

Paradise: Our Once and Future End: 2001 Conference of the Catholic Theological Association of Great Britain

The Hasidic Rabbis encourage the devout to turn and find the dwelling place of the Lord of the Universe within. The gate of paradise is no further than an open and converted heart. The siting of paradise has not always been so local and convenient. The beautiful garden, often simulated but never found, is always somehow beyond us to the West or East, further North or perhaps in the warmer South. That original vision of a garden of delights where harmonious and subtle ecosystems flourish and divine and human beings enjoy simple mutuality somehow changes in time into the human city, Palladian in its symmetry and light. There, God will dwell in the secular, 'heaven in ordinary'.

This city is the promised holy space, a new Jerusalem capable of construction even within the broken industrial landscape of satanic mills. This place we are to journey towards, this living space with God, is God's dwelling in Creation and our indwelling within the dynamic life that is triune. What is offered is not so much vision as participation and play. A space of reconciled relationships rather than renewed structures: Utopia, a non-place and yet the best of places, our heart's desire, delightful garden, awesome temple, city of Angels lit up by the permanent presence of God's glory, heaven and earth mixed for ever. The coming of St. John's hoped-for garden city supersedes even the incarnation of the Word. How to describe this? Botticelli has Dante and Beatrice circling ever upward in ecstatic converse, moving into the inviting light.

Our speakers in this year's conference aspired to lead us in such a conversation into enlightenment! Paula Gooder here explores the shifting landscape of paradise in the biblical literature and its non-biblical parallels. Robert Murray reflected on the promise of the poetry of paradise as vision and evocation in the works of the Syrian Ephraem, while George Ferzoco explored the evocation of Paradise in Dante's *Divina Commedia*: neither submitted his paper for publication. Susan Parsons challenges us to reassess the nature of moral action and speech in relation to discourse on Paradise. This paper by chance was delivered on the evening of September 11th from which session the Conference moved to the Chapel to pray for the dead and dying, the bereaved and all those caught up in the worst

terrorist act of modern times. Bruce Harbert next suggests that contemporary liturgical texts and the changed orientation of altar reveal the loss of an eschatological perspective, indicative of a community turned in on itself and incapable of expressing a sense of the kingdom of God as a reality among us. John McDade, in what was a contribution to a colloquium on paradise in different religions, reflects on Paradise in terms of our having a present sense of being in “deep God”. By the end we may not have entered Eden but there are pointers for the journey!

David McLoughlin
President

Eden and Beyond: Images of Paradise in Biblical and extra-Biblical Literature

Paula Gooder

Introduction

The word paradise is one which is so familiar to most of us that its utterance evokes an immediate mental image of a beautiful garden where the righteous dwell for eternity. This image, while finding its roots in the biblical tradition, is influenced as much by Dante, Milton and many Christian paintings as it is by biblical traditions. In fact, it is hard to see the word paradise without bringing to mind those famous medieval and renaissance paintings of the Garden of Eden, Heaven and Hell. The problem of this Christian heritage is that it encourages a rather monochrome image of the nature of Paradise which runs contrary to the variety of images contained in texts from the biblical era.

The purpose of this study is to examine the references to Paradise in texts from the biblical era and to explore the images evoked by