

The Church as a Garden

The idea of a garden to represent the beauty and pleasure of the Church has been used since the time of the Church Fathers. Many have developed this theme throughout the history of the Church. The English Puritan, John Owen, said that the “souls of the saints are the garden of Jesus Christ, the good ground... a garden for delight.” (2:41).

Human history began in a perfect garden, but that garden was destroyed by sin. Jesus was in a garden when he began his suffering to reverse what happened in the first garden (Matthew 26:36). Adam ran and hid from judgment in the garden’s trees, but in Gethsemane, Jesus stood and faced judgment for his people, gave himself into the hands of the soldiers, to bring us again to the paradise of God.

As though it anticipates the restoration of paradise, the Bible associates the garden with quiet pleasure and rest; the ultimate blessing and pleasure (Isaiah 58:11; 51:3; Genesis 13:10; Ezekiel 28:13, 31:8ff). They were often complex garden developments (Jeremiah 39:4; 2 Kings 25:4), but were also protected by walls or hedges (Nehemiah 3:15).

In 2:7, the first hint of the garden theme appears, which develops throughout the book. There she delights to sit in his shade and enjoys his sustenance. In 8:13, he speaks about her who “dwells in the gardens,” indicating a more permanent dwelling place.

The Church is the “planting of the Lord” (Isaiah 61:3), a place of sustenance and healing, a place of hidden mysteries and pleasure (“wells” 4:15) in contrast to the howling waste of the wilderness outside (Deuteronomy 32:10).

The writer uses the image of a garden to convey Christ’s intense love for his Church. In 4:12-5:1, he describes her personally as his garden. She is not just in the place of delight, she is delight itself—she is his garden, his cultivated possession (6:2-3). The consummation of the marriage is described as his coming into his garden (5:1).