Theopoetics of the Fall

Forbidden Fruit, Fig Leaf Consciousness, and the Narrative Logic of Christian Soteriology

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Preface:

A constructive engagement with the story of the Fall is needed. Doing so has the potential to open up alternative understandings of Christian soteriology, from within the tradition and without, that lie dormant, marginalized, or incompletely developed in theological terms for lack of an effective narrative logic. What if we were to question the idea that the Fall is a tragic story of disobedience and rebellion against God? What if we were to take seriously the divine warning not to eat of a certain fruit *because it was truly deadly*—to read the Fall, therefore, as a story of the poisoning of human consciousness? Our theories of salvation and divine intervention in history might take on a different angle if sin were understood not as spiritual rebellion but as the tragic derangement of a humanity that has lost its capacity for intimacy. These possibilities are there in the text, but this is not the received interpretation.

Introduction:

The Stories we Tell

The stories we tell matter. Whether they relate to personal experience, historical events, or cosmological speculation, the stories we share form a powerful part of our understanding of ourselves and the world around us. In the form of history, stories provide powerful political narratives that privilege certain points of view over others. In the form of science, they provide explanatory frameworks that orient how we relate to the natural world. In the form of myth, stories convey spiritual reflections on matters of value and ultimate concern. Consider thus the ways we now contest the story of Columbus' purported "discovery" of America and point instead to the history of genocide and colonialism it represents. Or in the field of biology, how

contemporary science no longer sees natural evolution as a competitive struggle for survival but rather a history of cross-species, symbiogenetic cooperation. These stories matter—and they materialize in their mattering in multiple ways for how we understand and organize our world. The values we hold, personally and culturally, are encoded into these stories. What we emphasize, where we begin, who we exclude—these are implicit indications of what we believe. *The stories we tell, therefore—and how we tell them—are thus an important and contested space of relational engagement in our pluralistic world.*

Stories matter because they result in a logic that derives from them. Indeed, the etymology for the word logic—*logos*—means precisely story, account, telling in Ancient Greek. In this sense, all of our domains of knowledge and learning—all of our -o*logies*, from biology to theology to cosmology—follow a logic that derives from the underlying stories we hold that frame our understanding. If we wish to change problematic aspects of our culture, we must inevitably confront the foundational stories that drive their inner logic.

In light of this, it is clear that those who wish to change something about the world as it is must engage with the stories that serve to prop up the status quo. We can only achieve limited results by critique alone. To engage at the level of narrative, we need a *poetics*—a creative weaving and reweaving of the narrative strands. *For only by virtue of new narrative interpretations can different pathways of identity, culture, and politics become possible in our world.* As John Thatamanil explains, these "imaginative frameworks are composed of the core metaphors, symbols, and narrative constructions" within which our core concepts are embedded and embodied in the world.

[i] The path of change, therefore—whether it be in pursuit of justice, or understanding, or transformation—is necessarily a constructive engagement with a poetics of meaning. If we dream of a better world, or a better way to live together in it, we might start by investigating the stories we hold, the values and assumptions they convey, and how we might construct and reconstruct narratives that orient in a new direction.

In what follows we will be applying this approach to one of the stories that has a significant role to play in our vision for a better world. It serves as one of the sacred stories in world religion and deals with the issue of why we live in a world of suffering and injustice in the first place. A reconsideration of its meaning could unlock important opportunities to correct the current story and the narrative logic it articulates as a vision of what it means to participate in the healing of a wounded world.

Our theo-logy is our story of God. *And the story we tell about God also tells us about ourselves and about what we value—perhaps, even how we define value itself.* By engaging in a theopoetic reconsideration of the story of Adam and Eve, in conversation with thinkers like Alfred North Whitehead and Catherine Keller and the processual and relational theology they vocalize, our hope is to articulate a different way for contemporary theology to read the story of the Fall and to interpret its meaning for the healing of a wounded world.

Chapter 1.
The Story of the Fall

The story of how things *begin* matters. For religious traditions around the world, one of the paradigmatic concerns through the ages has been the need to explain the existence of suffering and injustice we encounter in our lives. How and why did this situation come to be? Through stories and parables, the religious traditions across the ages have sought to explore the cause of injustice and the potential solutions that might exist to heal the violence, oppression, and pain that wounds our world.

For the three major monotheisms–Judaism, Christianity, and Islam–one story in particular has played a critical role in helping to explain the source of suffering in the

world. This is the story of "the Fall" of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. As laid out in the opening chapters of Genesis, this tale of our first ancestors and their fateful bite of 'forbidden fruit' was first written over three millennia ago and has served as a crucial explanatory tool. Its interpretation has led to the development of religious doctrines that subsequently *built upon* the story to articulate a vision of how such suffering and injustice can be healed and prevented. In theological terms, these resulting doctrines are concerned with the nature of salvation and are referred to as *soteriologies*.

Christian theology over the centuries has built a distinctive soteriology, framed around a salvation logic that derives from an understanding of how "sin" entered the world through Adam and Eve's fateful decision in the garden to eat the fruit that God had explicitly commanded them to avoid. Seeing Adam and Eve as having rebelled against divine law, traditional Christian soteriology is focused on restoring cosmic justice through the saving act of Jesus Christ, whose death on the cross represents a sacrifice to appease the wrath, and preserve the purity, of an angry God. By paying the penalty for sin on behalf of humanity, the innocent blood of Jesus is theologically understood to cleanse humanity from sin and allow us to be welcomed back into the embrace of a sovereign and just God. This is called the penal theory of 'substitutionary atonement'. As John Calvin puts it: "*our reconciliation with God was, that man, who had lost himself by his disobedience, should, by way of remedy, oppose to it obedience, satisfy the justice of God, and pay the penalty of sin. Therefore, our Lord came forth very man, adopted the person of Adam, and assumed his name, that he might in his stead obey the Father; that he might present our flesh as the*

price of satisfaction to the just judgment of God, and in the same flesh pay the penalty which we had incurred."[i]

For those who would question whether this explanation adequately reflects our understanding of God's love and mercy, or who reject the religious exclusivism and conflict this doctrine has led to in history, it is helpful to recognize that this entire soteriological framework, which remains the dominant understanding to this day in much of Christian theology, is built upon a *very specific interpretation of the story*—as a story of human pride, disobedience, and rebellion against God.

But is this the only way to interpret the story? Perhaps a careful engagement with the text could reveal a different way to read it and to understand the point it is trying to make about the source of sin and suffering in our world.

The Traditional Interpretation

In Genesis 2, God—having created the world as a living paradise—places Adam as a steward to work in the Garden and tend to its flourishing. The very first words we hear God utter to Adam are a warning: "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."[ii] The tragedy unfolds just a few verses later when Eve is approached by the serpent, who suggests that God's description of the deadly effects of the fruit was untrue. Contrary to God's warning, the serpent tells Eve that she "would surely not die" if she eats this fruit. Rather, he explains, God was withholding this source of knowledge from them because "God knows that when you of eat it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."[iii] Seeing that it

was good to eat and a potential source of wisdom, Eve takes the fruit and eats it, sharing some with Adam, who was with her.

The effects of the fruit are immediate. Just as the serpent predicted, "the eyes of both were opened," making them realize their nakedness. Their very first act was then to seek a way to *hide themselves*: they "sewed fig leaves together and made coverings."[iv] When God comes looking for them later in the cool of the afternoon and calls out for them, he finds the pair hiding in fear and shame. Upon learning what had happened, God's reaction is fierce. "What is this you have done?" he asks Eve, who points to the serpent's deception. God curses the serpent and declares to the pair the terrible consequences of their actions: a permanent state of conflict and strife with each other and with the world around them.

So goes the story. As it is traditionally understood, this fateful act had disastrous consequences for Adam and Eve and all of their descendants. The state of sin they had fallen into foretold a history of humanity as in a state of ongoing prideful rebellion against the benevolence of the sovereign God. In eating the forbidden fruit–violating the one and only command that God had given them–Adam and Eve are said to have initiated a state of existence in willful disobedience to God's law, leading them and the rest of humanity with them into a life of immorality, conflict, suffering, and violence. For Christian theology, the sin of Adam is the inciting event that forms the logic of the rest of the drama: a divine plan to save humanity from its state of sin and to restore God's creation through the salvific work of redemption through Jesus Christ.

Problems with the Traditional Interpretation

The story of "the Fall" matters. And the way we interpret it matters even more. *Its meaning, though, is not as contested as it should be*—layered as it is beneath so many centuries of reflection, doxological interpretation, and cultural representation. The interpretation of sin as rebellion reflects a set of values perhaps too conveniently aligned with the worldview of monarchs rather than mendicants, but our acculturated familiarity blinds us to the choices, assumptions, and values that drive its received interpretation. This blindness does not impede its influence in our lives, however. Through the way it frames a widely held cultural and religious understanding of the human condition, the nature of God, and the prospects for healing and justice in our world, its meaning is of crucial importance for the world of the 21st century.

In the 1960s, amidst a period of intense cultural upheaval in America and around the world, an influential article by theologian Valerie Saiving ignited a reconsideration of the traditional understanding of the doctrine of sin and is considered by many to represent the beginning of the field of feminist theology.[v] Saiving's argument was that the traditional doctrine of sin reflected a predominantly male-centered focus on prideful rebellion against God's authority but neglected an equally important aspect, the "sin of hiding"—which Saiving argued better spoke to the condition of women who must struggle with the temptation to an "underdevelopment or negation of Self" [vi] in a patriarchal world.

Taking Saiving's argument further, in 1982 feminist theologian Susan Nelson wrote an article called "The Sin

of Hiding" in which she further develops the idea that the traditional doctrine of sin deals inadequately with the twin poles of the human condition, our finitude and our freedom. "A theology that recognizes pride as the primary form of sin," writes Nelson, "and that fails to teach that the call of God to full humanity is the call into the freedom to name oneself, to assert one's selfhood, and to know pride in one's self–such a theology seeks to perpetuate woman's bondage to her hiddenness." [vii] In doing so, Nelson argues that "Christianity has perpetuated patterns of bondage and repression rather than breaking them."

Nelson's influential article has served as an important touchstone for contemporary theology and represents an opening for a larger series of questions about Christian doctrine, and in particular its soteriology. With Nelson, and with Saiving, we are led to wonder whether a more developed concept of *sin as "hiding"* opens to a deeper understanding of sin as a state of existential alienation from each other and from God–not because of God's punishment, or humanity's rebellion, but rather because of a deep wound in our consciousness that causes us to turn *from*, rather than towards, relationship. In this sense, sin could be understood as a woundedness that results in the *loss of the capacity for intimacy*. The source of suffering in the world and in the human condition thus becomes related to the kind of relational brokenness that radiates from this wound. Our inability to free ourselves from this situation, as individuals or as a species, stems from the fact that we cannot reach the place of the wound to heal ourselves, located as it is at the base of consciousness itself. The wound occurs at the place of our primordial encounter with the world: the existential

place from which we emanate as selves, feeling and becoming who we are, in and as response.

This is an important possibility to explore. Considering that our understanding of the problem of sin points us also to the logic of its solution, a reconsideration of the nature of sin in this way opens an opportunity to constructively reimagine the soteriology that could flow from it. If sin is a form of existential woundedness that destroys humanity's capacity for true intimacy, then our understanding of salvation would be focused on *healing* such a condition. Our understanding of Christ's saving act in history could then move away from the long-dominant doctrine of his dying on the cross as "substitutionary atonement" to pay the price of humanity's transgression, and towards rather a deeper engagement with a human condition that finds itself cut off from intimate relationality and unable to experience love.

Perhaps the idea of sin as 'hiding' shows us that the role of the fig leaf in the story has not received enough theological attention. Taking a lead from feminist theologians like Saiving and Nelson, we can explore and develop the sin of hiding further, as related perhaps to a particular form of consciousness—'*fig leaf consciousness*'—that forms in and as the existential condition of sin. The dynamics of fig leaf consciousness could be shown to involve *and produce* the spiritual alienation of sin by creating the lived illusion of individual egos, who erroneously conceive themselves as fundamentally *separate* from the rest of the world—outside of relationality and relationships, rather than composed in and through them. As Catherine Keller writes: "It is less precise to call this ego separate than *separative*, implying an activity or an intention rather than any fundamental

state of being."[viii] In such a state, the condition of sin becomes a self-imposed separation from relationship and an instantiation of a false selfhood within the protective walls of a structure of consciousness that, like the fig leaf, hides our vulnerability–forming a barrier to healthy relationship that humanity cannot overcome without the healing act of divine intervention.

This healing act of divine intervention, if sufficiently developed into a soteriology focused on restoring our capacity for intimacy, could shift the emphasis of our understanding of Jesus Christ–less as a cosmic sacrifice required to pay the price that divine justice demands for rebellion, but rather as an incarnational divine presence in the world that is able to heal the primordial wound of separation and alienation that imprisons humanity within the bounds of a separative ego.

But what is our *story*?

The desire for an alternative to the traditional doctrine of sin and the soteriology of substitutionary atonement is felt strongly in contemporary theology. Indeed the history of Christianity includes more than one way of understanding salvation and the role that Jesus Christ plays in it. And yet, the doctrine of substitutionary atonement remains stubbornly entrenched as the dominant understanding for most of mainstream Christian theology–either as a form of conservatism or for lack of a sufficiently robust theological alternative. As Nelson herself points out: "For to challenge one doctrine of a theological system is to know that the other doctrines will have to be challenged as well."[ix]

One particular obstacle that impedes the development of a more widely embraced alternative to the traditional understanding of sin and salvation is the absence of an engagement with the primary story itself—the story of the Fall—that for so many centuries now has been the primary source text in both the cultural and theological arenas. While it is helpful for theologians to develop new ways to understand individual concepts like sin, salvation, or atonement, these ideas cannot find their way to larger cultural influence until and unless they come together into the fullness of narrative.

To that end, while Nelson's development of the "sin of hiding" is an important contribution to theological discourse and a deepened understanding of the way sin expresses itself in human life, it does not address the theological question of how or why sin became a problem in the first place. It does not help us reinterpret the *origin* of sin nor offer a different way to understand the story of the Fall, so it leaves in place the regnant interpretation that the story of the Fall is a story of disobedience and rebellion.

The point is that our theological work needs to occur within a close engagement with the story itself—bringing a (theo)poetic imagination to the different layers of meaning that may be possible. Unless an alternative reading of the story can be lifted up to challenge the interpretation that the Fall was caused by humanity's disobedience to divine law, any attempt to offer a different theological account of the cause of suffering in the world will come up against the entrenched cultural understanding of this foundational story. While "hiding" may be a form of sin, if we proceed without developing a theological explanation of how the sin of hiding could be

related to *the story of the Fall*, the idea of sin as prideful rebellion remains the primary theory. And so, our intention in these pages is to articulate a theo*logically* robust alternative to the traditional reading through a theo*poetically* faithful engagement with the meaning of the story.

Our project begins with what seems like a dilemma: Nelson's theological point that hiding should hold a co-equal status with pride runs into a problem when it confronts the traditional reading of the *story*. Since the act of hiding behind the fig leaf comes only *after* the transgressive act of tasting the forbidden fruit, the prideful act of disobedience clearly seems to come first. How could we read the story otherwise?

We shall see that *It has to do with the nature of the fruit itself*. If we can understand how the knowledge of good and evil could so terribly wound human consciousness and lead to its distortion into the condition of the fig leaf, then we have a strong reason to argue that God's command was more than a command: It was a warning. We can thus read the story *differently*—pointing towards the encounter with an existential poison as the true source of the problem of sin, and leading to a very different soterio-*logic* in response.

Chapter 2.
Epistemology of the Fig Leaf

The result of the traditional reading of the Fall is that Christianity's understanding of sin and salvation becomes circumscribed within a logic of sovereignty and rebellion rather than intimacy and separation. With such a reading, scant attention is paid to the deeper reasons why God may have warned Adam and Eve away from the knowledge of good and evil in the first place. Nor does it seek to understand the spiritual damage and relational harm that such a mode of knowing may itself inherently cause. This represents a danger: It should be of some spiritual concern that a potential theological blindness to the source of the problem and the mechanism by which it does damage may very well leave humanity in a state of continued vulnerability to the harm, and further misdirect spiritual

attention away from a path of healing and restored intimacy we seek.

In contrast to the traditional reading, therefore, what if we were take seriously the idea that *the knowledge of good and evil might actually be the problem itself*? If the fruit was inherently poisonous, God's command to Adam and Eve becomes a dire warning to stay away from something deadly–something that has the potential to do irreversible damage to our capacity for loving relationship.

Certainly, any parent can identify with this kind of story. In the face of danger, a parent would warn a child to stay away from the threat–and would do so using language as stern as possible in proportion to the magnitude of the danger. While such a warning in the mouth of a parent is likely to be uttered as a command, its function as command does not serve as a self-referential symbol for authority itself–it points *beyond itself* to the danger. If I warn my child not to eat the poisonous berries that grow in the yard behind our house and my child disobeys me and falls deathly ill, the true problem I am confronted with is not the child's disobedience but the damage done. My focus as a loving parent–rather than domestic despot –is thus not on a challenge to my authority but to the pain, suffering, and urgent medical attention required.

These two concepts–the underexplored nature of the fruit and the fig leaf–point us in the direction we must go.

Epistemology & Fig Leaf Consciousness

The story of the Fall is a story about knowledge and knowing–epistemology and epistemics–*and how the relational dynamics of knowing flow into the existential*

dynamics of becoming. It is also, therefore, a story about how these dynamics can produce deep harm if they fall out of patterns of loving relationship. Consequently, if we are seeking in this analysis to understand how the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil could function as a poison to these dynamics, we need to explore how and in what ways it could cause this kind of harm.

To do so, in this chapter we will articulate four ways the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil can function in the story as a poison for human consciousness and human relationships. The four ways are: Epistemological Separation, Epistemic Violence, the Impossibility of Love, and Fig Leaf Consciousness.

Epistemological Separation

Firstly, we should consider the very specific relational position from which one can attain to the knowledge of such ultimate antinomies as 'Good' and 'Evil'. In order to gain the perspective that can grasp such all-encompassing categories, we begin to sense that their purest sense can be seen only by standing in the place of the "Absolute"–the place of separation, of ab-solution, of *non-relationality*. We can visualize this easily when we imagine ourselves needing to step *back* from a large object in order to see it fully. Isn't this exactly what is required to comprehend something as all-encompassing as good and evil in the world? The only position far enough away to see its boundaries would have to be a place of sufficient distance–like needing to leave a planet to orbit around it and see its shape. The knowledge of good and evil is, therefore, a state of separation: the place of the Absolute–free of entanglements and far enough away from the world to grasp it in its entirety.

The knowledge of good and evil is thus properly to be understood in this sense: as the knowledge of '*G*ood' and '*E*vil'. The problem with this, of course, is that the place of the Absolute is a place of non-relatedness, as the etymology of the word indicates–for only through separation and distance can the perspective of the *ab*-solute be attained. To attain absolute knowledge, *we must separate ourselves from the known in order to know it*. It is pursued, therefore, not through direct relationship, but rather through abstraction–through a form of *a priori* knowledge that does not require, or seek, actual relationship.

The knowledge of Good and Evil is thus a separative engagement with the world as an abstracted totality–with the 'map' rather than the 'territory'–surveying the whole of creation in order to assign all things to their proper category. The problem is that abstractions are inherently *false* substitutes for reality. It is not *actually possible* to conceive of something "in complete abstraction from the system of the universe."[i] The pursuit of the place of the Absolute is also a form of self-negation. Ernst Cassirer–who in 1921 wrote the first major philosophical interpretation of Einstein and the physics of relativity–explains that "it is absurd for us even to want to think the absolute," as it is by definition the loss of "an individual point of view"[ii] and thus the loss of the possibility for knowledge itself. The fact that such a "view from nowhere"[iii] is impossible to actually achieve in our thoroughly relational world does not prevent its misguided pursuit as a spiritual ideal, nor does it prevent the existential and relational damage that occurs from pursuing such an ideal.

If we appreciate the relational rupture that the illusion of absolute knowledge represents, we can better understand the true nature and harm of the serpent's deception. If eating the forbidden fruit is understood to have somehow directly resulted in a loss of intimacy, it can be understood here: as a loss that occurs at the very moment Adam and Eve ate the fruit and stepped into the deranged illusion of the Absolute. We recognize echoes of this ideal in our modern world as the quest for objectivity—a quest that has been abandoned by modern science but remains entrenched as a cultural ideal, instantiated and persistently nourished within the traditional theological perspective.

Epistemic Violence

The second consequence of the knowledge of Good and Evil has to do with the violence of reductionism that is inflicted upon the object of such totalizing knowledge. The knowledge of Good and Evil represents not just a certain *type* of knowledge, in terms of its content, but also a procrustean structure into which what is known is forced to fit. Neglecting the abstraction it represents, it considers the world from within a priori categories and represents the philosophical extreme of an idealism that conceives of actual entities in the world as derivative from a *more real* underlying reality. From the viewpoint of the *known*, however, this knowledge is a violence that reduces the living dynamism of the world into an inert object. Knowing in this way results in a *reification*—a thing-ification—of the known. It is the epistemological reduction and subjugation of the known into the inert boundedness of object-hood. To do so, this knowing enacts a fractal repetition of the original act of separation, but this time directed upon the object—eliminating the fundamental complexity of its entangled folding of the

world,[iv] such that each object can be dissected into its proper classification. *In so rending the intra-relatedness of the living world, the knowledge of Good and Evil is a practice of epistemic violence.* As the poet William Wordsworth famously put it: we "murder to dissect."[v]

Much of contemporary philosophy has come to a similar conclusion about the flawed and impossible epistemology that emanates from the false idea of objective knowledge. It is not as common, however, to read about the spiritual violence this type of epistemology inflicts, but our reading of the story of the Fall should not ignore the connection between the suffering of our world and the violent ways we come into relational knowing of it.

The Impossibility of Love

Thirdly, we should consider how the absolutizing knowledge of Good and Evil results in a state of persistent strife in the world. To the extent that the objectivizing gaze of the Absolute is directed at something or someone that has the capacity to *resist* its reification, it means that the relationship between the knower and known becomes one of intractable conflict and the fundamental impossibility of love. Jean-Paul Sartre describes this state of existential conflict in extensive detail in *Being and Nothingness*. For Sartre, "my fundamental connection with the Other is realized through knowledge"[vi] but since "consciousnesses are separated by an insurmountable nothingness" Sartre's conclusion is that the "problem of my being-for others remains therefore without solution."[vii] The conflict is a mutual stalemate between consciousnesses who are not in fact reducible to any *thing* at all, but who are locked into an impossible existential project of turning all "Others" into objects before the knowing gaze of the absolute Subject.

"Everything which may be said of me in my relations with the Other applies to him as well," writes Sartre. "While I attempt to free myself from the hold of the Other, the Other is trying to free himself from mine; while I seek to enslave the Other, the Other seeks to enslave me...The following descriptions of concrete behavior must be envisaged within the perspective of conflict."[viii] For Sartre, no escape from this situation is possible because these are the fundamental characteristics of an existence in which true intimacy—and therefore love itself—is impossible. Without the possibility of some kind of solution to this existential dilemma, divine or otherwise, Sartre's judgment about the impossibility of love in our world stands without a challenge, and his pessimism seems warranted. Indeed, Sartre's philosophy represents the most detailed existential account of the broken relational dynamics of a fallen world that Christian theology has as its disposal, albeit from an explicitly *atheist* French existentialist.

Fig Leaf Consciousness

But the theological tradition tends to align more with its Greek philosophical heritage than with the French. Rather than conceiving truth in the original Hebrew sense of 'emet'—which means the *faithfulness* of a relationship—the historical development of Christian theology resulted in an abandonment of this conception and the adoption of a very different meaning. In the Hellenized version of Christianity that came to dominance, truth is understood as 'aletheia', which means an *uncovering* of that which is hidden. What's important about this shift of hermeneutics from Jerusalem to Athens is that our conception of truth changes from *faithful relationality* into the a-relational rigor mortis of truth in noun-form

that can be possessed, hidden, controlled, and dispensed –as the history of the Church so painfully shows.

It should not escape our notice that the logic of aletheia as an un-*veiling* has as its core assumption the idea that the world is *veiled*. And it is precisely *here* where we can most properly understand the existential function that the fig leaf plays in the story of Adam and Eve. The fig leaf represents an existential epistemology of truth-as-hiddenness. The veil that is presumed to cover the world and hide its true reality *is the veil we ourselves have placed over it*, in a primordial act of hiding from our intimate relatedness. We recall that the very first act that Adam and Eve did after eating the fruit was to sew fig leaves and *cover over the relational nudity of their bodily materiality*– instantiating the veil as a rejection of the world itself and a disruption of the fundamental intimacy of relational existence.

But the installation of the veil is not only an act imposed on the self. As Saiving and Nelson remind us, hiding also can be an action inflicted upon *others*, as a form of oppressive exclusion. Therefore, in a world in which to be known is to be subjected to epistemic violence, the protective function of hiding behind the fig leaf makes sense as a tragic confirmation and justification of what is actually a terrible mistake. The fact that the fig leaf only serves to *reinforce* the relational separation instantiated by the pursuit of absolute knowledge is part of what makes the diabolical dilemma of sin-as-separation so difficult to heal once it begins.

By protecting oneself behind the veil of the fig leaf, the phenomenology of knowing in a fallen world becomes one of un-veiling the truth (a-letheia)–but this only serves

to further weave the problem into new layers. (1) It supports the idea that truth is a prized possession to be found behind and within, rather than relationally *with*– leading to an epistemics of violence that seeks to pierce through the surface of things to the "truth" inside. (2) It encourages an isolation and hiding of the self in a violent world and makes relationality and intimacy fraught with the risk of betrayal, impoverishing our fundamental relationality, and; (3) To the extent that certain relationships make it past the defensive layer, these rarer occasions privilege and support the idea that intimate relationships are to be found within protected enclosures, encouraging the formation of relational structures of fundamental opposition to an outside world of 'others'.

Taken together, these epistemological dynamics have disastrous relational consequences. In distorting our understanding of ourselves, and encouraging us to privatize our relationality, it causes persistent conflict in the world that further erodes our capacity for intimacy. It thus becomes plausible to understand how the knowledge of good and evil can represent an inherent cause of the kind of conflict and enmity the story of the Fall portrays.

Chapter 3.
Sin as the Epistemic Inversion of Relational Ontology

We have explored how the knowledge of good and evil could be understood as an existential poison through its distortion of human epistemology and the creation of fig leaf consciousness. At this point, however, it becomes necessary to ask why the knowledge of good and evil, if so inherently negative to relationality for Adam and Eve, would be something that would make them become "like God," as the story clearly affirms. Does God *know* in this way, through separation and the standpoint of the absolute? If we uphold such an idea of God, it would seem to confirm God's transcendent place of sovereign separation from humanity and strengthen the claim that the problem of sin is humanity's transgressive attempt to

stand in God's place? If so, the liberatory power of this alternative reading is greatly diminished.

Perhaps a solution to this dilemma can be understood by considering how we understand the ontological difference between God and world. In the traditional telling, God has been conceived as *utterly transcendent*–over and above the world, infinite and all-powerful. But this is not the only way to conceive of God, and this is *not* the story about God that we find in the Bible.

In the Bible, God is in deep, sustained, utterly *present* relationship with the world. It was only later, through the growth and development of Christianity from within the soil of Greek philosophy–from Plato and Aristotle through to Thomas Aquinas and beyond–that resulted in a conception of God as the unchanging absolute–the "unmoved mover" standing in an absolute distance from the inferiority of a finite world. As Catherine Keller points out: "No tenet of Christian theology has stood so firmly–and with so little scriptural justification–as the divine unchangingness."[i] In contrast to this Greek vision of deity there has been a persistent expression woven through the mystical traditions of Christianity–and indeed of many religions–of a more intimate understanding of God as utterly immanent with the world. In these mystical traditions God is to be found in the *depths of relational existence* rather than through the transcendent negation of it.

The traditional projection onto God of the nature of the Absolute needs to be reconsidered. Doing so allows us to come to a different answer for why the knowledge of good and evil is experienced differently by humanity than for God–not because of our ontological inferiority, but

because of the ontological *difference* that makes the God-world relationship one of immanent, intimate, inter-relationality. As developed within the field of process theology, the difference at the heart of the God-world relationship is understood to occur as a "mutual sensitivity"[ii]—a reciprocal dynamism, in which both the world and God become in processual relationship to each other as the interplay of potentiality and actuality. Abandoning the Aristotelian idol of God as changeless and un-movable in its relationship with the world, the God of process theology famously becomes that of the '*most moved*' mover in the thought of Charles Hartshorne. [iii] Recalling Jesus' words to Peter that "whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven,"[iv] Whitehead's process metaphysics elevates this idea to the level of ontology. In its concluding sentences, *Process and Reality* describes the intersection of the God-world relationship as a mutual flowing of reciprocal relatinoship: "What is done in the world is transformed into a reality in heaven, and floods back again into the world."[v] In this sense, God becomes through relational engagement with the world, and the world becomes in turn through its relationship with God.

But this encounter is not a pure symmetry. It is not an encounter of like-with-like, of mere identicality—which would have no vital force for novelty. It is rather an encounter of *differential becoming*, where the contrasting natures of God and world each contribute to the opportunity for faithful response in the other. Mutually emergent from this relationality, God and world are conceived to contribute to each other's processual becoming, in reciprocal relationship to each other.

The Chiastic Flow of Divine Perichoresis

It is the *reciprocal* nature of this relationship that matters when it comes to the issue of the knowledge of good and evil. In the metaphysical language of process theology, the God-world relationship is framed *chiastically*–meaning that the nature of God's processual becoming occurs in the inverse direction as that of the world's. The comparison is not one of ontological superiority or inferiority, but rather of difference as a necessary condition for relationship itself. By describing at the ontological level how it is that in encountering divinity we *face each other*, the chiastic structure describes the facing-towards of divine sociality–a facing-towards that is set in motion as the dance of divine 'perichoresis'.

So how is God's chiasmic flow different from the world's? In what way do we become *differently*? In the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, the divine embrace with the world occurs at the intersection of possibility and actuality. As Michael Hogue comments, "the ontological structure of God's polarities is transposed."[vi] God originates in and as possibility, whereas the world begins in and as actuality. This reciprocal complementarity also means that the way God relates to potentiality and actuality occurs differently than the way humanity relates to them. "For God, the conceptual is prior to the physical," Whitehead writes. But for the world "the physical poles are prior to the conceptual."[vii] This chiastic encounter between possibility and actuality is the facing-towards of the God-world relationship. Facing each other, we meet in the participatory act of ongoing creation–becoming as creative response to the becoming of the other.

Applying this chiastic ontology to a relational epistemology, we can consider that God's primordial knowledge of the world is therefore experienced as eternal possibilities—as potential trajectories of becoming. What the world *actually* becomes is then felt by God, who becomes processually in response. This mode of knowing is thoroughly *relational* with the world and its perpetual potentiality for good or for evil. It also corresponds to the directionality of God's processual becoming. This means that we should affirm that God's knowledge of good and evil is not, therefore, achieved from the place of the separated Absolute but rather is achieved as intimate relationship.

This enables us to change our understanding of the nature of God—not as the non-relational Absolute. "Not," as Catherine Keller writes, "as separate from all things" but rather "as less separable than anything else and therefore different from everything."[viii] This becoming of God through immanent relationship with the world should remind us that Christianity is fundamentally a *theology of incarnation*. God's experience of the world finds its completion through incarnational presence, a feeling of and with the actuality of the world.

For Adam and Eve, however—who are ontologically oriented in chiastic relationship with God—their experience of the abstract possibilities for Good and Evil in the world represents an encounter with something that inverts and damages their epistemic relationality. Like any part of the world, Adam and Eve participate in a processual directionality of becoming, which begins with the primordial encounter of *actuality*, rather than possibility. Face-to-face with the eternally becoming presence of God, Adam and Eve are oriented to know *first*

through the actuality of the world–through relationships, not through abstracted reifications of their possibilities. By requiring a type of consciousness that can engage first with abstraction rather than actuality, the knowledge of Good and Evil represents the paradigmatic "fallacy of misplaced concreteness" that Whitehead uses to describe the error of mistaking our concepts for reality. This fallacy consists, Whitehead explains, "of neglecting the degree of abstraction involved when an actual entity is considered merely so far as it exemplifies certain categories of thought."[ix]

The acquisition of a form of consciousness that knows and relates through abstraction puts Adam and Eve in direct conflict with their ontological orientation. It represents an epistemic inversion of their proper relational ontology, blocking their capacity for intimacy. The inversion, and its lived error, inflicts a self-violence that then radiates out to all relationships by wounding their very capacity for loving relationality.

Acquiring the knowledge of Good and Evil thus causes Adam and Eve to navigate relational existence *in reverse*–the way God's nature becomes–rather than in harmonious relationship with their true nature in the God-world chiasmus. Doing so does relational violence to themselves, their relationships with each other, and to their relationship with God–which is no longer nourished by a relationality of differential becoming, but becomes rather the static death of self-same identity: repetition *without* difference.[x]

This is the tragedy of what it means in the story that they would *become* "like God." And the diabolical truth of this

cunning statement by the serpent *is the fundamental deception* in the story. It is truth used against itself.

In sum, for Adam and Eve, tasting the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil results in a broken structure of consciousness that sees what are only *possibilities* in God's eyes as actualities through their own–actualities that, since they are mere abstractions, distort and block their ability to come into healthy relationships. Trapped within a 'fig leaf consciousness', everything they encounter–epistemologically, and therefore relationally–represents a negated example of an *a priori* reality from which they are fundamentally separated. The representational epistemology of fig leaf consciousness falsifies the actual world and believes in a hidden truth, located on the other side of the world's phenomenality, as more real than the actual entities of the world. This is an extreme example of the spiritual danger of an idealist philosophy in which true reality is conceived to be found underneath or behind the surface of the world.

This is the poisoned and poisonous epistemology of the fig leaf.

Chapter 4.
Against Supremacism

If the alternative reading posited above can hold theological water, it can unlock an important opportunity for a larger reformulation of Christian doctrine. By considering the ways the divine warning away from the forbidden fruit might convey an important spiritual truth about the connection between epistemology and relationality, contemporary theology can further develop a doctrine of sin as the loss of a capacity for intimacy, rather than an act of rebellion. In doing so, it can then develop a soteriology focused on what would be required to *heal* such a wound, as an alternative to the traditional logic of divine justice and substitutionary atonement. But as part of the argument, it is important to examine why the traditional reading of the Fall is objectionable to the kind of theological vision we wish to pursue. What exactly is *wrong* with understanding sin as an issue of disobedience and rebellion?

There are three primary objections that we would lift up to the traditional reading of the story of the Fall: A theological objection, an ontological objection, and a soteriological objection.

Theological Objection to Divine Sovereignty

The first objection to the traditional reading of the Fall is its problematic assumption of God in the image of a cosmic *sovereign*–supreme ruler over all of creation–rather than the many other images available for God in the Bible, such as giver of life, loving parent, faithful companion, or suffering servant. Why should we prioritize *authority*? What is this version of the story really about?

Such an image seems suspiciously like the projection of an all-too-human idealization of omnipotence onto God rather than a necessary characteristic of God's divine nature itself. Following Whitehead's formulation at the end of *Process and Reality*, contemporary theology questions the legitimacy of a vision of God "in the image of imperial ruler" and ask whether the Church has grievously given "unto God the attributes that belong exclusively to Caesar."[i] In supporting an idea of cosmic authoritarianism, howsoever benevolent such a reign might be, the traditional reading distorts our understanding of God's nature into an idol of power itself and further undermines the credibility of religion in an age that has long since abandoned its idealization of such patterns. *If we no longer believe in the political ideal of monarchy or empire, why would we leave our religious imagery in such a formulation?*

We can hold with historical sensitivity an appreciation for how a vision of the "Kingdom of God" might once have represented a hope for justice in a world of political tyranny, but this should not stop contemporary theologians from moving beyond this conception towards a more faithful attention to God's self-revelation in the Bible as divine sociality. When Catherine Keller points in her *Political Theology of the Earth* to the link between the concepts of transcendence, divine law, and the political theology of authoritarian regimes, she does so not as hyperbole but in studied engagement with the infamous German theorist Carl Schmitt who crafted the legal rationale of the Nazi regime under the idea that the logic of law itself requires a "sovereign exception" who stands outside the law to judge it.

To idealize the one who stands outside, is to idealize separation itself, and this is at the heart of the deception the serpent offers to Eve. Keller quotes Schmitt's justification that "all modern political concepts are secularized theology"[ii] and warns contemporary theology that it risks common cause with Schmitt when it endorses a logic that idealizes the transcendent separation of the sovereign exception. When Christian theologians, therefore, celebrate God as cosmic law-giver and read the story of the Fall as the breaking of divine law, it encourages a wider political theology that reinforces authoritarianism and justifies the sin of separation itself.

Perhaps Clayton Crockett puts it most directly when he asks: "What would it mean to think divinity as democracy?"[iii]. This question is provocative to our ears only because it points to an understanding of humanity's *participation* in divine life that remains underdeveloped,

despite the ancient and deeply orthodox doctrine of "theosis" it points to. The traditional reading of the story thus leads to a distorted understanding of God's nature in the false image of an idol of power itself. This leaves us further separated from God because it provides us with a spiritual compass that sends us looking for God in the wrong direction—in a transcendent realm ruling above the world, rather than immanently and incarnationally present *with* the world in an intimate relationality that has no need for hierarchy. "The absolute separateness of deity," writes Keller, symbolizes the "separative aspirations of a Mankind created in His image."[iv]

Ontological Objection to Cosmic Supremacism

This distorted understanding of divine nature has further consequences insofar as it also influences how we understand *ourselves* as created in the image of such a God. By placing God atop the pyramid of sovereignty, and defining sin as rebellion and its cure as a restoration of the correct hierarchy, this reading puts forward a supposition that *hierarchy itself* is a fundamental ideal in the order of creation and encourages us to understand ourselves and others in fundamentally hierarchical relationships. By encouraging hierarchy as a fundamental ideal, this view not only supports the nested structure of the world's powers and principalities, but also has the effect of expanding hierarchy into our vision of the natural order of the world. It encourages a universalization of such an ideal, which thus expresses itself in all manner of enforced supremacies along 'the great chain of being'.

Idealizing hierarchy in this way serves as the theological root of supremacism itself. Ontologically, an idealized hierarchy

becomes a logic of transcendent negation and encourages an understanding of our identities as fundamentally separative. The logic of ascent, Catherine Keller explains, thus "unfolds as a series of negations."[v] Each link in the chain of being is ontologically distinct and hierarchically ordered, with God at the top, vouchsafing a cosmic structure of domination. Thus conceived as a chain of transcendence, not only does this reading support relational structures of oppression, but it further enacts and idealizes the ontological *separation* that the story of the Fall is set up to mourn and resist.

Soteriological Objection to Substitutionary Atonement

By depicting the primary cause of the Fall as the *disobedience* of the act, the traditional reading of the story defines the problem of sin as fundamentally an issue of law-breaking. In thus framing the problem, it locates the nature of the solution within a logic of crime and punishment. If the problem is disobedience, the solution must involve a restoration of divine justice. This line of inquiry leads to a theology of "substitutionary atonement," in which the only way that justice can be restored is for someone to pay the price, even if it is paid by an innocent one willing to pay the price for another. The death of Jesus Christ on the cross is thus conceived as the only way to appease the wrath of God's anger at the rebellion of sin. It supports a view of God as unwilling or unable to be in the presence of sin and only able to be in direct contact with a humanity once purified by sacrificial blood. This may be the traditional understanding, but this is not the *Galilean* version of the story.

This interpretation not only seems like a theology in service to a politics of sovereignty, but also represents the opposite message of the story itself–which articulates a powerful spiritual revelation of the way forgiveness works as a fundamental *disruption* of the logic of retributive justice. The life and death of Jesus Christ certainly exhibits the painful price that forgiveness involves, but if we mistakenly think that the price has to do with *justice* we miss the deeper meaning of the Christ event and fail to learn *how* forgiveness operates at the level of spirit to achieve healing and reestablish lost intimacy.

Substitutionary atonement theory leads to all manner of theological problems and is by no means the only way Christianity has available to understand salvation, but its endurance as the dominant understanding through much of the history of Christianity has clearly been strengthened by its rootedness in a theory of the Fall that locates the problem as an issue of divine justice.

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Together, these three objections–against divine sovereignty, against cosmic supremacism, and against substitutionary atonement–express why an alternative to the traditional reading of the story of the Fall is so important to future possibilities in contemporary theology and the kind of theopoetic politics that can flow from it. Having articulated what an alternative reading and interpretation of the story could be, the closing question that remains for our story is precisely this: *what is the shape of the logic that flows from it*? In the concluding section, we will explore the possibilities for Christian soteriology that this reading of the story enables.

Chapter 5.
Theopoetic Possibilities for Christian Soteriology

Having read the story of the Fall as the story of the poisoning of humanity's capacity for intimacy and the instantiation of a broken structure of fig leaf consciousness, we can better appreciate the insights of Valerie Saiving and Susan Nelson in their development of the idea of sin as 'hiding'. We see how the fig leaf can represent the wound itself, behind which we are trapped in a state of hiddenness—an existentially inverted condition of existential separation, alienation, and conflict. We are now led to wonder what a healing resolution of this condition could be and how God could be involved. Our story of God, our theo-logy, thus becomes that of *healer* of a wounded world.

God as healer of a broken creation is perhaps more faithful to the Biblical tradition than God as cosmic sovereign putting down a rebellion. It views God not as cosmic emperor, nor as transcendent Absolute, nor as divine magistrate administering justice. Instead it views God from the trembling eyes of Adam and Eve in the story, frightened and hiding and alone.

We need a soteriology for a wounded humanity—a humanity that is locked in violent struggle with itself and with the world around it and is in desperate need of care and healing. God cannot protect us from ourselves—he cannot stop us from hurting and betraying and extracting life from each other and the world—but perhaps God *can* heal us so that we can creatively transform our relationships in and with the world.

If the problem of the Fall is the problem of a lost capacity for intimacy, then the soteriology that follows needs to address the brokenness of consciousness by offering a different way to know and be known. If the consequence of the Fall is a loss of the capacity for intimacy, then the logic of the solution is located in a path that would restore such a capacity. How can we abandon the consciousness of the fig leaf? And how do we come to know each other on the other side?

For Christianity, this can involve the soteriological role that the *incarnation* of Christ represents as the incoming of divine presence in the world, and the healing that presence is able to effect when, through this presence, humanity is able to be restored to perichoretic embrace within divinity.

While this explanation does not focus on the death of Jesus on the cross, it should be noted that the theology of incarnation has always involved the death of Jesus as a logical consequence of mortality. God's willingness to join humanity—to be present in the place of suffering and to experience the pain of death *with* humanity—supports the idea, just as well as the crucifixion, that reconciliation of broken intimacy *is both painful and costly*. *The being-with-us in the place of death* is what is soteriologically effective about Christ's incarnational presence—not his paying the price of God's wrathful punishment in our stead. This punitive dimension is not required by the logic of our story. Nor does removing it change or negate the role of Christ. It just changes our story about God.

An incarnational soteriology is also expressive of another point of agreement with the traditional story: that the depth of transformation and the magnitude of forgiveness required to heal, *from within,* the horrors of human history involves a level of divine intervention that humanity cannot achieve by itself. The incarnation is the shape of our hope. There are many wounds, and many types of wounds, and God's presence—*woven intimately into the very materiality of the world itself*, as the incarnation so deeply implies—can be expressed in infinite ways to treat these wounds.

To this end, an incarnational theology also opens up an important possibility for Christianity to confront the exclusivism that has characterized its soteriological belief through most of its history. If the story is that God's plan for healing and redeeming the world involves *only* those who recognize the name Jesus and assent to his restoration of divine justice in the cosmos, then it is natural to question how this could be a story about a God

we call “Love”. If the traditional answer is that God is also sovereign and just, then this only brings back up the question about why our story of God should need to value hierarchy and power as its operating principle. This seems like an artificial imposition on the story. Is this not just a human projection of God in the image of Caesar?

The transcendent sovereign: This is *not our* story of God, and we do not affirm the set of values it seems to reflect about the nature of loving relationship, however broken. Our theo-story is rather *about the real possibility of love’s actuality*—of forgiveness, and of healing. An incarnational soteriology is thus focused on *relational encounter* with God and its ever-present potentiality. It is open to the possibility that God is at work healing the world in many ways—and to the idea that the world needs healing in multiple ways and places. Thus, in developing a soteriology that would permit a ‘theology of religious diversity’, contemporary Christianity could bring Christianity into constructive dialogue with other religious and secular traditions, in spiritual solidarity and creative response, not only to the suffering of the world but also its astonishing beauty.

Such an engagement could proceed beyond soteriology. *In shared wonder at the utter miracle of existence*, the religions of the world can encounter each other as sacred response to the fundamentally apophatic mystery of reality and existence. Christianity could see other faiths (and faithful*nesses*) as attending to the incarnationality of divinity—what John Thatamanil describes as the “intraworldly signals of a transcendence pointing to the divine life”.[i]

From this place of sacred respect, Christianity could thus come to hold a "*many medicines*" theology of religion–one that would recognize the value that different religious and secular practices can offer in leading humanity into a place of forgiveness, healing, and restored relationality. Christianity could adopt this stance without needing to deny the efficacy of Christ in the story of salvation or the singularity of the Christ event in the history of God-world relations.

Many wounds, many medicines: Religion in general, and other religions in particular, can play an important role in the healing of the world by aiding in this communal process. In fact, to the extent that communities of any kind–religious or artistic or ecological or political–form around bringing a beneficial type of medicine to the world, this is something that an incarnational theology can affirm as the way the multiple mattering of its soteriology plays out.

To the extent, therefore, that other religions also pursue paths of healing and restoration of humanity's capacity for healthy relationality with God or with the world, Christianity can honor, respect, and find common cause with these efforts as complementary to its vision. Patterns of relationality, however, that *do not* contribute towards healing can also be vigorously critiqued and resisted. No callous or apathetic "relativism" here. The contestation of values in the world does not stop, but our processual, poetic engagement with each other is what relational becoming is all about.

Conclusion

Our thesis has been that a reconsideration of the cause of the Fall, faithful to the original story but radically different in its implications, has the ability to unlock a very different theological understanding of the spiritual condition that ails our world—and of the forms its potential solution might take. A reconsideration of the meaning of the story provides an opportunity for a different understanding of God's character and relationship with the world, and can help liberate Christian theology from a number of negative consequences of its historical development—consequences that seem to reflect the politics of empire and the culture of patriarchy more than a living faith in a God of love and perichoretic embrace. Given its foundational role in explaining the inciting event that underlies all the rest of Christian doctrine, an effective reconsideration of the traditional interpretation of "the

Fall" can serve as a catalyst for a larger reformulation of Christian soteriology—one that might be at once more faithful to the spiritual truths lifted up by its namesake, and simultaneously more radically open and hospitable to the sacred reflections of other faith traditions.

The purpose of this paper has been to argue that a theopoetically constructive engagement with the story of the Fall is both possible and needed if we are to imagine an alternative to a theology of the cosmic sovereign and its attendant soteriology of substitutionary atonement. In doing so at the level of story, the goal is to articulate a path that can reach outside the boundaries of theology itself and be integrated with our living religious traditions and our culture as a whole. This paper has attempted to sketch what such an alternative reading of the Fall could look like and how it could function within the larger soteriological doctrines of Christianity.

By taking seriously the divine warning in the text not to eat the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil because of its deadly effect, and by investigating why and how this knowledge could do spiritual harm, we are proposing an understanding of the Fall as a story about the disastrous poisoning of humanity's capacity for intimacy. The poisoning results in a mode of consciousness that is structured around an existential inversion of the way humanity *actually* becomes, in and through its mode of relational experience.

This alternative opens up the possibility of a theory of salvation as a divine healing of a broken world, and of a Christian theology that can reconcile and celebrate the salvific role of Jesus Christ while also affirming a vision of

other religions contributing uniquely valuable medicines of their own to an ailing world.

In so articulating this possible path for contemporary Christian theology, our hope is that a revised reading of the story of the Fall would lead to a deeper engagement with the woundedness of the world and the many medicines that are so urgently needed—to treat, comfort, and heal suffering and injustice, wherever they occur.

Notes

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[ii] Calvin, J. (1536). *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II.xii, 2-3. Transl. Beveridge, H. (1983). *Institutes of the christian religion*. Eerdmans.

[iii] Genesis 2:16-17.

[iv] Genesis 3:4.

[v] Genesis 3:7.

[vi] Saiving, V. (1960). "The Human Situation: A Feminine View". *The Journal of Religion,* Vol 40, No. 2. University of Chicago Press. 100-112.

[vii] Saiving, The Human Situation, 109.

[viii] Nelson, Susan, L. "The Sin of Hiding: A Feminist Critique of Reinhold Niebuhr's Account of the Sin of Pride." *Soundings: An International Journal 65 (1982), 316-326*. Quoted from excerpted passage found in Coleman, M. A., Howell, N. R., Russell, H. T., & Coleman, M. A. (2011). *Creating women's theology: A movement engaging process thought*, Pickwick Publications, 75.

[ix] Keller, C. (1986). From a broken web: Separation, sexism and self. Beacon Press, 9.

[x] Coleman, et al, Creating Women's Theology, 80.

[xi] Whitehead, A. N. (1985). Process and reality: An essay in cosmology; Gifford Lectures delivered in the University of Edinburgh during the session 1927-28. Free Press u.a., 3.

[xii] Cassirer, Ernst (1963). The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy. Harper and Row, 32.

[xiii] Nagel, T. (1989). *The view from nowhere*. Oxford University Press.

[xiv] See Catherine Keller's theopoetic engagement with the relational metaphysics of the fold in Cloud of the Impossible. Keller, C. (2015). Cloud of the impossible: Negative theology and planetary entanglement. Columbia University Press.

[xv] Wordsworth, W. (1798). (The Table Turned (n.d.). *Poetry.com*. Retrieved December 19, 2021, from https://www.poetry.com/poem/42392/the-table-turned.

[xvi] Sartre, J.P. (1992). Being and nothingness: The principle text of modern existentialism. Washington Square Press. 320.

[xvii] Sartre, Being and Nothingness, 490.

[xviii] Sartre, Being and Nothingness, 475.

[xix] Keller, From a Broken Web, 36.

[xx] Whitehead, Process and Reality, 235.

[xxi] See Hartshorne, C. (1984). Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes. State University of New York Press.

[xxii] Matthew 16:19.

[xxiii] Whitehead, Process and Reality, 351.

[xxiv] Hogue, M. S. (2018). American immanence: Democracy for an uncertain world. Columbia University Press, 109.

[xxv] Whitehead, Process and Reality, 348.

[xxvi] Keller, Cloud of the Impossible, 103.

[xxvii] Whitehead, Process and Reality, 7.

[xxviii] See Deleuze, G. (2014). *Difference and Repetition*. Bloomsbury.

[xxix] Whitehead, Process and Reality, 342.

[xxx] Schmitt, C. (2005). Political theology: Four chapters on the concept of sovereignty. Univ. of Chicago Press, 53.

[xxxi] Crockett, C. (2011). Radical Political Theology: Religion and Politics after Liberalism. Columbia University Press. 55.

[xxxii] Keller, From a Broken Web, 37.

[xxxiii] Keller, Cloud of the Impossible, 71.

[xxxiv] Thatamanil, J. (2020). Circling the elephant: A comparative theology of religious diversity. Fordham University Press, 219.

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