marginalise the presence of the Land, with its various Judaic associations, from his reflections on the significance of the Incarnation to Jew and Gentile alike.

Earlier commentators have also observed this tendency in Paul to apparently 'turn a blind eye' to what appears to be obvious to other New Testament writers. Käsemann, in comparing the perspectives of Luke and Paul, declared that, "Luke relates this (the history of Christianity) backwards to the history of Jesus and the Old Testament – matters in which Ephesians, despite several Old Testament reminiscences, is scarcely interested."<sup>33</sup> Whilst later scholars may agree with Käsemann's conclusions regarding Paul's presumed disinterest in the history or cultural background of Jesus, possibly

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<sup>29</sup> Sawyer, "The New Adam in the Theology of Paul," 113.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Rom 1:8-17.

<sup>31</sup> Davies, *The Gospel and the Land*, 167.

<sup>32</sup> Davies, *The Gospel and the Land*, 167. n.12.

<sup>33</sup> J. Paul Sampley, "And the Two Shall Become One Flesh:" *A Study of Traditions in Ephesians 5:21-33* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 3-4.

reflecting Paul's desire to foreground the spiritualised character of the New Creation in Christ, the apparent marginalisation of Old Testament themes in his writing, such as the Land and its Edenic representation, also seems more than arbitrary.

Indeed, rather than a matter of 'insignificance' or 'oversight,' Paul's exclusion of the Land as an element of theological importance appears intentional. As one brought up, as Paul himself observes, as a pious and observant Jew, he would be acutely conscious of the degree to which the blessings that flow to Israel, and each individual Jew justified before God through adherence to the Law,<sup>34</sup> that result in the fulfilment of the covenant, are substantially represented through the Land's possession. He would also be aware that the blessings obtained from that possession as a result of being reconciled with God found expression in Judaism through Edenic symbols – the living water, the year round fructification, the unimpeded fertility of people and animals alike, the absence of illness, war giving way to a permanent peace, and so on.<sup>35</sup>

This reality of Israelite understanding also finds cultic expression in forms such as the Seven Species of Israel<sup>36</sup> in which Israel's debt of gratitude to God is annually proclaimed in the festival of *Shavuot*, or Pentecost. It was also expressed in the decorations of the temple of Solomon, the re-establishment of which, as comprehensively expressed in the prophets, equates with the restoration of Israel,<sup>37</sup> an event that the Gospel writers proclaim is concluded in Christ.<sup>38</sup> Paul's use of this specific imagery will be presented in more detail shortly. In essence, the world, and particularly *eretz Yisrael*, after the disobedience of the first humans, and the subsequent possession of the

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<sup>34</sup> That is, the *Torah* of the Old Testament. Here, I have followed the Greek New Testament, *ho nomos*, or the Law, despite the changes in perception, from an encompassing model for living to a more prescribed system of relationships, that such a shift in language facilitates.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Isa 27: 6.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Deut 8:7-8

<sup>37</sup> See Ch. 2, "Eden and Israel," 2.3 Eden and the Sacred Bounty of Israel.

<sup>38</sup> Isa 25:9; Ezek 37:21-28. Cf. Acts 15:16; Rom 11:25-26.



“Land of Milk and Honey” (Deut 31:20) in partial fulfilment of the Abrahamic covenant, was always and everywhere rich in meaning for people of Jewish heritage.<sup>39</sup>

The challenge then, is to discover the significance of this exclusion or displacement of the land from Paul’s thinking and determine if the land of Israel, with its Edenic associations, finds an equivalence, is expressed in a different form, or has a recognisable presence elsewhere in Paul’s theology. That is, what does Paul substitute for the Land of Israel? As we shall see, the most compelling answer to this question is the Risen Christ, whom Paul, and then the Gospel writers, clothes in Edenic associations and imagery.

Davies himself frames this inquiry through a more encompassing question concerning Paul as someone cognisant of the debt his new faith owed to his own Jewish heritage. Put simply, this was, “Who are the true sons of Abraham?”<sup>40</sup> Davies contends that this was very much the issue which Paul grappled with in both Romans and Galatians in light of: i) Gentile Christians who could not claim physical descent from Abraham; and ii) Jews who could claim this descent but who had accepted Christ as Lord.<sup>41</sup>

According to Davies, Paul solved this problem, to Paul’s own satisfaction at least, through two related assertions. The first concerned Paul’s theology of Christ as the New Adam, substantially developed in 1 Corinthians 15, and in Romans 5:12-21, underpinning the broader theme of the Incarnation ushering in the time of the New Creation. The second assertion was less subtle and concerned the substantial rejection of *Torah*, or the Law, within Paul’s nascent Christian theology, and hence the relationship between Judaism and

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<sup>39</sup> Sawyer, “The New Adam in the Theology of Paul,” 110.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Gal 3:9, 29.

<sup>41</sup> Davies, *The Gospel and the Land*, 170. Possibly taking his cue from Paul, the writer of John’s Gospel also addresses the question of who what it means be called ‘children of Abraham’ in light of the Incarnation. See Mary L. Coloe, “Like Father, Like Son: The Role of Abraham in Tabernacles – John 8:31-59,” *Pacifica* 12 (February 1999):1-12.

the means through which righteousness was not only achieved and maintained, but also expressed. A third strategy was to reshape Abraham's faith and to make it conform to Paul's own experience of the Risen Christ. Each of these had the effect of appreciably recasting the perception of the Land and associated Edenic imagery in Paul's New Testament theology accordingly.<sup>42</sup>

The recognisable disparities in Paul's treatment of the Law, whereby expressions in support of the abiding validity of some parts<sup>43</sup> appear to compete with stringent denunciations and criticisms of its general reliability and validity in light of the advent of Christ,<sup>44</sup> creates in itself an unstable platform on which to base an analysis of this sort. It can also be seen how Paul's reshaping of the meaning of his own Abrahamic inheritance can be subsumed under his broader treatment of the value of the Law to the newly Christianised disciples regardless of their background. Given the above, and despite the fact that it only partially solved the problem Paul posed himself – "Who are the true sons of Abraham?" – it is in the theology of Christ as the New Adam that Paul develops where the most readily accessible material, which allows his readers to begin to interpret the significance of Christ as Paul understands it, can be most clearly observed. In the service of Paul's belief in the beginning of a new age represented through the encompassing image of the New Creation, it is also a valuable heuristic whereby changes in understandings about Eden as expressed in the Old and New Testaments can be observed and assessed.

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<sup>42</sup> Davies, *The Gospel and the Land*, 167-182.

<sup>43</sup> For example, Rom 2:14-15; 7:12, 14; 13:8-9; 1 Cor 7:19; 2 Cor 5:1-11; Gal 5:6b; Eph 6:1-3.

<sup>44</sup> For example, Rom 3:19-20; 5:12-13; Gal 2:17-19; 4:21-31; and 7:1-6, 7-8.

## 6.2 Jesus as the New Adam in the Theology of Paul: Shifting Edenic Horizons.

Paul's Jewish inheritance, according to various sources, not only sees him culturally and religiously shaped through his relation with the Land, it also affirms "a sturdy belief in the resurrection of the body."<sup>45</sup> We see explicit confirmation of this in the Old Testament prophets (Isa 26:19; Dan 12:1-3)<sup>46</sup> although, according to Bauckman, the foundations for this belief, "are firmly laid in the Old Testament portrayal of God as Sovereign Creator, Righteous Judge, and Divine Warrior."<sup>47</sup> That is, the foundation of the Jewish understanding of the resurrection of the body can be located in the redemptive and creative dimensions of the 'kingship of God,' the manifest blessings of which were commonly represented through the symbols of Eden.<sup>48</sup> It is, moreover, a notion that substantially gives shape to the understanding of the Israelite God developed in the Pentateuch, the Psalms, and the Prophets.

In the context of the kingdom of God inaugurated by Christ, which Perrin argues also has its origins in Old Testament understandings pertaining to the 'kingship of God,'<sup>49</sup> Paul's detailed explanation in 1 Corinthians 15 and Romans 5:12-21 of the meaning of Christ's resurrection therefore immediately acquires Edenic associations. According to Macaskill, these associations are so strong that they, "reverberate through these verses."<sup>50</sup> In both its eschatological and material dimensions, then, the interpretation of Jesus' death and

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<sup>45</sup> Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, "1 Corinthians," in G.K. Beale and D.A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 743.

<sup>46</sup> See also Ezek. 37: 1-14 which uses the image of bodily resurrection as a metaphor for national restoration. Other texts, according to Ciampa and Rosner, "also imply a belief in life after death but their exegesis is more controversial." Ciampa and Rosner, "1 Corinthians," 744.

<sup>47</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, "1 Corinthians," 743.

<sup>48</sup> See, Ch. 3, "Eden, *Hesed*, and the Desire for God," 3.1, Eden and *Hesed*; and Ch. 5, "Eden and Wilderness," Introduction.

<sup>49</sup> Norman Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom: Symbol and Metaphor in New Testament Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 16-34.

<sup>50</sup> Macaskill, "Paradise in the New Testament," 66.

resurrection offered in Paul's theology presented the hope of life renewed through Christ<sup>51</sup> which had an extant and active memory of Eden as its foundation. In this sense the use of Edenic imagery that elsewhere in various Old Testament and apocryphal texts is used to articulate the presence of a New Creation is, in its presence in the New Testament, a natural extension that conforms to Paul's own understanding of the eschaton. And just as Christ is risen in the Spirit, so Eden is too, a notion that finds fullest and final expression in the New Testament in the writer of Revelation's comparison between the Church, glorified in the Spirit, as the new Jerusalem (Rev 21: 1-4; 9-27; 22:1-5). Indeed, according to Macaskill, the presentation of Christ in these terms, "places the Eden story at the heart of Christian soteriology."<sup>52</sup>

In establishing his theology of the resurrection, then, with a double emphasis on both the future and the present, Paul can be seen not only to take the image of Jesus as the second Adam who, through perfect obedience to the will of the Father,<sup>53</sup> achieved the exalted end for which all humans were fundamentally created.<sup>54</sup> It also showed his readers, "how human beings may live when they are transformed and delivered from the power of sin introduced in to the human race by the first Adam."<sup>55</sup> In doing so Paul uses the Edenic imagery of the Old Testament to provide the first example of what will happen to all believers not just at the end of time, but also in the moment of each person dying and coming alive in Christ: "For as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ" (1 Cor 15:22-23).

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<sup>51</sup> Macaskill, "Paradise in the New Testament," 66. Cf. 2 Cor 4:6.

<sup>52</sup> Macaskill, "Paradise in the New Testament," 65.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Mk 14:36; Mt 26:39; Lk 22:42; Jn 5:30; 10:17-18.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Isa 52:13-15.

<sup>55</sup> Jerry J. Walls, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, "Introduction" (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 5.

In moving thus, from metaphor (15:20) to typology,<sup>56</sup> Paul subsequently extends the use of Edenic imagery by focussing on the differences between Adam and Christ. He does so by referring back to the Jewish feast of *Shavuot*, or Pentecost, where the first portion, or ‘first fruits,’ of the crop (*Bikkurim*), symbolically rendered through Edenic imagery, is offered in thanksgiving to God.<sup>57</sup> “As such the term signifies the pledge of the remainder, and concomitantly the assurance of the full harvest... the first instalment of that part which includes, as by synecdoche, the whole.”<sup>58</sup> In choosing the metaphor of *Shavuot*, then, Paul uses an image that is foundationally Edenic to underline the link between the fate of humanity and the fate of Christ.<sup>59</sup>

In using the reference to the ‘first fruits’ in this manner, Paul takes not only the threads of the Adamic myth, which the reader is to assume his audience at Corinth has reasonable familiarity, but weaves them in the fullness of Edenic imagery, over and against any surrounding or residual pagan understanding opposed to the belief of bodily resurrection<sup>60</sup> that might have led some of his readers to believe that their faith was “in vain.”<sup>61</sup> By implication the whole of the blessings of which the metaphor speaks, the first fruits that find expression culturally and religiously in Edenic imagery, is the full blessing of Eden, embodied in Christ. Importantly, however, Christ, as the New Adam who has fulfilled the will of the Father rather than deny it, as the old Adam had done previously, offers these blessings in the context of promise rather than loss (1 Cor 15:21). This is an understanding that finds fullest expression in the Synoptic Gospels in

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<sup>56</sup> Cf. Rom 5:12-19.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Deut 8:8.

<sup>58</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, “1 Corinthians,” 743. Citing de Boer (1988:109).

<sup>59</sup> Cf. 1 Cor 15:15-19

<sup>60</sup> Especially Greco-Roman philosophy which expressed “a thorough going scepticism regarding any place for the body in the afterlife.” Ciampa and Rosner, “1 Corinthians,” 743.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. 1 Cor 15:1-2, 14, 17, 19, 58.

the metaphor of the kingdom of God, wherein Jesus' message and his person are inextricable.<sup>62</sup>

These changes are amplified by Paul's extension of the metaphor of 'sowing' and 'harvesting' that he initiates with the reference to the first fruits described above. As Minear recounts, Paul's use of the term 'sowing' caused, and continues to cause, considerable confusion. He argues that Paul's own frustration at this lack of understanding<sup>63</sup> may be located in the misperception of the 'new life' promised to all in Christ's death and resurrection, that is, where the botanical allusion of the 'seed' is taken too far. Paul's response to this is as emphatic as it is abrupt: "What you sow does not come to life" (15:36). As Minear explains:

When a seed is planted in the soil it sprouts and comes to life in a new form – a grain of wheat producing nothing but wheat. All that is far from the thrust of Paul's concern. The *life* that he was concerned with was the gift of God through Christ. Just as the act of sowing (and dying) involved many participants (God, Christ, the Spirit, the apostles, the believers), so too, the "coming to life" was far different from the natural germination of any grain of wheat (cf. John 4:37; 12:24-25). Even further from Paul's mind was any correlation between sowing and the act of burying a friend's corpse. Because the choice of a body belongs to God, the "transubstantiation" of mortal sowing into celestial glory is a mystery that mortals cannot penetrate, and the effort to do so is presumptuous as well as futile.<sup>64</sup>

Despite the future oriented eschatology inherent in the image of 'sowing,' Paul, as in 1 Corinthians 15:22-23, elsewhere argues that this transformation is not limited to the time to come. Rather, "... all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the

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<sup>62</sup> David F. Ford, *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 179.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. 1 Cor 15: 36.

<sup>64</sup> Minear, *Christians and the New Creation*, 72.

Spirit” (2 Cor 3:18). The actual physical place of resurrection, then, although conceived of in Edenic terms as a synecdoche for covenantal Israel, was judged by Paul not only of no consequence but also, based on Paul’s own experience, as a potential distraction to the apprehension of the full meaning of the Christ event. Notwithstanding Paul’s tentative exploration of Eden as Heaven in 2 Corinthians 12:1-4, that most commentators interpret as ironical at best<sup>65</sup> or, in some accounts, intentional parody,<sup>66</sup> it would appear that Paul’s dominant emphasis of the meaning of ‘paradise’ – the post-Septuagint translation of גַּן־עֵדֶן (gan-‘ēden) – as an eschatological category, substantially falls on its realised nature.

The land of Israel, then, although traditionally constituted in Edenic terms, is no longer the locus of personal transformation or holiness, as it was in the Old Testament. The place of holiness, for Paul, becomes located instead in each individual who opens their hearts to Christ, as the Edenic Lord.<sup>67</sup> It is in Christ, through the Holy Spirit, that this occurs. The Edenic horizon has clearly shifted from Israel to the new community of believers, transferred from the sign of the kingship of God to the manifestation of the kingdom of God expressed in both its eschatological and material forms under the rubric of the New Creation.<sup>68</sup>

The relationship between Edenic imagery and the kingdom of God will be explored in greater detail in the following chapter. Before doing so it is appropriate to develop further the analysis of Paul’s theology and its relationship to Edenic imagery through examining his use of the *hieros gamos*, or sacred marriage, motif in his understanding of the relationship between Christ and the Church. The

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<sup>65</sup> Macaskill, “Paradise in the New Testament,” 71.

<sup>66</sup> Macaskill, “Paradise in the New Testament,” 71.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Gal 6:15-16.

<sup>68</sup> It is generally recognised that Paul makes relatively little specific reference to the kingdom of God (For example, Rom 14:17; 1 Cor 4:20; 6:9, 10; 15:24, 50; Gal 5:21; Eph 5:5.). Nevertheless the radically restructured world in Christ that he presents as evidence of the New Creation gives expression to the theme first presented in the Gospels.

analysis of this particular motif will subsequently be extended through consideration of its presence in Revelation 12:1-17.

### **6.3 The *hieros gamos* and the New Creation: Eden Re-imagined.**

In 2 Corinthians 4:6 Paul compares conversion in Christ, the new life emerging from the ‘dead,’ to that of the first day of creation, when God commanded light to shine out of the darkness. Unlike Adamic Christology, expounded at length in the Pauline texts but limited to just a few overt instances in the Gospels,<sup>69</sup> this notion of the New Creation through Christ can be identified across a range of New Testament writings. For some, this single theme encapsulates the major concerns of the New Testament as a whole,<sup>70</sup> of which the comparisons between Jesus and Adam is the thematic sub-set most readily identifiable by both ancient and contemporary commentators alike.

Paul Minear alerts the reader to twelve occasions which, when considered canonically, point to the presence of the theme of the New Creation as a dominant motif framing the Christian story.<sup>71</sup> It is not the intention here to analyse or discuss each of the examples Minear provides. Some are extensions of each other – for example the serpent imagery attributed in Matthew’s Gospel to both John the Baptist (Mt 3:1-8) and Jesus (23:33). Some have already been incorporated into consideration of the presence of Edenic imagery in Paul’s theology described above. However, there are also other instances of the presence of the motif of the New Creation, with its associated Edenic

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<sup>69</sup> Lk 3:38; Jn 1:1.

<sup>70</sup> To the degree that “the apostles measured time by the vocation of God’s people – its inception, course and consummation – not by solar or lunar calendars.” Minear, *Christians and the New Creation*, 124.

<sup>71</sup> Matt 3:1-8; 5:5; 6:9-10; 23:33; Mk 8:31, 34; 10:16; Acts 13:39-41; Gal 2:19b-20; Heb 6:4-6; 1 Jn 3:11-12; 1 Pet 2; 9-10.



imagery, not treated by Minear, that are at least as compelling as those examples already cited, notwithstanding their contested status.<sup>72</sup>

These instances, which emphasise the *hieros gamos* or ‘sacred marriage’ motif as symbolic of new life in Christ, predominantly represented in Paul’s theology of the Church as the Bride of Christ, notably developed in Ephesians 5, further draw into question the degree to which Paul’s expressed attitude of marginalising or superseding Old Testament traditions in favour of a universalism<sup>73</sup> is supported by his own rhetoric. That is to say, insofar as the images of a sacred ‘marriage’ between God and his bride, Israel, are integral to Jewish understandings of their relationship with God,<sup>74</sup> their presence in Paul’s developing theology at once suggest not only Paul’s cultural indebtedness to his Jewish roots, but also the power, resiliency, and cultural appropriateness of this imagery to express the lived experience of emerging Christian faith.

The association between the *hieros gamos*, and Edenic imagery, previously discussed in Chapter Four of this thesis in relation to the Song of Solomon, Prophetic writing, and in the mysterious bond between God and Eve described in Gen 4:1, can be assessed in the New Testament in this context. The reiteration and extension of this theme in various forms in the Book of Revelation suggests its widespread acceptance amongst early Christian writers and audiences alike. The analogy of “the woman clothed with the sun” (Rev 12:1) to Mary, the mother of Jesus, as the new Eve, which has enjoyed strong support in Catholic tradition, if treated with caution or ambivalence by a number of scholars,<sup>75</sup> is of particular interest. This is especially so, it

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<sup>72</sup> In this context Gunton, for example, cites an article by C.E.B Cranfield which argues for, “the uniqueness and authenticity of the accounts of the virgin birth of Jesus over against those who would dismiss them by assimilating them to patterns of contemporary religious thought.” Gunton, *Christ and Creation*, 27.

<sup>73</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Der antirömische Affekt,” in *The von Balthasar Reader*, ed. by Medardf Kehl and Werner Löser; transl. Robert J. Daly and Fred Lawrence (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1982), 223.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Isa 54:1; Jer 3:14-20; Ezek 16; Hos 2:2,7, 19-20.

<sup>75</sup> Adela Yarbro Collins, “The Apocalypse (Revelation),” in Brown, Fitzmyer, and Murphy, eds. *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 1008b. See also John Paul II.

is argued, in the context of the woman's actions contributing to the undoing of the "curse of the ground" initiated in Adam and Eve's disobedience towards God (Gen 3:15-20; 4:10-11). In doing so the possibility of the return to Eden inaugurated in Christ is further consolidated.

### 6.3.1 Paul, Eden, and the Church as the Bride of Christ.

The clearest example of the *hieros gamos* in Paul's writing is to be found in Ephesians 5:25b-27:

<sup>25</sup>Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, <sup>26</sup>in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, <sup>27</sup>so as to present the church to himself in splendour, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind – yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish.

In seeking to substantiate a view that the theological assumptions contained in the passage relating to Christ's love for the church, and his death for her, have their roots beyond the early Christian communities, Sampley compares the themes to other Pauline passages such as Ephesians 5:2b and Galatians 2:20.<sup>76</sup> On the basis of this comparison he concludes that the love ascribed to Christ in the passages alludes to formulations prior to the New Testament, in particular in the portraits of the marriage relationship between God and Israel found in Ezekiel and the Song of Solomon that were subsequently appropriated in Paul's emergent Christian theology. Sampley argues that:

Whereas 5:25b – 'Christ loved the church and gave herself up for her' – may on one level be understood apart from marriage imagery and language, 5:26-7 may not be so understood. These two verses contain a complex of ideas related primarily to marriage, and they exhibit certain

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Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae* (1995), 103; and Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, 32-33.

<sup>76</sup> A related linguistic formulation can also be found in Romans 8:32 which refers to God in a similar manner but is insufficiently precise to satisfy Sampley's evidentiary criteria. Sampley, "And the Two Shall Become One Flesh," 36.

features and characteristics that may be traced directly to two specific OT writings, namely Ezekiel and Song of Songs.<sup>77</sup>

Sampley identifies that the *hieros gamos* themes can be readily found elsewhere in the Old Testament,<sup>78</sup> analysis that I have also conducted earlier in this thesis.<sup>79</sup> But it is in these two texts, Ezekiel (especially Ezekiel 16), and The Song of Solomon, where he argues that the most comprehensive and informative parallels to Ephesians 5: 25b- 27 can be found.<sup>80</sup> In the first instance it is Ezekiel 16 that receives Sampley's critical attention, "since its context is similar to Eph 5:21-33 in that both treat of marriage and share some verbal parallels."<sup>81</sup> Broadly speaking, and in contrast with Jeremiah and Hosea, whose emphasis in their treatment of the *hieros gamos* is predominantly on the unfaithful character of the bride/Israel, it is the extended detail of God's paternal care in response to the bride's early desolation, and in her subsequent emergence as a young woman *sans pareil*, that warrants particular consideration. In particular Sampley draws the reader's attention to Ezekiel 16:8-14, where the covenantal relationship between God and Israel is expressed through the metaphor of marriage vows. Additionally, and most importantly in the context of Eph. 5:25b-27, the unblemished purity of the bride is also emphasised:

<sup>8</sup>I passed by you again and looked on you; you were at the age for love. I spread the edge of my cloak over you, and covered your nakedness: I pledged myself to you and entered into a covenant with you, says the LORD GOD, and you became mine. <sup>9</sup>Then I bathed you with water and washed off the blood from you, and anointed you with oil. <sup>10</sup>I clothed you with embroidered cloth and with sandals of fine leather; I bound you in fine linen and covered you with rich fabric. <sup>11</sup>I adorned you with ornaments: I put bracelets on your arms, a chain on your neck, <sup>12</sup>a ring on your nose, ear-rings in your ears, and a beautiful crown

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<sup>77</sup> Sampley, "And the Two Shall Become One Flesh," 37.

<sup>78</sup> For example, Jeremiah, Hosea, and Amos.

<sup>79</sup> See Ch. 4, "Eden and Matrimonial Symbolism."

<sup>80</sup> Sampley, "And the Two Shall Become One Flesh," 38.

<sup>81</sup> Sampley, "And the Two Shall Become One Flesh," 38.

upon your head. <sup>13</sup>You were adorned with gold and silver, while your clothing was of fine linen, rich fabric, and embroidered cloth. You had choice flour and honey and oil for food. You grew exceedingly beautiful, fit to be a queen. <sup>14</sup>Your fame spread among the nations on account of your beauty, for it was perfect because of my splendour that I had bestowed on you, says the LORD GOD.

Ezekiel 16:8-14.

Sampley appropriately recognises the correspondence between the image of the exquisite young bride in Ezekiel and the “spotless purity and splendour” of the bride, that is, the Church, presented in Ephesians.<sup>82</sup> Notably, it is not the prior impurity or lack of splendour of the foundling Israel that is the emphasis of Ezekiel 16, but rather the beauty of the bride that she becomes, glorified by God (16:14). Similarly, in Ephesians (5:26-27), the splendour and purity of the Church, Paul asserts, are to be the Church’s ‘insignia’<sup>83</sup> in the world.

Sampley further identifies another parallel between these two passages in the affinity between Ezekiel 16:9 – “Then I bathed you with water and washed off the blood from you...” and Ephesians 5:26 – “...in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word...” In making this comparison Paul extends the existing interrelationship between Jerusalem and the temple to Jerusalem and the Church.<sup>84</sup> Sampley contends that:

The interplay of conceptions of Jerusalem and the church in Galatians, Hebrews and Revelation points up the prevalence of these understandings in the early Christian communities, and probably indicates that the author of Ephesians has here taken over earlier church or Christian traditions and informed them with further details from Ezekiel 16.<sup>85</sup>

On the basis of the analysis already conducted in this thesis, it could be argued that Paul is not so much augmenting these earlier Church

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<sup>82</sup> Sampley, *“And the Two Shall Become One Flesh,”* 40.

<sup>83</sup> Sampley, *“And the Two Shall Become One Flesh,”* 40.

<sup>84</sup> Rev 21 cf. Baruch 5:1-9.

<sup>85</sup> Sampley, *“And the Two Shall Become One Flesh,”* 42.

understandings of the *hieros gamos*, as appropriating them for his own purposes. Concomitantly, these ancient understandings declare a consistent relationship between the imagery of the temple and that of Eden, most powerfully expressed in Ezekiel 47:1-12, the climax to which Ezekiel inexorably builds. Without being specific Sampley alludes to this in his reference to Galatians, Hebrews, and most notably Revelation<sup>86</sup> wherein, in a reprise of Ezekiel 47:1-12, the new Jerusalem, in its repristinated form, “prepared as a bride adorned for her husband,” (Rev 21:2, 9) is once again represented through Edenic imagery (Rev 22:1-5).

The relationship between the presence of the *hieros gamos* in Ezekiel, the subject of Sampley’s analysis, and Edenic imagery is further consolidated when the reader’s focus in Ezekiel 16 is drawn away from a quantitative emphasis on the purity and glorification of the bride, to that of God’s mercy and forgiveness, the real focus of the passage (Ezek 16:59-63). Here, as elsewhere, that mercy is manifest not just in the claim of reconciliation, but in the images by which the fullness of God’s *hesed* towards Israel is illustrated. In particular, and once more reflecting the narrative tension between the images of wilderness and those of Eden that structures and animates Old Testament narrative, the ‘wilderness’ of the self-inflicted alienation of Israel is replaced with the blessings of the eternal covenant, already shown in this thesis to be regularly and consistently represented in the Old Testament through Edenic imagery.<sup>87</sup>

Although not stated explicitly we find in the *hieros gamos* of Ephesians 5:25b-27 a similar absolution obtainable for the bride,<sup>88</sup> in whose body the faithful become ‘members’ through the ‘marriage’ of the Church to Christ (cf. Eph 30-32). As such, the blessings of Eden become available to the faithful through the sacrifice of the Edenic

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<sup>86</sup> Sampley, “*And the Two Shall Become One Flesh*,” 42.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Ezek 17:22-24.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Jn 3:16.

Lord, the water of life,<sup>89</sup> “that flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb” (Rev 22:1) from the new Jerusalem, the new Eden, into the world. For Paul, this is the essence of the New Creation, the kingdom of God, the dimensions of which Paul spells out in a variety of ways, but no less than in the radically reconfigured relations between husband and wife, children and parents, and masters and slaves outlined by Paul in the wider social framework of his specific theology (Eph 5:33-6:9), through which he builds the image of the Church.<sup>90</sup>

As indicated above Sampley also mobilises the imagery of the Song of Solomon (Song of Songs) to draw out the meaning of the *hieros gamos* in Ephesians. The relationship between the imagery of the lovers in the Song of Solomon and its various equivalences not only to human love, but also to that between God and Israel, and to Jerusalem and the temple, is mediated through Edenic imagery, and has already been described at length in this thesis.<sup>91</sup> Further to this, drawing on Jewish tradition that equates the imagery of the Song of Solomon with the Holy of Holies of the temple,<sup>92</sup> Sampley also argues for a recognisable equivalence between Israel, the bride, and God, the lover. According to Sampley this equivalence was transferred by the early Church Fathers, such as Hippolytus, Origen, Jerome, and Augustine, to Christ and the Church. Ephesians 5:21-33, then, can be understood to stand in a mediating position between the early church Fathers and their understanding of Ezekiel-Song of Songs.<sup>93</sup> Indeed, for these early Christian theologians, “Ephesians made the allegorical

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<sup>89</sup> Cf. Rev 21:6.

<sup>90</sup> For a full explication of this transformation, in the context of then existing social mores see, Sarah Ruden, *Paul Among the People: The Apostle Reinterpreted and Reimagined in His Own Time* (New York: Image Books, 2010).

<sup>91</sup> See Ch. 4, “Eden and Matrimonial Symbolism,” 4.3 Matrimonial Symbolism, Eden, and the Song of Solomon.

<sup>92</sup> For example, Yadaim 3.5 of *The Mishnah*, relates how Akiba was reported to have fought for maintaining the importance of the Song of Solomon on the basis that: “All the ages are not worth the day on which the Song of Songs was given to Israel, for all the Writings are holy, but the Song of Songs is the Holy of Holies.” Sampley, “*And the Two Shall Become One Flesh*,” 42.

<sup>93</sup> Sampley, “*And the Two Shall Become One Flesh*,” 45.

interpretation of Song of Songs easier, not more difficult.”<sup>94</sup> That may be so, but as will be shown through consideration of Revelation 12:1-17, there is still much in the meaning of the relationship between Israel and God represented through the matrimonial imagery of the *hieros gamos*, which eluded Christian commentary, ancient and modern alike. More to the point, Paul’s use of *hieros gamos* symbolism points to the embedded significance of Edenic imagery in facilitating shifting understandings in New Testament theology of God’s salvific action in the world.

### **6.3.2 Eden and Mary as the Second Eve: Revelation 12:1-17 and the Unbinding of the Curse of the Ground.**

The *hieros gamos* motif, with its associated Edenic imagery, used by Paul in the New Testament to express the underlying fecundity and joy of the New Creation, can also be found in the theology surrounding Mary, the mother of Christ, as the Second Eve.

According to Paul Minear the motif of Mary as the Second Eve, in the form of the Queen of Heaven, can be observed in Chapter 12 of the Book of Revelation where what are otherwise obscure and variously interpreted verses – those of Revelation 12:15-16<sup>95</sup> specifically, and Revelation 12:1-17 more generally – find clarity through her actions. “Pregnant and ... crying out in birth pangs” (12:2), she subsequently gives birth to a son, “a male child, who is to rule<sup>96</sup> all the nations with a rod of iron” (12: 5), and whose divine presence facilitates the undoing of the curse of the ground (12:16) instituted in Genesis 3:15-

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<sup>94</sup> Sampley, “*And the Two Shall Become One Flesh*,” 46.

<sup>95</sup> “Then from his mouth the serpent poured water like a river after the woman, to sweep her away with the flood. But the earth came to help the woman; it opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth” (Rev 12:15-16).

<sup>96</sup> The NRSV cites the alternative translation of ‘rule,’ from the Greek, as ‘*shepherd*,’ consistent with the interpretation of the “woman clothed with the sun” as the “True Israel,” an alternative interpretation of the image, who brings forth Christ, and who, after the completion of his earthly mission, that is to say, the fulfilment of the Covenant, ascends to heaven. (Cf. Ps 2:7-9; 46:6)

20,<sup>97</sup> and completed in Genesis 4:10-11, that condemned humankind to a life of physical hardship and alienation from God and each other. Indeed, Minear argues, following a lead provided by J.P.M. Sweet, that it is these verses in Genesis, “that dominates the whole of Revelation 12.”<sup>98</sup> In making this claim he asserts that no fewer than ten Genesis motifs may be found in Revelation 12:

... the role of the ancient serpent; the conflict between the serpent and the woman; the association of the serpent with the beasts of the earth; the conflict between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent; the injury done to the head of the serpent by the woman’s seed and the injury done to the woman’s seed by the serpent; the accent upon the act of giving birth and its painful character; the strategic use of the term brotherhood of blood, with the implicit contrasts between two brothers and their deaths; and the prominent, multiple, contrasted roles assigned to the mouth of the earth.<sup>99</sup>

The declaration of Eve, that she had “procreated a man with God,” (Gen 4:1) an interpretation that has previously been treated in Chapter Four of this thesis, could also be added to this list.<sup>100</sup> This clearly reveals more than just an aptitude on the part of the writer of Revelation in “associating the most ancient and the most recent” of murders.<sup>101</sup> Clearly John is attempting to reconcile human history, following the Fall, with the Christ event. Nevertheless, Minear’s enthusiasm for this relationship, and the identification with the image of the woman “clothed with the sun” (Rev 12:1) with Mary as the new Eve, whilst traditional in Roman Catholic interpretation,<sup>102</sup> is, as has been already remarked upon, not necessarily shared by other commentators. Beale, for example, suggests that whilst the image of the mother of Jesus may be “secondarily in mind,” the dominant relationship is between the “woman clothed with the sun” and the

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<sup>97</sup> Paul S. Minear, “Far as the Curse is Found: The Point of Revelation 15-16,” *Novum Testamentum* XXXIII, 1 (1991): 71-77.

<sup>98</sup> Minear, “Far as the Curse is Found,” 71. Citing Sweet, *Revelation* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979), 203.

<sup>99</sup> Minear, “Far as the Curse is Found,” 75. n.8.

<sup>100</sup> See Ch. 4, “Eden and Matrimonial Symbolism,” 4.1 Matrimonial Symbolism and Genesis 2-4.

<sup>101</sup> Minear, “Far as the Curse is Found,” 75.

<sup>102</sup> See n.75.



early community of faith from which emerged a Messianic leader.<sup>103</sup> There is, however, partial agreement with a number of scholars with respect to the presence and meaning of some other specific signs, symbols and analogies. Collins and Ford, along with Beale, conclude that the twelve stars with which the woman is crowned (12:1) suggest the twelve tribes of Israel, subsequently indicated in Christian theology, through a process of exegetical and typological additions and subtractions,<sup>104</sup> as the True Israel, the twelve Apostles, and the Church, in turn.<sup>105</sup> But beyond limited instances such as this there is widespread variation of interpretation of Revelation 12 in most commentaries, especially in relation to vv. 15-16, for which an agreed meaning seems to be elusive. Alternatively, critical engagement with these verses appears to be simply avoided.

Contextualised within the larger themes of Revelation, however, the image of the unbinding of the curse of the ground initiated by the blood of the brothers of the Lamb<sup>106</sup> is both consistent and logical. Indeed, in a preceding passage in Revelation John had conveyed clearly that the blessings of the new Jerusalem, expressed in the form of a new Eden, were now available to “the one” who “conquers” or “overcomes” (Rev 2:7), and for whom as a result God promises through his angelic emissary, “permission to eat from the tree of life that is in the paradise of God” (Rev 2:7).

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<sup>103</sup> G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 628. Early Christian commentary is varied on the matter, with interpretations consistent with the view expressed by Collins and John Paul II (for example, Oecumenius) competing with others that speak variously of its equivalence to the early Church, but little specifically in relation to Mary (Caesarius, Hippolytus, Methodius, Primasius, Tyconius, Victorinus). See William C. Weinrich, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament XII, Revelation* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 173-176.

<sup>104</sup> Insofar as the sources that the writer of Revelation uses for Chapter 12 were composed by non-Christian Jews, and subsequently appropriated by Christian communities. Collins, “The Apocalypse (Revelation),” 1008b.

<sup>105</sup> Collins, “The Apocalypse (Revelation),” 1008b; J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1975), 194-195; and G.K. Beale and D.A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 1122.

<sup>106</sup> Rev 12:11 cf. 12:16.

Such an interpretation offers interesting possibilities in the exegesis of other (possibly) related, and similarly unregarded passages. The mystery concerning Jesus writing on the ground, for example, described in John 8:1-11, in response to the dangerous question put to him by the Jewish authorities as to what he might regard as the appropriate punishment of a woman found in adultery (that is, did Jesus conform in his teaching to the Law of Moses?) is one such example. In this passage the reader is told that Jesus, after writing silently in the dirt while he listened to their question, straightened and confronted each of the authorities and other bystanders collectively with the challenge, “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her” (Jn 8:7). Jesus subsequently repeats the action of writing in the ground, an action qualified in commentary in the NRSV through reference to some sources which suggest that in doing so Jesus indicated, “the sins of each of them” (NRSV Jn 8:8 n. *h*). Understood through the specific lens of the ‘curse of the ground’ Genesis 3-4 gives a Scriptural context to Jesus’ accusation, beyond the limited possibilities offered by reference to passages such as Jeremiah 17:13. To the degree that almost all authorities consider Jn 8:7 to be a 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> C. inclusion<sup>107</sup> and marginalised accordingly, the interpretation derived from Revelation 12:16 offers fresh possibilities for understanding, especially in light of claims that the passage “preserves an authentic memory of an episode in the life of Jesus.”<sup>108</sup>

Be that as it may, Minear, in comparing the passage from Revelation 12:16 with Genesis 4:1-16, which immediately follows the curses of Genesis 3, observes that in both passages (Genesis 4:1-16 and Revelation 12:15-16), the earth is a significant actor in its own right.

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<sup>107</sup> See, for example, Beale and Carson, eds. *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 456; PHEME PERKINS, “The Gospel According to John,” in BROWN, FITZMYER, and MURPHY, eds., *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 965a; and A. E. HARVEY, *A Companion to the New Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 229–230.

<sup>108</sup> HARVEY, *A Companion to the New Testament*, 329. See also BRENDAN BYRNE, *Life Abounding: A Reading of John’s Gospel* (Strathfield: St Paul’s Publications, 2014), 4, 142.

More than just a witness to God's saving power, the earth is shown to actively facilitate that power, demonstrably undoing of the 'curse of the ground' by which 'the woman,' as one of the inheritors of that curse, was herself burdened.<sup>109</sup> As such, "the earth that had once been her enemy had become her protector and the protector of all her seed who were now able to overcome the flood of deceptions."<sup>110</sup>

The preceding verse (Rev 12:14) that uses imagery paralleling the liberation of the Hebrew slaves from Israel, in which God in His mercy promised to "bear them up on Eagle's wings,"<sup>111</sup> places the woman, after her child had been taken up to the throne of God, into the wilderness where she is protected and "nourished" by God for one thousand, two hundred and sixty days (12:6, 14), that is, until after the restoration of Jerusalem following judgement.<sup>112</sup>

Miner goes further to suggest that the release from the curse may also be implied by the reference, in v.1, to the moon under the feet of the woman, in that it signifies the subjection of a recognisable and familiar symbol of "darkness and the night."<sup>113</sup> A more satisfactory explanation in the context of the unbinding of the 'curse of the ground' may be to suggest that the subjugation of the moon by the woman, the chief and only sign of God in Chapter 12, amongst six alternative representations of evil,<sup>114</sup> offers an image of her ultimate dominance not just over the heavens but over creation in its entirety.<sup>115</sup> This enables, in the action that follows, the conditions for the New Jerusalem to be established on earth,<sup>116</sup> the climax to which

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<sup>109</sup> Miner, "Far as the Curse is Found," 75.

<sup>110</sup> Miner, "Far as the Curse is Found," 76.

<sup>111</sup> Cf. Ex 19:4

<sup>112</sup> Cf. Dan 9:20-27.

<sup>113</sup> Miner, "Far as the Curse is Found," 76. Cf. Ford, *Revelation*, 195-196.

<sup>114</sup> Ford, *Revelation*, 195.

<sup>115</sup> Cf. Thistleton, who describes the context of the presence of 'Leviathan' in the OT (Job 41:1; Ps 74:24; 104:26; Isa 51:9), or the 'sea serpent' or 'dragon' in the NT (Rev. 12:3-17; 20:2) as underlining, "not divine struggle but absolute sovereignty." Thistleton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, 201.

<sup>116</sup> Cf. Rev 21.

the Book of Revelation builds. Considered in this manner, Revelation 12 does not present the beginning of a dissociated or unrelated “book of signs,”<sup>117</sup> which follows the earlier chapters depicting the fraught material and spiritual circumstances of the Johannine communities in the early Christian world. Instead, it offers a powerful lens through which to observe and appreciate a specific theme of the writer of Revelation that deals with the means whereby the faithful can properly re-enter Eden,<sup>118</sup> John’s persistent and overarching image for the New Jerusalem and the new Temple,<sup>119</sup> with the Christian Church at its heart.

In ancient Judaism a permanent antidote to Adam and Eve’s transgression lies in adherence to *Torah*;<sup>120</sup> for Christianity, as represented in this instance by the Johannine writer of Revelation, the means by which reunification with God can be obtained lies in the ‘blood of the Lamb,’ that flows out into the four corners of the world. It is a reconciliation assisted, as it were, according to the events described in Revelation 12:1-17, by Mary’s action as the new Eve removing potential impediments to its efficacy. This is not to suggest that Christ’s sacrifice was not sufficient, in and of itself, for human salvation, but that in the context of the early Church, Mary’s role in Revelation 12:1-17 as both the new Eve and *theotokos* partakes of that divinity, further consolidating both the possibility of the return to Eden as well as the foundation for her own increasingly sacramental identity.

In presenting the imagery of Eve and Mary in the manner described above, Minear argues, the writer of Revelation also shows his facility in associating the agency of two of the most significant women in history.<sup>121</sup> Still, as suggested previously, many commentators are unhappy with this presumption. Beale, for example, dismisses the

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<sup>117</sup> Ford, *Revelation*, 195.

<sup>118</sup> Cf. Rev 11:19.

<sup>119</sup> Cf. Bar 5:1-9.

<sup>120</sup> Morris, “Exiled from Eden,” 145-147.

<sup>121</sup> Cf. Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, 39-52.

notion of a possible association between “the woman clothed with the sun” and Mary, the mother of Christ as the new Eve, contending that the potential range of the imagery of Revelation 12:1 “goes beyond anything that could have been said about Mary and her children.”<sup>122</sup> However, within the Jewish tradition that so powerfully informs the symbolism of Revelation, the reality of almost limitless interpretation in midrashic commentary<sup>123</sup> is not academic speculation or theory<sup>124</sup> but an implicit understanding that “as believers (or not as the case may be) our lives are textual eisegesis and not vice versa; ... the interpretation of the text is worked out in individual and collective histories.”<sup>125</sup> That is, it is worked out phenomenologically, in the lived experience and traditions of the faithful.

This is not a claim for a radical relativism, but rather a recognition of the multivalent characteristics of the imagery used by the writers of the Scriptures, both Jewish and Christian. Certainly Paul the Apostle, anticipating and perhaps laying the foundation of Revelation 12:2 through his own referencing of Genesis 3, and whose theology straddles Jewish and emergent Christian perspectives, declares that, “We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies” (Romans 8: 22-23). The birth of the kingly child, then, to “the woman clothed in the sun,” who was “to rule all the nations with a rod of iron” (Rev. 12: 2, 5), and who was subsequently “taken to God and his throne,” (12:5), also points to the recapitulation of the narrative of the birth of Eve’s first child, a universal man similarly procreated “with the help of the LORD.”<sup>126</sup> In this instance, however, rather than introducing sin in to the world

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<sup>122</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 629.

<sup>123</sup> Morris, “Exiled from Eden,” 119.

<sup>124</sup> Cf. Derrida’s contention that there lies an inherent instability in the endlessly repeatable characteristic of all signs, such that alterity, the possibility of alternative interpretations, is a structural feature of such representations. See Ch. 1, 1.2, “Jacques Derrida and the sign.”

<sup>125</sup> Morris, “Exiled from Eden,” 146.

<sup>126</sup> Cf. Gen 4:1.

(Gen 4: 8), the divine King, through his loving sacrifice and the wisdom of the Spirit, undoes that sin. The liberation from “the serpent,” revealed in the verses of Revelation 12, through the precarious birth of the holy child to Mary, as the new Eve, initiates the possibility of that redemption. The salvific effect of that event reverberates such that it fundamentally supports the hopes of all those who have suffered, or continue to suffer, for their faith.<sup>127</sup> In doing so a door is opened that “no one is able to shut,”<sup>128</sup> and the blessings of Eden once more enjoyed by all those who, in righteousness, enter the temple of God.<sup>129</sup>

### **Conclusion.**

This chapter introduced the second part of the thesis. It began to analyse and interpret how understandings pertaining to Eden previously developed and expressed in the Hebrew Scriptures were appropriated, integrated, and transformed in various ways by the early Church. In particular, these understandings were shown to be reframed in the New Testament in the context of the perceived reality of Christ as the incarnate son of God. Through the inauguration of the New Creation the real possibility of a return to the graced relationship enjoyed by people with God before the Fall, that Paul argued was unobtainable through the Law, was now a reality. The developing theology born of the transformational presence of Christ in the world subsequently conveyed not only the beliefs of the emerging Christian faith but also its own developing sense of identity, separate from the Judaism from which it emanated.

The writing of two key figures were examined – that of Paul, and that of the author of the Book of Revelation, both of whom sought to convey their understanding of the New Creation brought about

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<sup>127</sup> Cf. Rev 6:9-11; 20:4.

<sup>128</sup> Rev 3:8 cf. 2:7.

<sup>129</sup> Rev 3:12.

through Christ's sacrificial death and resurrection, by explicitly referencing Eden through symbol, narrative and motif.

The exploration of the presence and function of Edenic imagery in New Testament theology will be continued in the next chapter. There, the representation of Edenic imagery will be examined in the context of the Gospels. In particular John's representation of the incarnate Jesus as the human manifestation of Wisdom, through his use of Edenic imagery, will be discussed. The relationship between the New Testament concept of the kingdom of God, as it is manifest in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, and the use of Edenic imagery and associated symbols to convey these authors' understanding of the Kingdom will also be a feature of this analysis.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN: JESUS, EDEN AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD.**

In this chapter consideration of the presence of Edenic imagery in the New Testament is initially focussed on the belief of early Christian communities that identified Jesus with Old Testament understandings of Sophia, or the Wisdom or Word of God, active in the world. It is argued that it is in John's Gospel, in particular, where this representation, that traditionally equates Wisdom to *Torah*, is most creatively developed and expressed. John's conveying of Jesus as the embodiment of *Torah* will also be examined in the context of the presence in the New Testament of the symbols of Eden. The use of Edenic imagery by Luke and Matthew to project their understanding of the uniquely Christian concept of the kingdom of God, a notion that also has implicit connections to Wisdom, is also scrutinised. Specific interpretations of the parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk 15:11-32), that draw the reader's attention to the ecstatic abundance and mercy of God, and Jesus' use of the 'sign of Jonah' (Mt 12:38-42; 16:1-4) as a means of both validating his miracles, as well as foreshadowing the Resurrection as the crowning sign the New Creation, is a feature of this analysis.

### **7.1 Eden and Jesus as the Wisdom of God in the Gospel of John.**

For the nascent Christian church the person of Jesus is immediately associated not only with the God who created the universe, but also the One who also sustains and nourishes that created world; for God takes both pleasure as well as a jealous interest in every aspect of that Creation.<sup>1</sup> This recognition can be identified not just through the explicit comparisons between Jesus as creator and empowerer evident in the Gospels<sup>2</sup> but implicitly in pre-existent hymns or parts of hymns

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<sup>1</sup> Edwards, *Jesus the Wisdom of God*, 33. Cf. Job 28:23-27; Wis 6:12-16; 7: 16-22; 8:2-8; Sir 24:1-22; Bar 3:9-37.

<sup>2</sup> Most notably Jn 1:1-18; but also Mt 11:19, 27; 23:34 cf. Lk 7:35; 11:49; and 13:34-35.



sung in liturgical assemblies that can be found scattered through the Pauline letters.<sup>3</sup> These liturgical fragments speak of the acceptance of the co-equivalence between Jesus and God, or something like equivalence, among these groups prior to the idea's subsequent appearance in the canonical texts.<sup>4</sup>

It was this recognition that consolidated the belief that Jesus of Nazareth, whom God had raised up, was precisely the pre-existent Wisdom, or Word of God, an understanding expressed so emphatically in the prologue in John's Gospel, and in the "I am" statements that follow.<sup>5</sup> It also serves to link Jesus, through the action of Wisdom in the world, to the blessings of the kingdom of God inaugurated in Christ. Indeed, these early expressions of belief form a bridge between those understandings and the theology of the Incarnation.<sup>6</sup> Bruce Vawter has argued that the earliest Christologies may have had their very foundations in these associations.<sup>7</sup> Jack Suggs suggests further that those connected to the 'Q' or 'Sayings of Jesus' tradition, "tended to see Jesus' significance largely in terms of his function as Sophia's finest and final representative."<sup>8</sup> It is clear, then, that those passages in the Gospels where the association between Jesus and Wisdom is most pronounced drew heavily on the rich and extant meanings of that context.<sup>9</sup>

These associations can be found in the writing of Luke through the voice of Jesus who declares that, "...wisdom is vindicated by all her children" (Lk 7:35). Matthew, significantly, changes the word

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<sup>3</sup> Phil 2:6-11; Col 1:15-20; Eph 2:14-16; 1 Tim 3:16; 1 Pet 3:18-22; Heb 1:3; Jn 1:1-18.

<sup>4</sup> Edwards, *Jesus the Wisdom of God*, 33.

<sup>5</sup> Jn 1:1-18; 6:51 ("the bread of life"); 8:12; 9:5 ("the light of the world"); 10:7,9 ("the door"); 10:11,14 ("the good shepherd"); 11:25 ("the resurrection and the life"); 14:6 ("the way, the truth, and the life"); and 15:1 ("the true vine").

<sup>6</sup> Cf. 1 Cor 1:22-24, 30-31.

<sup>7</sup> Bruce Vawter, *This Man Jesus: An Essay Towards a New Testament Christology* (New York: Doubleday, 1973), 153-154.

<sup>8</sup> Edwards, *Jesus the Wisdom of God*, 40.

<sup>9</sup> Edwards, *Jesus the Wisdom of God*, 37.

“children” to “deeds” (Mt 11:19), so that Jesus becomes perfectly identified with Wisdom through his actions. From this the reader can extrapolate that Wisdom, effectively summarised as the communication of God, or God’s “extension of self”<sup>10</sup> to human beings, finds her equivalence not just in the presence of Jesus, but more potently in Jesus’s activities. This includes his performance of miracles and his teaching, activities that find their fullest expression in the conception of the kingdom of God.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, the preaching of the kingdom of God can thus be understood as the core of Jesus’ ministry, on the one hand, and the culmination of the action of Wisdom in the world on the other.

Notwithstanding, explicit concerns with Wisdom are only partial aspects of Matthew and Luke, whose dominant themes draw on Wisdom Christology, but are not eclipsed by it.<sup>12</sup> In comparison, John’s Gospel fully identifies and articulates the existence of Jesus as the pre-existent *Logos* or Word of God with Wisdom. In doing so John organises and structures the Gospel’s overriding concern with the history of revelation<sup>13</sup> through Edenic images that are used to indicate Wisdom’s presence in Christ. For instance, Ashton observes in relation to John’s Gospel how this is sketched out in the Prologue...

... which also gives both the before and after of Jesus’ brief sojourn on earth. Before taking flesh the *Logos*, himself divine, is close to God. His visit terminated, he nestles in God’s embrace. Neither what precedes nor what follows belongs to the Gospel narrative, but between these unseen eternities comes the account of Jesus’ rejection, his final message to his disciples, and his promised departure. Both the rejection (‘his own people received him not’) and

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<sup>10</sup> Roland Murphy, *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 147.

<sup>11</sup> Mt 4:17 cf. 11:4-5; 12:28, etc.

<sup>12</sup> Edwards cites Meier who cautions against “over exaggerating the place of Wisdom Christology in Matthew,” but who nevertheless concedes that in the combination of apocalyptic and sapiential themes Jesus is “not just the preacher of God’s Wisdom: he *is* that Wisdom revealed to the elect.” Edwards, *Jesus the Wisdom of God*, 37.

<sup>13</sup> John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 367.

also a partial acceptance ('those who did receive him') are adumbrated in the Prologue, which exhibits the startling insight that Jesus, the hero of the Gospel story, somehow re-enacted on earth the chequered career of heavenly Wisdom (*Logos*/revelation) and thus may be said to have incarnated the wisdom tradition, to have given it flesh.<sup>14</sup>

As God's "eloquence,"<sup>15</sup> then, there is a thoroughgoing identification and correlation between Wisdom and Jesus as the incarnation of God that permeates John's Gospel from beginning to end, structuring the narrative (the movement from concealment to disclosure) and, according to Ashton, "already projecting, implicitly at least, a story."<sup>16</sup> Indeed, what Edwards identifies as the absolute correspondence between Jesus and Wisdom<sup>17</sup> permits the detailed examination of the relationship between Edenic imagery as it is manifest in various Wisdom texts, and its presence in serving to illuminate John's adoption of the belief in Jesus as the revelation of God.

This relationship between Edenic imagery and the presence of Wisdom in the world, appropriated by John to represent the correspondence between Jesus as *Logos*, and Wisdom, can be identified in a number of examples in the Wisdom literature where it

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<sup>14</sup> Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, 367. See also, G.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: SPCK, 1978), 153; Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, ed. by Francis J. Maloney New York: Doubleday, 2003, esp. 258-265; and Brendan Byrne, *Life Abounding: A Reading of John's Gospel* (Strathfield: St. Pauls Publishing, 2014), 24-25, 118-119, 243-244.

<sup>15</sup> Peter Steele's poetic discernment of the "Word made flesh" (Jn. 1:14). See, Byrne, *Life Abounding* (in the Dedication).

<sup>16</sup> Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, 367.

<sup>17</sup> For example, "As Wisdom speaks in the first person... (Prv 8:3-36; Sir. 24) so Jesus addresses his hearers... As Wisdom descended to dwell among us (Prv 8:31; Sir 24:8; Bar 3:37; Wis 9:10), so Jesus... has descended from heaven to live among us ( Jn 1:14; 3:31; 4:38; 16:28). As Wisdom roams the streets, crying out her message, inviting all to hear... (Prv 1:20-21, 8:1-4; Wis 6:16) so Jesus walks the streets searching out women and men and crying out his invitation in public places 1:36-38, 43; 5:14; 7:28, 37; 9:35; 12:44). As Wisdom instructs disciples who are her children (Wis 6:17-19; Prv 8:32-33; Sir 4:11; 6:18), so Jesus give instructions to his disciples who are called his children (Jn 13:33). As Wisdom forms her disciples (Sir 6:20-26) and they come to love her (Prv 8:17; Sir. 4:12; Wis. 6:17-18), so Jesus forms his disciples (Jn 15:3; 17:17) and calls them his beloved friends (Jn 15:15; 16:27). As some accept and others reject Wisdom (Prv 1:24-25; 8:17; Sir 6:27; Wis. 6:12), so some receive the message of Jesus while others reject him (Jn 7:34; 8:21; 13:33)." Edwards, *Jesus the Wisdom of God*, 42.

is clearly expressed that Wisdom can, and should be, equated with *Torah*,<sup>18</sup> the regime of positive law revealed to Israel by God as a precondition of realising and maintaining God’s covenantal promise to Abraham.<sup>19</sup> In the New Testament Jesus functions in the same manner, rendering *Torah*, in its Greek translation *ho nomos*, or the Law, into its human form. In Sirach, for example, the reader is told that Wisdom, seeking a place to rest (Sir 24:7) is commanded by God, “to make your dwelling in Jacob, and in Israel receive your inheritance” (24: 8). Having served, or “ministered” before God in “the holy tent” (24:10), Wisdom was accordingly justified to find a home “in the beloved city” (24:11) of Jerusalem, where she “took root in an honoured people” (24:12). From here, appropriating symbolism evocative of passages in Isaiah and Ezekiel<sup>20</sup> that acclaim God’s creativity and righteousness through Edenic imagery, Wisdom “grew tall like a cedar of Lebanon” (v. 13), “gave forth perfume” (v. 15), “spread out my branches” (v. 16), budding forth delights “like the vine ... and my blossoms become glorious and abundant fruit” (v.17). Thus established, she sends out an invitation to a divine banquet:

<sup>19</sup>Come to me you who desire me,  
and eat your fill of my fruits.

<sup>20</sup>For the memory of me is sweeter than honey,  
and the possession of me sweeter than the honeycomb.

<sup>21</sup>Those who eat of me will hunger for more,  
and those who drink of me will thirst for more.

Sirach 24:19-21.

The imagery of feasting and conviviality, as a sub-set of Edenic imagery, which is a feature of several New Testament representations of the kingdom of God, can already be seen in this passage. Its

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<sup>18</sup> For a comprehensive treatment of the relationship between Wisdom and *Torah* in Second Temple Judaism see Bernd Schipper and D. Andrew Teeter, eds., *The Reception of ‘Torah’ in the Wisdom Literature of the Second Temple Period* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

<sup>19</sup> Pierre Grelot, “The law,” in Xavier Léon-Dufour, ed., *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1973/1982), 302b. For further explication see Chapter Two, “Eden and Israel,” 2.4 Eden and *Torah*.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Isa 31:1-2; 41:19; 51:3; Ezek 31:1-9.

presence will be explored in greater detail in the analysis of the parable of the prodigal son (Lk 15:11-31) which follows shortly. As in Proverbs 9, which similarly offers a warm invitation to all who are purposeless, but who otherwise might find life's meaning in her extravagant company (Prov 9:1-6), the bounty of Wisdom's blessings lies not in sensuous pleasure, although these are the metaphors through which her blessings are conveyed, but in reconciliation with oneself and, by inference, with God: "Whoever obeys me will not be put to shame, and those who work with me will not sin" (Sir 24: 22). As such, and reflecting Psalm 119 which so comprehensively details the benefits of adherence to *Torah*, Wisdom is presented as the source not just of nourishment, but of life itself.<sup>21</sup>

This is language which will later be found in the Christian Gospels, and especially in the Gospel of John but, as Edwards points out, for Ben Sirah it has a very concrete Jewish meaning – Wisdom is *Torah*.<sup>22</sup> Lest the reader misses the point, Ben Sirah subsequently spells it out explicitly: "All this is the book of the covenant of the Most High God, the law that Moses commanded us as an inheritance for the congregation of Jacob" (24:23). Baruch similarly equates Wisdom, or the Word of God, with *Torah* (Bar 3:9-4:4): "She is the book of the commandments of God, the law that endures forever. All who hold her fast will live, and those who forsake her will die" (Bar 4:4).

Chapter Two of the thesis described the many ways that *Torah* finds expression in the Old Testament through Edenic imagery.<sup>23</sup> At the heart of this symbolism *Torah* is represented as God's ecstatic and overflowing abundance of all that is life affirming and good. This frequently takes the form of the 'living water' which flowed out from Eden,<sup>24</sup> which sustained the Israelites in their flight from Egypt into the Promised Land (Ex 17:6; Num 20:8), a sacred entity that is itself

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<sup>21</sup> Edwards, *Jesus the Wisdom of God*, 26.

<sup>22</sup> Edwards, *Jesus the Wisdom of God*, 26.

<sup>23</sup> See Ch. 2, "Eden and Israel," 2.4, Eden and *Torah*.

<sup>24</sup> Gen 2:10 cf. Ps 46:4.

frequently represented through Edenic imagery.<sup>25</sup> The ‘living water,’ purified through the liturgical practices of the Temple, also brought life, through the intervention of the prophet Elisha, to barren land outside of the city of Jericho (2 Kings 3:19-22). As well as serving to illustrate the blessings and benefits of *Torah* in several of the Psalms<sup>26</sup> the presence of Edenic imagery, as a manifestation of the Glory of God, also act as a primary image of Israel’s reconciliation with God for a number of the prophets.<sup>27</sup>

To the extent that covenantal Israel, which finds justification and fulfilment through *Torah*, has been equated with Eden, the potency of this imagery has long been identified in the writings of the Old Testament authors to the point where it may be considered conventional. Not surprisingly, then, Ben Sirah also avails himself of Edenic imagery, for example, comparing *Torah* in a general sense to the beneficence of the great rivers of the ancient world (Sir 24: 25-27), and specifically to the enigmatic Pishon and Gihon rivers, a relationship that I have further argued earlier in this thesis places Israel in unique association with Eden.<sup>28</sup> This association, between Israel, *Torah*, and Eden, is consolidated in Sirach by subsequent references to Wisdom as the flood which issued from Ezekiel’s reprinted Temple, itself an expression of the Edenic blessings which flow into Israel initially as a trickle,<sup>29</sup> but which build to a mighty river following Israel’s reconciliation with God.<sup>30</sup> As we shall see, representations of the kingdom of God, at the heart of Jesus’ ministry, themselves draw inspiration from, and are in turn consolidated through, these relationships.

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<sup>25</sup> A detailed examination of this potential correlation can be found in this thesis in Chapter Four, “Eden and Israel,” 2.1, Eden and the Land of Israel.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Ps 1, 2, 4, and 119.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Isa 12:3; 35:1-2, 6-7; 51:3; Ezek 47:1-12; Jer 2:13; 31:19; Zech 13:1.

<sup>28</sup> See Chapter Two, “Eden and Israel,” 2.1, Eden and the Land of Israel.

<sup>29</sup> “Like water poured from a bottle, or jug,” is Zimmerli’s perception of the original. See Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel* 2:505.

<sup>30</sup> Sir 24:30-33, cf. Ezek 47:1-5.

## 7.2 Jesus as the Water of Life.

John's representation of Jesus as incarnate Wisdom borrows from that Old Testament imagery, assimilating, reproducing, and augmenting key symbols and motifs as required. The reader can observe, for example, that whereas Wisdom prepares a feast such that all who eat their fill of her fruits, and drink of her, will hunger and thirst for more (Sir 24:19-21), Jesus declares that he, in himself, is "... the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty" (Jn 6:35, 51). Jesus, moreover, as a manifestation of divine Wisdom that finds equivalence in a specific, historical, individual, and human form of the Law, represents himself to the world in John's Gospel through Edenic imagery that similarly mobilises the power of the metaphor of the 'water of life' as a dominant motif. Here, however, the unquenchable 'thirst' for knowledge of God that Wisdom engenders in the wise, is satiated through Christ.<sup>31</sup>

By implication, it can be seen that Jesus, in John's representation, equates himself to Eden as both the goal of righteousness, and the justification for that change in human orientation that leads back to Eden. This is a notion developed further in John's Gospel in the scene where the risen Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene (20:1-17), examined more closely in the next chapter. It is later made explicit in the Book of Revelation, both through the development of the representation of the Church as the Bride of Christ manifest as the new Eden (Rev 22:1-5),<sup>32</sup> as well as in specific references to a relocation to Eden as Jesus' reward to "everyone who conquers" (4:7), and to those who emerge justified "out of the great ordeal" (7:14-17).

Nowhere, however, is this equivalence between Jesus as 'the water of life' expressed more completely, or with such narrative confidence,

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. von Balthasar, "Der antirömische Affekt," in *The von Balthasar Reader*, 216.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Ezek 47:1-12.

than in John's description of Jesus' encounter with a Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob (Jn 4:4-42). This is an incident which not only anticipates the integration of Ezekiel's Old Testament vision of the New Temple (Ezek 47:1-12) with the writer of Revelation's concluding New Testament image of the Church as the New Jerusalem (Rev 22:1-5). It also serves as an interpretive key for other critical, and sometimes misunderstood, events in John's Gospel. Significant amongst these is the foreshadowing of Jesus' sacrificial death (and the nature of that death), as the precondition for the coming of the Holy Spirit that occurs in John 7:38-39: "... let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.' Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified."<sup>33</sup> Consider also John 20: 11-18, which describes Mary Magdalene's post-resurrection encounter with Jesus, where she confuses him with 'the gardener.' This is an event which is normally glossed over in commentaries, but which can also be seen, through its thematic links to the earlier narrative of the Samaritan woman at the well, to point to the symbolic presence of Eden in the manifestation of the New Creation in Christ.

Notwithstanding the unusual choice of translation in the NRSV text of 'heart' for the Greek word *κοιλίας* (*koilias*), that the NRSV offers in a footnote as 'belly,'<sup>34</sup> which accords more fully with the piercing of Jesus' side at the time of his crucifixion,<sup>35</sup> the continuation of the use of Edenic imagery points to another recognisably Johannine feature. This is the multiple, diverse representations of the same themes in John's Gospel that C.F.D. Moule characterises as the "great verities"<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. Isa 12:3; Joel 2:28; Zech 12:10; 13:1.

<sup>34</sup> Alternative possible renderings from the Greek also include 'body cavity,' 'stomach,' 'womb,' and 'uterus.' See Richard J. Goodrich, and Albert L. Lucaszewski, eds., *A Reader's Greek New Testament*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), n.39, 219.

<sup>35</sup> Described uniquely in the Gospels in Jn 19:34.

<sup>36</sup> C.F.D. Moule, "The Individualism of the Fourth Gospel," *Novum Testamentum* 5, fasc. 2/3 (July 1962), 175.



of his vision, in which history and eschatology, that is, Jesus as the revelation of God, is expressed as a single inseparable unity: "... the entire ministry is the self-giving, the exaltation on the cross is the exaltation in glory; the Spirit is Christ's own *alter ego*; and there is no concern about a future *παρουσία* (parousia), for the coming of the Spirit is 'the coming,' absolutely."<sup>37</sup>

In this light, the report that the story of Jesus' meeting with the 'The Woman at the Well' is Hans Urs von Balthasar's own preferred image for eternal life,<sup>38</sup> not only makes sense, it also supports the elevation of the importance of the imagery of Christ as the 'water of life' above that of the merely illustrative, to a central motif around which other images of Eden in the New Testament constellate. This is not to suggest an explicit hierarchy of meaning in these images as they are used by John – elsewhere the imagery of Jesus as 'light,' an ancient symbol of divinity and righteousness that has multiple associations in the ANE including but not restricted to Eden,<sup>39</sup> also receives considerable attention.<sup>40</sup> Rather, the inclusion of the image of Jesus as the 'water of life,' in the context of the story of the Woman at the Well, expresses in its narrative detail a range of historical, scriptural, and spiritual associations bound together through the image of Jesus as the source of all meaning.<sup>41</sup> The multi-valent quality of the image

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<sup>37</sup> Moule, "The Individualism of the Fourth Gospel," 174.

<sup>38</sup> Geoffrey Wainwright, "Eschatology," in Edward T. Oakes and David Mann, eds., *The Cambridge Guide to Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 121.

<sup>39</sup> Note, for example, the relationship between the Tree of Life, at the centre of Eden, and its manifestation in Jewish cultic activity as the Tree of Light, the *menora*, or seven branched candelabra, that stood beside the altar of the ancient Temple. See, Barker, *The Gate of Heaven*, 90-91; Yardin, *The Tree of Light*, 35. For St Ephrem, the 'Robe of Glory,' the image through which he links all of salvation history, is a garment of light, stripped from Adam and Eve as a result of their disobedience but available again to all who, through baptism, "put on Christ" (Cf. Rom 13:14 and Gal 3:27). See Sebastian Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of Saint Ephrem the Syrian* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publication, 1992), 39, 71, 91-92, 94; and St Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns on Paradise*, intro. and transl. Sebastian Brock (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990), 66-69.

<sup>40</sup> Jn 1:4; 3:19; 8:12; 9:15; 12:35, 36, 46.

<sup>41</sup> In an interesting extension of John's description of Jesus as "the light of the world" the medieval theologian (a name she did not ascribe to herself) Hildegard of Bingen refers to God's presence in the world as "the living light," indicated by the

can be observed in von Balthasar's own complex and detailed commentary on John in relation to the origins of the Church, that draws together the various instances where the image of Jesus as the 'water of life' finds expression:

The account of the piercing of the lance and the outpouring of blood and water have to be read in the continuity of the johannine water-spirit-blood symbolism to which the key word "thirst" also belongs: earthly water results again in thirst while Jesus' water quenches thirst forever (Jn 4:13f); "if anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink, as one who believes in me (Jn 7:37f), thus the thirst of the believer will be forever quenched (6:35). Connected with this is the extravagant promise that his water in being drunk will become a source springing into eternal life (Jn 4:14); as scripture says, "Streams of living water will gush forth from his koilia (innards, bowels, heart: Jn 7:38). That Jesus, as the absolute thirster, is himself made to flow in an eternal fountain, we have already seen. The scriptural saying is connected either with the ever-present analogy of water and Word-Spirit (Jesus' words are indeed "spirit and life"), or better with the fountains in the new temple of Ezekiel (Ezek 47; cf. Zech 13:1), with which Jesus compared his body (Jn 2:21). That John saw the institution of the sacraments of Eucharist and baptism in the flowing forth of water and blood cannot be doubted in the context of his general symbolism (cf. Cana, 2:1-11; the unity of water and Spirit, 3:5; of water, Spirit, and blood, 1 Jn 5:6, with explicit reference to "Jesus Christ: he it is who has come through water and blood")...The (new) temple just like the newly opened drinkable fountain point to community: the body given is the place of the new institution of the covenant, of the new gathering of the community: room, altar, sacrifice, meal, community, and its Spirit all at once.<sup>42</sup>

It can be seen how von Balthasar's reflection on the passages concerned specifically links the Edenic image of Jesus as the 'water of life' to the theme of redemption through Christ's blood. This theme is already present in the story of the wedding at Cana (Jn 2:1-11), and

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manifestation of 'viridity,' that is, Edenic fertility and plenitude. See Constant Mews, "Religious Thinker: 'A Frail Human Being' on Fiery Life," in Barbara Newman, ed, *Voice of the Living Light: Hildegard of Bingen and Her World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 52-69. On pages 57 and 58 Mews refers explicitly to Hildegard's identification of this 'viridity' with the Garden of Eden, a notion that is extended in following pages to the attributes of Wisdom.

<sup>42</sup> von Balthasar, "Der antirömische Affekt," in *The von Balthasar Reader*, 216.

reiterated later by Jesus himself outside the Temple of Jerusalem at the time of *Sukkoth*, the Festival of Booths.<sup>43</sup> (The additional symbolism of John 7:37-39, which links Jesus as the ‘water of life’ to the ingathering of the Edenic fullness of the harvest, that *Sukkoth* celebrates, should also be noted.) Von Balthasar also identifies John’s understanding of the sacramental function of the Church, as an expression of the New Creation, developed most notably in the linking narrative of Nicodemus’s night-time visit to Jesus, just prior to the incident with the Samaritan woman, wherein Jesus declares that “no-one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of the water and Spirit” (Jn 3:5). The implicit foregrounding of God’s mercy, or, more properly God’s *hesed*, or loving predisposition to the world, in the water-Spirit-blood symbolism that emerges from the piercing of Jesus’ side, also deserves comment. That is, the relationship between the Greek *κοιλίας* (*koilias*) to the Hebrew *racham/recham*, similarly translated from the Hebrew as ‘womb,’ implicitly links the person of Jesus to the Old Testament representation of God as *El Shaddai*, that is, as ‘breast,’ or maternity itself, in God’s absolute provision, nourishment and blessing.<sup>44</sup>

Von Balthasar’s exegesis, then, clearly supports Moule’s observation regarding the ‘great verities’ of John, repeated in various forms, which serve John’s overarching purpose of conveying his understanding of God’s self-disclosure through Christ. It is not the intention of this thesis to analyse the story of the “Woman at the Well” in relation to Edenic imagery beyond this – exegeses on Jesus as the *fontalis plenitudo* are available in many commentaries – other than to also draw attention to the relationship between the imagery of Eden, foregrounded in the symbol of the ‘water of life,’ and the *hieros gamos* motif manifest in Jesus’ meeting with the Samaritan woman

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<sup>43</sup> Jn 2:4 cf. Jn 7:37-39.

<sup>44</sup> See Emmanuel Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, transl. Annette Aronowicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 183. Cf. Ex 33:19; Deut 13:17; 30:3; Ps 102:13; 116:5; Isa 14:1; 30:18.

that develops John's understanding of the Church through the language of that chance encounter.<sup>45</sup>

This encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman is rich with associations of fertility and new life drawn from the explicit marriage symbolism embedded in the narrative of the wedding at Cana that precedes it (Jn 2:1-11), the subsequent pericope concerning Nicodemus and the need for a person to be born again (3:1-21), and the additional passage describing John the Baptist's identification of Jesus as the "bridegroom" who had come to claim the "bride" (3:23-36). Combined with the well imagery, with its echoes of the stories of Rebekah and Abraham's servant (Gen 24:10-19), Jacob and Rachel (Gen 29:1-14), and Moses and Zipporah (Ex 2:15b-21), the story suggests that the Samaritan woman is herself to be the bride referred to the earlier passage.<sup>46</sup>

Whilst some commentators believe the link between the Samaritan woman and the bride referred to in John's earlier wedding narrative is tenuous,<sup>47</sup> other elements in the story suggest that they are being unduly conservative in holding to that view. Having previously been married five times, Jesus reveals that the Samaritan woman is now living with a sixth man (Jn 4:16-18). Jesus would therefore be her seventh 'husband,' a possibility reflected in the culturally informal tenor of their exchange, if not in reality.<sup>48</sup> As improbable as this notion is in the social milieu of the time,<sup>49</sup> the proposition is consistent with ANE numerological interpretations that connect the number seven, through the combination of its constituent parts (3 plus 4), to

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<sup>45</sup> Jn 4:1-6.

<sup>46</sup> J. Gerald Janzen, "How Can a Man Be Born When He Is Old? Jacob/Israel in Genesis and the Gospel of John", in *Encounter* 67 (2006): 338.

<sup>47</sup> See, for example Francis J. Maloney, *The Gospel of John* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998), 121.

<sup>48</sup> Jn 4: 7-15 cf. 4:27.

<sup>49</sup> Craig R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 48.

the integration of heaven and earth.<sup>50</sup> Accordingly, whilst remaining nameless in the Gospel passage, the woman, as St Photinia or ‘the luminous one,’ is venerated in Orthodox theology as an early representative of the universal Church, soon to be established through Jesus’ sacrificial blood and the Spirit. We should also note that whilst the Samaritan woman is displaced in the narrative by the people of her village who, in response to her testimony, “believed in him” (Jn 4: 39), so too Jesus’ message radiates linguistically, insofar as what begins in the passage in first person singular, quickly evolves into plural speech.<sup>51</sup> That is, the blessings of Wisdom that find equivalence in the Old Testament in *Torah*, are now revealed in John’s Gospel in the person of the Edenic Christ, the new Temple, from whom flows the water of life. Manifest in the universal Church the glory of God will then shine its light on all the Nations.

### **7.3 Eden and the Kingdom of God in Matthew and Luke.**

It has already been asserted above that the action of Wisdom finds expression in Matthew and Luke’s Gospels through Jesus’ activities on the one hand, and ‘Wisdom’s children,’ that is, those brought to new life in Christ, on the other.<sup>52</sup>

To the extent that these actions and their effects find their dominant expression in these Gospels in the metaphor of the kingdom of God,<sup>53</sup> or in Matthew’s preferred but not exclusive term, the ‘kingdom of heaven,’<sup>54</sup> an equivalence between the action and characteristics of

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<sup>50</sup> That is, 3 representing heaven as the numerical equivalent of the circle, or dome, and 4 representing the earth as the numerical equivalent of the square. See Clark, *The Islamic Garden*, 64-65. See also Joseph Martos, *Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to Sacraments in the Catholic Church* (Liguori: Triumph Books, 1991), 51. Cf. Mk. 8:4-8.

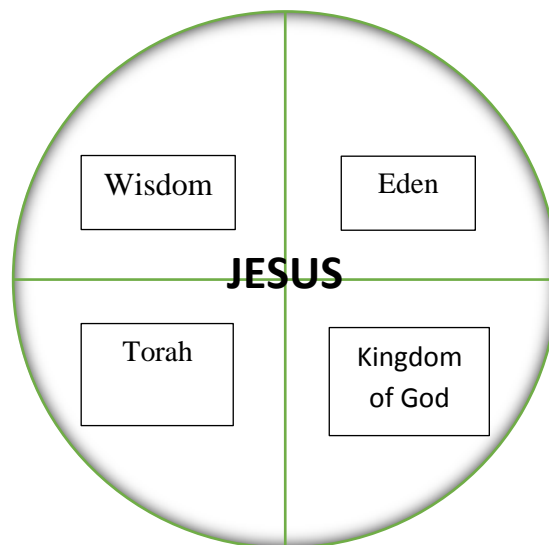
<sup>51</sup> Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, 48.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Mt 11:19 and Lk 7:35.

<sup>53</sup> Accepting that in contemporary scholarship the kingdom of God has been repeatedly classified as a metaphor. See, Anne Moore, *Moving Beyond Symbol and Myth: Understanding the Kingship of God of the Hebrew Bible Through Metaphor* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2009), 26-27.

<sup>54</sup> See Mt 3:2; 5:20, but most noticeably in the parables – 13:11, 31, 33, 44, 45, and 52. As with the majority commentators I use the term kingdom of Heaven and kingdom of God interchangeably, not only on the basis of accepting Matthew’s

Wisdom and those features expressive of the kingdom of God can be identified. I have also argued that there is an equivalence, found in texts such as Sirach and Baruch,<sup>55</sup> between Wisdom and *Torah*, which finds expression in the blessings experienced through adherence to its precepts.<sup>56</sup> To the degree that Jesus is represented in the Gospels as the embodiment of *Torah*,<sup>57</sup> a further equivalence, then, can also be identified between Jesus as both Wisdom (John's dominant image) and *Torah* (by association), both of which are figuratively present in Matthew and Luke through the imagery pertaining to the kingdom of God. In broad terms, then, the blessings of the kingdom of God, manifest through the Incarnation, are the blessings of both Wisdom and *Torah*. These are frequently articulated through the imagery of Eden, in the form of God's abundant provision of all that is necessary for human flourishing. These associations can be represented graphically in the following diagram (Fig 3):




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perceived cultural sensitivity to his Jewish audience's discomfort at using the name of God directly (Cf. *New Oxford Annotated Bible, with the Apocrypha, NRSV*, (Oxford, OUP, 2010), but also accepting the compelling theological point that the 'Kingdom of Heaven' denotes not a place distinct from earth, but rather the saving action of God, as King, in this world. Cf. N.T Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 51-53.

<sup>55</sup> Sir 24:23; Bar 3:9-4:4

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Gen 2:15-17; Deut 8:6-9; 30:6-10; Josh 3:8-17; 1 Kings 6:29-35; Ps 1:1-3; 119.

<sup>57</sup> Under the Greek nomenclature of *ho nomos*, or the Law. Cf. Mt 5:17-20; Lk 16:17; Jn 14:6.

Nonetheless, as Brümmer reminds us,<sup>58</sup> by dint of their metaphorical nature there are also distinct differences in the understandings pertaining each of these sets of images, not the least to the kingdom of God, as this term is voiced in both Matthew and Luke. These understandings speak more emphatically not of the traditions and beliefs of second Temple Judaism, from which perceptions of the relationships between Wisdom and *Torah* emerge,<sup>59</sup> but of the post-Easter awareness of the New Creation in Christ. To return to the methodological foundations of this inquiry, we have in this ‘post-critical’ transformation, the ‘rehandling’ of ancient Jewish understandings of the kingship of God in the context of the Incarnation. But it is clear, in the parables and in the Gospel stories of Jesus’ interactions with those he meets, that full understanding of the New Testament appropriation of these ancient understandings comes not from the ‘surface’ of the text but from faith, the earthly manifestation in grace of ‘the beyond’ that informs, supports, and interprets the fulfilment of oneself in Christ through the other.

Before proceeding further with this analysis some discussion of the ‘kingdom of God’ is necessary insofar as, as most commentators recognise,<sup>60</sup> there is little specific detail in Jesus’ own use of the term to enable a fixed understanding to be derived. That this is so may be frustrating for exegetes of the New Testament but it should not surprise us. Anne Moore’s extensive critique of Norman Perrin’s<sup>61</sup> assessment of the kingship of God (the Old Testament precursor for the term kingdom of God) as ‘symbol,’<sup>62</sup> for example, is substantially

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<sup>58</sup> Vincent Brümmer, *The Model of Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 15.

<sup>59</sup> Schipper & Teeter, *The Reception of ‘Torah,’* 1-8.

<sup>60</sup> Moore, *Moving Beyond Symbol and Myth*, 10; Gerald O’Collins, *Christology: A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus*, Oxford: OUP, 54-59; N.T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 35.

<sup>61</sup> Norman Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom: Symbol and Metaphor in New Testament Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976).

<sup>62</sup> Perrin uses the term “steno-symbol” to describe the kingship/kingdom of God, a distinction he appropriates from the work of Philip Wheelwright to specify a symbol which has a one-to-one equivalence with that which it denotes. Perrin himself concedes that such an understanding is problematic in the context of the kingship of

founded on her conclusion that the range of meanings associated with the term, as it is received in Jewish literature, is irregular<sup>63</sup> to the degree that a single understanding cannot confidently be identified.<sup>64</sup>

This does not mean that a broadly accepted understanding of the scope of the term ‘kingdom of God’ does not exist. Gustav Dalman, who reviewed the Hebrew Bible, Talmud, and Targums for the Jewish understanding of the kingdom of God,<sup>65</sup> located the essence of the term in what is described as “the kingly activities of God.”<sup>66</sup> Moore also cites Charles H. Dodd who summarised Dalman’s conclusions in the following manner:

The expression “the *malkuth* of God” connotes the fact that God reigns as King. In sense, though not in grammatical form, the substantial conception of the phrase “the Kingdom of God” is the idea of God, and the term, “kingdom” indicates that specific aspect, attributes or activities of God in which he is revealed as King or sovereign Lord of His people, or of the universe which he created.<sup>67</sup>

Dalman’s explanation of the kingdom of God “has been generally accepted within biblical scholarship.”<sup>68</sup> The issue, then, is not the broad parameters of the term, but the way in which it used by Jesus in Matthew and Luke and the meanings generated through that use. In this context Gerald O’Collins, writing from the perspective of systematic theology, observes that on Jesus’ lips the image of the

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God as the term was used in Jewish apocalyptic, but nevertheless holds to the broad acceptance of kingship/kingdom of God as ‘symbol’ more generally. See Perrin, *Jesus and the Language Kingdom*, 29-32.

<sup>63</sup> That is, inconsistent.

<sup>64</sup> For a broader discussion of Moore’s concerns with Perrin, and an articulate overview of the historical trajectory of analysis of the kingdom of God see Moore, *Moving Beyond Symbol and Myth*, 9-29.

<sup>65</sup> To the degree that the lack of a precise definition of the term in Jesus’ ministry comes precisely from the assumption that its meaning was pre-existing, that is, understood in the Second Temple milieu in which Jesus participated. See Joel Edmund Anderson, “Jonah in Mark and Matthew: Creation, Covenant, Christ, and the Kingdom of God,” *Biblical theology Bulletin* 42, no. 4 (Oct. 2012): 173; Moore, *Moving Beyond Symbol and Myth*, 10; Joel Willits, “Jesus, the Kingdom and the Promised Land: Engaging N.T. Wright on the Question of Kingdom and Land,” *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 13 (2015): 348.

<sup>66</sup> Moore, *Moving Beyond Symbol and Myth*, 12.

<sup>67</sup> Moore, *Moving Beyond Symbol and Myth*, 12-13.

<sup>68</sup> Moore, *Moving Beyond Symbol and Myth*, 18.



kingdom, “was more or less a way of talking of God as Lord of the world and God’s decisive, climactic intervention to liberate sinful and suffering men and women from the grip of evil and give them a new and final age of salvation.”<sup>69</sup>

Integral to this aspect of the *kerygma* were Jesus’ parables, miracles and other works, and his radical reaching out to the poor, the marginalised and the dispossessed. As such the parables are not subsidiary or peripheral to determining the meaning of Jesus but are a distinctive aspect of Jesus’ earthly ministry which mediate the kingdom of God prophetically, confronting and challenging his listeners.<sup>70</sup> Similarly, and notwithstanding Jesus’ actions, O’Collins relates how the miracles themselves can be understood as signs of the kingdom, inextricably tied up with its proclamation:

His healings and exorcisms were compassionate salvific gestures, the first fruits of the presence of the kingdom that manifested the power of God’s merciful rule already operative in and through his person. Matthew edited Q material to present Jesus as saying: ‘if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you’ (Matt 12:28; see Luke 11:20). His exorcisms, in particular, manifested the strength of the Spirit (Mark 3:22-30) which, according to the Synoptics, empowered Jesus’ ministry for the kingdom, right from his baptism.<sup>71</sup>

Significant implications about Jesus’ function and identity, then, can be seen to emerge from the way the Synoptic Gospels portray Jesus’ role in bringing the kingdom of God to fruition. In this context, the question of the relationship between Jesus’ use of the metaphor of the kingdom of God, or its equivalents, and Edenic imagery can be investigated through his use of parables, and in his performance of miracles as signs of its inauguration on earth.

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<sup>69</sup> O’Collins, *Christology*, 54.

<sup>70</sup> O’Collins, *Christology*, 55.

<sup>71</sup> O’Collins, *Christology*, 56.

On the basis of the preceding analysis O'Collins' subsequent concern to focus on the perceived tension between the 'already present' or 'yet to come' aspects of the kingdom, for which "no clear parallel in Judaism" exists,<sup>72</sup> is mistaken. As van Eijk observes in his commentary on the relationship between the kingdom of God and Church as sacrament:

If the kingdom could be called otherworldly, this does not mean it is not of this world. It is for this world, but in a new era. When the kingdom is not otherworldly, neither is it only for the future.<sup>73</sup>

Indeed, in attempting to counter what he identifies as the popular misconception that the kingdom of God is something in which people participate only after death, van Eijk notes that "the fulfilment of the promise of the kingdom will occur within human history as its culmination, and not '... just over the edge into eternity.'"<sup>74</sup> Further to this, the notion of the kingdom as at once 'already present' and 'not yet' can be both recognised through its association with the imagery of Eden drawn from Jesus' relationship to both Wisdom and *Torah*. The kingdom of God, as with Eden, in its capacity to shift in time and place, can equally be said, then, to accommodate within its conceptual parameters, the earthly and the divine.

The nearness of the kingdom of God,<sup>75</sup> accordingly, is made manifest through the appearance of the Son of Man, both in history and through the Spirit, in the present moment as well as in eternity; the newness of the kingdom is apparent in each moment of life in which God's creativity and mercy are realised, both through the grace of Christ as well as through the activity of "Wisdom's children." In both instances the blessings of the kingdom of God are frequently, though not exclusively, depicted through the salvific attributes of Edenic imagery.

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<sup>72</sup> O'Collins, *Christology*, 55.

<sup>73</sup> Ton van Eijk, "Sacrament of the Kingdom of God," *Exchange* 37 (2008): 509. See also O'Callaghan, *Christ Our Hope*, 330-331.

<sup>74</sup> van Eijk, "Sacrament of the Kingdom of God," 509.

<sup>75</sup> Mt 4:17; 7:7; Mk 1:14-15; Lk 10:9; 21:31.

Bearing these perspectives in mind, two aspects of Jesus' conception of the kingdom of God as presented Luke and Matthew will now be examined.

The first and most conventional representation can be found in Luke in the parable most commonly known as the 'Prodigal Son' (Lk 15:11-32). This is a story of exile and return, the overall structure of which participates in the oppositional motif of Eden/wilderness that I have argued in Chapter Five of this thesis provides both structure and narrative tension, and hence forward momentum, for much of the Old Testament. Here, the profligate youngest son of a wealthy and pious Jew, having spent his material and spiritual inheritance (15:18), returns from the religious and cultural 'wilderness' (15:15-16) to be once again taken up into the fullness of his father's love. The parable has received recent additional, but not original, emphasis through the alternative title of 'the Merciful Father.'<sup>76</sup> It occurs in a cluster of parables about loss and restoration and is one of several that Luke uses to convey an understanding of the kingdom of God as a place and time of reinstatement, abundance, magnanimity, justice, mercy, prestige, honour, fulfilment, and joy. That is to say, the parable is illustrative of the "year of the LORD'S favour," Isaiah's summative phrase<sup>77</sup> for the blessings of the new Zion used by Jesus himself to announce, in the Nazareth synagogue, his commission to bring the kingdom of God to Israel.<sup>78</sup> Given its multiple narrative layers, the story is regarded as having presented Christian tradition with, "an inexhaustible source of interpretation."<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> A notion that has antecedents in early Christian commentary, particularly in the debate in relation to Christian apostasy in the face of Roman repression. For a summary see Christopher A. Hall, "Rejecting the Prodigal," *Christianity Today* 42/12 (Oct. 1998): 73-76.

<sup>77</sup> Isa 61:1-2.

<sup>78</sup> Lk 4:19.

<sup>79</sup> Brendan Byrne, *The Hospitality of God*, 127. See also Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXI*, 1083-1084; Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke - Sacra Pagina Series 3* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991), 240.

In the context of the restoration of those who are “lost,” who were “dead” but who are now brought back to life (15:24), the relationship between the kingdom of God to the blessings of Eden, denied to humanity through the Fall, is not an obscure one. Ambrose of Milan points precisely to this interpretation in his own exposition on the Gospel of Luke:

The Father rejoices “because my son was dead and has come to life again. He was lost and is found.” “He who was, is lost.” He, who was not, cannot be lost. The Gentiles are not, the Christian is, according as it is written above that, “God has chosen things that are not, that he might bring to nothing things that are.”<sup>80</sup> It is also possible to understand here the likeness of the human race in one man. Adam was, and we were all in him. Adam was lost, and all were lost in him.<sup>81</sup>

That is to say, Ambrose, anticipating a theme that his ‘student’ Augustine<sup>82</sup> was to later develop so strikingly, locates in Adam the source of all human alienation from God. Accordingly, the restoration of the prodigal son to a place of honour in his familial community is one that also automatically restores access for him to the material and social privileges that perfect identification with the Father brings. Understanding that the unification to which the parable points is that of humankind with God through Christ, the fullness of God’s abundance, conventionally represented through Edenic imagery or its equivalents, is also restored.<sup>83</sup> The relationship between Wisdom’s ‘banquet’ (Sir 24:19-21) as a subset of Eden’s plenitude and the celebratory feast provided by the father for the son, as an expression of “God’s welcome to the despised, rejected and victimised,”<sup>84</sup> should be noted. Nor are these blessings restricted to those who have returned from ‘far away’ (15: 20) – the position of the remaining son, by association those who were unable to perceive that they were already

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<sup>80</sup> Cf. 1 Cor 1:28.

<sup>81</sup> Just, *Ancient Christian Commentary*, 252. Cf. 1 Cor 15:22.

<sup>82</sup> “The influence of Ambrose on Augustine is far out of proportion to any direct contact which the two men may have had.” Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (New York: Dorset Press, 1967), 87.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Isa 25:6-10.

<sup>84</sup> Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 179.

unconditionally loved by the father and enjoyed his favour, is also made explicit: “Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours” (15:31).

An additional question, posed by this parable of loss and restoration, that is implicitly critical of the Pharisees and Scribes who oppose Jesus but which remains open, is also compelling: who will enter the banquet hall, “to make merry with sinners and the God who delights in their company?”<sup>85</sup> As already shown, the Wisdom tradition, on which both Matthew and Luke draw for their own understanding of the kingdom of God, similarly portrays the blessings of God through analogy to a banquet, the extravagance of which is compared to Eden.<sup>86</sup> Perhaps the more forensic question suggested by Luke’s story, however, is not so much, “who will enter the Father’s banquet hall?” or, indeed, to return to the beginnings of the parable, “how will God find the sinner?” but rather, “how can a sinner, one who is lost, participate in the blessings of the pre-existent Eden, manifest as the New Creation through Christ?”<sup>87</sup>

For Luke, the answer lies not in Jesus’ atoning death. Instead it can be found in the unconditional relationship between God and sinful humanity, revealed through Christ. Indeed, Fitzmyer’s commentary explicitly reminds the reader that, “God loves the sinner while he is still a sinner, *before* he repents; and that somehow it is this Divine love that makes the sinner’s repentance possible.”<sup>88</sup> Parallels between this representation of God’s unconditional love and mercy and those between God’s gracious predisposition towards Israel represented in Ezekiel’s Old Testament account of the ‘unfaithful bride’ (Ezek 16: 4-

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<sup>85</sup> Robert J. Harris, “The Gospel According to Luke,” in Brown, Fitzmyer, and Murphy, eds., *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 707b.

<sup>86</sup> Sir 24:9-21.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Gen 2:8.

<sup>88</sup> Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke*, X-XXIV, 1086.

63), as previously discussed in chapters Four and Six of this thesis,<sup>89</sup> can also be identified here.

Joel Willitts, engaging with N.T. Wright's tentative assertion that, "the kingdom of God referred more to the fact of Israel's god becoming king than to a localized place,"<sup>90</sup> provides an alternative interpretation of Luke's story of exile and return. He argues that Jesus' use of the metaphor of the kingdom of God more broadly, and particularly in the parable of the Prodigal Son, points to "historical evidence of an abiding hope for the territorial restoration of Israel among at least some segments of early Christianity on the one side, and the Jewish milieu on the other."<sup>91</sup> Following his own analysis of Wright's observation cited above, Willitts asserts "the most probable historical conclusion to be that Jesus *affirmed*<sup>92</sup> the ancient promise of Israel's territorial restoration in his kingdom proclamation."<sup>93</sup> From this perspective Luke's story of the prodigal son, then, is an explicit biblical-historical metaphor of Jewish displacement and reestablishment that Willitts argues is the dominant meaning embedded more broadly in Jesus' proclamation of kingdom.

Wright's broader theological treatment of New Testament understandings of the kingdom of God, however, offers a more nuanced interpretation of the story that accords with the conventional emphasis on the necessary personal transformation of each individual in Christ, previously identified in Paul's writing.<sup>94</sup> Certainly Wright recognises the biblical-historical context of Jewish exile revealed in the Old Testament and the corresponding belief in messianic

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<sup>89</sup> As previously discussed in 4.3, Matrimonial imagery in Prophetic Writing and its Edenic Associations, and 6.3.1, Paul, Eden and the Bride of Christ.

<sup>90</sup> Joel Willitts, "Jesus, the Kingdom and the Promised Land," *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, 13 (2015), 348.

<sup>91</sup> Willitts, "Jesus, the Kingdom and the Promised Land," 372.

<sup>92</sup> Willitts' italics.

<sup>93</sup> Willitts, "Jesus, the Kingdom and the Promised Land," 372.

<sup>94</sup> See Ch. 6, "Jesus and the Return to Eden," 6.2, Jesus as the New Adam in the theology of Paul.

restoration that accompanies it.<sup>95</sup> Nevertheless, and despite Jesus' immersion in the milieu of second temple Judaism, the Christological concerns of the New Testament writers, rather than any abiding messianic concern with the Jews return to the Promised Land, under continuing Roman occupation at the time of Jesus, are their focus. At the heart of this understanding is the awareness, revealed in what are believed to be Jesus' own teachings and stories, that it is Jesus himself who is both the sign and manifestation of the ancient eschatological hope. As Wright identifies:

Exile and restoration: this is the central drama that Israel believed herself to be acting out. And the story of the prodigal son says, quite simply: this hope is now being fulfilled – but it does not look like what was expected. Israel went into exile because of her own folly and disobedience, and is now returning simply because of the fantastically, indeed prodigal, love of her god. But this is a highly subversive retelling. The real return from exile, including the real resurrection from the dead, is taking place, in an extremely paradoxical fashion, in Jesus' own ministry.<sup>96</sup>

That is, God's covenant *hesed*, or loving and merciful predisposition towards Israel that promises fulfilment in the Land of Milk and Honey<sup>97</sup> is once more demonstrated, in this case through Jesus' actions. Through parables, such as the one Luke tells of the prodigal son, Jesus explains and vindicates these salvific activities. As Wright further explains:

The parable does not 'teach,' in the sense of teaching abstract or timeless truth; it *acts*. It creates a new world. Those who object to what Jesus is doing are warned of the role they are in fact playing in this new world, in the great climactic drama of Israel's history.<sup>98</sup>

In the prodigal son's estrangement not just from his family but from *Torah* (15:13-15), Luke offers a cultural and religious portrait of exile.

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<sup>95</sup> See N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996), 125-130, 209, 224, 235, 428-431.

<sup>96</sup> Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 127. See also Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 179; Collins, *The Scepter and the Star*, 1.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. Ps 46:4.

<sup>98</sup> Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 130.

But from that wilderness, the ‘unsown land’ incapable of sustaining a life meaningful to Jews, relief for the son is only possible through a return to righteousness. Once more justified before both God and his father he is able to partake of the blessings of Eden in the form of his father’s extravagant generosity, a banquet of abundance and unconditional love that itself acts as a sustaining metaphor of the kingdom of God.

Jesus’ poignant declaration that, unlike the foxes which have holes and birds of the air which have nests, the Son of Man has no place on this earth to lay his head,<sup>99</sup> further suggests that Willitts’ assertion regarding the function of the parable as affirming Jewish messianic expectations in Jesus’ time may have some historical appeal, but limited theological validity in the context of Luke’s Christological focus.

Rather, and reiterating Paul’s contention discussed in the previous chapter,<sup>100</sup> *eretz Yisrael*, which this thesis argues is substantially constituted in Edenic terms and through Edenic images, finds restoration in Luke’s Gospel not through a topography delineated by stream, and outcrop, and forest. Instead it is vindicated in each of “Wisdom’s children” through Christ as both the fulfilment of *Torah*, as well as the ultimate destination of the exiled or the lost. For Luke, as for Paul, the place of restoration and personal transformation for those who open their hearts to Christ as Edenic Lord, the garden of the New Creation manifest as the kingdom of God, ultimately lies within.<sup>101</sup> The imagery of Eden, in this context, is one of internal transformation, of encounter with the resurrected Christ.

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<sup>99</sup> Mt 8:20; Lk 9:58.

<sup>100</sup> See 6.1, “Eden and the Land of Israel in the Writing of Paul.”

<sup>101</sup> Lk 17:21-22. cf. Heb 12:22-24.



#### 7.4 Eden and the Sign of Jonah in Matthew's Gospel.

This chapter will conclude with an examination of how the narrative of exile and return, concomitantly expressed in the oppositional motif of Eden/wilderness, is presented in Mathew's Gospel through the articulation of the 'sign of Jonah' (Mt 12:38-42; 16:1-4), emblematic not only of God's universal saving grace, but also of the ineluctable demands of the New Creation. In these verses, Matthew draws on the symbolism contained in the Old Testament story of Jonah which enunciates God's challenge to the post-exilic Jewish community to live in the new Zion.<sup>102</sup> Matthew appropriates this material both as a means of foregrounding God's mercy and plenitude, as well as foreshadowing the Resurrection as the ultimate revelation of the kingdom of God before those who appear incapable of reading "the signs of the times."<sup>103</sup>

The relationship between the imagery of Eden and the kingdom of God identifiable in the story of Jonah is expressed forcefully in a series of articles by Joel Anderson. In the first instance these articles identify the creation themes in the story of Jonah,<sup>104</sup> including the presence of Edenic imagery to symbolise the restoration of *eretz Yisrael* and the Temple.<sup>105</sup> Subsequently, Anderson's texts articulate the relationship between these themes and broader New Testament concerns in Mark and Matthew, especially that of expressing the New Creation in Christ.<sup>106</sup> Applying an inter-textual hermeneutic developed through narrative theology, Anderson argues that the story of Jonah is told against the backdrop of both the creation narratives of Genesis 1-3, as well as the flood/re-creation narratives of Genesis 6-9. From this

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<sup>102</sup> Joel Edmund Anderson, "Jonah's Peculiar re-Creation," *Biblical Theological Bulletin* 41, No. 4 (Oct. 2011): 180a, 186a; see also David D. Downs, "The Specter of Exile in the Story of Jonah," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 31 (2009): 27-44. The presumption is that the text is post-exilic in origin. For a pre-exilic interpretation that foregrounds the presence of a theme of exile see Paul Kahn, "An Analysis of the Book of Jonah," *Judaism* No. 43 (1994), 87-100.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Mt 16:2-3.

<sup>104</sup> Anderson, "Jonah's Peculiar re-Creation," 179-188.

<sup>105</sup> Anderson, "Jonah's Peculiar re-Creation," 183b.

<sup>106</sup> Anderson, "Jonah in Mark and Matthew," 172-186.

perspective, the intended theological purposes of the text can be properly assessed.<sup>107</sup> Out of this analysis a theme of the mystery of God's mercy<sup>108</sup> in the context of exile and return can be identified. This invites, in its Christian application, comparison with the themes of mercy and celebration expressed in Luke's parable of the Prodigal Son, as previously discussed. As such the relationship between the blessings of the kingdom of God and the ecstatic abundance of Eden, available to all who open their hearts and minds to the Father through Christ, is once more presented to the reader.

For Anderson, the story of the Jewish exiles parallels the story of Jonah in a number of ways:

Like Jonah, Judah refused to be a 'light to the gentiles,' and instead hopped on board with the idolatrous nations as they turned their back on YHWH. Just as Jonah had been cast into the sea, Judah suffered for its rebelliousness and was destroyed, effectively cast from YHWH's presence in exile. Just as Jonah had experienced a re-creation of sorts by being vomited back onto dry land and given one more chance to obey YHWH, so too had the exiles of Judah experienced a re-creation and been allowed to return to the Promised Land, given one more chance to truly live as the people of YHWH.<sup>109</sup>

However, as with the parable of the Prodigal Son, any expectations as to the form of the messianic restoration of Israel are confounded by the narrative itself, which declares, both specifically and in general, a notion that fundamentally subverts any presumptions as to the status of the Jews as the exclusive beneficiaries of God's *hesed*. As the interpolative and axial Psalm of praise found in Jonah 2 declares: "Deliverance belongs to the LORD!"<sup>110</sup>

As Isaiah 43:19 states, YHWH was doing a "new thing," but it involved a creation that went beyond the salvation of merely the Jews. It aimed at the re-creation of all humanity.

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<sup>107</sup> Anderson, "Jonah's Peculiar re-Creation," 180a.

<sup>108</sup> For a fuller discussion of this see also George M. Landes, "The Kerygma of the Book of Jonah: The Contextual Interpretation of the Jonah Psalm," *Interpretation* 21, No. 1 (1967): 1-31.

<sup>109</sup> Anderson, "Jonah's Peculiar re-Creation," 186a.

<sup>110</sup> Jon 2:9-10 cf. 4:6-11.

The challenge, therefore, for both Jonah and the returning exiles was simple: would they accept it or would they retreat to their own ethnic ghetto and cut themselves off from YHWH's work in the re-creation? Jonah's reaction, spelled out in chapter 4, not only unfolds against the backdrop of Genesis 3, but its intertextual allusions to the Edenic Temple of Genesis 1-3 would have had direct relevance to the post-exilic community's rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple.<sup>111</sup>

For Matthew, the answer to the question as to whether the behaviour and attitudes of the religious leaders who are the focus of Jesus' criticism are affirming either of God or of human flourishing<sup>112</sup> is provided in Jesus himself. The irritation that Jesus expresses in Matthew 12:39 and in 16:1-4, where he offers the Scribes and Pharisees and Sadducees<sup>113</sup> only the "sign of Jonah," in response to their subversive request for divine portents, can be understood in this context. That is to say, there is nothing wrong in requesting a sign from God – the Old Testament is full of such requests and God's gracious response<sup>114</sup> – the issue for Jesus, and the point that Matthew is making by drawing the reader's attention to the story of Jonah, is that such requests become unjustified "when one is already surrounded by good and sufficient evidence one chooses not to accept."<sup>115</sup> Understood in this manner it could be said that, for an audience familiar with the story of Jonah and its symbolism, the promise of the blessings of Eden, mediated here by Christ, are also manifest in that sign.

As the fulfilment of *Torah*, Jesus can be understood to be the typological completion of many Old Testament prophecies and

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<sup>111</sup> Anderson, "Jonah's Peculiar re-Creation," 186a.

<sup>112</sup> Cf. Deut 30:15-20.

<sup>113</sup> It should be noted that the Sadducees had ceased to exist by the time Matthew's Gospel was written, suggesting that Matthew was using the term metaphorically, in combination with the Scribes and Pharisees, to symbolise those in the Jewish leadership who opposed Jesus. See Benedict T. Viviano, "The Gospel According to Matthew," in Brown, Fitzmyer, and Murphy, eds., *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 659a.

<sup>114</sup> Ex 33:12-14, 15-17, 18-23; Judg 6:39; 1 Chr 4:10; 2 Chr 7:14-15; Prov 15:8.

<sup>115</sup> Downs, "The Specter of Exile in the Story of Jonah," 46.

stories.<sup>116</sup> Indeed, from a Christian perspective, the “new thing” Isaiah foretells is precisely the New Creation embodied in Jesus which, expressed through the imagery of Eden, restores life to the desert of human limitations:

<sup>18</sup> Do not remember the former things,  
or consider the things of old.  
<sup>19</sup> I am about to do a new thing;  
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?  
I will make a way in the wilderness  
and rivers in the desert.  
<sup>20</sup> The wild animals will honour me,  
the jackals and the ostriches;  
for I give water in the wilderness,  
rivers in the desert...

Isaiah 43:18-20

Nevertheless, and as Anderson observes, the challenging thing in the passages from Matthew is that the Edenic restoration described in Jonah is one that extends beyond the promise to the Jews made by God through Isaiah, “To give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself so that they declare my praise.”<sup>117</sup> In a similar way the beneficiaries of the new Eden declared by Christ are, for Matthew, clearly those who, like the pagan Ninevites, and unlike the religious authorities who confront Jesus, are able to recognise the universal God.<sup>118</sup> As with Paul, the answer to the question, “who are the true sons of Abraham?”<sup>119</sup> raised by Jonah and Matthew (and Luke) lies not in the “evil and adulterous generation,” the children of the Covenant to whom evil spirits return again and again,<sup>120</sup> but in those “who believe,” who are “heirs according to the promise.”<sup>121</sup> Thus, as with Jonah, in which God’s salvation is seen to be granted universally through the symbol of the Samaritan Ninevites, the

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<sup>116</sup> Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction* (San Francisco: Harper, 1996), 96.

<sup>117</sup> Isa 43:20-21.

<sup>118</sup> Jon 1:14, 16; 3:5, 8, 10; cf. Mt 12:41-42;

<sup>119</sup> Gal 3: 9, 29.

<sup>120</sup> Mt 12:43-45.

<sup>121</sup> Gal 3: 29.

kingdom of God in Matthew is offered not just to the Jews who, like the elder son in Luke's parable of loss and redemption, are incapable of comprehending God's unconditional love,<sup>122</sup> but to all who in faith recognise Christ.

This message of universal salvation is emphasised in Matthew through the passages which immediately precede Jesus' ultimatum delivered in the parallel text (Mt 16:1-4) concerning the limits of the signs he will provide to the faithless and the wicked. That is, just prior to this specific passage Matthew recounts both the incident of the Canaanite woman, a Gentile who in Jewish tradition was regarded as 'impure,'<sup>123</sup> and from whose daughter Jesus removes an 'evil spirit' in response to the woman's overt faith in Him (15:21-28), and the following pericope of the 'Feeding of the Four Thousand,' in which Jesus is described as providing sustenance for what is held to be a large crowd ("four thousand, besides women and children"), most probably of Samaritan origin,<sup>124</sup> who were also considered anathema to the Jews. The implication is that the Gentiles have been incorporated into the "fullness of Israel."<sup>125</sup> Adopting a logic that proceeds 'from the lesser to the greater'<sup>126</sup> Mathew similarly concludes 12:42 with reference to the Queen of Sheba's visit to King Solomon<sup>127</sup> in order to initially test him, but then to gather to herself the benefit of his great wisdom: "how much more," asks Downs, "ought Jesus' audience to repent, given the miracle they have already witnessed?"<sup>128</sup> By way of contrast, and insofar as Jonah's time under the sea (3 days) "afforded a close enough parallel to Jesus' burial in the earth to generate the

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<sup>122</sup> Cf. Lk 15:5.

<sup>123</sup> That is, "...menstruants from the cradle," (Midrash *Nidil*, 4.1 cf Mt 15: 1-20). Viviano, "The Gospel According to Matthew," 658a. See also David Daube, "Jesus and the Samaritan Woman: The Meaning of συγχράομαι," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 69. No. 2. (June 1950): 137-138. (συγχράομαι – sugchraomai: meaning, 'to use together', or 'to associate with' – my translation)

<sup>124</sup> Mt 15:29 cf. 28:16.

<sup>125</sup> Viviano, "The Gospel According to Matthew," 659a. Cf. Acts 6:5, 13:19, and 21:8.

<sup>126</sup> Downs, "The Specter of Exile in the Story of Jonah," 45.

<sup>127</sup> 1 Kings 10:1-9.

<sup>128</sup> Downs, "The Specter of Exile in the Story of Jonah," 45.

analogy used in Matthew,<sup>129</sup> the combined texts (Mt 12:38-42 and 16:1-4) referencing Jonah can equally be seen to be, “the first prelude” of the Matthean passion and the Easter story more generally, as well as a first response of Jesus to the decision of the Pharisees to kill him (12:14).<sup>130</sup>

In light of the above, the question of the relationship between the imagery of Eden and Jonah’s ‘resurrection’ through the agency of the large fish, or ‘sea monster,’<sup>131</sup> who delivers him from Sheol,<sup>132</sup> and the resurrection of Christ, foreshadowed in Jesus’ appropriation of the symbolism of Jonah, must be also be considered. Anderson, drawing on various sources, argues that the plant that God “appoints” to provide shade for Jonah, and to otherwise “save him from his discomfort”<sup>133</sup> following his disgorgement onto the “dry land”<sup>134</sup> can be seen to echo the Tree of Life at the centre of Eden described in Genesis 2:9; by association the worm that subsequently destroys the plant “echoes the serpent in the Garden of Eden.”<sup>135</sup> By themselves these links might be considered tenuous, but in the overall pattern of alignment between the story of Jonah and the creation stories of Genesis 1-3 and 6-9, which recall to mind the imagery of Eden, the inference is reasonable.

More compelling are the associations between Christ, as the New Creation, and the blessings of Eden implicit in the inauguration of the kingdom of God demonstrated both through the parables regarding the ‘kingdom of heaven’ following 12:38-42, and the miracles preceding 16:1-4. Combining the various aspects of the Jonah story present in Matthew’s Gospel, then, it can be seen that the entire story is the sign

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<sup>129</sup> Downs, “The Specter of Exile in the Story of Jonah,” 45.

<sup>130</sup> Downs, “The Specter of Exile in the Story of Jonah,” 45; Anderson, “Jonah in Mark and Matthew,” 176, 182.

<sup>131</sup> Jon 1:17 cf. Mt 12:40

<sup>132</sup> Jon 2:5-6.

<sup>133</sup> Jon 4: 6.

<sup>134</sup> Gen 1: 9 cf. Jon 2:10.

<sup>135</sup> Anderson, “Jonah’s Peculiar re-Creation,” 186b.

of which Jesus speaks, even if that sign is imperceptible to the Pharisees and other religious authorities with whom Jesus is in conflict.<sup>136</sup>

By way of contrast, for Matthew's post-resurrection and predominantly Gentile audience, the message is clear: i) Jesus' identity as Messiah is something more glorious and powerful than previously anticipated; ii) just as Jerusalem had come under judgement previously for rejecting God, so too it has come under judgement for rejecting Jesus;<sup>137</sup> iii) God's restoration of Israel, manifest through the motif of exile and return, is embodied in Christ;<sup>138</sup> and iv) as a consequence of (iii) the Messianic realm encompassing the New Creation in Christ, inclusive of the restoration of Eden, extends deliverance to Gentiles as well, and all beyond the boundaries of Zion.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter, and the preceding one, have described some of the ways that the imagery of the Garden of Eden is used in the New Testament to illustrate the blessings of the New Creation in Christ. Contrary to views that the story Garden of Eden was considered of little value or relevance to Jesus and his followers,<sup>139</sup> they reveal how New Testament authors appropriated a range of previously existing meanings attached to the imagery Eden to illustrate the continuities and differences between extant Judaism and the beliefs and values of the evolving Jesus movement. These include the maintenance of a number of key motifs and narrative structures, such as the subsuming of matrimonial imagery, including the *hieros gamos* motif, under the overarching blessings of Eden, the juxtaposition of Edenic imagery against that of wilderness to heighten the positive perception of

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<sup>136</sup> Anderson, "Jonah in Mark and Matthew," 175.

<sup>137</sup> Anderson, "Jonah in Mark and Matthew," 174.

<sup>138</sup> Cf. Lk 24:21.

<sup>139</sup> Guy G. Stroumsa, "Introduction: the paradise chronotope," in Bockmuehl and Stroumsa, eds, *Paradise in Antiquity*, 8-9.

emergent Christian theology, in the context of the extant second temple Jewish belief in the restoration of Israel, and the ongoing specific use of generally recognisable and culturally dispersed Edenic symbols such as the ‘tree of life,’ and the ‘water of life,’ to clarify, emphasise, and consolidate their ideas in light of the Christian experience of the Incarnation.

At the same time substantial changes in the way some of these Edenic images were presented can also be identified. Paul’s displacement of the metaphorical Eden, from the Land of Israel into the heart of each individual Christian believer, John’s emphatic depiction through the use of Edenic imagery of Jesus as the Wisdom of God, the Law, and the new Temple, and the writer of Revelation’s subsequent relocation of Eden into the Church as the new Jerusalem, through the Holy Spirit, all point to radically new understandings of the relationship between Eden and the Christian world. This diversity of voices represents much more than an amplified example of inter-textuality at work. Instead, through a dialogical process the kingdom of God is proclaimed polyphonically by a range of authors each of whom, in faith, give emphasis to their themes through the judicious, intentional use of the imagery of Eden.

In the next chapter these differences and continuities will be further explored in the context of the Passion Narrative. Here, the use of Edenic symbolism, can be seen to be central to conveying the New Testament authors’ dominant theme of a world, and human life within it, redeemed through Christ’s saving death and resurrection.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Cf. Gal 6:15-16.



## CHAPTER EIGHT: EDEN AND THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF CHRIST.

The previous chapter introduced the early Christian belief that the God who created the world was at one and the same time its redeemer.<sup>1</sup>

The manner by which that relationship was elaborated for readers of John's Gospel, through the use of Edenic imagery, was examined by analysis of the Johannine representation of Christ as the manifestation of the pre-existent Word, or Wisdom, of God. The ubiquitous presence of Edenic imagery, symbolic of the New Creation in Christ, of which the inauguration of the kingdom of God was the preeminent feature, was further asserted by consideration of a range of textual examples located more widely in the New Testament. It was described how these texts used Edenic imagery to support and convey critical understandings of the meaning of Christ's words and actions, and included the parable of the Prodigal Son, and Jesus' offer of the 'sign of Jonah' to the faithless world, foreshadowing the Resurrection.

By way of extension to the material and ideas already discussed, the emphasis of this chapter will not be on Christ as the disclosure of God's Wisdom *per se* – perceived, and verified “within the obedience of faith”<sup>2</sup> – but on the compelling force of the Incarnation,<sup>3</sup> and the relationship of that phenomenon to the Passion Narrative. My concern, then, is to focus on the imagery of Eden in the context of the embodied Christ, “the grace enabled corollary” of the electing God,<sup>4</sup> both fully human and fully divine.<sup>5</sup> Here, the imagery of Eden is seen to help conform and orientate human understanding to the extraordinary truth of a God who not only comes among us, “as

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. 1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:12-20.

<sup>2</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics. 1: Seeing the Form*, transl. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 455.

<sup>3</sup> von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord, 1*, 459. Cf. Jn 19:30.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Dafydd Jones, “Karl Barth on Gethsemane,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 9, No.2 (April 2007): 153.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Heb 5: 1-10.

another ourself which dwells in and authenticates our darkness,”<sup>6</sup> but whose actions and physical presence concretises the possibility of hope.

### **8.1 Eden and the Embodied Christ.**

Maria Boulding’s commentary on Advent points precisely to the nexus between the quality of the faith experience of individual Christians and their sense of the Incarnation:

The eternal Word was born of our flesh, so that we, who could not grasp with our minds what was from the beginning, might see with our eyes and touch with our hands, and know his glory within our human experience. He has shared everything that is ours, in order to lift us into everything that is his, He is here, of the flesh of Mary, the flesh of the human family. ‘Our Father who art in heaven’ and our brother who art on earth, of one stock with us in the shared nature, Sanctifier and sanctified.<sup>7</sup>

Karl Barth, similarly reflecting on the creation affirming realism of Jesus of Nazareth,<sup>8</sup> argues that such is the intensity of God’s love, and such is its radical quality, that it is *only* through the Incarnation, and the subsequent death and resurrection of Christ, that it can be perceived.<sup>9</sup>

Nowhere is this necessity, of the material expression of God’s love, articulated more thoroughly in the New Testament than in the Letter to the Hebrews where the writer exhorts the listeners to remain faithful and strong, as Christ had been when tormented by doubt and fear in Gethsemane, as the only appropriate response to the oppression the intended audience of Hebrews were themselves obviously experiencing: “In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplication, with loud tears and cries, to the one who was able to

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<sup>6</sup> Christopher Ben Simpson, *Merleau-Ponty and Theology* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 127.

<sup>7</sup> Maria Boulding, *The Coming of God* (Conception: The Printery House, 1990), 51. Cf. Heb 2:5-17.

<sup>8</sup> Simpson, *Merleau-Ponty and Theology*, 123.

<sup>9</sup> Jones, “Karl Barth on Gethsemane,” 151.

save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission” (Heb 5:7-9).

The reader similarly discovers in the New Testament that Jesus’ relationship with his body is not only basic to his person, but central to the formation and growth of the New Creation,<sup>10</sup> concomitantly represented through the reinstatement of Eden.<sup>11</sup> As Dafydd Jones expresses it, reflecting on Karl Barth’s discernment of Gethsemane, “the *logos asarkos* is always becoming and being (and never *not* becoming and being) the *logos ensarkos*.”<sup>12</sup> That is to say, as conceived of through the Incarnation the transcendence of God is always present in the body of Christ. Yet, even in John’s Gospel where, together with the Letter to the Hebrews, is to be found what is considered the ‘highest’ Christology of the entire New Testament,<sup>13</sup> Jesus is portrayed in “emphatically earthy tones.”<sup>14</sup>

The corporeality of the Christ event, especially in the Passion narratives and stories of the resurrection of Jesus, is also a defining feature of the Synoptic Gospels. The reader is told that when Jesus goes to Gethsemane to pray, a “sadness came over him, and great distress” (Mt 26:27); that his soul was “sorrowful, even to the point of death” (26:28); that a “sudden fear” and “great distress” came over him (Mk 14:33); that he “knelt” on the ground to pray that, if it were possible, he might be relieved of the inescapable demands of God’s plan of salvation (Lk 22:41); that he recognised the physical limitations of others, insofar as “the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak” (Mt 26:41; Mk 12:37); that in his anguish he prayed fervently,

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<sup>10</sup> Mt 26:18. cf. Jn 19:30.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Rev 22:1-5.

<sup>12</sup> That is, the pre-existing Word is always becoming and being the incarnate Word. Jones, “Karl Barth on Gethsemane,” 152.

<sup>13</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 393.

<sup>14</sup> Donald Senior, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of John* (Collegeville: Michael Glazier, 1991), 7.

such that “his sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood” (Lk 22:44).<sup>15</sup>

Following these scenes, Jesus is immediately delivered “into the hands” of his betrayers (Mt 26:45; Mk 12:41); beyond this, the physicality of the events of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus continues. The reader is told, for example, where the risen Jesus, having forced the disciples towards a reluctant recognition of Him by showing them his hands and feet (Lk 24:40), consolidates their acceptance by the simple act of demanding something to eat, which Jesus then, “took and ate before their eyes” (24:43).

This is not an argument for the harmonisation of the Gospels, but an attempt to draw attention to the pervasive and ubiquitous physicality of the Gospel narrative in general, and the Passion narratives more specifically, as the primary referent of the Christian faith.<sup>16</sup>

Nevertheless, to the degree that the stories of Jesus’ Passion, death and resurrection are the abiding focus of each of the evangelists, the source and goal of all preceding narrative,<sup>17</sup> a degree of common theological purpose and understanding must be recognised. It will be argued that for the early Christian communities it was predominantly the imagery of Eden, analogous for the blessing of a transfigured existence in Christ as a manifestation of the glory of God, which conformed that understanding to one of grace. This is a notion that lasted, in part, well into the Middle Ages,<sup>18</sup> before the perceived problems with Eden, rather than its blessings, appeared to dominate

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<sup>15</sup> The unresolved debate relating to the provenance of this specific passage is not at issue here – its presence in the canonical text is sufficient for its consideration in the wider theme of Jesus’ internal struggle which the Synoptic writers are collectively expressing.

<sup>16</sup> Jn 1:14; Rev 21:3 cf. Ex 29:46.

<sup>17</sup> Senior, *The Passion of Jesus in John*, 12. Cf. Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave. A Commentary On the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels*, vol.1 (New York: Doubleday, 1994), vii. Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, transl. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1971), 277.

<sup>18</sup> Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), for example, takes as one her foundational concepts the notion of ‘viridity,’ as an attribute of the divine nature, of which Eden is a concrete representation, once more obtainable by men and women through Christ. Mews, “Religious Thinker,” 52-69.

the Church's perspective of this fundamental symbol of God's loving predisposition to the world.

At the same time the Incarnation also unlocks the full meaning of what it means to be human, insofar as, as Karl Barth declares, "This man is *man*."<sup>19</sup> The flesh of Jesus does not mask his divine origin and substance but enables it to be revealed to the world.<sup>20</sup> By its very nature, then, the story of the embodied Jesus, particularly in his death, burial and resurrection, becomes the paradigm and criterion for understanding our own existence. Accordingly, the blessings of Eden, which direct Christian comprehension of the logic and value of human relationship with God, correspondingly inform Christian understanding of inherent human value and potential. In doing so it also informs the Church's own self-identity, through its historical links to the Apostles, as the sacramental institution invested, though its links to the Apostles, with the responsibility of "giving witness and voice to the faith of the whole people of God gathered together in Christ."<sup>21</sup>

The events affecting the body of Christ, then, now become the axis through which the relationship between the imagery of Eden, as a mediating expression<sup>22</sup> of God's blessing, and Christ's saving grace, can be investigated.<sup>23</sup> In particular, the circumstances pertaining to

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<sup>19</sup> Thistleton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, 392.

<sup>20</sup> Senior, *The Passion of Jesus in John*, 16.

<sup>21</sup> Second Vatican Council, "Gaudium et Spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," #3.

[http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_cons\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html).

<sup>22</sup> D.R. de Lacey, "Jesus as Mediator," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 29, no.9 (1987): 115. Cf. Marguerite Abdul-Masih, *Edward Schillebeeckx and Hans Frei: A Conversation on Method and Christology* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001), 59-62; von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord 1*, 451-462.

<sup>23</sup> A constitutive belief of early Christian faith that can be observed in the ecstatic writings of the fourth-century theologian-poet St Ephrem the Syrian, whose cycle of fifteen hymns on Paradise weaves a profound synthesis of early Christian understandings of redemption around the events of Genesis 2-3. See, for example, Hymn IX.1: "In the world there is struggle, in Eden, a crown of glory. At our resurrection both earth and heaven will God renew, liberating all creatures, granting them paschal joy, along with us." St. Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns on Paradise*, intro. and transl. Sebastian Brock (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990), 135-136.

Jesus in Gethsemane, of Golgotha and Easter Saturday, and in the Garden of the Resurrection, are explored in order to determine the scope and depth of this relationship. This examination takes place in the context of, on the one hand, Church teaching that has traditionally tended to speak of this relationship only indirectly and with caution,<sup>24</sup> and on the other hand, lived human experience that integrates these understandings of Eden through Christ into a contemporary and personalised Christian faith.<sup>25</sup> It is to the climactic events pertaining to the death, burial and resurrection of Christ where the focus of this thesis now turns.

## 8.2 Jesus, Eden and Gethsemane.

‘Gethsemane,’ which most scholars interpret to mean ‘oil press,’<sup>26</sup> refers to a place on the Mount of Olives adjacent to Jerusalem, to the East across the Kidron valley. It is specifically identified in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, and subsequently assumed into commentary on the Gospels of John and Luke,<sup>27</sup> who do not mention it by name;<sup>28</sup> references elsewhere in the New Testament are indirect, and can only be inferred,<sup>29</sup> even where that relationship is perceived to be strong.<sup>30</sup> It features in John’s Gospel as the site where Jesus and his

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<sup>24</sup> Kevin Madigan, “Ancient and High-Medieval Interpretations of Jesus in Gethsemane: Some Reflections on Tradition and Continuity in Christian Thought,” *Harvard Theological Review*, 88, no. 1 (Jan 1995): 157-173; and Ben Van Onna, “Paradise and Evolution,” *Concilium* 6, no. 3, 1967: 64.

<sup>25</sup> Abdul-Masih, *Edward Schillebeeckx and Hans Frei*, 101-103.

<sup>26</sup> Greek – *Gethsēmani*; Heb/Aramaic - *Gat-šēmānī*

<sup>27</sup> Raymond Brown, for example, whilst drawing the reader’s attention precisely to the fact that only Matthew and Mark identify the place as ‘Gethsemane,’ nevertheless subtitles the section dealing with Jesus’ prayer to the Father as it is expressed in each of the four Gospels as “Prayer in Gethsemane.” Indeed, *From Gethsemane to the Grave* becomes the subtitle of the entire two volume commentary on the death of Jesus. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 146-234. Most other commentaries on the Passion narratives make a similar assumption in their titles and sub-titles, reserving more fine-grained analysis for the body of their text. Cf. Pierre Benoît, *The Passion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Lk 22:39; Jn 18:1.

<sup>29</sup> Eg. Acts 1:12; 1 Cor 15:58; 2 Cor 12:8; Heb 5:7-9.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics, Vol. IV: The Doctrine of Reconciliation, 1*, transl. G.W. Bromley (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956/1980), 259.

disciples frequently met,<sup>31</sup> and in the Synoptics where the composite scene of Jesus' prayers to his Father and his arrest immediately following, by the Jewish authorities, takes place.<sup>32</sup>

Raymond Brown, and others, remarking on the fact that the name 'Gethsemane' is not used in either Luke or John, assume its inclusion to be no more than an historical reminiscence,<sup>33</sup> having "no theological import."<sup>34</sup> In making this claim Brown rejects both ancient attempts, such as those by Jerome,<sup>35</sup> as well as more recent commentary, such as that by D.M. Stanley,<sup>36</sup> to invest Gethsemane with explicit meaning tied to the events that take place there. Intertextual 'resonance,' for example, such as that identified in 2 Samuel 15:23, 30, is not considered by Brown of sufficient strength to link Gethsemane explicitly to any overarching biblical themes. It is worth weighing the validity of Brown's reasoning for dismissing any specific biblical, and particularly Edenic, associations with Gethsemane more thoroughly.

The first point Brown makes is to critically contrast Jerome's typological reference to the events in salvation history precipitated by Christ's commitment to his divine destiny<sup>37</sup> with Stanley's assertion that there is a symbolic relationship between crushing olives and Jesus' 'agony'<sup>38</sup> in Gethsemane, as it is described in the Synoptics.<sup>39</sup> The implication is that the considerable variance that Brown identifies in these interpretations, and ones like them, depletes Gethsemane of

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<sup>31</sup> Jn 18:2.

<sup>32</sup> Mt. 26: 38-39; Mk 14: 34-36; Lk 22:42

<sup>33</sup> Pierre Benoit recognises the same but, rather than the 'recollection' of Gethsemane being innocuous, speculates that the veracity of the name may be "an echo of Peter's teaching." Benoit, *The Passion*, 9. Cf. R.S. Barbour, "Gethsemane in the Tradition of the Passion," *New Testament Studies* 16, Issue 3 (1970): 235.

<sup>34</sup> Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 1:148-149.

<sup>35</sup> Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 1:148.

<sup>36</sup> D.M. Stanley, *Jesus in Gethsemane* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 131.

<sup>37</sup> On the basis that Jerome makes an etymological connection between Gethsemane, and *Gē'-ēšēmānīm*, "valley of fatness," cf. Isa 28:1-4.

<sup>38</sup> Lk 22:44 – "καὶ γινόμενος ἐν ἀγωνίᾳ ἐκτενέστερον" – "then in his anguish he prayed more fervently"

<sup>39</sup> Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 1:148, n.4. Cf. Stanley, *Jesus in Gethsemane*, 131.

any substantive theological significance. In one sense Brown is correct, insofar as a discrete, or even contextual, meaning for ‘Gethsemane,’ in a text where names are frequently of fundamental significance, appears to be absent. By itself, however, this does not render the name ‘Gethsemane’ incidental; rather, it points to the multi-valent nature of many biblical concepts, especially those transformed or expanded upon in light of post-Resurrection faith.

It would appear that the early Church Fathers, whom Brown describes as having erroneously made a very strong connection between Gethsemane and Eden,<sup>40</sup> were of this mind, interpreting Jesus’ ‘agony’ in Gethsemane as critical to the “whole purpose of Jesus’ ministry and of the gospel.”<sup>41</sup> Brown dismisses the rabbinic material relied on by the Fathers to support their understandings of the relationship between Eden and Gethsemane on the basis that the sources are at least of late 1<sup>st</sup> Century origin and therefore integrated into those understandings anachronistically.<sup>42</sup> Brown’s criticism, however, appears to overlook the fact that the rabbinic commentaries that he is referring to did not emerge spontaneously but had antecedents in much earlier traditional Jewish understandings to which the Gospel writers, as well as their audiences, most likely also had access. St Ephrem the Syrian, for example, draws on the imagery of Eden to describe post-Resurrection life in Christ, using it as the locus of meaning in a cycle of fifteen hymns that “weave a profound theological synthesis” organised around Genesis 2 and 3.<sup>43</sup> For Ephrem, the axis between primordial and eschatological understandings of ‘Paradise’ is Gethsemane, where Jesus “... remained in prayer... to bring Adam into his own garden again.”<sup>44</sup> In doing so, according to Sebastian Brock, Ephrem evoked in his

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<sup>40</sup> Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 1:148.

<sup>41</sup> Arthur A. Just Jr. ed., *Ancient Commentary on Scripture: New Testament III, Luke* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003), 340.

<sup>42</sup> Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 1:148, n.5.

<sup>43</sup> St Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns on Paradise*, 8.

<sup>44</sup> Ephrem the Syrian, Commentary on Tatian’s Diatessaron 20.11. in Just, *Ancient Commentary on Scripture*, 344.



writings a conception of Paradise held to be traditional in the Judaism at the time of Enoch, around the second century BCE.<sup>45</sup>

Brown consolidates his criticism by further noting that John refers to the place where Jesus assembled with his disciples on the Mount of Olives<sup>46</sup> as a *κῆπος* (*kēpos*), that is, an ordinary garden with simple horticultural connotations, rather than the *paradeisos* of Genesis 2:8 which, according to Brown, would be a more obvious choice if the relationship to Eden was to be intentional. Brown then asks rhetorically, in relation to the word *kēpos*: “...every time it is used are we to think of the Garden of Eden?”<sup>47</sup> The answer, of course, is no *unless* the inferences are very strong, as they appear to be in this instance. To begin with, John also uses the term *kēpos* to refer both to the place of Jesus’ crucifixion and burial<sup>48</sup> as well as his first post-resurrection appearance to Mary Magdalene.<sup>49</sup> These references occur not in the context of everyday horticultural usage, except perhaps where Mary Magdalene ironically ‘confuses’ Jesus with ‘the gardener,’<sup>50</sup> but in the context of what Joachim Schaper argues are connotations of kingship and royal gardens.<sup>51</sup> This theme will be explored in more detail later in this chapter, where the relationship between Jesus and the garden of the Resurrection as a sign of the New Creation (Jn 20:1-17) is more fully examined. Suffice it to say that recurrent themes,<sup>52</sup> the great “verities of John,”<sup>53</sup> and their associated symbols, are a feature of his writing. Of these, the inability of Jesus’ own people<sup>54</sup> to recognise his true nature is an overarching concern

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<sup>45</sup> St Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns on Paradise*, 49. See also Coloe, “Like Father, Like Son,” 9-10.

<sup>46</sup> Jn 18:1.

<sup>47</sup> Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 1:148, n.5.

<sup>48</sup> Jn 19:41.

<sup>49</sup> Jn 20:1-17.

<sup>50</sup> Jn 20:15. “*dokousa hoti ho kēpouros estin.*”

<sup>51</sup> Joachim Schaper, “The messiah in the garden: John 19.38-41, (royal) gardens, and messianic concepts,” in Bockmuehl and Stroumsa, eds., *Paradise in Antiquity*, 17-27.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Jn 4: 4-42.

<sup>53</sup> Moule, “The Individualism of the Fourth Gospel,” 175. Cf. C.K Barret, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: SPCK, 1978), 5; Senior, *The Passion of Jesus*, 15-18.

<sup>54</sup> Jn 1:11.

resolved only after the Resurrection, at which point, narratively and theologically, the *kēpos* does become the *paradeisos*. That is to say, the *hortus*, or mundane garden of unrealised faith, becomes the Eden of the New Creation, blossoming in the hearts of those who finally come to full understanding of the Christ event, healing and nourishing the world with its transforming beauty and fecundity.<sup>55</sup>

To be sure, Paul's theology of Jesus as the New Adam, of which John is the predominant advocate amongst the Gospel writers,<sup>56</sup> hinges, in the Synoptics, on the scene in Gethsemane prior to his arrest, where Jesus accedes fully to his role in God's plan for the world's salvation. As Barbour argues, in the context of the encompassing conflict between good and evil, "if we are to talk at all of a cosmic struggle in the case of Luke, that struggle is at Gethsemane and not on the Cross."<sup>57</sup>

It is worth reflecting on the association between Gethsemane, as the place of the oil-press, and the *menorah*, or seven-branched candelabra that illuminated the altar of the tabernacle,<sup>58</sup> which was kept aflame by olive oil, and for which an equivalence to the Tree of Life at the centre of Eden has been made in Jewish tradition. In any case, as can be seen above, there exists a strong connection in tradition and, it will be argued, in Scripture, between Gethsemane and the imagery of the Garden of Eden that confirms the central place of Edenic imagery in the Passion narratives.

### **8.2.1 Eden, Gethsemane and the *Aqedah*.**

An initial investigation into possible relationships between the

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<sup>55</sup> Rev 22:2 cf. Ezek 47:12.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Jn 1:1; Lk 3:38.

<sup>57</sup> R.S. Barbour, "Gethsemane in the Tradition of the Passion," *New Testament Studies* 16, Issue 3, 1970, 241. Barth similarly argues that the section on Gethsemane "forms the turning point between the two parts of the whole Gospel record." Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV, 1, 264.

<sup>58</sup> Ex 25:31-38.

imagery of Eden and the events in Gethsemane can be undertaken through the comparison between Jesus' conceding his life to the will of the Father (Mt 26:38; Mk 14:36; Lk 22:42; Jn 12:27-28; 14:31),<sup>59</sup> and the Old Testament narrative known as the *Aqedah* (or the 'binding of Isaac' (Gen 22), which describes God's demand of the life of Abraham's miraculously conceived and beloved son.<sup>60</sup>

It can be appreciated that given Isaac's integral role in the fulfilment of God's covenant promise to Abraham, the motif of 'obedience unto death' present in the New Testament can readily be 'read back' onto the Old Testament narrative. Certainly, von Balthasar claims that it is precisely in the vicarious acts of atonement described in the Old Testament, such as the *Aqedah*, where "the oldest core of christology" has its roots.<sup>61</sup> According to this typology, Jesus, like the Isaac of the extra-biblical tradition,<sup>62</sup> actively and willingly faces his sacrifice with unflinching courage, an action understood in the context of the story of Isaac as the ultimate paradigm for an exemplarist Christian soteriology.<sup>63</sup>

Potent as this interpretation was, especially for the Matthean community who were under stress not only from without, but who also perceived themselves as cut off from their own Jewish past,<sup>64</sup> the typological connection between the binding of Isaac and Christ's accession to the will of the Father also contextualises Jesus' actions as

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<sup>59</sup> Recognising that the references to sacrifice made by Jesus in John's Gospel are embedded elsewhere in his text, similarly foreshadowing the events of the Passion.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Heb 5:7-9; 11:17-20.

<sup>61</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Pneuma und Institution," in Medard Kehl & Werner Löser, eds; transl. Robert Daly & Fred Lawrence, *The von Balthasar Reader* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark), 151.

<sup>62</sup> That is to say, Isaac's role in Gen 22 is only implicit (cf. Gen 22:80).

Nevertheless, it is held in various Jewish commentaries that, as a 25 year old man in the fullness of his strength, Isaac, as did Jesus, must have acceded willingly to God's demand.

<sup>63</sup> Leroy Andrew Huizenga, "Obedience unto Death: The Matthean Gethsemane and Arrest Sequence and the *Aqedah*," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 71, no. 3 (Jul 2009): 507-519. Huizenga argues that the 'radical obedience' demonstrated by Jesus is a key feature of the Matthean text, one that "permeates the Gospel." Cf. Mt 3:13-17; 5:18-20; 7:15-23 etc) Huizenga, "Obedience unto Death," 516.

<sup>64</sup> Donald Senior, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1985), 13. See also Barbour, "Gethsemane," 238; and Benoit, *The Passion and Resurrection*, 337.

a pivotal moment within more cosmic concerns relating to the inauguration of the Kingdom of God. It is a revelation for which the symbols of Eden have comprehensively been shown in the previous chapter to provide a meaningful frame of reference.<sup>65</sup>

Acceptance of any inter-textual correspondence supporting the notion of Jesus as a new Isaac, as an extension of the Old Testament narrative, however, is not uncontested and is dependent on a range of assumptions and allowances that not all New Testament scholars accept.<sup>66</sup> These assumptions include: i) reliance on a significant input from extra-biblical Jewish tradition which presents, in a variety of documents, Isaac as the willing and active participant in his own sacrificial death;<sup>67</sup> ii) the critical acceptance, similarly based on apocryphal and extra-biblical documents, of the antiquity and cultural embeddedness within pre-Christian Judaism of the *Aqedah* as a pre-existing resource that was itself appropriated by the earliest Christians, not an innovation or novelty of post-Christian Jewish commentary – this is in opposition to generic Christian claims that Jesus’ atonement occasioned its invention in Amoraic texts;<sup>68</sup> and iii) accepting a broader understanding of the term ‘Aqedah’ as “a convenient collective designation encompassing all its permutations,” rather than referring specifically to the actual binding of Isaac immediately prior to the moment of sacrifice.<sup>69</sup>

The debate itself has a long history,<sup>70</sup> and it is not the intention of this thesis to describe it with any of the complexity with which it is

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<sup>65</sup> Ch. 7, “Jesus, Eden, and the Kingdom of God.”

<sup>66</sup> Cf. P.R. Davies and B.D. Chilton, “The Aqedah: A Revised Tradition History,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 40 (1978): 514-546.

<sup>67</sup> These include the Qumran document 4Q225, 2ii.4, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*, *Targum Neofiti*, *Genesis Rabbah*, 56:8. See Huizenga, “Obedience unto Death,” 509-515.

<sup>68</sup> In support of this notion Huizenga cites accounts of the Aqedah featuring Isaac’s active involvement in various texts such as Josephus’ *Antiquities*, *Liber Antiquitatem Biblicarum*, 4 Maccabees, and *First Clement*, Huizenga, “Obedience unto Death,” 509-511, 513. Cf. P.R. Davies and B.D. Chilton, “The Aqedah: A Revised Tradition History,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 40 (1978): 516.

<sup>69</sup> Huizenga, “Obedience unto Death,” 509.

<sup>70</sup> George Every for example, summarises that whilst this part of the story of Abraham “has made a deep impression on all his descendants, Jews, Christians and

prosecuted.<sup>71</sup> Apropos the case for the positive comparison between Jesus' sacrifice initiated in Gethsemane and the *Aqedah*, Huizenga's contribution argues strongly for the pre-existence of the *Aqedah* tradition prior to the development of the Gospels;<sup>72</sup> contemporary Jewish scholarship supports a similar position.<sup>73</sup> Indeed, for Huizenga:

The Matthean Jesus and the Isaac of ancient Jewish tradition resemble each other to a remarkable degree: both are promised children conceived under extraordinary circumstances, beloved sons who, for redemptive purposes, willingly face their sacrifices at the season of Passover in obedience to their respective fathers. Thus, when read as a narrative with attention to its first-century CE cultural location, the Gospel of Matthew presents a significant Isaac typology.<sup>74</sup>

Huizenga further supports this claim of inter-textual and thematic links with additional references to what he argues are numerous instances of shared syntax between the two passages.<sup>75</sup> Be that as it may, the critical point, in trying to identify the presence of Edenic imagery in the various Gethsemane passages, lies not in atonement theology *per se*, important as it may be and which may or may not be "the essential feature of the *Aqedah*,"<sup>76</sup> nor in the common theme of 'obedience unto death,' which Huizenga selects as the dominant meaning of the two related passages. Rather, attention must be on the question of covenantal promise and fulfilment, of which Edenic

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Moslems... they have not found it easy to agree on the significance..." George Every, *Christian Mythology* (London: Hamlyn, 1970/1987), 48.

<sup>71</sup> Based on the citations offered in various articles that address the topic, recent scholarly interest appears to have been re-ignited in the 1940s, with relatively consistent activity in the following decades. For an historical overview of this discussion see James Swetnam, *Jesus and Isaac: A Study of the Epistle to the Hebrews in the Light of Aqedah* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1891), 4-22.

<sup>72</sup> Huizenga, "Obedience unto Death," 507-519.

<sup>73</sup> See, for example, Bernstein, "Angels at the Aqedah," (2000), 266; Isaac Kalimi, *Early Jewish Exegesis and Theological Controversy: Studies in Scripture in the Shadow of Internal and External Controversies* (Assen: Royal Van Gorcum, 2002); Kalimi, "'Go, I beg you, take your beloved son and slay him!' The Binding of Isaac in Rabbinic Literature and Thought." *The Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 13 (2010): 1-29.

<sup>74</sup> Huizenga, "Obedience unto Death," 508.

<sup>75</sup> Huizenga, "Obedience unto Death," 518-520.

<sup>76</sup> Abraham Oh, "Canonical understanding of the sacrifice of Isaac: The influence of the Jewish tradition," *HTS Theological Studies* 72.3 (2016): 1.

imagery is a recurring and ubiquitous motif, in both the Old and New Testaments. Additionally, the broader relationship between the cultic features of the *Aqedah* and the perception of Jesus as the new Temple must be acknowledged, insofar as the *Aqedah* was an event that took place according to tradition, if not according to Scripture,<sup>77</sup> on Mount Moriah, or Mount Zion, where the Temple of Jerusalem was subsequently built.

Put simply, the death of Isaac, had it occurred, would have abruptly arrested the promise of the Abrahamic covenant, of deliverance to the descendants of Abraham into the Land of Milk and Honey which, as this thesis has previously argued, had a direct relationship to Eden.<sup>78</sup> Explicit recognition of this can be seen in the passage that immediately follows the *Aqedah*:

<sup>15</sup>The angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven, <sup>16</sup>and said: ‘By myself I have sworn, says the LORD: Because you have done this, and not withheld your son, your only son, <sup>17</sup>I will bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies, <sup>18</sup>and by your offspring shall all the nations of earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.’

Genesis 22:15-18

That is to say, despite its unconditional status, the fulfilment of the Abrahamic covenant is affirmed in the *Aqedah*. Reiteration of this judgement can be found in the New Testament in the Letter to the Hebrews, in the context of the sacrificial death and resurrection of Christ. Here Christ, “the pioneer and perfecter of our faith” (Heb

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<sup>77</sup> Kalimi argues that whilst there is reference to the “land of Moriah” in the *Aqedah*, a specific place is not mentioned, nor the mountain on which Isaac was bound. By way of contrast, he suggests that the story of the binding of Isaac itself may have “even imparted to the Temple Mount an additional measure of sanctity as a place chosen for sacrifices (animal sacrifices to be precise) in the earliest antiquity.” There is the additional possibility that the association between the site of the Temple and the *Aqedah* hides a polemic with the rival Samaritans who also claimed the story as taking place on their sacred place of Mount Gerizim. Kalimi, *Early Jewish Exegesis and Theological Controversy*, 1-32.

<sup>78</sup> See Ch. 2, “Eden and Israel.”

12:2),<sup>79</sup> “for the sake of joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame” (Heb 12:20). Christ does so “surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses,” including Abraham (11:17-19) and Moses (11:23-28) as well as numerous other saints and prophets (11:29-38) who are each identified as his precursors. Prior to this passage the author of Hebrews had articulated at length Christ’s role as the mediator of the new covenant that promises not just the material foundations of nationhood achieved through what the writer considers commonplace pieties (9: 6-10) but an eternal inheritance (9:15). That is say, whilst the response of God to the actions of Abraham and Isaac ensured the continuation of God’s covenantal promise to Abraham, and through him to all humanity, its fulfilment, and the Edenic blessings it offered, was guaranteed through the heroic accession of Jesus to the will of the Father in Gethsemane. In both instances – in the *Aqedah* and in Gethsemane – it is radical human obedience in faith, not passive resignation, that brings humanity closer to the return to Eden, the narrative impulse that propels the Christian Bible from the time of the Fall.

Such speculation is not raw invention. As Huizinga further remarks, the verbal allusions to the *Aqedah* that he identifies in Matthew’s Gospel, “need not necessarily evoke simple echoes of the ‘plain meaning’ of Genesis 17 and 22 but rather echoes of the legends of Isaac known to the reader when warranted by thematic coherence.”<sup>80</sup> That is say, Christian interpretation of the account of Jesus in Gethsemane *vis a vis* Genesis 17 and 22 was established through a process of ‘dialogical hermeneutics’ that emerges from the ‘communicative competence’ of listeners and readers of Matthew’s Gospel, Huizinga’s central text, and the other texts that evoke similar comparisons. It is a process that is likely to have had its formation, or points of reference, in the extra-biblical legends found in the Targums, midrashim, Jewish commentaries, as well as other extant cultural

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<sup>79</sup> Cf. Heb 7:11.

<sup>80</sup> Huizinga, “Obedience unto Death,” 519.

phenomena. As Huizinga further reminds his own readers, Matthew's listeners were, after all, Jewish!

Reference to Jewish medieval commentary on the *Aqedah* is also informative, insofar as it invokes the symbolism and imagery of Eden so as to develop its own specific themes. In this material, which may well have been influenced by the Christian Scriptures which describe how Christ's blood procures redemption from sin and death for all humanity,<sup>81</sup> Isaac was indeed sacrificed by Abraham, who was then "swept by the tears" of the ministering angels into the Garden of Eden, where he stayed for three years while he healed, until his marriage to Rebecca at the age of 40 (Gen 25:20).<sup>82</sup> According to Shalom Spiegel these legends developed particularly in the Rhineland in Germany during the 11<sup>th</sup> Century where entire Jewish communities were wiped out in the Crusaders' pogroms.<sup>83</sup> Preferring suicide to being forced to deny their faith, many considered their death as a new *Aqedah*,<sup>84</sup> which nevertheless would result in being resurrected, even from ashes, into a life of hope and fruitfulness. Thus, having potentially influenced Christian reception and interpretation of Gethsemane in early Christian communities through the *Aqedah* narrative, Jewish medieval understanding of the *Aqedah* appears to itself have been influenced in turn by aspects of that Christian theology. As the lengthy and inconclusive debates on the place of the *Aqedah* in considerations of Gethsemane suggest, a definitive conclusion as to precisely what happened is unlikely. Nevertheless, what is clear is that in both the *Aqedah* and the Gethsemane narratives the fulfilment of the Abrahamic covenant on the one hand, and the new covenant in Christ on the other, is made possible only

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<sup>81</sup> Cf. Heb 13:12; Acts 20:28; Rev 5:9.

<sup>82</sup> Shalom Spiegel, *The Last Trial: On the Legends and Lore of the Command to Abraham to Offer Isaac as a Sacrifice; The Akedah*, transl. and intro. Judah Goldin (Woodstock, Jewish Lights Publishing, 2007), 130, 149-150; Kalimi, " 'Go, I beg you,' " 25.

<sup>83</sup> Kalimi, " 'Go, I beg you,' " 25.

<sup>84</sup> Kalimi, " 'Go, I beg you,' " 25. Cf. David bar Meshullam of Speyer (c. late 11<sup>th</sup> – early 12<sup>th</sup> C), "The Sacrifices;" and Judah Samuel Abbas (d. 1167), "At the Hour of Mercy," in T. Carmi, ed. and transl., *The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse* (New York: Viking Press, 1981).



through human accession to the will of God in faith; in both instances that fulfilment is marked through the imagery of the abundance, fecundity, and joy of Eden.

### **8.2.2 Eden, and the ‘Agony’ in Gethsemane.**

A second line of inquiry into the relationship between the imagery of Eden and Gethsemane can be developed in relation to the various passages in the Gospels depicting Jesus’ anguished prayers in Gethsemane prior to his arrest<sup>85</sup> and subsequent trial before the Sanhedrin. R.S. Barbour, when attempting to reconcile the theology of what is conventionally referred to as Jesus’ “Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane” with its historical possibility, wryly notes that the title commonly given to the scene is fundamentally eclectic – the ‘Agony’ comes from Luke, the ‘garden’ from John, and ‘Gethsemane’ from Mark and Matthew!<sup>86</sup> Be that as it may, the conglomerate name for the scene where Jesus goes into Gethsemane to pray, in anticipation of his tortured death, does point to the importance of the story as it is canonically presented, and as it is received in Christian faith. That is to say, notwithstanding its original status as possibly outside of, or marginal to, the first ‘primitive’ Passion narrative,<sup>87</sup> the story of the gradual prayerful unfolding of Jesus’ reconciliation to the will of the Father has become a significant, even indispensable,<sup>88</sup> element in its own right in the story of the Incarnation as it moves towards its climax. This is as equally true for John’s Gospel, where it is alluded to

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<sup>85</sup> Lk 22:39-40.

<sup>86</sup> Barbour, “Gethsemane,” 231.

<sup>87</sup> Barbour, citing Bultmann, and Kuhn, in Barbour, “Gethsemane,” 231.

<sup>88</sup> Cf Barbour, “Gethsemane,” 241.

through reference to ‘a garden’<sup>89</sup> that is at the heart of the Gethsemane *mythos*,<sup>90</sup> as it is in the Synoptics.

Nowhere, however (and bearing in mind that there are not less than three independent or semi-independent sources suggested for the tradition of Jesus’ agony and prayer<sup>91</sup>), are explicit reasons provided in the Gospels for the depth of anguish that Jesus experiences. Both the reader and Jesus’ disciples are left to ascertain for themselves, against the varying accounts, the underlying cause and meaning of Jesus’ distress. Indeed, according to Ruprecht, the coming *πειρασμόν* (*peirasmon* – ‘temptation’ or ‘test’)<sup>92</sup> that Jesus alludes to as he and his disciples first enter Gethsemane on the night of his arrest must have looked to the disciples, “like a sailor’s warning of an approaching storm when the sky is still blue.”<sup>93</sup> Even exegetical giants such as Joseph Fitzmyer are limited to inference and speculation on Jesus’ behaviour. Thus, with reference to the Lukan passage (22:42) where Jesus requests to be absolved from drinking what is essentially the ‘cup of death,’<sup>94</sup> Fitzmyer writes:

With these words the Lukan Jesus expresses a natural revulsion for the fate that awaits him. Nowhere else in the gospel tradition is the humanity of Jesus so evident as here. His reaction refers not only to the physical suffering and

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<sup>89</sup> Jn 18:1. A common interpretation of the absence of the pericope in John’s Gospel is that it points to the historical veracity of the account i.e. its roots in the earlier ‘primitive’ versions of the Passion into which the story of Gethsemane was inserted later. C.K. Barrett takes issue with this notion, arguing that omission of the Agony leaves the visit to the garden unmotivated. Barrett’s conclusion is that rather than John following a (primary) source he is introducing modifications of his own into what could well have been the Marcan narrative. See Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 517.

<sup>90</sup> Louis A. Ruprecht, Jr, “Mark’s Tragic Vision: Gethsemane,” *Religion and Literature* 24, no. 3 (Autumn, 1992): 3.

<sup>91</sup> Barbour, “Gethsemane,” 232.

<sup>92</sup> Mt 26:41; Mk 14:38; Lk 22:40.

<sup>93</sup> Ruprecht, “Mark’s Tragic Vision,” 3.

<sup>94</sup> Ruprecht, in using this term, is identifying in the Lukan ‘performance’ of the Passion direct allusions to the elements of Greek tragedy. Fitzmyer’s exegesis of the original Greek speaks instead of the ‘cup of destiny.’ In von Balthasar’s theology of substitution it is the ‘chalice of wrath’ from which Jesus drinks. See Ruprecht, “Mark’s Tragic Vision,” 2-4; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday), 1985), 1442; von Balthasar, *Pneuma und Institution*, 153.

psychic anguish that are coming, but probably includes as well inner distress and doubt about the meaning of it all.<sup>95</sup>

Certainly, if the Gethsemane scene is approached in isolation – which Fitzmyer appears to do – in anticipation of the Cross, of which Gethsemane is deemed merely the overture to,<sup>96</sup> then the meaning of Jesus’ ‘agony’ in Gethsemane is structurally and narratively opaque. Inter-textual references, for example, to 2 Corinthians 12:8, or Hebrews 2:18; 4:15; or 5:7, functioning paraenetically, provide only minimal help. It is only when the broader theological concerns of the individual Gospel writers are taken into account that the deeper meanings of the scene begin to emerge. Of these texts, the Gospel of Mark, from whom, in various ways, the other Gospel writers, including John, shape their own accounts, provides the initial framework through which to undertake analysis of Gethsemane, especially in the context of Edenic symbolism.

Barbour, for example, draws the reader’s attention to the relationship in Mark between Gethsemane and various aspects of the Parousia<sup>97</sup> revealed earlier to the same disciples whom Jesus requests accompany him while he prayed in the garden – Peter, James, and John.<sup>98</sup> As such the outcome of the temptation, or test,<sup>99</sup> to which Jesus is subjected in Gethsemane is said to similarly bring the eternal truth of Christ “forward into history.”<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 1442.

<sup>96</sup> Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 1443.

<sup>97</sup> On this, see also Donald Senior, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1984), 70.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Mk 5:37; 9:2-8; 13:3 and possibly 5:37, where the same three disciples who are present in Gethsemane and the Transfiguration are with Jesus when Jairus’ daughter is raised from the dead.

<sup>99</sup> As indicated in the introduction to this section the Lukan use of ‘ἀγωνία’ (agonia) (22:44) gives this scene its name. Johnson points out the Greek word typically refers to the sort of struggle in which wrestlers engage. It is the only occurrence of the word in the NT. Other uses, eg. 2 Macc 3:14, 16; 15:19, refer specifically to anguish of soul, but in this instance, according to Johnson, the intended meaning is more concrete. See Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke - Sacra Pagina.3* (Daniel J. Harrington, ed) (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991), 351-352.

<sup>100</sup> Barbour, “Gethsemane,” 237. Citing Nineham.

Seemingly outpaced by the movement of his life as it is “propelled towards crisis,”<sup>101</sup> it is precisely at this point that previous understandings held by Jesus of his own subjectivity and purpose are reduced to their essence.<sup>102</sup> Within this intensified framework what is revealed in Gethsemane is not simply, or even primarily, the human ‘agony’ of Jesus as man<sup>103</sup> although, as Barth points out, Jesus’ potential for temptation is a critical aspect of the validity and power of the Incarnation.<sup>104</sup> Rather, the ‘agony’ unveils Jesus’ eternal truth as the Son of God, which is his destiny.<sup>105</sup> At this point the distinction between the human and the divine Jesus can be seen to be arbitrary, an imposed limitation unbefitting of, and inappropriate to, the Edenic Lord whose dominion encompasses, like Eden, both heaven and earth. As Barbour observes, “Had Mark been a Trinitarian, we might almost have said that this is a struggle within the godhead itself, as it is certainly also a struggle within the man.”<sup>106</sup> Such a revelation is not available to the disciples, who fall asleep while Jesus prays (Mk 14:37, 40). What they are enabled to see is only the surface of Jesus’ concerns (14: 33-34).<sup>107</sup> But what, as the Son of God, are these concerns?

For Barbour, the portrait of Jesus’ emotional outpouring<sup>108</sup> in Gethsemane, “is not... the awe of the creature before the *mysterium tremendum* of God so much as the accompaniment of his encounter with the power of evil itself.”<sup>109</sup> Understood on this basis the material in Mark that better informs the reader’s understanding of Gethsemane, then, is not the partial revelations of the Parousia that punctuate Mark’s Gospel, important as they are, but Jesus’ first encounter with

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<sup>101</sup> Cf Paul Dafydd Jones, “Karl Barth on Gethsemane,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 9, no. 2 (April 2007): 147.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. Jones, “Karl Barth on Gethsemane,” 158. See also von Balthasar, *Pneuma und Institution*, 148.

<sup>103</sup> Barbour, “Gethsemane,” 237.

<sup>104</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics, IV, 1*, 259. Cf. Heb 2:11.

<sup>105</sup> Cf. Ruprecht, “Mark’s Tragic Vision,” 2, 9-12.

<sup>106</sup> Barbour, “Gethsemane,” 237.

<sup>107</sup> Barbour, “Gethsemane,” 237.

<sup>108</sup> Cf Jn 11:33.

<sup>109</sup> Barbour, “Gethsemane,” 237. Cf. Jones, “Karl Barth on Gethsemane,” 149.

Satan in the wilderness, immediately following his baptism (Mk 1:12). Here, faced with the seductive force of evil, as in Gethsemane, Jesus was also confronted with an existential crisis. As von Balthasar writes in his extensive reflection on this passage:

... it is fitting, in the deepest sense of the word... that the symbolic-sacramental immersion is 'immediately' (Mk 1.12) followed by the spiritual-existential immersion; it is the Spirit who has been received, who 'drives' Jesus 'out into the wilderness,' 'and he was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to him' (Mk1:13).<sup>110</sup>

Von Balthasar, in this passage, was drawing a direct comparison between Jesus's temptation in the wilderness and the historico-religious circumstance of Israel – Jesus' "shouldering of a concrete situation" wherein "events that were attempted, bungled, abandoned when half-accomplished by Israel... now are endured, experienced to the finish, and thereby brought to accomplishment, in a unique act of assuming them and recapitulating them."<sup>111</sup> In the same way that the parable of the Prodigal Son<sup>112</sup> may have referenced the beliefs of first century Judaism,<sup>113</sup> von Balthasar's assumptions may be correct. But they are not the whole story, and nor would I argue are those beliefs the main concerns of the Gospel writers. Rather, as discussed in the previous chapter,<sup>114</sup> developing Christian theology and associated commentary of the time is more concerned with the overarching themes of the New Creation in Christ, so comprehensively represented in the imagery of Eden than it is in the specific historical dimensions of messianic Judaism.<sup>115</sup> To this end, Joachim Jeremias refers

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<sup>110</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics. VII: Theology: The New Covenant*, transl. Brian O'Neill (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1982), 70-71.

<sup>111</sup> von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: VII*, 71.

<sup>112</sup> Lk 15:11-32.

<sup>113</sup> Cf. Joel Willitts, "Jesus, the Kingdom and the Promised Land," *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 13 (2015): 348.

<sup>114</sup> Ch. 7 "Jesus, Eden and the Kingdom of God," 7.2 Eden and the Kingdom of God in Matthew and Luke.

<sup>115</sup> See, for example, the various commentaries on Mark 1:12-13 in Thomas C. Oden and Christopher A. Hall, eds., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. New Testament II: Mark* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 16-17. For an overview of ancient commentary on Matthew see Manlio Simonetti, *Ancient*

specifically to Jesus' temptation in the wilderness as presented in the beginning of Mark and related texts.<sup>116</sup> He draws out the nature of the relationship between Jesus' refusal to be tempted by Satan at the beginning of his ministry and the reinstatement of Eden as an expression of God's universal love, presaging and subsequently symbolic of the inauguration of the Kingdom of God:

The expectation was that just as, according to Gen 2.19, Adam lived among the wild animals in paradise, so in the last days peace would again prevail between man and beast. Isaiah 11.6-9 depicts how the wolf will dwell with the lamb and the leopard will lie down with the kid; how the calf and lion will graze together and a little child shall lead them; how the suckling child will play safely over the hole of the asp. Paradise is restored, the time of salvation is dawning; that is what *ἦν μετὰ τῶν φηρίων*<sup>117</sup> means. Because temptation has been overcome and Satan has been vanquished, the gate to paradise is opened again.<sup>118</sup>

Jeremias' interpretation is strengthened by the juxtaposition of images of Eden and wilderness recognisable in this scene, a feature that this thesis argues is present in the overall narrative structure of both the Old and New Testaments. In this instance, the attending angels and benign animals, which signify Eden, and which accompany Jesus in his isolation,<sup>119</sup> not only provide comfort and assurance to Jesus, in the middle of the wilderness into which, led or driven by the Spirit,<sup>120</sup> he was immersed. These Isaiahan images of peace and reconciliation also contextualise the passage for the reader, as well as providing an interpretive structure for the events that follow, such that in the New Adam's rejection of Satan's various inducements, the return to Eden is foregrounded as a possibility for all descendants of the original Adam. That is to say, the emphasis on Satan and his temptations, in various guises, is a continuing theme of the Synoptic Gospels more broadly.

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*Christian Commentary on Scripture. New Testament Ia: Matthew 1-13* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 55-64.

<sup>116</sup> That is, Mt 4:1-11; Mk 1:12-13; Lk 4:1-13.

<sup>117</sup> 'was with the wild beasts'

<sup>118</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, transl. John Bowden, (London SCM Press, 1971), 69-70.

<sup>119</sup> Mt 4:11; Mk 1:13.

<sup>120</sup> Mt 4:1; Lk 4:1. cf. Mk 1:12.

And it is it is one that receives additional attention in the presentation of the events in Gethsemane.

Drawing on the work of Conzelmann, Barbour further describes how in the Passover pericope in Luke's Gospel, in anticipation of Gethsemane, Satan, whom Conzelmann holds has been resting or otherwise engaged since his earlier appearance,<sup>121</sup> comes back to enter into Judas.<sup>122</sup> Certainly the following verses in which Jesus reveals that Satan has requested (or has *obtained*<sup>123</sup>) permission to "sift" the disciples "like wheat"<sup>124</sup> draws the reader's attention to the cosmic struggle between good and evil, the outcome for which, it appears, through the inclusion of the various pericopes concerning Jesus' temptation by Satan, Jesus had been given responsibility. The subsequent reference in Luke to the strengthening angel<sup>125</sup> brings the narrative back to the first temptation in the wilderness discussed above, suggesting the ongoing centrality of this theme as well as pointing to the ongoing presence and importance of the Edenic symbolism with which it is partnered to remind the reader of what is at stake.

Barth expresses much of what Barbour recognises in relation to the theme of the struggle between good and evil presented in the Gospels, of which the temptation in Gethsemane, and Jesus' subsequent prayers, are an accompaniment. However, in relation to Jesus' 'agony,' there are, in Barth's commentary on Gethsemane *vis a vis* Jesus' first temptation in the wilderness,<sup>126</sup> fundamental differences in interpretation. These assert that the origins of Jesus' anguish in Gethsemane can be found not in his struggle with Satan, *per se*,

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<sup>121</sup> Lk 4:1-12.

<sup>122</sup> Lk 22:3.

<sup>123</sup> See NRSV, Lk 22:31, footnote *a*. One can only presume that that permission was requested of, obtained from, God.

<sup>124</sup> Lk 22:31.

<sup>125</sup> Lk 22:43. The debate as to the original status of this verse is acknowledged. However, in this instance, the emphasis is on the narrative as received in contemporary faith ie. as written in the NRSV.

<sup>126</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics, IV, 1*, §59, 259-273.

despite what is at stake in that particular battle,<sup>127</sup> but in the crushing awareness of the suffering that will be experienced by Jesus through his immanent separation from the Father:

It was a matter of the divine judgement being taken out of the hands of Jesus and placed in those of His supremely unrighteous judges and executed by them upon Him. It was a matter of the enemy who had been repulsed as the tempter having and exercising by divine permission and appointment the right, the irresistible right of might. It was a matter of the obedience and penitence in which Jesus had persisted coming to fruition in His own rejection and condemnation – not by chance, but according to the plan of God Himself, not superficially, but in serious earnest. That was what came upon Him in His suffering and dying, as God’s answer to His appeal. Jesus saw this cup. He tasted its bitterness. He had not made any mistake. He had not been needlessly afraid. There was every reason to ask that it might pass from Him.<sup>128</sup>

Barth’s assessment clearly emphasises the human drama inherent in Jesus’ sense of impending separation from his beloved Father. The pain of this separation is amplified, according to Barth, by Jesus’ awareness that in death, “the night in which no one can work,”<sup>129</sup> the will of the Father and that of those who would do him harm is to become indistinguishable – “the triumph of God concealed in His adversary.”<sup>130</sup> Compounding this sense of bereavement is the fact that divine judgement is to be taken out of Jesus’ hands and given to the unrighteous.

Just as the temptation in the wilderness, then, becomes a prefiguring of Gethsemane, the ‘agony’ in Gethsemane itself becomes a prefiguring of Good Friday and Holy Saturday, wherein the destruction of Jesus, as both man and Son of God, is complete. Jesus’ acceptance of the responsibility, as the Son of God, to serve God alone, to offer himself to be judged in place of those upon whom that

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<sup>127</sup> That is, “Instead of acting for all other men and in their place, He would have left them in the lurch at the very moment when He had made their cause His own.”  
Barth, *Church Dogmatics, IV, 1*, 262.

<sup>128</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics, IV, 1*, 271.

<sup>129</sup> Jn 9:4.

<sup>130</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics, IV, 1*, 270-271.



judgement should fall, is not a defeat or even a resignation, however, but “a great and irresistible advance... an expression of the supreme and only praise which God expects from man and which is rendered to Him only by this One man in place of all... the way... holy and just and gracious.”<sup>131</sup> At the same time, the abandonment of Jesus by the Father is all encompassing, suggesting at the same time the elimination of the possibility of Eden as both an immanent reality and an eschatological hope.

Understood from a Trinitarian perspective, however, which von Balthasar argues is the single way by which the idea of Jesus’ self-abandonment can be contained and apprehended,<sup>132</sup> it is precisely at this moment when the prospect of a return to Eden becomes most acute. Jesus’ kenotic act, of which Holy Saturday is the ultimate manifestation, and to which Jesus finally and fully accedes in Gethsemane, provides for the possibility that through Jesus’ ‘obedience unto death,’ “the whole power and glory of God are made present to us.”<sup>133</sup> That is to say, Jesus’ self-emptying within the Godhead, which begins in Gethsemane in response to the will of the Father, provides both the agency and the locus for the possibility of the full restoration of Eden for all of humanity.

Glenn Morrison alludes to this restoration in his connection between the image of Jesus’ ‘throwing himself on the ground’ to pray in Gethsemane,<sup>134</sup> as a sign of Jesus’ own awareness of the terrible reality of God-abandonment, and humanity’s origins in ‘the dust of the ground’ (Gen 2:7) prior to being placed by God into Eden. Conceived in this manner, “journeying from Eden to Gethsemane, as it were, becomes the pathway of joy, humility and discipleship – to rejoice in being made in the likeness and image of God, to humbly listen to the risen Christ’s word even unto death, and discover the new

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<sup>131</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV, 1, 270-271.

<sup>132</sup> von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: VII*, 225,230; *Mysterium Paschale*, transl. & intro. Aidan Nichols (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 168.

<sup>133</sup> von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 33.

<sup>134</sup> Mt 26:39; Mk 14:35; Lk 22:41.

life of being a disciple... ('follow me' (Jn 21:19)).<sup>135</sup> That is, Gethsemane represents a gateway to the New Eden in Christ.

A related interpretation can be made between Jesus' anguished prayer in the dirt of Gethsemane, in which his sweat "became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground" (Lk 22:44), and the later passage in Revelation (12:16) where the earth itself, "opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth," so as to save the infant, interpreted traditionally in Catholic theology to be the Christ child,<sup>136</sup> from being killed. In doing so the 'curse of the earth,' instigated at the time of the Fall, is itself symbolically lifted, simultaneously signalling the reinstatement of Eden "to everyone who conquers,"<sup>137</sup> along with the concomitant inference of the potential reconciliation of humanity to God.

In each of the instances described above, it is precisely the relationship between Jesus and the lifting of the 'curse of the earth' that acts as a marker of the journey of fallen humanity back to Eden, with its associations of integration, completeness, and abundance. It is this relationship that will be examined in greater detail in the section that follows, concerning Eden and the death of Jesus. In particular the next section deals with the relationship between the symbolism of Eden and the phenomenon of Holy Saturday, when the axis of salvation history turns on the actions of the loving God, in the form of the resurrection of the entombed Christ.

### **8.3 Eden and the Death and Burial of Jesus.**

Hans Urs von Balthasar believes that the cultural and theological transition from the old covenant to the new finds its most distinctive and powerful expression in Jesus' 'annihilation' of death – "the last

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<sup>135</sup> Glenn Morrison, "A Theology of Feasting: Encountering the Kingdom of God," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 82/2 (2017): 136.

<sup>136</sup> See Ch.6, n.101.

<sup>137</sup> Jn 2:17.

enemy” – “brought about, through the grace of the Cross, on Easter Saturday, wherein “death is swallowed up in victory.”<sup>138</sup> This definitive step, from the prophetic to the eschatological,<sup>139</sup> that von Balthasar argues was unobtainable in the Old Testament,<sup>140</sup> realises its conclusion “only in the ‘descent’ of God, under the form of the dead man Jesus, to the lowest rung of the ‘ladder of obedience,’”<sup>141</sup> that is, into Hell.

To be sure, the complete disarming of the “principalities and powers”<sup>142</sup> can only take place “from within,” in full participation in, and through complete identification with, “the absolute passivity of being dead.”<sup>143</sup> The proclamation of salvation that Jesus makes to the “spirits in prison” there (1 Peter 3:18-20), accordingly, is nothing less than the Gospel itself, “objectively present in the world of the dead through the event itself, and thereby... made known.”<sup>144</sup> Within this Trinitarian reality the manifest grace of the Kingdom of God that the Gospel expresses ubiquitously through the imagery of Eden can be understood metaphorically to lie immediately adjacent to Hell, a notion that finds its symbolic equivalence throughout the Old and New Testaments in the regular juxtaposition of the imagery of Eden and wilderness of which, for Christians, Jesus’ awful death on Golgotha is the ultimate earthly example.

Von Balthasar further expresses that it is only in the events of Easter Saturday where the entities of ‘hell’ and its implied opposite, ‘paradise,’ the post-Septuagint rendering of Eden, that von Balthasar appears to equate with ‘heaven,’<sup>145</sup> receive their theological

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<sup>138</sup> 1 Cor 15:54 cf. 2 Cor 5:4.

<sup>139</sup> von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: VII*, 228. Cf. “Pneuma und Institution,” in *The von Balthasar Reader*, 149.

<sup>140</sup> von Balthasar, “Einfaltungen,” in *The von Balthasar Reader*, 156-160; von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics. VII*, 228; and, von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 171.

<sup>141</sup> von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: VII*, 229.

<sup>142</sup> Col 2:15.

<sup>143</sup> von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: VII*, 230.

<sup>144</sup> von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: VII*, 230.

<sup>145</sup> von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: VII*, 234.

“unequivocalness.”<sup>146</sup> Concomitantly, then, there also occurs a fundamental change in the way the imagery of Eden is perceived in the post-Easter Christian world. Thus, it is only against the incomparable degree of suffering that Jesus experiences in the state of perfect identification with the lost and the dead on Easter Saturday that hell, the “limit of God-forsakenness at which no hope is possible,”<sup>147</sup> finds its clearest biblical expression. As such both ‘hell’ and ‘paradise,’ in the New Testament, can be seen to become uniquely Christological concepts no longer understood as the traces of an ancient religious ideal, but rather as the markers of human hope and the perfect alignment of human life in Christ.<sup>148</sup> That is, having acknowledged the ‘polyvalent’ or ‘polymorphous’ characteristic of both hell and paradise<sup>149</sup> in the various ways the terms had previously been understood in both the Old and New Testaments, von Balthasar asserts that both terms now receive their ultimate meaning conformed in light of the Easter Mystery.

Exactly how ‘paradise’ is understood by von Balthasar, however, is not revealed in his writing. Given the context the reader can assume that he was referring to the term as it is used in an incident reported in Luke 23:39-43. Here, one of the criminals crucified beside Jesus, whose faith in Jesus as Messiah leads him to believe that Jesus can dispense justice accordingly, requests to be “remembered” by him when Jesus comes into his kingdom. In response the ‘faithful criminal’ is assured by Jesus that, as of that very day, he will be with him “in Paradise.” Nevertheless, suggesting that there is a straightforward parallel in Luke’s Gospel between ‘paradise’ and either ‘heaven’ or the kingdom of God, as an eschatological category, is not supported either by Luke’s wider theology, or by its use in other New Testament texts, such as in the writing of Paul.

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<sup>146</sup> von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: VII*, 229, n.3.

<sup>147</sup> Kelly, *Eschatology and Hope*, 90.

<sup>148</sup> See, Ch. 6, “Jesus and the Return to Eden,” n.1.

<sup>149</sup> von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, 7:229, n.3. cf. von Balthasar, *Mysterium Pascale*, 161.

For some, this passage is a clear indication of Luke's Platonised view of death.<sup>150</sup> It is a notion that Grant Macaskill rejects by comparing it to other Lucan texts which indicate, "a continuing belief in a final resurrection and Parousia."<sup>151</sup> As such, 'paradise' as it is used in Luke 23:43, points instead to a newly developed Christian understanding of the term as an intermediate state between death and the Parousia.<sup>152</sup> The reference is only one of two specific uses of the term in the New Testament, the other being by Paul (2 Cor 12:4), held by many commentators to be intentionally ironic, and possibly even parody.<sup>153</sup> There too, where Paul can be seen to be attempting to separate himself from existing Jewish understandings of 'paradise' as a representation of the heavenly Temple,<sup>154</sup> the term can also be seen to indicate a presently existing but intermediate state of the dead in Christ.<sup>155</sup> In either case the understanding of 'paradise' is a delimited one that does not conform to a Trinitarian understanding of Heaven implicit in Jesus' 'descent' into Hell – "the moment in which God's self-giving purpose is fulfilled."<sup>156</sup> Not surprisingly, Macaskill's ultimate conclusion as to the use of the term 'paradise' in Luke remains reserved. On the one hand Macaskill recognises that Luke maintains belief in a future Parousia, marking a definitive point in the establishment of the kingdom of God, without necessarily suggesting that it is climactic. On the other hand he also recognises the absolute presence of a realised eschatology in Luke's theology. From this perspective, "While Jesus is able to promise the criminal an

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<sup>150</sup> von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 171; Cf. Macaskill, "Paradise in the New Testament," 71.

<sup>151</sup> Macaskill, "Paradise in the New Testament," 72.

<sup>152</sup> Macaskill, "Paradise in the New Testament," 72. See also Charles E. Hill, *Regnum Caelorum: Patterns of Millennial Thought in Early Christianity*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2001), 216-217, 228.

<sup>153</sup> Macaskill, "Paradise in the New Testament," 71

<sup>154</sup> Macaskill, "Paradise in the New Testament," 72.

<sup>155</sup> Macaskill, "Paradise in the New Testament," 71.

<sup>156</sup> Kelly, *Eschatology and Hope*, 163.

immediate transition to paradise, this does not represent the totality of Jesus' kingdom.”<sup>157</sup>

Rather, the verses that immediately follow v.43 which describe how, at the moment of Jesus' death, the curtain of the Temple is torn in two<sup>158</sup> point to an integrated eschatology in Luke's Gospel, informed by the imagery of Eden, wherein the separation between heaven and earth, symbolically represented by the curtain of the Temple,<sup>159</sup> is eliminated. As Paul expressed, and from whose theology his travelling companion Luke may well have been influenced,<sup>160</sup> Christ is the Lord of both the dead and the living.<sup>161</sup>

Johnson has complained that the specific curtain of the Temple, of which there were four, is not mentioned in any of the Synoptic Gospels, and thus the actual meaning ascribed to this event is difficult to ascertain.<sup>162</sup> Nevertheless, in the context of the events, in which the body of the man Jesus becomes Spirit, the general assumption, that the evangelists are referring to the main curtain before the *debir*, or Holy of Holies, wherein God was believed to reside on earth and which has its equivalence both scripturally (Gen 3:8) and architecturally (1 Kings 6:29-35) with Eden, is reasonable.<sup>163</sup>

Understood in this manner Luke's use of 'paradise' points to more than just an understanding of the term as an intermediate stage for the righteous dead before full unity with Christ, as von Balthasar would have it. Instead it signifies a more complete grace in heaven and earth encompassing, “the return to the original creation, the eating of the

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<sup>157</sup> Macaskill, “Paradise in the New Testament”, 74.

<sup>158</sup> Lk 23: 44-45 cf. Mt 27:51; Mk 15:38.

<sup>159</sup> Barker, *The Gate of Heaven*, 104-132.

<sup>160</sup> Col 4:14; Philem 1:24.

<sup>161</sup> Rom 14:9.

<sup>162</sup> Johnson, *Luke*, 379.

<sup>163</sup> As Johnson reminds the reader, this is a notion accentuated by the fact that each of the three Gospel accounts of this incident use the word '*naos*' to refer to the curtain, with its specific reference to the temple, rather than the more general '*eiron*' to describe the event.

fruit of the tree of life, and fellowship with the righteous.”<sup>164</sup> As with Paul and Luke before him, then, von Balthasar’s declaration of a contained understanding of ‘paradise,’ seems both premature and unrealisable against the ‘over-determined’ or inherently *chronotopic* and multi-valent character of Eden that points more expansively to the generosity and creativity of God in both life and death.

The multi-valent aspect of ‘paradise’ that is evident in the varied use of Edenic imagery in the New Testament can also be observed in the additional emphasis that von Balthasar, and other commentators on the theology of Holy Saturday, place on the merciful quality of Jesus’ kenotic act of absolute surrender to the will of the Father. That is to say, despite his assertion that the Easter event delimits the hitherto ‘polymorphous’ characteristic of ‘paradise,’ von Balthasar also uses the term to expand the understanding of the salvific dimension of Holy Saturday by pointing to an aspect of the interior life of God, the covenantal love for humanity expressed in the Old Testament through the ancient Jewish notion of *hesed*.<sup>165</sup>

It is not necessary to enter into a broad discussion of the nature and meaning of *hesed* here,<sup>166</sup> except to reiterate that the term, when understood in the context of the divine love at the heart of Holy Saturday, is also strongly suggestive of God’s offer of ‘salvation’ to all of humanity. Understood thus, Christ’s ‘descent’ into hell, as a component of what Anthony Kelly describes as “the ultimate parable of human hope,”<sup>167</sup> becomes equally the ultimate sign of ‘God for us,’<sup>168</sup> the promise of the Incarnation expressed analogously in the

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<sup>164</sup> Robert J Karris, “Luke,” in Brown, Fitzmyer, and Murphy, eds., *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 719b.

<sup>165</sup> Various translated not only as ‘mercy,’ but also ‘covenantal love,’ ‘kindness,’ ‘loving kindness,’ ‘faithfulness,’ ‘grace,’ or ‘righteousness.’

<sup>166</sup> For a full examination of the relationship between *hesed* and Eden see Ch. 3, “Eden, *Hesed*, and the Desire for God,” especially 3.1 Eden and *Hesed*.

<sup>167</sup> Kelly, *Eschatology and Hope*, 90. Cf. Walter Kasper, *Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life*, transl. W. Madges (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2013), 90.

<sup>168</sup> Rom 8:31.

New Testament through the use of Edenic imagery at the core of the New Creation.

In articulating his own understanding of the merciful dimension of Holy Saturday, with its implicit recognition of the concomitant immediacy of Eden, von Balthasar quotes extensively from the work of Joachim Jeremias<sup>169</sup> who argues that the doctrine of Christ's 'descent' into and preaching in Hell, expressed in 1 Peter (3:19f; 4:6) was substantially influenced by the Ethiopic Book of Enoch (37 BCE approx.). In quoting from this text both Jeremias and von Balthasar draw the profound distinction between Enoch's account of his own unsuccessful visit to Heaven on behalf of earth's fallen angels<sup>170</sup> and the merciful outcome of Christ's sacrificial death, such that the Christian, whose very faith is dependent on the merciful response of God to Christ's own self-abandonment, can conclude that the very essence of God is mercy.<sup>171</sup> In order to understand this doctrine, Jeremias writes:

... it must be observed that it has its antitype in the Ethiopic Book of Enoch... Chapters 12-16... describe how Enoch is sent to the fallen angels of Gen 6 to convey to them the message that they will 'find no peace or forgiveness.' Stricken with terror, they ask Enoch to draw up a petition in which they implore God's indulgence and forgiveness. Enoch is then lifted up to God's fiery throne and receives God's answer which he must dispatch to the fallen sons of God. It consists of one short clause of five words only, the terrible sentence: 'You will have no peace.'<sup>172</sup>

Jeremias points to these passages in Enoch as the unambiguous template for the doctrine of Christ's 'descent' into Hell. By comparison, however, whereas Enoch's narrative reveals what he holds to be the impossibility of forgiveness for transgressions against God, the message of Easter Saturday presented in the Gospels is

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<sup>169</sup> von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 159-160.

<sup>170</sup> Gen 6:1-4.

<sup>171</sup> Kasper, *Mercy*, 83-129.

<sup>172</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *The Central Message of the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), 33.



fundamentally the opposite: “The righteous one died for the unrighteous.”<sup>173</sup> As result the blessings of the New Creation, analogised by John (20:1-18) and the writer of Revelation (2:7; 12:16; 22:1-5) as the return to Eden, become available to all descendants of Adam, even those who might otherwise be perceived to be beyond redemption, who choose to live in Christ.

#### **8.4 Mary Magdalene meets the Edenic Lord in the Garden of the Resurrection: John 20:1-18.**

In his concluding remarks on the Holy Saturday von Balthasar recognises that the change wrought in the world through Christ’s being with the dead occurs both as, and in, mystery. In the axial stillness of Holy Saturday, “The Word of God has become unheard, and no message forces its way upwards to speak of its journey through the darkness: for it can do this only as not-word, as not-form, through a not-land, behind a sealed stone.”<sup>174</sup> Neither is the transformation of Jesus’ body, that takes place “in the deepest silence of death,”<sup>175</sup> and which is ultimately recognisable in what is itself limited to the metaphor of the Resurrection, the achievement of Jesus himself. Rather, it is the action of God that consolidates the victory of life over death, and as such beyond the scope of what human eye has seen, and the human heart can imagine.<sup>176</sup> (1 Cor 2:9). Accordingly...

... all traces that the living Word of God left behind on earth are as it were wiped out; the soul that comes back from the untraceable land, the body that rises from the sealed grave, is ‘no longer Christ according to the flesh,’ but a ‘new creature.’ The old is past: behold the new has come! (2 Cor 5:16f).<sup>177</sup>

Those who encounter the risen Christ, then, must come to terms, as best they can, with a phenomenon unique in time – the intimate

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<sup>173</sup> Cf. 1 Peter 3:18.

<sup>174</sup> von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: VII*, 234.

<sup>175</sup> von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: VII*, 234.

<sup>176</sup> 1 Cor 2:9 cf. Rom 11:33.

<sup>177</sup> von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: VII*, 234.

presence of the post-Resurrection Word of God in the world, and with it, the possibility of the immediate experience of New Creation. The challenge for the Gospel writers to convey this understanding to their respective audiences must be appreciated in this context. On the one hand nothing like it had occurred in human history. If, on the other hand, as Paul quickly assessed, the proclamation of the risen Christ among the early Christian community was in vain, then the entire foundation of their faith was similarly invalid (1 Cor 15:14).

As suggested in the introduction to this chapter, for the Gospel writers it was through their emphasis on the corporeal reality of Christ, now present to the disciples on the other side of death, through which they attempted to convey the truth of the manifestation of their risen Lord amongst them.<sup>178</sup> At the same time, the empty tomb, which first alerted Jesus' followers to the "unique realism"<sup>179</sup> of God's saving action, also alerts the reader to the theological and metaphysical considerations flowing from the post-death manifestation of Jesus as a further expression of God's self-communication to the world.<sup>180</sup> As Kelly writes:

If theology glosses over the biblical evidence of the empty tomb, it cannot but look on the world as a vast graveyard. It is more a garden in which the seeds of eternal life are sprouting. New life has sprung up within it. The dead body of Jesus has been transformed.<sup>181</sup>

Of the Gospel writers, John's account of the meeting between Mary Magdalene and the risen Christ is the one that most noticeably draws on garden imagery in general, and, as we shall see, Edenic imagery in particular. Kelly suggests that this reflects the fecundity of hope emanating from the Resurrection. In doing so John, expanding on earlier themes, such as Jesus as the Water of Life first presented in Jesus' meeting with Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob (4:1-30),

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<sup>178</sup> Mt 28:9, 16-17; Mk 16: 9, 12, 14; Lk 24: 15-19, 25-27, 30; Jn 20:14-17; 19-23; 26-29.

<sup>179</sup> Kelly, *Eschatology and Hope*, 84.

<sup>180</sup> Kelly, *Eschatology and Hope*, 84.

<sup>181</sup> Kelly, *Eschatology and Hope*, 85.

invests the scene heavily with Edenic associations. Bearing this in mind, the image of ‘Jesus the Gardener’ (Jn 20:15) that most commentators on John’s Gospel tend to regard as a narrative distraction, becomes instead an image of considerable significance, especially when trying to comprehend something of the religious, theological, cultural, and emotional meaning generated in John by his representation of Jesus’ post-death appearance.

In this passage, Mary, when she finds her Master’s tomb empty, fails to recognise Jesus when he appears to her in what is sometimes suggested is her grief induced confusion,<sup>182</sup> supposing him instead to be the gardener of the cemetery (20:14-15). Her fear is that the same people who have killed him have removed his body (20:3). It is only when Jesus calls to her by name that there ensues what has been described as, “the greatest recognition scene in all literature,”<sup>183</sup> one expressed in only two words: “Mary!” “Rabbouni!” (20:16) It is implicit in Jesus’ response to her, that is, *Μή μου ἅπτου* (*Mē mou haptou*),<sup>184</sup> (20:17) that, in some form or other, she has moved to embrace him.<sup>185</sup>

Not surprisingly, given the contingency of the Christian faith on Jesus’ resurrection,<sup>186</sup> this scene has received a great deal of critical and artistic attention. But much of the critical and interpretative action in response has fallen on what happens either side of what may be called ‘the gardener moment.’ Indeed, most commentators have little, or nothing, to say on the matter of Jesus ‘the gardener,’ are dismissive of those who do hint towards something profound in this particular piece of text or, according to Wyatt, “make the most banal observations.”<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> See, for example, Judith Schubert, *The Gospel of John – Question by Question* (Mahwah NJ: Paulist Press, 2008), 236e.

<sup>183</sup> Nicolas Wyatt, “‘Supposing Him to Be the Gardener’ (John 20, 15. A Study of the Paradise Motif in John)” in *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der Älteren Kirche* 81, Issue 1-2 (1990): 38.

<sup>184</sup> *Μή μου ἅπτου* – Do not hold onto me/ do not touch me/ do not hold to me.

<sup>185</sup> Cf. Mt 28:9; Lk 10:39.

<sup>186</sup> Cf. 1 Cor 15:14.

<sup>187</sup> See, for example, C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London:

Conversely, the reader can get a sense of where the emphasis in this scene has fallen over the years by the name by which it has become known, *Noli me tangere*, that is, ‘don’t touch me’ – the moment after the initial meeting.

On the one hand, this apparent privileging of the textual content either side of the ‘gardener moment’ is understandable. There is much to be explored in the *Noli me tangere* scene, especially when contrasted, for example, with Jesus’ later invitation to Thomas, where Jesus asks him to place his hand inside Jesus’ wound to confirm that the resurrected Christ really is present to the disciples (20:27). Analysis of the inherent emotional tension in the scene explored through inter-textual comparisons with, for example, the Song of Songs (Song 3:2), has also been undertaken.<sup>188</sup> Similarly, the answer to the question of what it means to see with the ‘eyes of faith’ can also be advanced through reference to this passage.<sup>189</sup>

However, recent Biblical scholarship suggest that this displacement of critical attention away from the ‘gardener moment’ in John’s Gospel is a significant oversight.<sup>190</sup> Indeed, according to Joachin Schaper, it is precisely in the image of ‘Jesus the Gardener’ where the reader is presented with, “one of the most highly charged symbolic statements in the Gospel of John.”<sup>191</sup> Accordingly, the nature of this symbolic

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SPCK, 1996), 564; Raymond E. Brown, intro., transl. and notes, *The Anchor Bible – The Gospel According to John (xiii-xxi)* (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 1009; Rudolph Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, transl. G.R. Beasley Murray, R.W.N. Hoare, and J.K. Riches (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1971), 686; Earnest Haenchen, *John 2*, transl. Robert W. Funk (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 209; Francis J. Maloney, S.D.B., *The Gospel of John - Sacra Pagina 4* (Collegeville: Michael Glazier, 1998), 525; and Rudolph Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John: Volume 3 – Commentary on Chapters 13-21* (New York: Crossroads, 1990), 317.

<sup>188</sup> See, for example, Bobby Dykema Katsanis, “Meeting in the Garden: Intertextuality with the Song of Songs in Holbein’s *Noli me tangere*” in *Interpretation*, October (2007): 412. For a more informed treatment of the relationship between the themes of Eden as found in Genesis 2-3 and the Song of Songs see Landy, “The Song of Songs and the Garden of Eden,” 513-528.

<sup>189</sup> Maloney, *The Gospel of John*, 527.

<sup>190</sup> Joachin Schaper, “The messiah in the garden: John 38-41, (royal) gardens and messianic concepts,” in Bockmuehl and Stroumsa, eds., *Paradise in Antiquity*, 17.

<sup>191</sup> Schaper, “The messiah in the garden,” 27.

statement will now be examined, in this instance through reference a lesser known painting of Rembrandt's that depicts the scene of Mary's confused identification of the risen Christ.

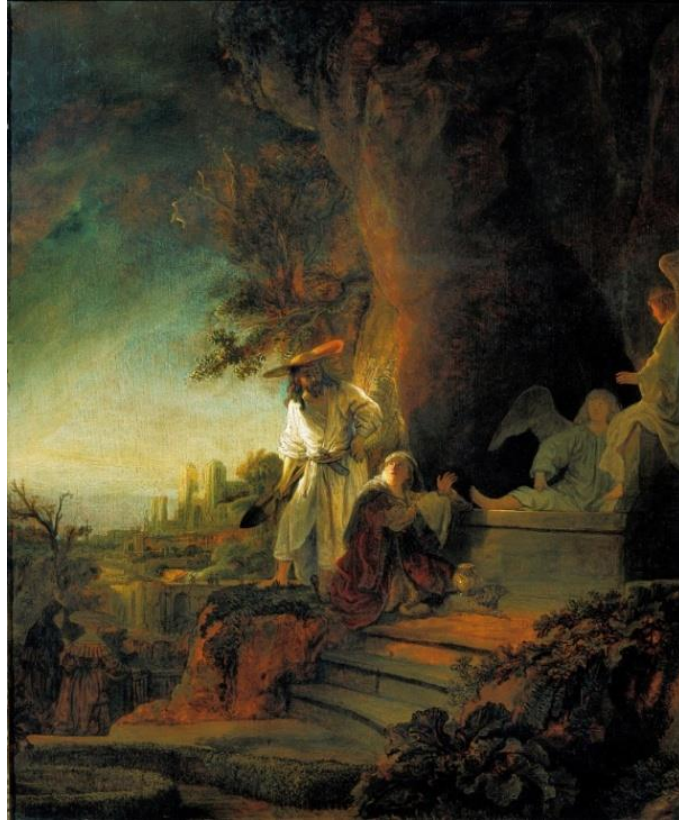


Figure 4: *The Magdalene at the Empty Tomb* – Rembrandt (1638)<sup>192</sup>

Rembrandt's *The Magdalene at the Empty Tomb* (1638) is exceptional in that Rembrandt, faithful to the Vulgate text in his Bible, depicts Jesus with a gardener's hat, a gardener's spade, and a pruning knife. That is, the scene, rather than being a reference for Rembrandt, becomes the vision itself.<sup>193</sup>

But the "humble literality"<sup>194</sup> of the scene is quickly marginalised in commentaries by subsequent allusions to, for example, Jesus as the

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<sup>192</sup> Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn (1609-1669) – *The Magdalene at the Empty Tomb*. Oil on wood - H. 61 cm; W. 49.5 cm. The Royal Collection London, RCIN 404816.

<sup>193</sup> Donald Bruce, "The Age of Rembrandt at the Queen's Gallery," *Contemporary Review* 287, no. 1675 (Aug 2005): 97.

<sup>194</sup> Bruce, "The Age of Rembrandt at the Queen's Gallery," 97.

‘cosmic gardener,’ an allegorical motif that achieved prominence in the Middle Ages but which had its origins in much earlier Christian homiletics.<sup>195</sup> These earlier commentaries were also typically silent on the possibility that the notion of ‘Jesus the gardener’ might have inherent value, preferring instead to see the image as, for example, symptomatic of Mary’s disbelief or, alternatively, emblematic of Christ’s compassion, that is, pertaining to Christ presenting himself to Mary in a manner that she, a simple woman, might comprehend, before he reveals himself to her in the fullness of his post-resurrection glory.<sup>196</sup> These are very durable notions. Schnackenberg, for example, reprising nearly 1600 years later this latter interpretation previously expressed by Jerome, writes that, “Questions as to whether and how the ‘gardener’ was dressed, are beside the point; the risen one assumes a form and a dress appropriate for those to whom he wants to reveal himself.”<sup>197</sup>

But what if Rembrandt, with the acuity of his artist’s vision, and informed by his, “assiduous reading of the Gospel of St John” that, “seeped up into Rembrandt’s imagination like an underground stream,”<sup>198</sup> had correctly interpreted the significance of Mary immediate response to meeting the transcendent Christ? That is to say, what if the representation of Jesus as a gardener was exactly what John intended? That is, that there was a double irony in play in which it was not only Mary who could not ‘see’ the corporeal post-resurrection Christ, but the reader as well?

To put this question into context it is helpful to consider some commentary relating to the overall focus of John’s Gospel and the motifs and narrative methods he employed to achieve his aims. Wyatt, for example, describes John’s Gospel as, “a complex interweaving of

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<sup>195</sup> See, for example, Gregory the Great, “Forty Gospel Homilies, 25,” and Jerome, “Homily 87, On John 1 (sic): 1-14”, in Joel C. Elowsky, ed, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture – New Testament IV b: John 11-21* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 346.

<sup>196</sup> Joel C. Elowsky (ed), *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, 345.

<sup>197</sup> Rudolph Schnackenberg, *The Gospel According to St John*, 317.

<sup>198</sup> Bruce, “The Age of Rembrandt at the Queen’s Gallery,” 97.

ancient royal and messianic themes, more a poetic meditation on the incarnation than a straightforward account of the impact Jesus made on his contemporaries.”<sup>199</sup> Moule, as previously discussed, argues much the same thing, that John’s theology is expressed as a single indivisible unity, but one where the “great verities” of his vision are reiterated through multiple, diverse representations of the same themes.<sup>200</sup> Of these ‘great verities,’ Mary Coloe believes it is the transference of the meaning of Israel’s temple, from a building, to the person of Jesus, and then to the community of believers, that is at the heart of John’s narrative.<sup>201</sup>

It has been shown in this thesis, through a variety of Old Testament references, where the interrelationship between the Temple and the Garden of Eden is implicit, especially in a number of the Psalms<sup>202</sup> as well as in various passages from Isaiah<sup>203</sup> where “Eden was often linked to Jerusalem as the ideal it would one day attain.”<sup>204</sup> Explicitly, we see the relationship between the Garden of Eden and the Temple developed at length in Ezekiel 47:1-12. It is worth noting that in Ezekiel’s transfigured geography the Divine Glory, or *Kāböd*, is no longer in Jerusalem but ambiguously in a place at the limits of Israel’s borders known simply as, “YHWH is there”<sup>205</sup> a notion which can be read back into Ezekiel typologically as prototypically Christian. It is this image which the writer of Revelation appropriates to conclude his own vision of the world repristinated through the Church as the New Jerusalem, represented as Eden (Rev 22:1-5).

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<sup>199</sup> Wyatt, “Supposing Him to Be the Gardener,” 36.

<sup>200</sup> C.D.F. Moule, “The Individualism of the Fourth Gospel,” *Novum Testamentum* 5, fasc. 2/3 (July 1962): 175-175.

<sup>201</sup> Mary Coloe, “Temple Imagery in John,” *Interpretation* 63.4 (October 2009): 368.

<sup>202</sup> Ps 29:3a-3c; 33:7; 74:13; 89:9-11; 93:1-4.

<sup>203</sup> Isa 11:6-9; 51:1-3; 65:17-25.

<sup>204</sup> Barker, *The Gate of Heaven*, 68.

<sup>205</sup> For a fuller explication of this theme see Steven S. Tuell, “Divine Presence and Absence in Ezekiel’s Prophecy,” in Margaret S. Odell and John T. Strong, eds., *The Book of Ezekiel: Theological and Anthropological Perspectives* (Atlanta: Society for Biblical Literature, 2000), 97-120; Darr, “The Wall Around Paradise,” 276-279.

It can be argued, however, that the most poetic and accessible Christian vision of the expansion of God's presence beyond the temple of Jerusalem is to be found not in the Book of Revelation but, as suggested in Chapter Seven, in John's interpretation of Ezekiel 47:1-12, in the story known in many instances as 'The Samaritan Woman at the Well' (John 4:4-42). Here it is revealed that it is from Jesus, as the new Temple, that the perpetually sustaining water of life will flow to those prepared to work towards perfecting themselves through the Spirit, in grace. The blessings that flow from Ezekiel's temple are now available, moreover, beyond the ritual limitations of the Torah, amongst those who believe in their hearts, through their own experience, that Jesus is the anticipated Messiah (Jn 4:25-26), "the Saviour of the World."

In a number of respects, then, the 'gardener moment' of John 20:14-15 can be seen to reprise this earlier scene in John's Gospel. As the site of the Resurrection the garden in which Jesus is buried can be seen to be not just the foundation of the New Temple, but equally the new Eden. Mary Magdalene, as much an outsider within the Jewish community as the Samaritan woman at the well, similarly goes forth to tell others of the risen Jesus, that is, of the New Adam. And just as in the earlier story where the Samaritan woman is displaced by 'the people of the town,' who come to believe through their own experience, Mary herself is displaced in the narrative by the disciples, who obtain their own confirmation of the Resurrection through the truth of Jesus' pierced body.

Now, whilst this is just a brief summary of material already covered extensively in the earlier chapters of this thesis it can be reasonably asserted that if there is a direct relationship between the Garden of Eden and the temple, then Jesus, at once the New Adam and the new Temple, might appropriately be perceived as its 'gardener.' Certainly Wyatt argues that the curse of Adam results not so much in Adam being forced to till the soil, but that in his exile his punishment is to be



ritually divorced from the *hortus conclusus*,<sup>206</sup> the ordered world of Eden.<sup>207</sup> Jesus' lifting of the curse of Adam, another of the 'verities' of John, places him then firmly back into the garden, as Rembrandt, and John, would have it. Admittedly, the notion of Jesus as 'the cosmic gardener,' defined and articulated through allegory and metaphor, can be seen to be a natural corollary of this.

There is, however, a further dimension to the notion of 'Jesus the gardener' that is much more concrete and recognisable and less defined abstractly by myth and symbolism, that confirm him not just as the curator of Eden, but its Lord. In this representation Jesus is seen as the inheritor of a messianic tradition wherein kings throughout the ANE were often depicted as gardeners.<sup>208</sup> This developed in relation to symbolic connotations of fertility and control over the forces of nature that attached themselves to messianic kings, but equally in relation to the status obtained by having the resources to keep a large garden for pleasure.

These kings were also buried in the confines of palace gardens and this, according to Schaper, is the point that John is making both implicitly and explicitly through a combination of references. These references would have been accepted and understood by his audience<sup>209</sup> both historically, and also religiously through their relationship to the Hebrew Scriptures where, for example, the Kings' Garden features as the resting place of both Manesseh and Amon.<sup>210</sup> Extending this point, the Septuagint translation of Nehemiah 3:16, in particular, connects the King's Garden, in the Kidron Valley, next to the site of the ancient Temple, with the tomb of David, as does Acts

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<sup>206</sup> That is, the 'enclosed garden.'

<sup>207</sup> Wyatt, "'Supposing Him to Be the Gardener,'" 36.

<sup>208</sup> Schaper, "The messiah in the garden," 18.

<sup>209</sup> What Torje Stordalen refers to as "communicative competence," arguing for implicit awareness by ancient audiences for what may be obscure to contemporary readers. See Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 377, 390.

<sup>210</sup> As Schaper notes, there is special significance of the garden mentioned in 2 Kings 21:18 and 26 in connection to the burials of Manesseh and Amon, and further references to this garden in other texts, for example, 2 Kings 25:4, Jeremiah 5:7 and 39:4, and Nehemiah 3:15. Schaper, "The messiah in the garden," 25.

2:29, which simultaneously draws a connection between the presence of David's tomb among the faithful with the resurrection of Christ. John, describing the burial of Jesus (19:38b-42) implicitly references this through placing Jesus's body in a new tomb within a garden, that was also the place of Jesus' crucifixion. We should also note that the Gihon, one of the four rivers of creation issuing from Eden, which fed the gardens of the Kidron valley, through the King's Garden, was also the site of royal coronations. Thus Solomon is anointed and proclaimed king at the Gihon (1 Kings 1:33-34, 44-45); similarly Psalm 110, depending on the translation, describes the messiah, king and priest, drinking from the Gihon, either as part of a victory procession or a ritualistic aspect of a coronation rite.<sup>211</sup>

Reinforcing the notion of the royal burial of Jesus, John, within this section, has Nicodemus providing "about 100 pounds" weight of expensive ointments with which to anoint Jesus' corpse (19:39), the amount deemed appropriate in ancient Israel for the burial of a king. This motif is also present in Mark's Gospel in the story of Jesus' anointment at Bethany (Mk 14:3-4) by a woman who conventionally is believed to be Mary Magdalene. Accordingly, within the *Noli me tangere* tradition, Mary is typically represented as carrying her "alabaster jar" of spikenard, described in Mark 14:5 as being worth around 300 *denaris*, the average annual wage of a rural worker of the time – more than \$50,000 in today's value! In case the reader misses the point Mark, in this scene, has Jesus defend Mary from criticism of being wasteful with something of such value by having Jesus declare that she had done the appropriate thing – "she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial" (Mk 14:8). Here, significantly, Jesus foreshadows not just the immediate sense of his death, but the death of a royal figure.

Now, as with the discussion about the inter-changeability of the Garden of Eden and the Temple, incorporated symbolically into the

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<sup>211</sup> Wyatt, "Supposing Him to Be the Gardener," 25.

resurrected body of Jesus, the details above provide only a brief summary of a substantial discourse on the theme of Jesus as Royal Gardener. Nevertheless, it can be concluded that, as suggested earlier, the mention of the garden in John 19 and 20 does support a view that in locating Jesus' tomb in a garden, like that of David and other Davidic rulers, Jesus is depicted by John, "as a true Davidide and King Messiah, buried in the King's Garden and demonstrating his messiahship by rising from the grave in the very same garden in which, according to tradition... David's tomb was located."<sup>212</sup>

When this notion is superimposed onto the more broadly developed theme of Jesus as simultaneously the New Adam and the new High Priest of the revived Temple, depicted through Edenic imagery, which is also present in these passages, then the potential meaning of the scene described by John in 20:14-15 expands significantly. The emphasis now is not just on Mary Magdalene's perceived confusion as to the identity of the risen Jesus, as Royal Gardener or even humble labourer; nor can it be confined as confirming evidence of Jesus' identity as Messiah and Davidic king.<sup>213</sup> Rather, by augmenting and amplifying the 'verities' introduced earlier in his Gospel through the lens of the Cross and the Resurrection, John presents his readers with an enduring image of Jesus as the Edenic Lord of the New Creation.

### **Conclusion.**

In the corporeal reality of Jesus the world was graced with a template through which to comprehend the meaning of its own being-constituted in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27). Concomitantly, the human body, the 'general instrument' that puts it in touch with "the common texture of all objects,"<sup>214</sup> was confirmed as the privileged bearer of that capacity for transcendence.<sup>215</sup> Within each of the

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<sup>212</sup> Schaper, "The messiah in the garden," 26.

<sup>213</sup> Cf. Jn 18:33-37; 19:20-22.

<sup>214</sup> Simpson, *Merleau-Ponty and Theology*, 39.

<sup>215</sup> Simpson, *Merleau-Ponty and Theology*, 127.

Gospels the stories pertaining to the purpose and the climax of Jesus' embodied presence – his crucifixion, death, and resurrection – are theologically and structurally central to understanding this unique moment in human history. In these texts both the full depth of God's covenantal relationship with humankind and, consequentially, the full meaning of what it means to be human, were made available to the world.

So profound, however, is this gracious act of God, and so dynamic is human experience lived in the context of that event, that the full extent of its significance is always 'overdetermined,' forever revealing its inexhaustible content.<sup>216</sup> Nevertheless, the paradox of God's concrete truth presenting itself as "always more,"<sup>217</sup> as essentially "ungraspable,"<sup>218</sup> must be engaged with existentially, and to that end the imagery of Eden, simultaneously of this world and of the divine realm, can be seen in these climactic moments of the Gospels to be a primary referent.

To varying degrees, it has been the imagery of Eden that has been engaged by the Gospel writers to provide a partial framework for understanding the meaning of each of the Passion narratives in the context of the overall significance of Easter. Jesus' 'agony' in Gethsemane, for example, finds reference both in the covenantal framework of ancient Israel, and in Jesus' first temptation in the wilderness, both of which were framed by their Edenic associations. Similarly, in the events of the Cross, but more particularly of Holy Saturday, the immediate possibility of 'paradise,' the eschatological Eden, was revealed in the totality of Jesus' being with the dead in Hell. Finally, in the Resurrection, the totality of death was shown to have been overcome, replaced instead with the Edenic abundance of the New Creation, with Christ as its Edenic Lord.

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<sup>216</sup> Kelly, *Eschatology and Hope*, 159-180.

<sup>217</sup> Cf. Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*, transl. Hubert Hoskins (New York: Crossroad, 1981).

<sup>218</sup> Simpson, *Merleau-Ponty and Theology*, 32.

This is not to make a claim for Eden as an all-encompassing image, sufficient unto itself, that can reveal through metaphor and symbol all that the mystery of Easter brings to the world. Rather it points to the enduring power of Eden to provide both historically and in the immediate moments of lived faith a meaningful scaffold with which to engage with the phenomenon of 'Christ for us.' It is at once concrete and transcendent, a glimpse of grace that provides a compelling reason to choose life rather than wilderness, and that offers in its beauty and joyful abundance the eternal possibility of hope.

## **CONCLUSION**

Walter Brueggemann expresses the narrative and spiritual development of covenantal Israel primarily as one of movement and homecoming. He points to the Hebrew experience of expulsion, alienation and discontinuity, to that of anticipation, rooted in the speech of God,<sup>1</sup> of a permanent home in *eretz Yisrael*. This yearning, as this thesis has shown, was frequently expressed symbolically through the imagery of Eden. It is an image with which Israel itself, along with Jerusalem, and the Temple at the centre of ancient Israelite world, were variously equated. For the New Testament writers this existential longing was no less powerfully felt. But rather than in the Land, it was through the salvific gift of the Incarnation, and hope for the Parousia, that the experience of Eden was again made possible. For all who sought to live righteously the blessings of Eden, the symbolic representation of “the excess of the given”<sup>2</sup> that was the kingdom of God, were once more obtainable through the death and resurrection of Christ.

Nevertheless, preliminary research for this thesis supports the argument that, for a variety of not necessarily related reasons, Christian theology overall has been generally subdued, if not ambivalent, in articulating the relationship between the representation of the New Creation in Christ and Edenic imagery. Whilst some recent scholarship has sought to redress this imbalance, it is the further contention of this thesis that an integrated Christian theology of Eden is still substantially absent. My research, then, is an attempt to rectify this situation, in the context of lived Christian faith. It does so by comparing the manner with which Edenic imagery was understood and used in the Old Testament with its subsequent appropriation, integration, and transformation by various New Testament authors as they sought to express, to their own specific audiences, “the immediacy of the original visionary experiences of privileged

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 16.

<sup>2</sup> Anthony J. Kelly, *The Resurrection Effect: Transforming Christian Life and Thought* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2008), 54, 59.

witnesses.”<sup>3</sup> The outcome of this comparison, and the extension of the analysis into the New Testament, was to reveal the ubiquitous and embedded presence of Edenic imagery in the New Testament, such that its use can be deemed a primary organising, mediating, and meaning-generating motif of the New Testament account of the Christ event.

### **Summary of Chapters.**

Chapter One undertook a critical overview of the relationship between figurative language and religious experience as evidenced in the writing of three significant modern philosophers – Jacques Derrida, Paul Ricoeur, and Emanuel Levinas respectively. It was evaluated that the relational, or ethical, metaphysics of Emanuel Levinas, which expressed the real possibility of the human experience of God within language, most appropriately accommodated the potential for the polyvalent imagery of the Garden of Eden to be something more than just the residue of myth constrained, on the one hand, by the boundaries of language (Derrida), or restricted in its possible meanings by narrative form (Ricoeur). By way of contrast, Levinas’ assessment of the function of figurative language was that it provided, as an aspect of the ethical transcendence of being, not only the opportunity but also one of the most important means through which a person may encounter, or move towards, an ‘other,’ whether that ‘other’ be human or divine. Accordingly, in the context of Trinitarian faith, Levinas’ understanding of figurative language, or imagery, was deemed to most constructively inform the investigation that followed.

Chapter Two, through the lens of a dialogical hermeneutical process, examined the intersection of Edenic symbolism with various constitutive elements of ancient Jewish culture. It was identified that the relationship between Eden and the ancient Temple, either directly,

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<sup>3</sup> Anthony J. Kelly, “Faith as Sight? Toward a Phenomenology of Revelation,” *Australian eJournal of Theology* 19.3 (December 2012): 190.



or through temple architecture and decoration, was well established. The research also determined that the relationship between the Garden of Eden and the Land of Israel, as a geographical entity as well as a theological ideal, was also strong. This correlation is established both in the canonical Scriptures and in other traditional Jewish texts, for example, in the degree to which *eretz Ysrael* is deemed to exist within the boundaries of the four rivers of Eden, and insofar as both Eden and Israel experience a shared status as the *omphalos*, or navel, of the ancient Israelite world. This understanding is consolidated in the interchangeability between Eden and the temple itself, at the heart of Zion. The presence of Edenic symbolism in the cultic activity of the Temple, through the presentation of the sacred bounty or Seven Species of Israel, as it is manifest specifically at the festival of *Shavuot*, or First Fruits, further enhances this relationship.

The multidimensional relationship between Eden and Israel is also shown through the consistent use of Edenic symbolism, particularly in the writings of the Prophets, and in the Psalms, to show the richness and abundance of the blessings gifted to Israel, and each individual within it, through strict adherence to *Torah*. Jewish beliefs equate *Torah* with the Tree of Life at the centre of Eden; conversely, the presence of Edenic imagery manifests, in an immediately recognisable form, the religious and social perfection to which Israel is to aspire.

Chapter Three further explored the relational bond between Eden and ancient Israel by examining the manner in which God's predisposition towards Israel, and through Israel towards all of humanity, was manifest in the form of God's *hesed*, or 'loving kindness,' towards His chosen people. It was argued that the presence and influence of this *hesed* relationship was frequently represented in the Old Testament by the positive imagery of Eden, or its equivalents, notwithstanding the inherent legal framework out of which the theological concept of *hesed* emerges. That is, the outward or material representation of the emotional content of the covenantal relationship between God and Israel was shown to be frequently provided in the Old Testament,

especially in the writings of the Prophets and in the Psalms, through the imagery of Eden.

The use of this imagery acted to both symbolically represent God's enduring love for Israel, and each righteous person within it, as well as to point to the inexhaustible creative source of that blessing.

Concomitantly, it was argued that the imagery of Eden was also one of the primary means through which the post-exilic promise of the New Jerusalem, with the revived Temple at its centre, was made knowable in concrete and familiar terms. Guaranteed by its covenantal status, this unique bond between God and Israel was to endure for eternity, despite the frequent instances of Israel's obstinate pride, provocations and infidelity.

The chapter subsequently explored the reciprocal desire, generated by the recognition of being loved by God, of men and women to seek out and respond to the source of that divine preferment. In ancient Israel this response, formalised through adherence to *Torah*, was understood not just as a sacerdotal act expressive of specific cultic demands, but as an existential necessity. Either directly or indirectly this essential acknowledgement of God's life-sustaining love was shown to be often represented in the Old Testament, and other traditional texts, through the expressed hope of a 'return to Eden,' and in the use of Edenic symbolism more generally, to mark out the qualitative dimension of that reconciliation.

It was further argued that this particular understanding of *eros*, expressive of the reciprocal longing for God, must be fundamentally ethical so as to avoid the contamination of human self-absorption. In this purified form *eros*, of which Edenic imagery is an authentic and reliable expression, is seen to be in unity with *agapic*, or self-less, love.

Chapter Four extended the phenomenological analysis of Edenic symbolism, and related imagery in the Old Testament, by comparing it to that of matrimonial symbolism, another key Old Testament motif,

especially present in the writings of the Prophets, which analogises the relationship between God and ancient Israel to that of a husband to his bride. The significance and durability of the sacred marriage or *hieros gamos* metaphor can be seen through its later adoption in New Testament theology to describe the fertile and loving relationship between Christ and the Church.

Be that as it may, the ‘language of love,’ rooted as it is in concrete human experience, and human society, was revealed not just to inspire and educate the covenantal relationship. It was also shown to be descriptive of the inherent limitations in the human capacity to love God reciprocally. Whilst marriage was presented as the most intimate and privileged means through which men and women relate to each other, consequently appropriated by the Old Testament authors as the foremost metaphor describing the closeness of God to humanity, the innate predicament of human fallibility limited the universal applicability of that symbolism. That is to say, the metaphor of marriage informs human understanding of the dimensions of human relationship with God, but it is not equivalent to it.

Understood from this perspective, the assertion that matrimonial symbolism was valued as the pre-eminent means by which God’s relationship with humankind was revealed and characterised in the Old Testament was challenged. By way of contrast, our extended analysis of a range of examples drawn from a variety of genres, including the creation stories, the Song of Solomon, and the writings of the prophets, showed that the use of matrimonial symbolism is ultimately subsumed within that of Eden. Certainly, “Man loves because God loves and as God loves.”<sup>4</sup> But my research shows that this truth is more completely expressed in the idealism of Eden, within which matrimonial symbolism is subsumed, than it is in the often imperfectly expressed human societal construct of marriage. This is so, notwithstanding the applicability of matrimonial symbolism in

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<sup>4</sup> Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, 199.

representing God's own fidelity towards Israel, and to the entire God-created world, as a relational ideal towards which humans must nevertheless strive, both in their relationship with God and with each other.

Chapter Five, the final chapter in Part One of this thesis, examined the contrasting presence of Edenic imagery in the Old Testament with that of 'wilderness.' It was argued that this fundamental opposition is used to provide narrative structure, as well as to energise and give narrative momentum, to one of the Bible's key themes – that of the movement of the people of Israel, following the Fall, back into right relationship with God. It was argued that it is through the juxtaposition of Eden and 'wilderness,' as two contrasting sets of imagery representing the life-giving presence of God on the one hand, and the "wideness of the human heart,"<sup>5</sup> where God is absent, on the other, that this effect is substantively achieved. A variety of examples were provided to illustrate how this juxtaposition works in what might be described as an 'oscillating form,' where the presence of Eden and wilderness, or their equivalents, are in ongoing narrative tension. The general embeddedness and ubiquity of this juxtaposition regularly reminds the reader of either the blessings with which ancient Israel was graced through fidelity to YHWH or, alternatively, the calamity that befalls Israel where that relationship is compromised. Thus, it can also be said that this juxtaposition, whilst structural, is also discursive.

It was further argued that whilst this imagery relies on an appeal to transcendent or abstract notions of promise and loss embedded in an appreciation of God's *hesed*, or covenantal relationship with Israel, its most powerful meanings are rooted in the primary experiences of Israel as a land where its political and geographical existence is continually under threat. Within this context, Eden promises the ever-

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<sup>5</sup> Downey's term for the psychological wilderness that is the desire for power, admiration, reputation, recognition and personal achievement, that were the terms of Satan's offer to Jesus, which effectively represent the human dimension of hell (Mt 4:1-11; Lk 4:1-13). Michael Downey, *Altogether Gift: A Trinitarian Spirituality* (Dublin: Dominican Publication, 2000), 25.

continuing presence of life sustaining water, of light, of abundance, of fertility, and concomitantly, of peace, and health, and joy.

In contrast, 'wilderness,' translatable as 'trackless wastes,' or 'unsown land,' incapable of sustaining not just life but the associated cultural and religious components of that life as well, is offered as illustrative of the calamity that will befall Israel, where she persists in her infidelity and intransigence towards God, or chooses to turn away from God in preference to other lesser deities. The understanding that the 'wilderness experience' of Israel, which is frequently elevated to an end in itself in some contemporary commentary, was only ever meant to be preparatory or transitional, is also implied in the Scriptures in the frequent presentation of this juxtaposition.

Part Two of this thesis gathered the information developed in the preceding five chapters, of the presence and function of Edenic symbolism in the Old Testament. It then used that material to inform an examination of the significance and relevance of the imagery of the Garden of Eden to both Jesus and his followers. In the process it also sought to interrogate the view that the importance of Edenic symbolism was minimised in the New Testament through the effects of a realised eschatology, with its implied emphasis on Jesus' preaching of the kingdom of God. More broadly the analysis investigated the range and application of Edenic imagery in the New Testament, beyond that which is generally understood or recognised. Towards these ends various lines of inquiry were initiated. Complementary to this was the development of a broader realised eschatology, which acknowledged and incorporated the Edenic horizon as part of a more comprehensive contemporary Christian theology.

Chapter Six commenced this process by considering the writing of the Apostle Paul, so as to determine if, and where, and how he, as a Pharisaic Jew, had appropriated or adapted Old Testament understandings of Eden in response to his transformative encounter

with the risen Christ. In the first instance, Paul's understanding of the Land, *eretz Yisrael*, of which an equivalence between it and the Garden of Eden has been identified in the Old Testament, was examined. Based on what appeared to be Paul's idiosyncratic exclusion in his writing of this otherwise fundamental aspect of Jewish identity, it was suggested that Paul deliberately minimised the importance of the land of Israel in his developing Christian theology. Instead he offered in its place a view that the New Creation, of which Eden is an integral sign, was to be found not in the soil of Israel, as messianic Judaism would have it, but in the heart of all those who are reborn in Christ. Further to this, Paul's understanding of Jesus as the New Adam consolidated the view that the New Creation was not only inaugurated by Christ but was located through him, and in him, as well; as such the imagery of Eden was shown to be integral to Paul's representation of the self-identity of Jesus of Nazareth.

The chapter subsequently examined Paul's use of the motif of the *hieros gamos*, or sacred marriage, that Chapter Four had previously concluded had been subsumed in the Old Testament within Edenic symbolism. It was maintained that the use of the *hieros gamos* in Paul's writing was a further instance of the appropriation and transformation of Old Testament motifs in order to express emerging New Testament understandings in light of the Christ event. The comparison between the symbolism of the *hieros gamos*, as developed by Paul in Ephesians 5:25b-27, and that of the marriage between God and Israel analogised in Ezekiel 16, was presented. In both instances it was the imagery of Eden that was used to contextualise the blessings, as well as to suggest the degree of intimacy, of that sacred bond. The chapter concluded by a further examination of the relationship between the *hieros gamos* motif and Edenic imagery by analysing Revelation 12:1-17, which describes the undoing of 'the curse of the ground,' first encountered in Genesis in consequence of Adam and Eve's disobedience towards God, through the active role of 'the woman clothed in the sun' (Rev 12:1). Indeed, the image of 'the

woman clothed in the sun,' is one that this thesis contends can be appropriately understood as a representation of Mary as the new Eve, based on her holy status and redemptive actions. It was also argued that this passage from the Book of Revelation is a further example of the overarching theme of the return to Eden, first presented in the Old Testament through adherence to *Torah*, and reframed in the New Testament, through Christ and the nascent Christian Church.

Chapter Seven extended the analysis of the presence and application of Edenic symbolism in the New Testament by examining how the representation of Jesus as the Word, or Wisdom, of God was developed in the Gospel of John. This understanding, prevalent in early Christian communities, was suggested as the bridge which allowed these communities to accept belief in the Incarnation and the developing Trinitarian theologies which emanated from this belief.

The relationship between Wisdom, *Torah*, and Edenic symbolism, as the means through which the blessings gifted through these aspects of God in the world were communicated, was also examined at length. It was argued that, in this dimension of John's representation of Christ, Jesus equates himself to Eden in the sense of both the goal and the justification for the return to righteousness. This was portrayed in the scene in John's gospel commonly referred to as 'The Samaritan Woman at the Well,' a scene that this thesis further argues in Chapter Eight, is reprised, albeit in a different form, in the later recognition scene between Mary Magdalen and the risen Christ, where Mary ostensibly confuses her Lord with the gardener of the cemetery where he had been entombed.

The use of Edenic symbolism by both Mathew and Luke to develop their understanding of the metaphor of the kingdom of God was also examined. Using the examples of the Lukan parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk 15:11-32), and the Matthean pericope wherein Jesus offers the "evil and adulterous generation" only 'the sign of Jonah' (Mt 12:38-42; 16:1-4), it was argued that both Gospel writers appreciably

depend on extant understandings of Edenic symbolism and imagery to help consolidate and communicate their representation of the New Creation in Christ, and the metaphor of the kingdom of God as the outward sign of that New Creation, to their respective communities.

Chapter Eight, the final chapter in this study, drew together a number of understandings relating to the use and purpose of Edenic imagery developed in earlier analysis so as to facilitate consideration of its possible presence and function in the Passion narratives – the various representations of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ that are the climax of the Gospel stories. By their very nature, dealing with material for which, for the most part, either there were no human witnesses, or which have the mystery of events beyond death at their heart, these narratives are heavily dependent on figurative language to convey their authors' intentions and perceptions. It was shown that in a number of key moments the symbols and metaphors used were drawn from Edenic imagery in the context of the return to Eden made possible through Christ, as the New Adam.

Notwithstanding this heavy reliance of the New Testament writers on symbolism and imagery, the reader's attention was also drawn to the emphatic physical presence of Jesus of Nazareth in these accounts, and the tangible reality of the events that are described. The purpose here was to underscore the importance of 'contactful' human encounters. Anticipating Levinas' understanding of figurative language as a 'relational scaffold,' described in Chapter One of this thesis, the Gospel writers use the profound physicality of the environment of Jerusalem and the events that take place there to develop what might be described as the armature on which their understanding of the relationality of the human person, revealed through the mystery of the Passion stories, is constructed. Through the use of imagistic or figurative language, the spiritual and psychological dimensions of the Christian faith were subsequently transmitted. Acknowledging that the "singular illuminating phenomenon" of



Easter is by its nature ultimately beyond reduction,<sup>6</sup> the imagery of Eden nonetheless permitted the inspired understandings of the New Testament authors to be conveyed, as far as humanly possible, to their respective audiences, and subsequently in the ensuing commentaries and reflections.

It was submitted, for example, that Matthew's account of Jesus' 'agony' in Gethsemane represents a pronounced 'Isaac' typology. This suggests that Jesus' accession to the will of the Father, permitting the full inauguration of the New Creation, was deemed comparable to Isaac's similar submission in faith to God's authority, an accession which at the most basic level permitted the fulfilment of the Abrahamic covenant. In both instances the blessings that flowed from these self-emptying actions were ultimately conveyed through the imagery of Eden, or its equivalents. Similarly, it was contended that Luke's account of the scene in Gethsemane, where Jesus was attended by ministering angels, had as its template earlier Gospel narratives relating to Jesus' temptation by Satan in the wilderness. This was an incident which correspondingly emphasised the ever-present proximity of the possible return to Eden, the hoped for reconciliation with God actuated by Jesus' sacrificial death. It was further revealed that this definitive step, from the prophetic to the eschatological, subsequently redefined the understanding of Edenic imagery, which was now understood as expressive of the full glory of God, measured against the saving reality of Easter. This was an understanding that later found expression not only in the writings of the early Church Fathers and Mothers, but in early Christian liturgy, and Church architecture. The meeting between the risen Jesus and Mary Magdalen in the garden of the Resurrection, described in John's Gospel, articulates this understanding of the New Creation, by placing Jesus, as Edenic Lord, in what is essentially a 'royal garden,' the natural context of ancient Jewish kings.

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<sup>6</sup> Kelly, *The Resurrection Effect*, 59.

### **Implications of the Research.**

The implications of the research into the potential presence and value of Edenic symbolism and associated imagery in New Testament theology fall across seven areas. They relate to: i) the relevance of the Eden story to New Testament theology; ii) the discursive and structuring role of the juxtaposition of the imagery of Eden and that of wilderness; iii) the symbolic function of Edenic imagery as constitutive of representations of ancient Israel, and the New Creation in Christ in turn; iv) the function of Edenic imagery as constitutive of Christ's identity as the New Adam, with its implications for human redemption and renewal; v) the qualified relationship between Edenic imagery and matrimonial symbolism; vi) the subsuming of other secondary images, such as Wisdom and *Torah*, within Edenic imagery, and the subsequent appropriation of those relationships into New Testament theology; and vii) the close relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament in the fact of the integration, appropriation, and transformation of Old Testament imagery of Eden in the New Testament.

Firstly, one of the most significant implications of the research is to displace the notion that Eden is inconsequential to New Testament theology, of little significance to either Jesus or his followers, or fundamentally weakened by a realised eschatology forgetful of Eden in its relation to Christ. In contrast, this research shows that the story of the Garden of Eden, with its associated imagery, profoundly informs the telling of nearly every aspect of the Christ event. In each of the Gospels, and in the subsequent Epistles, and in the concluding apocalypse of John, the imagery of Eden is used in a multiplicity of ways to articulate not only Jesus' self-identity, but also the overarching themes of creation, revelation, and redemption that flow from the life-affirming presence of God amongst us, inaugurating the New Creation.

Secondly, the recurring juxtaposition of the imagery of Eden, contrasted with that of ‘wilderness,’ affirms an appreciation of the Christian Bible as an integrated text. The juxtaposition of these two sets of images has been shown to provide both a thematic structure against which various biblical narratives are played out, whilst energising, in the inherent tension of its oppositional form, the forward momentum of the text towards its climax in the death and resurrection of Christ. The recognition of the overarching presence of Edenic imagery in the form of this specific motif concomitantly undermines support for the belief that the story of Eden finds expression only in the beginning and conclusion of the canonical Bible. This is an erroneous notion that has been used to partially justify the diminution of the significance of the Garden of Eden to Christian theology, except as a marker of innate human weakness and sin. Indeed, rather than simply ‘bookending’ the Bible, the presence of Edenic imagery, revealed throughout both the Old and New Testaments, can be seen to function as an ever-present back-drop against which the various biblical narratives are brought to life, continually reminding the reader, or listener, of the eternal material presence of God’s love and blessings, even where darkness seems overpowering,<sup>7</sup> or God’s silence permanent and total.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, the juxtaposition of Eden and wilderness, where Eden represents that which is life affirming and graced by God on the one hand, and wilderness represents that which is not-God on the other, gives a clear direction as to the status of what is commonly referred to as the ‘wilderness experience.’ That is, rather than ‘wilderness’ being a spiritual destination in and of itself, based on a perception of ‘wilderness’ as a positive theological category popular in both ancient and contemporary contemplative traditions, the experience of wilderness is interpreted, in this reading, as a transitional or punitive form of human experience. Whilst the liminal qualities of wilderness

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<sup>7</sup> Lk 1:79; Jn 1:5, 12:46; Eph 5:8; 1 Thess 5:4-8.

<sup>8</sup> Mt 27:46; Jn 20:13.

may support a necessary period of human introspection, formation, and reflection, the ‘wilderness experience,’ in both the Old and New Testaments is shown to be generally represented as one that falls to humanity either through ignorance or intransigence – the consequence of an apparent unwillingness to choose a life lived in God and the blessings gifted through that graced relationship. This is not to deny the experience of ‘wilderness’ as a frequent and potentially positive existential companion. Rather, it is to invalidate the assumed spiritual sovereignty of ‘wilderness’ in the light of the enduring master-narrative of hope offered in the canonical Bible, a narrative supported by the recurring vision of Eden.

A third implication of the research is to locate the Garden of Eden of the Old Testament firmly within the ancient Israelite religious and cultural milieu, presenting a view of Eden equivalent to the covenantal ‘land of milk and honey’ that became the nation of Israel. This suggests that Eden, located at the centre of the ancient Israelite world, functions symbolically as the representation of a religious and political ideal towards which Israel must constantly aspire. Within this representation Eden also serves to give recognisable shape to the covenantal blessings that fall to Israel through the realisation of that ideal. The relationship between Eden and the ancient Temple – with the Tree of Life at the centre of both – consolidates this understanding, as does the relationship between Adam and his traditionally expressed role as its erstwhile high priest. This is an image brought to life in nascent Christian theology which appropriated the post-Babylonian Jewish ideal of a revived Jerusalem, with the repristinated Temple at its centre, giving it new expression in the form of the Church, with Jesus, as high priest and Edenic Lord, at its heart.

Fourthly, further implications of the relationship between Eden and elements of ancient Israelite cultural and religious expression can be drawn from the recognisable equivalence between the God affirming imagery of Eden and the blessings that derive from adherence to

*Torah*. This equivalence is particularly observable in the writings of the Prophets, in the Psalms, and in Wisdom literature, all of which describe, at both the national and personal level, the relationship between adherence to *Torah* and the consolidation of covenantal Israel as Eden. The representation of Jesus as the fulfilment of the Law, referenced explicitly in the writings of Matthew and Paul, and implied in the Gospel of John through his assertion of Jesus as the Wisdom of God, also consolidate understandings of Jesus not just as the New Adam, but as the new Eden itself, a notion expanded upon and given fuller expression in the summative passages in the book of Revelation.

A fifth implication of the research for Christian theology, and for the contemporary Church more generally, can also be derived from the examination of the central place of Edenic imagery in ancient Israel. This is to argue that matrimonial symbolism, one of the key motifs through which the Old Testament prophets described God's fidelity and ardour towards Israel, is itself subsumed within the overarching ideals represented in Edenic imagery. The developing New Testament theology of the Church as the bride of Christ, mined from this ancient tradition, must be understood from this perspective.

Notwithstanding its associations to fecundity, fertility, abundance, intimacy, joy, and knowledge, the reality is that the inherently human, and thus fallible, institution of marriage, intending of the highest human ideals, is nevertheless contrasted in its limitations against the transcendent imagery of Eden. It was shown in Chapter Seven, for example, how in John's Gospel, Jesus, as the 'living water,' brings the Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob to Eden through the covenantal relationship of love.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, in what is argued is a related passage, Jesus is shown bringing Mary Magdalene, through the 'seeing' of the 'eyes of faith' to the Eden of the Resurrection. The Church's identity and self-understanding are informed, in turn, through appreciation of

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Mal 2:14.

this relationship between matrimonial symbolism and the imagery of Eden.

The research, for example, offers strong support to the call of various post-Vatican II popes for the Church to be an institution seeking constant self-renewal. This is to be achieved through an understanding of its own imperfections, rather than falling into complacency in the comfort of its own sacramental identity as the spotless bride of Christ. Pope Paul VI, appreciating the power of the message emerging from the deliberations of the 21<sup>st</sup> Ecumenical Council, expresses this most emphatically in his first encyclical. There, he threw out a confronting challenge that draws precisely on the perceived limitations of matrimonial imagery as a human institution within the wider context of the Church as the earthly manifestation of the kingdom of God:

The Church must look with penetrating eyes within herself, ponder the mystery of her own being... This vivid and lively self-awareness inevitably leads to a comparison between the ideal image of the Church as Christ envisaged her and loved her as his holy and spotless bride (cf. Eph 5:27), and the actual image which the Church presents to the world today... This is the source of the Church's heroic and impatient struggle for renewal: the struggle to correct those flaws introduced by her members which her own self-examination, mirroring her exemplar Christ, points out to her and condemns.<sup>10</sup>

It is a challenge that Pope Francis restates nearly 50 years later, in his own demand for the Church to be true to the fidelity of its calling. Francis argues that without “new life and an authentic evangelical spirit,” born of an honest, driving and sustaining self-appraisal, ecclesial structures will hamper not only efforts at evangelisation, but also impede the experience of the Edenic joy of the Gospel.<sup>11</sup>

Sixth, the subsuming of what can be perceived as secondary images within those of Eden can also be observed directly in John's Gospel. Here, the representation of Jesus as the Wisdom of God is conveyed

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<sup>10</sup> Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesium Suam* (1964), 9, 10, 11.

<sup>11</sup> Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), 26.

emphatically in images that either directly reference Eden, or do so indirectly through the appropriation of Old Testament Wisdom imagery. This imagery is contextualised through specific Eden motifs such as the water of life, of light, of ecstatic abundance, and of healing. More indirect references linking the positive action of Wisdom in the world to the New Creation in Christ can be found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, both of which express the activities of ‘Wisdom’s children’ as revealing the kingdom of God through the appropriation of Edenic symbolism. In Luke’s Gospel this was illustrated through the contextualising of the meaning of parables such as that of the Prodigal Son through the use of Edenic imagery; in Matthew’s case it concerned the giving of the ‘Sign of Jonah,’ with its implicit foreshadowing of the death and resurrection of Christ, to contextualise various miracles of Jesus, and other stories of faith.

Lastly, the use of these, and other examples of Edenic imagery in the Gospels, points to the substantial integration, appropriation and transformation of Old Testament understandings of Eden in the diverse communities for whom the Gospel writers were developing and presenting their respective theologies. Redefined in light of Jesus’s death and resurrection, the Gospel writers, as with Paul before them, and the later New Testament authors who built on their work, appropriated Edenic symbolism as one of their primary referents in their attempt to convey the meaning of Jesus’ presence on earth, and the substance of the mission invested in him, “for those who have not seen, but believe.”<sup>12</sup> The widespread use and implicit recognition of Edenic symbolism, and associated imagery in these texts, also points to what must be considered its relatively unproblematic and unlaboured integration and adaptation from Old Testament understandings, so as to convey the radical message of love, and redemption, and creative renewal at the heart of the New Testament.

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<sup>12</sup> Kelly, *The Resurrection Effect*, 60. Cf. Jn 20:29; 1 Pet 1:8-9.

In its seemingly inexhaustible capacity to reflect the glory of God's extravagant love and creative power, the use of the imagery of Eden, then, is clearly intended to strengthen and expand, rather than to diminish or constrain, the theological imagination of each individual Christian, as well as the Church itself. The results from my research, in response to the perceived ambivalence, ambiguity, or indifference towards Eden, identifiable in a significant amount of Christian commentary, are offered accordingly as a prolegomenon to a developing theology of Eden which might re-familiarise and educate contemporary Christian audiences to its presence, function, and potency in New Testament faith. In doing so the research is also intended to bring Eden out from its relative obscurity, subject as it appears to be to a range of misconceptions and limited understandings, to its rightful place in the foreground of Christian contemplation.



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