SESSION 15
The Theology of Paradise

There is a single concept that will help you integrate the theology of the Bible in a very simple and intuitive way: the theology of the Garden.

The Garden of Eden

- "The Lord planted a garden in Eden ... and there he put the man whom he had formed" (Genesis 2:8).
- "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed" (Genesis 2:23-25).
- "And God blessed them saying, 'Increase and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it. And have dominion over the fishes of the sea and the fowls of the air and all the creatures that move upon the earth' " (Genesis 1:28).

Paradise Lost

- "She took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate. Then the eyes of them both were opened: and when they perceived themselves to be naked, they sewed together fig leaves, and made themselves clothes. And when they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in paradise at the afternoon air, Adam and his wife hid themselves from the face of the Lord God amidst the trees of paradise" (Genesis 3:6-8).
- "God drove out the man and ... placed the cherubim and flaming sword ... to guard the way to the tree of life" (Genesis 3:24).
The Return to Paradise

- "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth... And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Revelation 21:1-2).
- "Then he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb... also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations" (Revelation 22:1-2).

The Covenant with Israel

- "For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us whenever we call upon him" (Deuteronomy 4:7).
- "Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst" (Exodus 25:9).
- "The Lord called to Moses out of the mountain saying, 'Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel... If you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples... and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:3-6).

Temple in Jerusalem as the Garden of Eden

- "King David discovers the "foundation stone," which was believed to be the stone upon which God founded the world (Cf. 2 Chronicles 3:1).
- The Ark of the Covenant is placed upon the foundation stone in the Holy of Holies.
- "The interior ornamentation of the Holy Place with its cherubim, palms and interwoven flowers... were intended to suggest the garden of Paradise" (Yves Congar, The Mystery of the Temple).
- "Out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Isaiah 2:3).
The Paschal Sacrifice

"Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month they shall take every man a lamb according to their fathers' houses, a lamb, for a household ... you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs in the evening. They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it."

Exodus 12:2-7

The Priesthood of Husband and Wife

• Husband and wife offered the sacrifice of the Paschal Lamb in the Temple.
• "It is a mandatory precept to slaughter the Passover sacrifice on the fourteenth day of Nissan after midday anywhere in the Temple forecourt. Both men and woman are obligated to perform this precept."
• "The Israelite killed [the lamb], and the priest caught [the blood]; he handed it to his colleague and his colleague [passed it on] to his colleague ... The priest nearest the altar sprinkled it once over against the base [of the altar]."

Source: Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Pesahim, Procedure and Laws of the First Pasover Sacrifice in Brief. Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Pesahim, 64b.

The Family as the Temple in Miniature

• "On Pesach, the Festival commemorating the founding of the homes of Yisrael, each home is transformed into a Temple, every table into an altar, all bread a sacrificial meal" (Commentary on the Haggadah).
• "We see, then, that every Jewish home is intended to be a dwelling place for the Divine Presence, a miniature Sanctuary. The life that husband and wife lead in the home is like the service performed by the priests at the Temple altar ... God promised His nation: 'And I shall dwell in their midst' (Exodus 25:8)" (Eliahu Kitov).


This beautiful theology of Israel was destined to be opened to all the nations in a very profound and personal way. To enter into the mystery, we will need to enter into a new Garden.
The Issue of the Temple

• "As some spoke of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings, Jesus said, 'As for these things which you see, the days will come when there shall not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down' (Luke 21:5-6).

• "Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' The Jews then said, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?' But he spoke of the temple of his body" (John 2:19-21).

• "At last two came forward and said, 'This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days"' (Matthew 26:61).

The Agony in the Garden

• "Jesus went forth with his disciples across the Kidron valley, where there was a garden … Jesus said to them, 'Pray that you many not enter into temptation.' And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, 'Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.' And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down upon the ground" (John 18:1 and Luke 22:40-44).

• "Jesus is earning for us the "living bread come down from heaven" by the sweat of his brow.

A Consuming Thirst for the Father

• "Jesus went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called the place of the skull, which is called in Hebrew Golgotha" (John 19:17).

• "When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, ‘Woman, behold, your son!’ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Behold, your mother!’" (John 19:26-27).

• "Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the scripture), ‘I thirst!’ … When Jesus had received the [common wine], he said, ‘It is finished’; and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit" (John 19:28-30).

Resurrection in the Garden

"Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb where no one had ever been laid. So because of the Jewish day of Preparation, as the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there. Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb … Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping? Whom do you seek?’ Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, ‘Sir if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him; and I will take him away’ … Jesus said to her, ‘Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father’" (John 19:41-20:17).
Christ made the journey from the agony of humanity’s exile from God to union with him in heaven. He allows us to have a foretaste of this Paradise in the Church.

An Opening of the Mystery

• “And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom” (Matthew 27:51).
• “But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water” (John 19:34).
• “There flowed from his side blood and water. Beloved, do not pass over this mystery without thought; it has yet another hidden meaning, which I will explain to you. I said that the water and blood symbolized baptism and the holy Eucharist. From these two sacraments the Church is born” (St. John Chrysostom, Office of Readings, Good Friday).

The Church as the Paradise of God

• “What then was Paradise is now represented by the Church” (St. Augustine).
• “The assembly of the saints bears resemblance to Paradise: in it each day is plucked the fruit of Him who gives life to all: in it, my brethren, is trodden the cluster of grapes, to be the Medicine of Life” (St. Ephrem).
• “The Church becomes a well of satisfaction by this gift of the Spirit ... for it is in her a fountain of living water springing up unto everlasting life” (St. Augustine).

The Church as the Chosen People of God

• “Come to him, to that living stone, rejected by men but in God’s sight chose and and precious; and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ ... you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” (1 Peter 2:4-9).
• “Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this rule, upon the Israel of God” (Galatians 6:16).
Marriage and the Paschal Sacrifice

- Husband and wife were called to offer the sacrifice of the Paschal Lamb in the Temple.
- Bridegroom and bride come to the Church seal their marriages in the name of the Blessed Trinity: “Shelly receive this ring as a sign of my love and fidelity. In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”
- Jesus is present in the spousal union: “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20).
- Bridegroom and bride are called to offer the Paschal Lamb abiding in their union to God.

The Home as Ecclesia Domestica

- “I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Romans 12:1).
- “Spouses are therefore the permanent reminder to the Church of what happened on the Cross; they are witnesses to the salvation in which the sacrament makes them sharers. Of this salvation event marriage, like every sacrament, is a memorial, actuation and prophecy” (Pope John Paul II, Familiaris Consortio, #13.)
- “The family is, so to speak, the domestic church” (Vatican II, Lumen Gentium, #11).

The Christian Family is a type of Paradise. God dwells in our midst. We are a kingdom of priests offering the sacrifice of Jesus Christ dwelling in the midst of our spousal union.

Small Group Discussion

Starter Questions

1. How can your home better reflect its dignity as a Temple of God?
2. How can you come to view the “one flesh union” of husband and wife as a sacrifice to God?

Next Week
Grace Flowing from the Temple