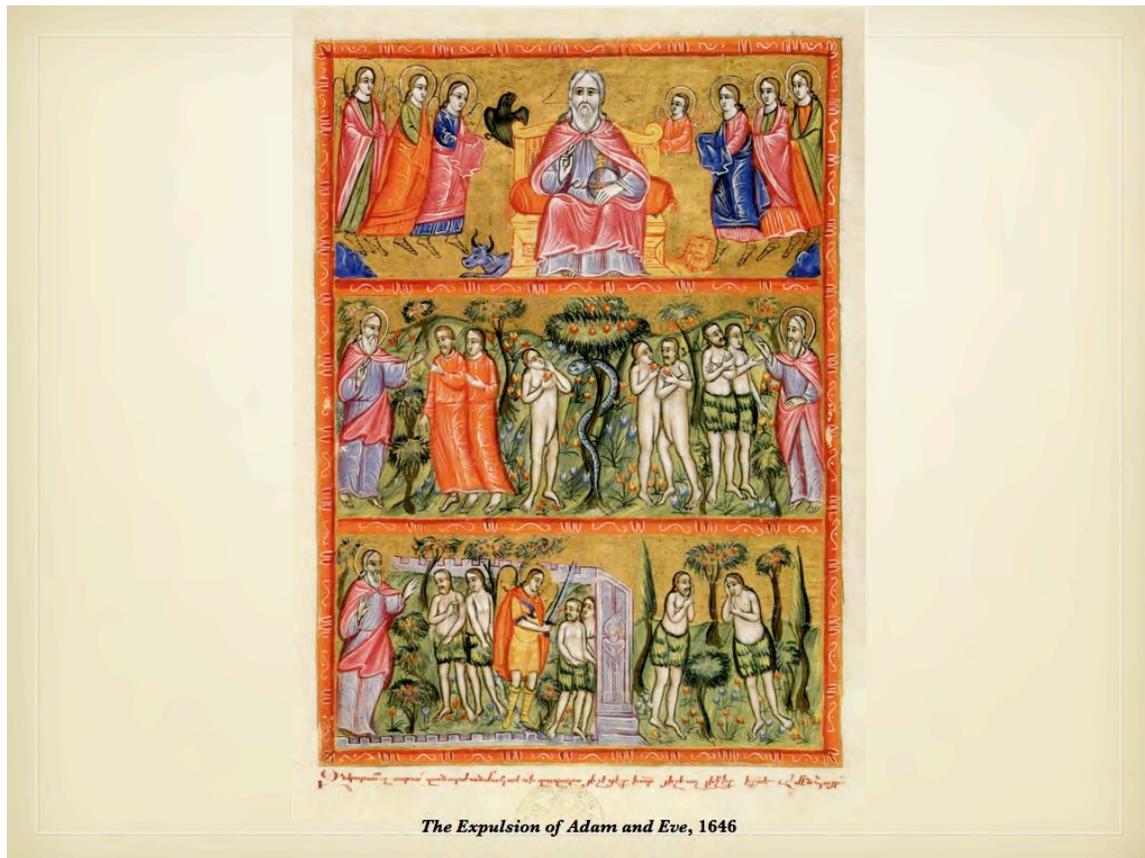


The Nakedness and the Clothing of Adam and Eve

Jeffrey M. Bradshaw

Western art typically portrays Adam and Eve as naked in the Garden of Eden, and dressed in “coats of skin” after the Fall. However, the Eastern Orthodox tradition depicts the sequence of their change of clothing in reverse manner. How can that be? The Eastern Church remembers the accounts that portray Adam as a King and Priest in Eden, so naturally he is shown there in his regal robes.¹ Moreover, Orthodox readers interpret the “skins” that the couple wore after their expulsion from the Garden as being their own now-fully-human flesh. Anderson interprets this symbolism to mean that “Adam has exchanged an angelic constitution for a mortal one”²—in other words, they have lost their terrestrial glory and are now in a telestial state.



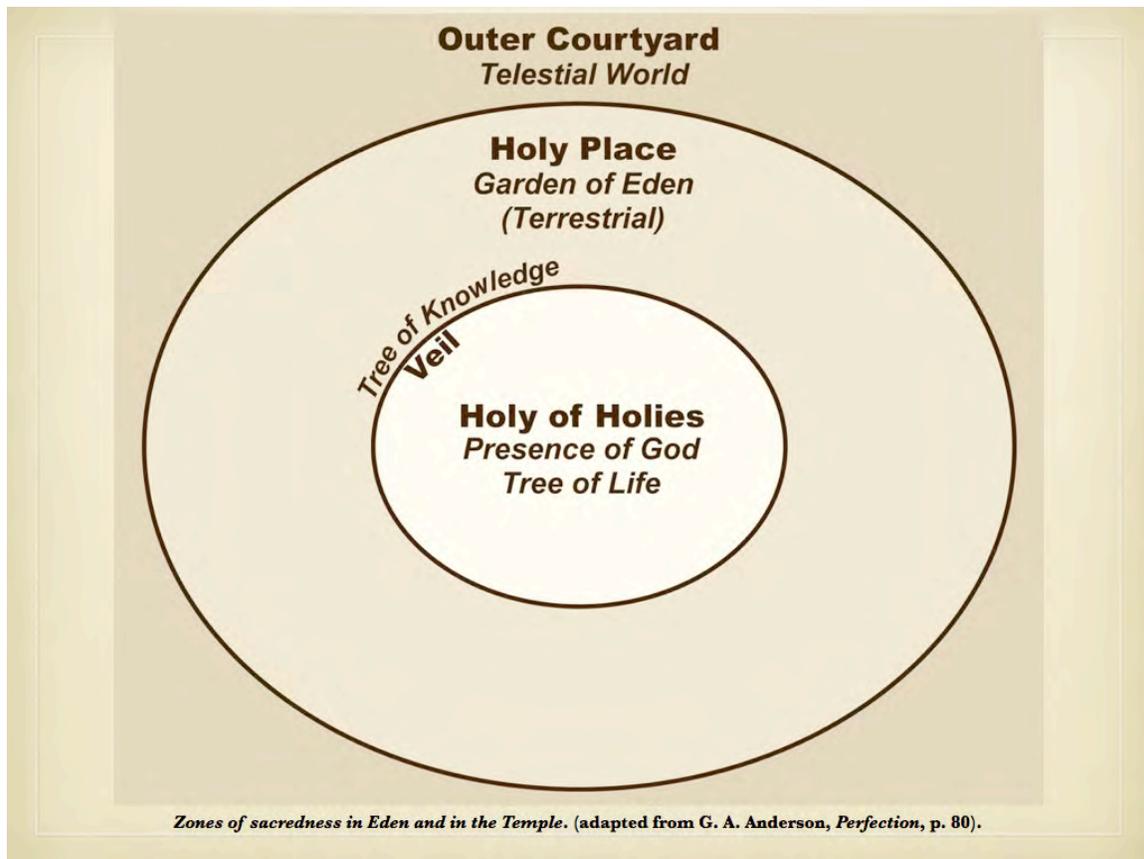
The top panel of the figure above shows God seated in the heavenly council surrounded by angels and the four beasts of the book of Revelation. The second panel depicts, from left to right: Adam and Eve clothed in heavenly robes following their creation; then stripped of their glorious garments and “clothed” only in mortal skin after eating the forbidden fruit; and finally both clad in fig leaf aprons as Eve converses with God. The third panel shows Adam conversing with God, the couple’s expulsion from the walled Garden through a door showing images of cherubim, and their subsequent hardship in the fallen world. Orthodox tradition generally leaves Adam and Eve in their aprons after the Fall and expulsion, seeing them as already having received their “coats of skin” at the time they were clothed in mortal flesh.

Gradients of Holiness and Changes of Clothing

Recalling the parallels between the layout of the Garden of Eden and Israelite Houses of God, Anderson points out that “the vestments of the priest matched exactly those particular areas of the Temple to which he had access... Each time the high priest moved from one gradient of holiness to another, he had to remove one set of clothes and put on another to mark the change”:³

(a) Outside the Tabernacle priests wear ordinary clothes. (b) When on duty in the Tabernacle, they wear four pieces of clothing whose material and quality of workmanship match that of the fabrics found on the outer walls of the courtyard.⁴ (c) The High Priest wears those four pieces plus four additional ones—these added garments match the fabric of the Holy Chamber where he must go daily to tend the incense altar.

In Eden a similar set of vestments is found, again each set suited to its particular space. (a) Adam and Eve were, at creation, vested like priests and granted access to most of Eden. (b) Had they been found worthy, an even more glorious set of garments would have been theirs (and according to St. Ephrem, they would have entered even holier ground). (c) But having [transgressed], they were stripped of their angelic garments and put on mortal flesh. Thus, when their feet met ordinary earth—the realm of the animals—their constitution had become “fleshly,” or mortal.⁵



According to Brock, the imagery of clothing in the story of Adam and Eve is “a means of linking together in a dynamic fashion the whole of salvation history; it is a means of indicating the

interrelatedness between every stage in this continuing working out of divine Providence,” including “the place of each individual Christian’s [ordinances] within the divine economy as a whole.”⁶ We describe the sequence of changes in more detail below.

From Glory to Nakedness (Moses 3:25)

Though figuratively “naked,” because their knowledge of their premortal state had been taken away by a “veil of forgetfulness,”⁷ Adam and Eve had come to Eden nonetheless “trailing clouds of glory.”⁸ While the couple, as yet, were free from transgression, they could stand “naked” in God’s presence without shame,⁹ being “clothed with purity”¹⁰ in what early commentators called “garments of light”¹¹ or “garments of contentment.”¹² In one source, Eve describes her appearance by saying: “I was decked out like a bride, and I reclined in a wedding-chamber of light.”¹³

In the context of temple teachings based on the experiences of Adam and Eve, Hugh Nibley explains:

The garment [of light] represents the preexistent glory of the candidate... When he leaves on his earthly mission, it is laid up for him in heaven to await his return. It thus serves as security and lends urgency and weight to the need for following righteous ways on earth. For if one fails here, one loses not only one’s glorious future in the eternities to come, but also the whole accumulation of past deeds and accomplishments in the long ages of preexistence.¹⁴

From Innocence to Transgression (Moses 4:16)

Rabbinical tradition taught that, following his transgression, “Adam... lost his [heavenly] clothing—God stripped it off him,”¹⁵ and similarly that Eve “was stripped of the righteousness in which [she] had been clothed.”¹⁶ In the *Life of Adam and Eve*, Adam is made to say that God then “sent seventy plagues upon us, to our eyes, and to our ears and as far as our feet.”¹⁷ As we have seen, this can be taken to mean that “Adam has exchanged an angelic constitution for a mortal one,” in other words that he has been “clothed with flesh.”¹⁸ Shamed by their loss of glory, Adam and Eve covered their earthly bodies with fig leaf aprons.

Rabbinical writings describe how, in likeness of Adam and Eve, each soul descending to earth “divests itself of its heavenly garment, and is clothed in a garment of flesh and blood,”¹⁹ the prior glory being, as it were, “veiled... in flesh.”²⁰ The various “afflictions” of mortality initially given to Adam and now bestowed upon “all... generations”²¹ “are against the ‘seven natures: the flesh for hearing, the eyes for seeing, the breath to smell, the veins to touch, the blood for taste, and bones for endurance, and the intelligence for joy’;²² or against life, sight, hearing, smell, speech, taste, procreation.”²³ Though Adam and Eve had been protected from fatal harm, ancient texts recount that Satan had been allowed to hurt them, and the “wounds,” foreshadowing the wounds later received by Christ at His crucifixion,²⁴ “remained on their bodies.”²⁵

Nibley sees the wounds of nature and of Satan to various parts of the body as symbols figuratively corresponding to the “blows of death” taught by Satan to Cain.²⁶ He describes their enactment in Jewish ritual as follows:

The wages of sin is death, and the dead body is chided at an old-fashioned Jewish funeral because its members no longer function, and each one is struck an impatient and accusing blow. This is the *chibut ha-keber*: “On the third day the departed is treated with increased rigor. Blows are struck on his eyes because he would not see, on his ears because he would not hear, on his lips because they uttered profanities, on his tongue because it bore false testimony against his neighbor, on his feet because they ran toward evil doing.”²⁷

From Transgression to Blamelessness (Moses 4:27, 6:50-53)

Adam was powerless except through death to rid himself of the mortal flesh he had now put on. However, while still in this life, he was enabled to “[put] off the natural man and [become] a saint through the atonement of Christ” so that he could be found “blameless in the sight of God.”²⁸ When Adam asked why “men must repent and be baptized,” the Lord replied: “Behold I have forgiven thee thy transgression in the Garden of Eden.”²⁹



God Dressing Adam and Eve, detail of the Creation cupola, San Marco, Venice

Above is a mosaic from the San Marco cupola in Venice showing God dressing Adam and Eve. The coats of animal skins given to them were a visible sign of God’s forgiveness, constituting a tangible witness of the couple’s acceptance of the atonement that would reverse the “blows of death” and cover the shame of spiritual nakedness they experienced following their transgression. The “second skin” provided by the Lord figuratively replaced their covering of mortal skin with the flesh of Jesus Christ, the “second Adam,”³⁰ through whose power they

would experience a “renewing of their bodies.”³¹ Indeed, the Hebrew term for “atonement” exactly fits this situation, meaning “to cover or recover, cover again, to repair a hole, cure a sickness, mend a rift, make good a torn or broken covering.”³²

Though the leather garment given to Adam and handed down through the patriarchs was foremost a sign of repentance,³³ it was also a sign of authority,³⁴ and a symbol of “royal rebirth and rejuvenation.”³⁵ It provided protection, afforded modesty, reminded Adam and Eve of their covenants, and served as an earnest of the glorious celestial robes that awaited them through their faithfulness.³⁶

The “putting off of the natural man” so as to be made a “new creature” in Christ³⁷ is figuratively enacted in the rites of some Christian traditions relating to the renunciation of Satan and the acceptance of Christ through baptism. In these rites, the candidate “is stripped of the garments inherited from Adam and vested with the token of those garments he or she shall enjoy at the resurrection.”³⁸

From Blamelessness to Celestial Glory (Moses 4:27)

While the coats of skins “covered” the direct effects of Adam and Eve’s transgression (corresponding to the idea of *justification*), additional clothing worn over the first garment represented their being endowed with glory, holiness, and godliness (i.e., *sanctification*).³⁹ In connection with the doctrines and ordinances of the gospel that promise “eternal life... unto all the obedient,”⁴⁰ Adam and Eve would, in the resurrection, be “clothed with honour and majesty... [and] covered... with light as with a garment,”⁴¹ in perfect similitude of God’s own glory.⁴²

Rabbinical writings recount: “When the time comes for the soul to leave this world, the Angel of Death strips off the worldly garment, and at the same instant the soul is clothed in the holy garment that was stripped away when it descended to this world. Then the soul delights in having been stripped of its worldly body and in having its original garment restored.”⁴³ Similarly, Nephi describes the worthy dead as “being clothed with purity, yea, even with the robe of righteousness.”⁴⁴ *I Enoch* says that the “righteous and the chosen will have arisen from the earth... and have put on the garment of glory... the garment of life from the Lord of Spirits; and your garment will not wear out, and your glory will not fade in the presence of the Lord of Spirits.”⁴⁵ “For these are those selected by God for an everlasting covenant and to them shall belong the glory of Adam.”⁴⁶

In ancient Israel, the temple clothing of priests symbolized the heavenly clothing that would be given them in the next life.⁴⁷ Nibley explains that “the white undergarment is the proper preexistent glory of the wearer, while the [outer garment of the high priest] is the priesthood later added to it.”⁴⁸ Anderson describes God’s concerted attempt at Sinai to figuratively reverse the effects of the Fall of mankind and then to cover him with glory:

... by ordaining that Israel wash and then put on new clothes. “When you have already been washed and purified through the Law of God,” Origen declared, “then Moses will dress you with a garment of incorruptibility so that ‘your shame may never appear’⁴⁹ and ‘this mortality may be absorbed by life.’”⁵⁰ And what was done to Israel in this general way was done to the

priesthood in a much more dramatic way. Priests' clothing anticipated the resurrection body that all would receive at the end of time.⁵¹

Eve Receives a Fitting and Proper Name (Moses 4:26)

Just before God clothed the first couple with “coats of skin,” Eve was given a proper and fitting name, replacing the generic name of “woman” (*ishah*) she had received previously.⁵² Jolene Edmunds Rockwood explains how the second naming differed from the first:⁵³

[In the first instance of naming,] man is actually making a pun on the origin of woman. As the human (*ha- 'adam*) received his existence from the earth (*ha- 'adamah*), now the man (*ish*) has been used to form the woman (*ishah*). We see this difference even more clearly when we look more closely at the episode where *ha- 'adam* names the animals. He uses a Hebrew naming formula: the verb “to call” (*gara*) followed by the word “name” (*shem*) or “calling the name.” Cain “buildded a city, and *called* the *name* of the city, after the name of his son”; and “Adam knew his wife again, and she bare a son, and *called* his *name* Seth.”⁵⁴ It is interesting that the man does not employ this formula for the woman until after the Fall when he “*calls* her *name* Eve”....

As before Adam made a covenant with her, now he gives her a title of great honor: “Life, the mother of all living.” This is not a mere naming. It signifies that a great event has taken place, and a title commensurate with the event is bestowed upon the woman. It is also similar to the Near Eastern formula for titles given to goddesses.

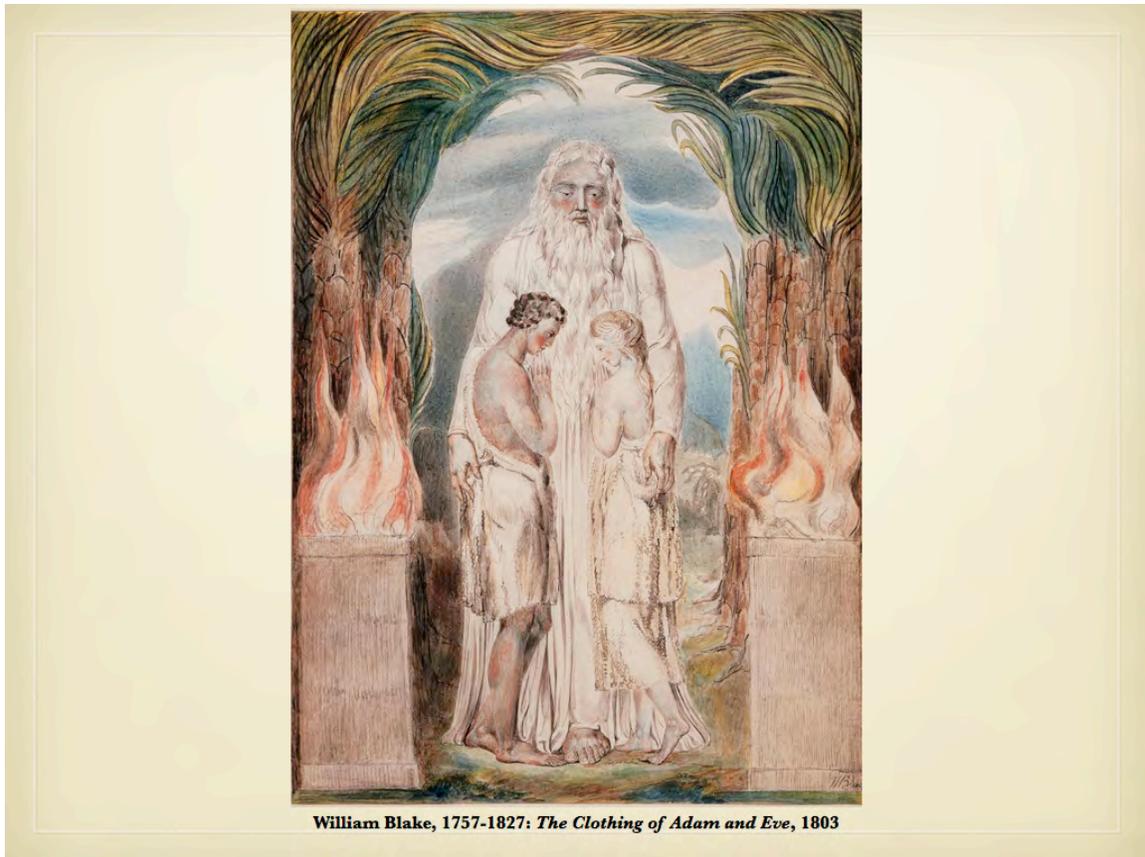
Recall also that Old Testament figures such as Abram (Abraham) and Jacob (Israel) received a new name from God Himself at significant junctures in their lives.⁵⁵ Later sources tie the same motif to the life of Moses. For example, in a text “drawing almost exclusively upon Philo’s *De Vita Mosis*” (but also “drawing upon other sources”), Clement of Alexandria gave a description of a group of “Initiates” who had an account of the three names given to Moses: “Joachim, given him by his mother at circumcision; Moses, given him by Pharaoh’s daughter; and Melchi, a name he had in heaven which was given him, apparently by God, after his ascension”⁵⁶—and suggesting the “eternal priesthood of Melchizedek.”⁵⁷ In this sense, Melchizedek (*Melchi-zedek* = king of righteousness⁵⁸) might be regarded as much a title as a name.⁵⁹

Just as the naming episode in Moses 3:19-20 was considered by Islamic commentators to be a test of Adam’s knowledge of certain names as a measure of worthiness for his exalted role, so also was the story of the naming of Eve seen in precisely the same way. Notice the words al-Tha’labi uses to describe the incident:

When Adam awoke from his sleep he saw [Eve] sitting at his head. The angels said to Adam, testing his knowledge: “What is this, Adam?” He answered: “A woman.” They asked: “And what is her name?” he replied: “Eve (*hawwa*).”⁶⁰

Conclusions

The imagery of clothing is beautifully conveys the correspondence between the stages of personal progression and the accrual of glory in increasing likeness to God. This clothing in glory is not an event that transpires in an instant, but rather occurs through a process of gradual growth, “grace for grace.”⁶¹



William Blake, 1757-1827: *The Clothing of Adam and Eve*, 1803

Above, William Blake depicts the exit scene at the gates of Eden as a tender moment of forgiveness and farewell. In childlike submission and gratitude, Adam and Eve bow their heads and prepare to leave God's embrace and prove themselves by overcoming the dangers of the mortal world.

In his *Hymns on Paradise*, Ephrem the Syrian summarizes the blessings that come to the posterity of Adam and Eve through their faithfulness:

Among the saints none is naked,
for they have put on glory,
nor is any clad in those leaves,
or standing in shame,
for they have found, through our Lord,
the robe that belonged to Adam and Eve.⁶²

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Endnotes

1 G. A. Anderson, *Perfection*, p. 119. See a Muslim parallel in R. Milstein *et al.*, *Stories*, B&W plate 2. The idea of Adam as Priest and King is consistent with the Prophet Joseph Smith's teachings that Adam received the First Presidency and its keys (i.e., the keys necessary to direct the Kingdom of God on the earth) "before the world was formed" (J. Smith, Jr., *Words*, before 8 August 1839, p. 8). Similarly, the *Book of the Cave of Treasures* records that immediately following his creation, "Adam was arrayed in the apparel of sovereignty, and there was the crown of glory set upon his head, there was he made king, and priest, and prophet, there did God make him to sit upon his honorable throne, and there did God give him dominion over all creatures and things" (E. A. W. Budge, *Cave*, p. 53).

As a prelude to his investiture, a medieval Ethiopian Christian text portrays Adam in the Garden of Eden being commanded by God to enact a series of covenantal gestures in order to "become associated with the *Surafel* (i.e., the Seraphim) in the mysteries." Afterward, God arrayed him in gloriously clothing from head to foot (B. Mika'el, *Book*, pp. 21-22; cf. M. i. A. A. al-Kisa'i, *Tales*, pp. 28-29). In this sense, Adam and Eve, "though naked, [were] still clothed" (Ephrem the Syrian, *Paradise, Hymns on Faith (The Pearl)*, 133:2, p. 71).

2 G. A. Anderson, *Perfection*, p. 127. Thus, in a sense, Adam and Eve could be seen as having received two "garments of skin": the first when they were clothed with mortal flesh, and the second when they were clothed by God in coats of animal skin. Confusion in many commentaries may have resulted from the conflation of these two events. Moreover, rabbinical

wordplay equated the coats of skin (*cor*) with garments of light (*'ur*) (J. Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah* 1), which, notes Nibley, has also led to “a great deal of controversy” (H. W. Nibley, *Vestments*, p. 124). See also S. D. Ricks, *Garment*, pp. 706-708; J. A. Tvedtnes, *Clothing*, pp. 651-654.

³ G. A. Anderson, *Perfection*, p. 122.

⁴ Exodus 28.

⁵ G. A. Anderson, *Perfection*, p. 123.

⁶ Brock in Ephrem the Syrian, *Paradise*, pp. 66-67.

⁷ R. A. Bullard *et al.*, *Archons*, 89:3-7, p. 164; G. W. MacRae *et al.*, *Adam* 1990, 64:24-29, 65:10-13, p. 279; G. R. S. Mead, *Pistis*, 6, 144, 380, p. 315; C. Schmidt, *Pistis*, 4:144, pp. 749-753.

⁸ W. Wordsworth in L. Richards, *Marvelous*, p. 290.

⁹ Moses 3:25; cf. D&C 121:45.

¹⁰ 2 Nephi 9:14; cf. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 15:14, cited in A. Louth *et al.*, *Genesis* 1-11, p. 72.

¹¹ G. A. Anderson, *Perfection*, p. 215.

¹² M. i. A. A. al-Kisa'i, *Tales*, p. 61.

¹³ M. E. Stone, *Adamgirk*, 3:1:7, p. 48.

¹⁴ H. W. Nibley, *Message* 2005, p. 489. See also E. Hennecke *et al.*, *Acts of Thomas*, 108.9-15, pp. 498-499; B. T. Ostler, *Clothed*, p. 4.

¹⁵ L. Ginzberg, *Legends*, 1:79.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1:96; cf. Timothy of Alexandria, *Abbaton*, p. 200.

¹⁷ G. A. Anderson, *Perfection*, p. 127; cf. G. A. Anderson *et al.*, *Synopsis*, Georgian version, 34(8):2, p. 38.

¹⁸ G. A. Anderson, *Perfection*, p. 127.

¹⁹ H. Schwartz, *Tree*, 200, p. 166.

²⁰ *Hymns of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, *Hymns* (1985), #175.

²¹ G. A. Anderson *et al.*, *Synopsis*, Latin 34:2, p. 38E.

²² Cf. F. I. Andersen, 2 Enoch, 30:8-9, p. 150.

²³ H. W. Nibley, *Message* 2005, p. 178; cf. H. C. Kee, *Testaments*, 2:1-9, p. 782.

24 H. W. Nibley, *Prayer Circle*, p. 60. See S. C. Malan, *Adam and Eve*, 1:23, 69, pp. 23, 83-84; cf. J. Cooper *et al.*, *Testament*, 1:23, pp. 73, 75; M. E. Stone, *Legend*, p. 160.

25 S. C. Malan, *Adam and Eve*, 1:46, p. 50. See also 1:59, p. 66.

26 H. W. Nibley, *Teachings of the PGP*, 19, p. 253.

27 H. W. Nibley, *Message 2005*, p. 178, pp. 173-174.

28 Mosiah 3:19, 21; cf. Moses 5:5-8.

29 Moses 6:53.

30 Romans 5:12-21; 1 Corinthians 15:20-22, 45-50.

31 D&C 84:33.

32 M. Barker, *Atonement*. See T. G. Madsen, *Sacrament*, p. 13.

33 H. W. Nibley, *Evangelium*, p. 38 n. 78.

34 H. W. Nibley, *Vestments*, p. 124.

35 H. W. Nibley, *Message 2005*, p. 425.

36 C. E. Asay, *Garment*, p. 37; E. T. Marshall, *Garments*; H. W. Nibley, *Vestments*, p. 124. It seems that once Adam and Eve had completed their earth life, the garment of skins was no longer needed (JS-H 1:31). See also Ephrem the Syrian, *Diatessaron*, cited in M. Barker, *Hidden*, p. 34, and M. Lidzbarski, *Ginza*, GL 2:19, p. 488; H. W. Nibley, *Apocryphal*, p. 299.

37 Mosiah 3:19, 2 Corinthians 5:17.

38 G. A. Anderson, *Perfection*, p. 130. See also M. Barker, *Gate*, pp. 113-114; B. T. Ostler, *Clothed*, p. 3; S. D. Ricks, *Garment*, p. 709; M. von Wellnitz, *Liturgy*, pp. 11-12, Romans 6:3-4, 1 Corinthians 15:53.

39 In this connection, Elder Joseph Fielding Smith wrote that temples are “places for sanctification” (“The Los Angeles Temple,” *Improvement Era*, November 1951, p. 798, cited in T. G. Madsen, *Purposes*, p. 93).

40 Moses 5:11.

41 Psalm 104:1-2.

42 1 John 3:1-3.

43 H. Schwartz, *Tree*, 200, p. 166. See also E. Hennecke *et al.*, *Acts of Thomas*, 111-112.72-80, p. 502; H. W. Nibley, *Message 2005*, p. 496; B. T. Ostler, *Clothed*, pp. 4-5.

44 2 Nephi 9:14; cf. Revelation 3:4-5, 4:4, 6:11, 7:9, 13-15, 2 *Esdras* 2:45.

⁴⁵ G. W. E. Nickelsburg *et al.*, 1 Enoch, 62:15-16, p. 81.

⁴⁶ Rule of the Community 4:22-23 in F. G. Martinez, DSS Translated, p. 7; H. W. Nibley, Message 2005, p. 467.

⁴⁷ See J. A. Tvedtnes, Clothing, pp. 662-695.

⁴⁸ H. W. Nibley, Message 2005, pp. 489-490, citing Hoffman; cf. M. von Wellnitz, Liturgy, pp. 17, 19-20, Abraham 3:26: “added upon.”

⁴⁹ Exodus 20:26.

⁵⁰ Origen, *Leviticus 1-16*, 6:7, cited in G. A. Anderson, Perfection, pp. 122, 124. See 2 Corinthians 5:4.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 122, 124.

⁵² While the first name given to Eve [*ishah* = woman, see Moses 3:23] was provisional, the eating of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge had increased the understanding of the couple and had also enabled the possibility of childbirth. Later, in Moses 4:26, Adam could at last bestow a fitting personal name on Eve, one “that expresses her nature and destiny positively and sympathetically” (N. M. Sarna, Genesis, p. 29). “Her first name pointed to her origin (‘out of man’), whereas her second name pointed to her destiny (‘the mother of all living’)” (J. H. Sailhamer, Genesis, p. 57).

⁵³ J. E. Rockwood, Redemption of Eve, pp. 17, 21.

⁵⁴ Genesis 4:17, 25.

⁵⁵ See Genesis 17:5, 32:28. Compare Mandaean practices where, shortly after birth, the newborn child is given four names, one of which is “the most secret and important one” that is “used always (and almost exclusively) in religious rituals (E. Lupieri, Mandaeans, p. 17; cf. E. S. Drower, Haran, p. 32). Moreover, those who participate in the Islamic *hajj* are washed, dressed in white, and given a “‘new name,’ one that they must not reveal—for it is theirs to use in the next life when they approach Allāh... Muslims are urged to return to Mecca again..., but these pilgrimages are for or in behalf of other people, preferably relatives, who did not have the chance to go. Apparently, they may get the ‘new name’ for them as well” (D. Rona, Revealed, p. 190).

⁵⁶ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, 1:23, p. 335.

⁵⁷ E. R. Goodenough, *Light*, pp. 292-293.

⁵⁸ “Melchizedek” is written as two words in Genesis 14, Psalm 110, the *Samaritan Pentateuch* (S. Lowy, Principles, p. 320), the *Targums* (J. W. Etheridge, Onkelos, 14), and *11QMelchizedek* (F. G. Martinez, Melchizedek, 2:9, p. 140).

⁵⁹ M. Barker, Who was Melchizedek. D&C 107:4 tells us that in ancient times the name of Melchizedek was substituted for the name of God, “out of respect or reverence to the name of the Supreme Being, to avoid the too frequent repetition of his name.” In light of this concept, it is

not surprising to read a report of Wayne Meeks that, who reports that in the Samaritan literature, “the name with which Moses was ‘crowned’ or ‘clothed’ is always Elohim” (W. A. Meeks, *Moses*, p. 359). Meeks reports that the name of Elohim, conferred on Moses, was “distinguished from YHWH, ‘the name which god revealed to him.’ Furthermore the tradition is univocal that it was ‘on the top of Mount Horeb’ that Moses was thus named” (W. A. Meeks, *Moses*, p. 360).

60 al-Tabari, *Creation*, p. 48; cf. the question and response passages in Egyptian temple ritual (H. W. Nibley, *Message 2005*, pp. 449-452).

61 D&C 93:12.

62 Ephrem the Syrian, *Paradise*, 6:9, p. 112.