Gary A. Anderson, *The Genesis of Perfection: Adam and Eve in Jewish and Christian Imagination.* Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001. Pp. xx + 257. Cloth, $24.95. ISBN: 0-664-22403–2.

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Opposite the title page of Gary Anderson's monograph, *The Genesis of Perfection*, the author lists "Three Theses," each with a supporting citation:

> Thesis One states, "In Judaism, creation is understood through the revelation at Mount Sinai." The supporting reference is from the rabbinic midrashic text *Genesis Rabbah*.
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> Thesis Two offers the other tradition, "In Christianity, creation is understood through the advent and passion of Christ." The *Martyrology of Jerome* provides the text.
> Thesis Three gives Anderson's conclusion, "Adam and Eve did not thwart the designs of God but, paradoxically, advanced them." Adam's words after the fall from John Milton's *Paradise Lost* poetically declare the assurance of the ultimate triumph.

Considering the richness and depth of Anderson's exposition of the interpretation of the Genesis 1:26–4:2 narrative in rabbinic, patristic, literary, liturgical, and artistic sources, it is remarkable how he is able to encapsulate the argument so succinctly. Anderson could stop here, mission accomplished. Fortunately, Anderson has invited his readers to delight in the diverse and entertaining details of the argument.

Anderson, professor of Old Testament at Harvard Divinity School, notes in his Preface that his scholarship has been both in the history of composition, primarily the historical-critical method; and in the history of reception or interpretation. Most Old Testament scholarship has been weighted towards the former, but in this work Anderson shifts the balance to interpretation. This is not simply to balance matters for the sake of equanimity and objectivity, but because he believes that it is in interpretation by the religious communities we understand what is most important in the

text. Anderson does provide the balancing concerns of historical-criticism, but consigns them to Appendix A ("Biblical Origins and the Fall"). Perhaps form reveals preference, for the body of his monograph is clearly focused on the history of reception and how the story is retold in a variety of genres.

The tension between these two disciplines is real. The Bible, while relating the adventures of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden in terse but provocative fashion, seemingly dispenses with the tale and its typologies in Genesis, not mentioning the scene again until Paul's 5th chapter of the Letter to the Romans. So much for the critical influence of Eden upon the Biblical message. Nevertheless, for synagogue and church the story of the beginnings directs us to the last and perfect fulfillment of the human-divine relationship. Judaism and Christianity, having lived and still living the story, have found no problem contributing to and filling out its details.

Knowing how the story will end helps to determine where it should be going: such is Anderson's basic principle for how Jewish and Christian readers modify and endow the Biblical text with more meaning.

Anderson's method is to listen to all sorts of voices that reflect the traditions about Adam and Eve. To determine his favorite voice would be difficult. Probably the apocryphal *Life of Adam and Eve* ranks foremost (an English translation of the Armenian version by Michael Stone and Anderson is Appendix C). *Genesis Rabbah* and several other witnesses to rabbinic commentary are utilized frequently. The most numerous citations come from the Puritan John Milton's poem *Paradise Lost*, which Anderson believes owes much to Milton possibly being familiar with the *Life of Adam and Eve* or at least its scenario. Dante receives some air time as well.

Of course, the reason we are here with this book review is Anderson's reliance upon Ephrem the Syrian for an interpretation of Adam and Eve in Eden from a Semitic Christian perspective. Ephrem is not the only Eastern Church voice, as Anderson calls upon Bar Hebraeus, Narsai, and Theodore of Mopsuestia to offer witness to the development of the Adam and Eve story.

Anderson begins the journey uniquely by exegeting Michelangelo's painting of the temptation of Adam and Eve on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Somebody got to Michelangelo's theology; Anderson surmises it could well have been Egidio da Viterbo, a contemporary intellectual at the papal court who helped revive interest and research into Augustine. Adam and the serpent are depicted straining towards each other, muscles tensed. Eve re-

mains reclining and relaxed between the two, her right middle finger pointing directly at her genitalia. Anderson sees a double meaning or symbolism in the gesture—Eve points to the cause of the Fall (sexuality), as well as the cause of salvation (the birth of Christ). Eve has now become Mary. One knows where one is going when one begins at the end.

The beginning, however, takes place at creation, or even before it. "Let us make man in our own image," God addressed the angelic host. This is an act of elevation by God of human beings over the angels, an enthronement, at which some angels, especially Satan, took umbrage. Another instance of the younger-superseding-the-elder theme is before us: Adam who was created after the angels now has primacy. Psalm 8:4—"What is man that thou art mindful of him?"—is interpreted in rabbinic tradition as the outraged cry of the rebel angels. Desiring to put the interloper in his place, Satan plots to entrap Adam with the help of the serpent.

Israel too is elevated and elected above the older nations as God's very own people and the recipients of God's Torah, just as Christian tradition perceives that God elevated and elected Jesus as God's Messiah. To be the beloved son is to be elected to die, but when the Son volunteers to empty himself and go to earth for the sake of the fallen Adam, he receives the greatest of honours.

Where Adam knew Eve is essential spiritual geography, which finds rabbinic and Christian interpreters at odds with one another. Sexuality is not condemned as sinful *per se*, but where it happens is critical for its interpretation. Christian interpreters—Anderson relies heavily here upon Ephrem—understand Eden as sacred space, similar to the Jerusalem Temple. As a holy place, one can only be in it if one is in a state of purity befitting the image of God. Christians, therefore, read that Adam and Eve could have had sexual relations only outside the Garden. Jewish commentators believed, on the other hand, that Adam and Eve did know one another inside the Garden, and that Eden was not a sacred space.

Anderson turns to Augustine who argued against the Pelagian position that the gospel could transform human nature as an exercise of the freedom of the human will. Sainthood and perfection were possible for all, according to Pelagius, but Augustine knew that if perfection were possible, it would be obligatory for all. Complete human freedom would be oppressive, making the human being responsible for every action taken—and severely punishable as well. The dilemma with sexuality, Augustine presses, is that the harmonious relationship between erotic desire and bodily obedience—bodies behaving in perfect concord with their will—had

been disrupted. The imbalances of lust and impotence are proof of this discontinuity.

Sex in Eden? God was making the arrangements for the connubial bed in the Garden, but Adam and Eve were too quick to sin and did not have time to consummate their marriage. Now the sexual organs themselves are seen as the culprits, operating independently of the will of the individual. Eden being no sacred space, Augustine places the struggle for sexual self-control back into the arena of monastic life, for even the greatest monks are not immune from the impetuosity of the sexual organs. This was a radical, uncomfortable, and unwelcome idea for the defenders of the monastic life.

The focus shifts to Eve's role in sin and salvation. Eve knows of the prohibition regarding the tree of knowledge, but in response to the serpent seemingly makes an addition that one should not touch, as well as not eat from the tree. The rabbis believed that it was Adam who added touching to the list as one would do to protect a small child from harm. The serpent took advantage of this, demonstrating that since touching is not fatal, so eating would not be either. Ephrem writes that both Adam and Eve heard the two commands together, especially that one should not come near the tree of knowledge for it guarded the inner sanctum of the tree of life. This two-chambered geography of Eden is unique among Christian and Jewish interpreters.

Eve now merges into Mary and Mary is only really comprehended in light of Eve. As the *theotokos*, Mary is an active participant in the incarnation, sanctifying the womb profaned in Eden. In *The Protoevangelium of James*, Joseph despairs over Mary's pregnancy having left her alone and unattended, just as Eve was deceived by the serpent when she was alone, unattended either by Adam or the angels. So when Mary encounters Gabriel, she is reluctant to assent until she has figured out the truth of what is to happen, lest she be deceived like Eve. While Abraham is praised for assenting to God's command without hesitation and without comment, Mary is commended for her shrewdness and caution.

The persistent issue whether Eve is the source of sin finds its critical mass in 1 Timothy 2:14–15. Anderson enjoins Origen, Ephrem, Augustine, and finally Milton to lift the blame off Eve's shoulders. Origen sees the first couple not as types for all men and all women, but Adam is the one who points to God's Christ, while Eve represents all God's church, male and female.

Ephrem treats Adam and Eve as equally guilty, believing that prior to transgression they were clothed in glory. At the decisive

moment, they were physically transformed in a visible way, signified by the discovery of their own nakedness. Ephrem not only takes the burden of full guilt from Eve, he chastises Adam for cowardly dissembling before God.

Augustine is nearly modern in his Biblical interpretation, not allowing 1 Timothy to usurp Paul's verdict on Adam ("sin came into the world through one man") in Romans 5:12–21, for the latter proceeds from the heart of Paul's theology. That Adam was not deceived did not mean he was innocent. It simply meant that Adam's sin differed in manner from Eve's, but his sin was more a result of his free will, and thus worthy of more blame.

The act of transgression is done, and now the rest of life must be lived. The garments of skin God fashioned for the naked couple before they had to leave Eden has attracted much speculation. Changing garments/robes as one moves from one level of holiness to another is the pattern of priests in the Temple. If Eden were sacred ground, then Adam's holiness would have been similar to a priest's. Some rabbinic writers saw the garments of skin as mortal human flesh, not as a separate piece of clothing to be put on or taken off. So Adam and Eve did die when they ate of the fruit—eventually, not immediately. Exile was a kind of protection for Adam and Eve, for to remain before God in Eden, while defiled by sin, was to court danger and death.

Baptismal liturgies adopted the imagery of clothing and garments of skin. The one about to be baptized is stripped naked of the garments inherited from Adam, then dressed in garments he or she shall wear at the resurrection.

Exiled from Eden, were Adam and Eve punished eternally or instead engaged in a long penance? The Christian model for penance comes from a surprising person: King Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4) who is driven out of Babylon and becomes like a beast of the field. In the Greek versions of the story, the evil king repents, confesses God, and is restored. Tertullian lifts up Nebuchadnezzar's penance as exemplary, for if this terrible person could be saved, then no one would be beyond God's mercy.

The initial punishment of Adam and Eve consisted of being condemned to eat the grass of the field normally intended for animals. The *Life of Adam and Eve* records that the couple had only the food of the animals to eat, but after tremendous penance God took notice and gave them seed to grow cereals.

Ephrem returns to the example of Nebuchadnezzar whom he perceives as a second Adam, representing the entire human condition in summary, both in his/our fall and in his/our repentance.

The fate of Adam and Nebuchadnezzar to dwell among and eat like animals becomes a form of the ascetic life in the Syriac church. No longer mere penance, the lives of the holy men and women in Egypt and Syria, whether "grazers" as above or stylites like the famous Simeon, are described in the language of glory. Anderson cites Sebastian Brock's article on early Syriac asceticism that "this style of life was in fact a return to...the life of Adam in Paradise before the Fall."

At first glance, Anderson finds this lifestyle more like Adam outside Eden and therefore incongruous with a redeemed Adam living inside Eden. But then Anderson stumbled upon a modern Hasidic story by Israeli novelist Shai Agnon about a holy woman Tehillah who lavishes her financial resources, time and energy on Jerusalem's poor and destitute. Anderson recognized that by treating such hardship and asceticism as penance rather than punishment, the holy men and women progressed towards deification. By imitating Adam outside Eden, the early Christian monks were assuring themselves of a place inside Eden.

The last chapter of the story appears initially to be outside the realm of the Eden saga. Anderson examines the "harrowing of hell," with Dante's *Inferno* and the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus* (English translation of pertinent sections included as Appendix D) as principal sources.

As a consequence of the Fall, Satan has obtained legitimate rights over humanity. Cohort Hades or Death has the right to bring every human being into his realm. But Death cannot figure out Jesus, for while he performs acts of divine power, he is most human in other respects. Yet Hades cannot resist the temptation and takes Jesus on Good Friday. In death Jesus' power is revealed, one that can only be activated by weakness. Entering the kingdom of death, Jesus raises up Adam and Eve. The point Anderson stresses is that the kingdom of Hades is lamentable but just, so God cannot appeal on grounds of reason, but overturns the power of Hades by an act of deception.

Satan, in some circumstances, represents the powers of justice, so the God who is merciful has to resort to a different tact. A thoroughly just world would leave no room for human beings, Anderson concludes, so God must deceive himself.

Anderson calls again upon Ephrem to interpret this narrative through sections in *Carmina Nisibena*. Ephrem does not perceive Death as a rebel angel, but as a servant who performs justly what he has been commanded. Death opens the door for Christ, announces him to all therein, and on bended knee declares that he is

Christ's servant forever. In his *Commentary on the Diatessaron* Ephrem shows that it was fortunate that Abel was the first to enter Sheol, for having been murdered by Cain he had to enter unjustly. If Adam had been the first to enter, his sentence would have been justly deserved and he would have been condemned to stay there forever. Ephrem, like other patristic writers, sees Abel as a type of Christ, who dies unfairly and gives God the moral authority to rescue Adam, who represents all humanity, from the bonds of Sheol.

The strength of this book lies in a number of its features. Engagingly written in a style neither condescending to the scholar, nor overly technical for the lay reader, the book features attractive plates of paintings and diagrams of concepts. The paintings are not there for mere illustration, but lead the reader through primary insights into the argument. Likewise, his reliance upon Dante and especially Milton widen the intellectual field for investigation.

In addition to attaching the appendices of the *Life of Adam and Eve* and the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, Anderson offers a useful Glossary of theological terms, biographical notices, and historical references that should especially aid the non-specialist. The same is the case for Appendix B, an annotated text of Genesis 1–3 (actually, a few verses from Genesis 4 and 5 are tacked on). End notes give the appropriate references for quotations, and a General Bibliography helps fill out the research and thought on a particular theme.

Naturally, Anderson's most significant contribution from the perspective of readers of this journal is his utilization of Ephrem and other Syriac and Eastern Christian writers as primary witnesses to a topic of universal interest. Of course, a plea could be heard for integrating more examples from Syriac literature and tradition, but Anderson's efforts have been appropriately balanced. Other scholars will fill in the gaps and addenda in time. Hopefully, this work will open the gates for other monographs on Biblical, theological, and historical themes that will introduce the scholarly and general public to the wealth of the East.