

Chapter 1

The City: The New Jerusalem

“I saw the holy city, the New Jerusalem” (Revelation 21:2). These words from the final book of the Bible set out a vision of heaven that has captivated the Christian imagination. To speak of heaven is to affirm that the human longing to *see* God will one day be fulfilled – that we shall finally be able to gaze upon the face of what Christianity affirms to be the most wondrous sight anyone can hope to behold. One of Israel’s greatest Psalms asks to be granted the privilege of being able to gaze upon “the beauty of the Lord” in the land of the living (Psalm 27:4) – to be able to catch a glimpse of the face of God in the midst of the ambiguities and sorrows of this life. We see God but dimly in this life; yet, as Paul argued in his first letter to the Corinthian Christians, we shall one day see God “face to face” (1 Corinthians 13:12).

To *see* God; to *see* heaven. From a Christian perspective, the horizons defined by the parameters of our human existence merely limit what we can see; they do not define what there is to be seen. Imprisoned by its history and mortality, humanity has had to content itself with pressing

its boundaries to their absolute limits, longing to know what lies beyond them. Can we break through the limits of time and space, and glimpse another realm – another dimension, hidden from us at present, yet which one day we shall encounter, and even enter?

Images and the Christian Faith

It has often been observed that humanity has the capacity to think. Perhaps it is still better observed that we possess the unique capacity to *imagine*. Our understanding of the universe, God, and ourselves is primarily controlled by images, rather than concepts. The concept of heaven is an excellent example of a Christian idea that is fundamentally imaginative in provenance, and that demands an imaginative mode of encounter with the reality that it mediates. This insight lies behind the Orthodox emphasis on the important role of icons in the Christian life, which – when rightly understood and used – act as “windows into heaven.” Perhaps this is nowhere so evident as in human reflection on heaven, which is controlled and stimulated by a series of powerful images – supremely, the image of a city and of a garden.

Human language finds itself pressed to its limits when trying to depict and describe the divine. Words and images are borrowed from everyday life, and put to new uses in an attempt to capture and preserve precious insights into the nature of God. The Christian understanding of both the divine and human natures is such that – if it is right – we are unable to grasp the full reality of God. Can the human mind ever hope to comprehend something that must ultimately lie beyond its ability to enfold?

A story is told concerning the great Christian theologian Augustine of Hippo (354–430), who is particularly noted for a massive treatise on the mystery of the Trinity – the distinctively Christian understanding of the richly textured nature of God. Perhaps in the midst of composing this treatise, Augustine found himself pacing the Mediterranean shoreline of his native North Africa, not far from the great city of Carthage. Not for the first time, a theologian found his language and imagery challenged to the utmost, and his intellectual resources exhausted, in his attempt to put into words the greater reality of God. While wandering across the sand, he noticed a small boy scooping seawater into his hands, and pouring as much as his small hands could hold into a hole he had earlier hollowed in the sand. Puzzled, Augustine watched as the lad repeated his action again and again.

Eventually, his curiosity got the better of him. What, he asked the boy, did he think he was doing? The reply probably perplexed him still further. The youth was in the process of emptying the ocean into the small cavity he had scooped out in the hot sand. Augustine was dismissive: how could such a vast body of water be contained in such a small hole? The boy was equally dismissive in return: how could Augustine expect to contain the vast mystery of God in the mere words of a book?

The story illuminates one of the central themes of Christian theology and spirituality alike – that there are limits placed upon the human ability to grasp the things of God. Our knowledge of God is accommodated to our capacity. As writers from Augustine to Calvin argued, God is perfectly aware of the limitations placed upon human nature – which, after all, is itself a divine creation. Knowing our limits, such writers argued, God both discloses divine truths

and enters into our world in forms that are tempered to our limited abilities and competencies. Familiar images from the world around us become windows of perception into the nature and purposes of God. The parables of Jesus are perhaps the most familiar example of this: an everyday event (a sower sowing seed in the fields), or a keenly observed event (a woman's joy on finding a lost coin) become the means by which deeper spiritual truths are disclosed. The woman's joy becomes a powerful symbol of the delight of God when wayward humanity returns home to its tender creator and redeemer. Yet this is not an arbitrary association or connection; it is one that Christians hold to be divinely *authorized*.

This is perhaps best seen in the Old Testament images of God, which are developed and given still greater impact in the New. As the Oxford scholar and theologian Austin Farrer argued, Christianity represents a "rebirth of images," both in terms of the importance assigned to images in conceiving and sustaining the Christian life and the new impetus given to the religious imagery that the church inherited from Israel. To speak of God as "king," "shepherd," or "mother" is to draw upon a richly textured biblical tradition, which authorizes its users to speak of God in this manner, and whose imagery engages both mind and imagination in a sustained process of reflection and internal appropriation. Such analogies were drawn from the ancient Near Eastern world of everyday experience; they nevertheless possessed the capacity to point beyond themselves, signifying something of a greater reality lying beyond them and the world that contained them.

Christian writers have always appreciated the importance of these images, not least because they appealed to both the human reason and imagination. Romanticism may be

singled out for its emphasis on the imagination as a faculty of spiritual discernment, and a correspondingly high emphasis on the role of religious imagery. “Vision or Imagination is a Representation of what Eternally Exists, Really and Unchangeably” (William Blake). Where reason, the Romantics argued, kept humanity firmly anchored to the realities of this world, the imagination liberated humanity from bondage to the material order, enabling it to discern transcendent spiritual truths. “While reason is the natural organ of truth, imagination is the organ of meaning” (C. S. Lewis). Yet Romanticism differed merely in its *emphasis* at this point; such insights have nourished Christian theology and spirituality down the ages.

Heaven is perhaps the supreme example of a Christian concept that is mediated directly through images. To speak of “imagining heaven” does not imply or entail that heaven is a *fictional* notion, constructed by deliberately disregarding the harsher realities of the everyday world. It is to affirm the critical role of the God-given human capacity to construct and enter into mental pictures of divine reality, which are mediated through Scripture and the subsequent tradition of reflection and development. We are able to inhabit the mental images we create, and thence anticipate the delight of finally entering the greater reality to which they correspond. Marco Polo (1254–1324), having returned to Italy from the court of Kublai Khan, was able to convey some of the wonders of China by asking his audience to imagine a world they had never visited, but which he could recreate, if only in part, by his narratives and descriptions. The unknown could be glimpsed by comparisons with the known – through *analogies*.

Biblical writers imagined – that is to say, pictured and invited others to picture – heaven in terms of certain types

of earthly spaces – spaces that possessed distinct qualities capable of disclosing the unique nature of heaven itself. Three such images are of critical importance: the kingdom, the city, and the garden. Each of these analogies of heaven models an aspect of the greater reality to which they point, however haltingly. Yet analogies are at best imperfect accounts of their referents, modeling only part of a greater whole. They possess an inbuilt propensity to break down, misleading those who press them beyond their intended limits. Above all, these three images mislead us if we regard them as irreducibly spatial or geographical in nature, and thus conveying the notion that heaven is merely a place or region. A spatial analogy does not imply that heaven is a specific physical location, any more than the use of social analogies for God – such as “father” or “king” – implies that God is a physical human being.

To explore the Christian vision of heaven, it is therefore necessary to engage with its controlling images. We shall begin by considering perhaps the most familiar of all: the image of heaven as a city – more specifically, as the New Jerusalem. Many sections of the Old Testament resound with the praise of the city of Jerusalem, which is seen both as a tangible image of the presence and providence of God within its sturdy walls, and also as a pointer to the fulfillment of messianic expectations. The New Testament gives a new twist to this focus, not least in the remarkable reworking of the theme of the “city of God” found in the Revelation of St. John. For this biblical writer, the fulfillment of all Christian hopes and expectations centers upon the new Jerusalem, the city of God within which the risen Christ reigns triumphant. This image has stimulated intense reflection on the part of Christian theologians. For Augustine of Hippo, the conflict between the “city of God” and the

“city of the world” underlies the quest for responsible Christian political and social action. The reformer John Calvin (1509–64) saw the city of Geneva as the ideal Christian republic, embodying the core values of the kingdom of God on earth. The early Puritans, founding settlements in the Massachusetts Bay area, found inspiration in the biblical image of the city on the hill. Boston was to become the American Geneva, the city of God which would draw all comers to its powerful and purifying light.

So how did this association between heaven and Jerusalem develop?

The City of Jerusalem in the Old Testament

In turning to consider how a city came to be an image of heaven, we must appreciate that the ancient world saw the city as far more than an aggregate of streets and buildings. A city offered security; its gates and walls protected its population against their enemies, whether these took the form of marauding wild animals or invading armies. One of the great prayers of ancient Israel was that there should be no breaches in the walls of the city of Jerusalem (Psalm 144:14). The security of the city’s population depended on the integrity of its walls, towers, and gates.

Yet a city is more than a place of safety. In the ancient world, the “city” designated a community of citizens, united by common origins and sharing common concerns, rather than the physical buildings that they occupied. Greek cities were often destroyed in times of war, but were reconstructed or resettled elsewhere. The core identity of the city – what was transmitted from one generation to another – rested in its citizens, not its physical structures. Cities were understood

to be cohesive corporate entities, rather than aggregates of individuals, defined by a definite set of beliefs and values, which in turn determined those of its members.

Yet for Israel, there was a third aspect of the city which was of particular significance. A city was a *settlement*. Where once Israel had been a nomadic people, wandering in the wilderness of Sinai for 40 years, it finally came to settle down in cities. The period of wandering was over; a period of permanent inhabitation of a definite geographical region had begun.

In the Old Testament, one city towers above all others in significance. To the Israelites, Jerusalem was simply "*the city*." The rise of the prominence of Jerusalem is directly linked to David's decision to establish his throne within this ancient Jebusite city, and to make it the resting place of the Ark of the Covenant. These deeply symbolic actions led to Jerusalem being viewed as the chosen habitation of God, "for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord" (1 Kings 8:10–11). The pilgrim who made the long journey to the city could do so in the sure knowledge that God truly dwelt within Jerusalem's sturdy walls (Psalms 9:11, 74:2, 135:21).

This highly idealistic view of Jerusalem was tainted by the prophetic insistence that sin and corruption within its walls would lead to the city losing its unique status. The siege of Jerusalem by the Assyrians, culminating in its capture and the destruction of its temple in 586 BC, was a devastating catastrophe, both for the social and political history of the city and for the hopes and beliefs of its population. Had Jerusalem lost its special status in the sight of God? The prophet Ezekiel had a vision of the "glory of the Lord" departing from the Jerusalem Temple. Would it ever return? It was against this background of despair that the prophetic vision of the New Jerusalem began to take shape.

A new city of God would arise, in which the throne of God would be established, and within which the “glory of the Lord” would once more dwell. The glory of this renewed temple would exceed that of the former temple, destroyed by the Assyrians (Haggai 2:9).

Initially, this prophetic vision of a New Jerusalem was understood to apply to a future earthly city – a reconstructed city of bricks and mortar, which would rise from the ruins of the old city with the return of its people from their exile in Babylon. The Old Testament books of Nehemiah and Ezra document attempts to restore Jerusalem to its former glory, and fulfill the hopes of a renewed presence of the glory of the Lord. Yet with the passing of time, Jewish hopes began to crystallize around the idea of a heavenly Jerusalem – a future city, beyond this world, filled with the “glory of the Lord,” in which God is seated on a throne. The city is filled with eternal light, which draws people from afar to the safety and rest that it offers.

The future hopes of Israel, which had once centered on the earthly city of Jerusalem and its temple, now underwent a decisive shift in focus. The calamitous history of Jerusalem led many to look to a future heavenly city, which was somehow represented or foreshadowed in its earthly counterpart. This trend, which was already present in the centuries before Christ, received a massive stimulus as a result of the Jewish revolt of AD 66 against the occupying Roman forces in Palestine. The Roman emperor Titus, in ruthlessly putting down this revolt in AD 70, destroyed the temple at Jerusalem, leaving only small segments of the original edifice standing (such as the western “wailing wall,” still a site for Jewish prayers). With the destruction of the earthly focus of Jewish hopes, it was perhaps inevitable that a heavenly alternative would be found. The “New

Jerusalem” now came to refer to a future hope that lay beyond history, rather than to the hope of rebuilding the original Jebusite city of David. While the earthly city of Jerusalem plays an important role for several New Testament writers, it is this vision of a heavenly Jerusalem that dominates its closing pages.

The City of Jerusalem in the New Testament

The image of the “New Jerusalem” has exercised a controlling influence over Christian literature and art down the centuries. The origins of this evocative image lie primarily in the “Revelation of St. John,” the closing book of the Christian Bible. Its powerful imagery has saturated Christian hymnody and theological reflection, and perhaps nowhere so clearly as the church’s reflection on how heaven is to be visualized. The consolation of heaven is here contrasted with the suffering, tragedy, and pain of life on earth. Revelation – also known as “the Apocalypse” in some Christian circles – is traditionally held to reflect the conditions of social exclusion or perhaps persecution faced by Christians in this region of the Roman empire in the later years of the reign of the emperor Domitian. Perhaps its most enduring image – and certainly that most relevant to this study – is its portrayal of the New Jerusalem:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “See, the home of God is among mortals. He

will dwell with them; they will be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." (Revelation 21:1-5)

The theme of the New Jerusalem is here integrated with motifs drawn from the creation account – such as the presence of the “tree of life” (Revelation 22:2) – suggesting that heaven can be seen as the restoration of the bliss of Eden, when God dwelt with humanity in harmony. The pain, sorrow, and evil of a fallen world have finally passed away, and the creation restored to its original intention. The Christians of Asia Minor at this time were few in number, and generally of low social status. There is no doubt that they derived much consolation from the anticipation of entering a heavenly city that vastly exceeded any earthly comforts or security they had known. The holy city was paved with gold and decked with jewels and precious stones, dazzling its inhabitants and intensifying the sense of longing to enter through its gates on the part of those still on earth.

The New Jerusalem – like its earthly counterpart – is portrayed as a walled city. Its security is beyond question. It is perched on the peak of a hill that no invading army could hope to ascend. Its walls are so thick that they could not be breached by any known siege engine, and so high that no human could hope to scale them. Its 12 gates are guarded by angels. Just as return to Eden was once prevented by a guardian angel, so the New Jerusalem is defended against invasion by supernatural forces.

It is important to note that the 12 gates of the New Jerusalem – though guarded by angels – are permanently

thrown open. Whereas the classic fortified city of ancient times was designed to exclude outsiders, the architecture of the New Jerusalem seems designed to welcome them within its boundaries. The city is portrayed as perfectly cubical (21:16), perhaps signifying that it is a perfection of the square temple that the prophet Ezekiel envisaged for the rebuilt Jerusalem after the return from exile (Ezekiel 43:16, 48:20).

The careful attention paid to imagery suggests that the New Jerusalem is to be seen in terms of the fulfillment of Israel through the restoration of its 12 tribes (21:12–14). Most significantly of all, the New Jerusalem does not contain a temple (21:22). The cultic hierarchies of the old priestly tradition are swept to one side. All are now priests, and there is no need for a temple, in that God dwells within the city as a whole. In a remarkable transformation of images, the city has itself become a temple, in that God is now all in all. Where Old Testament prophets had yearned for the rebuilding of the temple, Revelation declares that it has become redundant. What it foreshadowed had now taken place. With the advent of the reality of God's presence, its symbol was no longer required. The dwelling place of God is now with the people of God; it can no longer be contained within a physical structure. The New Jerusalem is thus characterized by the pervasive presence of God, and the triumphant and joyful response of those who had long awaited this experience.

This image of heaven resonates strongly with one of the leading themes of Paul's theology – that Christians are to be regarded as “citizens of heaven” (Philippians 3:19–21). Paul makes a distinction between those who “set their minds on earthly things” and those whose citizenship is “in heaven.” Paul himself was a Roman citizen, who knew

what privileges this brought – particularly on those occasions when he found himself in conflict with the Roman authorities. For Paul, Christians possessed something greater: the “citizenship of heaven,” which is to be understood as a present possession, not something that is yet to come. While believers have yet to enter into the full possession of what this citizenship entails, they already possess that privilege. We have no permanent citizenship in this world, in that our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20). As the author of the letter to the Hebrews puts it, “here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come” (Hebrews 13:14).

The theme of a heavenly city is thus firmly embedded in the New Testament. It proved highly attractive to subsequent Christian writers, who saw the image of the “city of God” as a remarkably fertile means of articulating the basic themes of the Christian hope. Perhaps the most important of these writers is Augustine of Hippo.

Augustine of Hippo on the Two Cities

Augustine’s major work *The City of God* was written in a context that could easily be described as “apocalyptic” – the destruction of the great city of Rome, and the collapse of the Roman Empire, which seemed to many to mark the end of civilization as they knew it. A central theme of Augustine’s work is the relation between two cities – the “city of God” and the “secular city” (or “the city of the world”). The complexities of the Christian life, especially its political aspects, can be explained in terms of the tensions and interplay between these two cities. The fall of Rome was widely held to be prophesied in the Book of Revelation, which sees

Babylon as a symbol of this great imperial power. It is no accident that Augustine chose to return to the imagery of this New Testament book in his attempt to bring stability and a sense of historical location to the Christian church at this apocalyptic moment.

According to Augustine, believers live “in this intermediate period,” separating the incarnation of Christ from his final return in glory. The church is to be seen as in exile in the “city of the world.” It is *in* the world, yet not *of* the world. These two cities embody radically different values and aspirations.

The two cities are shaped by two loves: the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God; the heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self. The former, in a word, glories in itself, the latter in the Lord. For the one seeks glory from people; but the greatest glory of the other is God, the witness of conscience. The one lifts up its head in its own glory; the other says to its God, “You are my glory, and the one who lifts up my head.” In the one, the princes and the nations it subdues are ruled by the love of ruling; in the other, the princes and the subjects serve one another in love, the latter obeying, while the former are mindful of the needs of all. The one delights in its own strength, represented in the persons of its rulers; the other says to its God, “I will love you, O Lord, my strength.”

There is a tension between the present situation of believers, in which the church is exiled in the world, and somehow obliged to maintain its distinctive ethos while surrounded by disbelief, and their future hope, in which the church will be delivered from the world, and finally allowed to share in the glory of God. Augustine rejects the idea that the church on earth is a pure body of saints (a teaching

associated with his bitter opponents, the Donatists). For Augustine, the church shares in the fallen character of the world, and therefore includes the pure and the impure, saints and sinners. Only at the last day will this tension finally be resolved. Although Augustine does not develop this idea quite as far as some of his readers might like, later writers remedied this shortcoming. For John Calvin, a distinction could be drawn between the “visible” and “invisible” church – that is, between the church as an empirical and observable reality in the world, and as a future reality in the heavenly places. While Calvin insisted that there was a genuine continuity between the two, they were not identical.

So what is life in the heavenly city like? Perhaps the most famous aspect of Augustine’s reflections on heaven concern the sexual aspects of human life. For Augustine, there will be no sex in heaven. Both male and female will enjoy the beauty of perfect bodies, but there will be no temptation to lust precisely because there will be no temptation of any kind.

Both male and female will be raised, yet there will be no lust, which is the cause of shame. For they were naked before they sinned, and the man and woman were not ashamed. While all blemishes will be removed from our bodies, their natural forms will remain. The female will not be seen as a defective, but as a natural state, which now experiences neither sexual intercourse nor childbirth. There will be female body parts; these, however, will not be adapted to their former purpose, but to a new beauty, which will not cause lust on the part of anyone looking on. Rather, it will inspire praise of the wisdom and goodness of God.

Augustine’s argument here rests on his interpretation of the paradise narrative of Genesis, which he takes to mean

that human nakedness was a thing of beauty before sin entered the world and made it a cause of temptation and lustful desire. Heaven, which is supremely characterized by an absence of sin, allows a restoration of the conditions of paradise, in which humans could be naked without shame or fear.

Augustine further argues that life in the New Jerusalem is characterized by the theme of *rest*. Does not the letter to the Hebrews promise rest to believers? It is in the heavenly city that this Gospel promise finds its fulfillment. Eternal life will be like a perpetual Sabbath, in which the saints will dwell in the peace of God. Their earthly labors in the vineyard having ceased at sundown, believers enter into the reward promised them by the Lord of that vineyard (Matthew 20:1–12). The peace enjoyed in the heavenly city is grounded in the final rout and scattering of the enemies of the believer, both outward and inward.

There is no complete peace as long as we have to govern our own faults. For as long as those faults remain, they threaten us with warfare. Furthermore, we cannot rest in victory over those that have been suppressed, in that we must ensure that they remain suppressed.

For Augustine, the complete tranquillity that heaven alone allows results from all external foes having been vanquished, and human weaknesses and faults transcended in the New Jerusalem.

Influential though Augustine's theological analysis has been on Christian political thinking down the ages, it is important to appreciate that it has failed to have the *iconic* significance one might expect. Augustine developed ideas, rather than images, preferring to extract the conceptual

meat from the image of the “heavenly city” rather than develop its iconic potential. The “two cities” thus become little more than convenient pegs on which to hang important theological principles; they are not developed *as images*, with an inbuilt propensity to stimulate and excite the baptized imagination.

Yet it is arguably the *imagery*, rather than the *theology*, of the New Testament that has had the greatest impact on the development of the notion of heaven in Christian literature. The idea of a heavenly city proved to be a remarkably fertile source of stimulation for Christian writers, seeking to depict the future Christian hope in highly visual and memorable terms. What better way was there to stimulate and sustain the Christian hope than anticipating the delight of entering the palatial courts of the New Jerusalem, and savoring its spacious chambers? To develop this theme, we may turn to consider the theme of the “New Jerusalem” in some spiritual writers of the Middle Ages.

The Heavenly City and Medieval Spirituality

A remarkable new period in the history of the Christian church began under Charlemagne (c.742–814), the first Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. During his long reign – often referred to as the “Carolingian period” – a cultural Renaissance began. Religious iconography was an integral aspect of this Renaissance, as may be seen from the new interest in mosaics and murals in the design of ecclesiastical buildings – such as Charlemagne’s palatine chapel – or the illustration of sacred manuscripts. The four surviving ninth-century illuminated manuscripts of the Book of Revelation demonstrate that a certain stylized way of representing the

heavenly city had developed, reflecting popular stereotypes of what cities ought to look like. The New Jerusalem is depicted as a collection of buildings enclosed within towered, crenellated walls.

This development is of particular interest when set against the backdrop of what are usually described as “otherworld journeys.” Early writings of this genre tend to portray heaven primarily in Edenic terms, representing it as a rich, verdant, and fertile garden. This is particularly clear in the apocryphal “Apocalypse of Paul,” dating from the early second century. This writing mingles the images of heaven as city and garden, but focuses primarily on the opulent gardens that surround that city:

I entered in and saw the city of Christ. And it was all of gold, and twelve walls compassed it about, and there were twelve towers within . . . And there were twelve gates in the circuit of the city, of great beauty, and four rivers that compassed it about. There was a river of honey, and a river of milk, and a river of wine, and a river of oil. And I said to the angel: What are these rivers that compass this city about? And he said to me: These are the four rivers which flow abundantly for them that are in this land of promise, of which the names are these: the river of honey is called Phison, and the river of milk Euphrates, and the river of oil Geon, and the river of wine Tigris.

The imagery here represents an easily recognizable image of Eden, with its four irrigating rivers, mingled with the theme of the city of God. Yet the author’s interest clearly focuses on the garden, rather than the city. This focus of interest in the Edenic aspects of heaven continues in later “otherworld journey” literature, particularly those of Celtic origin, such as the “Voyage of Brendan” and “Patrick’s

Purgatory.” The traditional Celtic Christian emphasis upon the beauty and majesty of nature here impacts upon their conception of heaven.

Yet elsewhere, the motif of the city begins to dominate. The rise of the Italian city state and a new interest in urban architecture led to the image of the heavenly city gaining priority over that of the paradisiacal garden in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Great Renaissance cities such as Florence saw themselves as recapturing the glory of ancient Rome, and lent new credibility to conceiving heaven in urban terms. If cities represented the height of human civilization, why should not heaven represent its apotheosis? The “otherworld journeys” of the knight Tondal (1150) and Thurkil of Essex (1206) – to which we shall return presently – thus both place their emphasis upon the city at the center of a garden, rather than dwell on the beauties of those gardens themselves. Heaven now primarily consists of richly jewelled and gilded churches, citadels, or fortresses, with particular attention being paid to their architectural features. These luxuriant buildings are located in the midst of rolling lush parklands; yet the garden now merely sets the context for the city, rather than being the dominant image.

The significance of the New Jerusalem for Christian spirituality was explored most thoroughly within the religious orders of the Middle Ages. The Christian culture of western medieval Europe attached particular importance to the monastic orders. It was clearly understood that those who had renounced the world to enter the great monasteries of Europe were to be regarded as spiritually superior to those who remained within the world, and enjoyed its comforts and pleasures. It is tempting to regard this as a form of spiritual arrogance. Yet the monastic orders saw it otherwise, arguing that the monastic life was based on the beliefs and

lifestyle of the primitive Christian community at Jerusalem, as it is described in Acts 4:32: “Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common.” We see here the great themes of unity of heart and soul, common property, and renunciation of the world that were valued and put into practice within the monastic communities. The monastic life was thus seen as a quest for Christian authenticity, marking a recovery of a more biblical way of life in an increasingly corrupt and unstable culture.

Yet leaving behind the delights of the world in order to enter the regimented and disciplined life of the monastery was no easy matter. Works such as Thomas à Kempis’s *Imitation of Christ*, written during the fifteenth century, encouraged their readers to develop a “contempt” for the world, cultivating the view that the world was a fallen and sinful sphere of existence, which had to be repudiated if salvation was to be achieved. Several means of encouraging the emergence of a culture of disinterest or disdain for the world were developed. One – particularly associated with Thomas à Kempis himself – was to promote meditation on the life of Christ, particularly Christ’s command that his followers should deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow him (Mark 8:34).

A second, and rather more positive, strategy focused on the hope of heaven, which was easily visualized in terms of a triumphant entry into the New Jerusalem, paralleling Christ’s entry into the earthly Jerusalem toward the end of his ministry, celebrated on Palm Sunday. Believers were encouraged to anticipate their entry into heaven, and to appreciate how the joy and glory of heaven eclipsed any earthly pleasure or delight. This theme found its way as

early as the ninth century into a section of the Requiem Mass. The final part of that Mass – “*In Paradisum deducant te Angeli,*” usually abbreviated simply to “*In Paradisum*” – celebrates the hope of the New Jerusalem after earth’s struggles and sorrows:

May angels lead you to paradise;
May martyrs welcome you on your arrival;
May they guide you to the holy city of Jerusalem.

This liturgical theme was picked up and developed in the monastic devotional literature of the period, which contrasted the eternal bliss of heaven with the passing joys and sorrows of earth. The deprivations and hardships of the monastic life would seem insignificant in comparison with the joy of entering heaven. In his classic vision of the new Jerusalem, Bernard of Cluny (c.1100–c.1150) vividly depicts the heavenly city in evocative terms, designed to captivate the imagination and galvanize the human longing to enter its portals. The New Jerusalem exceeds in beauty and glory anything that the human heart can desire and hope to embrace. J. M. Neale’s well-known translation runs:

Jerusalem the golden
With milk and honey blessed,
Beneath thy contemplation
Sink heart and voice oppressed.
I know not, O, I know not
What joys await us there,
What radiancy of glory,
What bliss beyond compare.

They stand, those halls of Zion,
All jubilant with song,

And bright with many an angel,
And all the martyr throng.
The Prince is ever with them,
The daylight is serene,
The pastures of the blessed
Are decked in glorious sheen.

There is the throne of David,
And there, from care released,
The shout of them that triumph,
The song of them that feast.
And they, who with their Leader,
Have conquered in the fight,
For ever and for ever
Are clad in robes of white.

O sweet and blessed country,
The home of God's elect!
O sweet and blessed country
That eager hearts expect!
Jesu, in mercy bring us
To that dear land of rest;
Who art, with God the Father
And Spirit, ever blessed.

Bernard here celebrates the richness of the New Jerusalem, which is compared to the Promised Land anticipated by Israel. He sets out a vision of what lies ahead as a means of encouraging and sustaining Christian faith at present. Note Bernard's emphasis upon the inability of human language to convey adequately the wonders of heaven, and his insistence that believers can be assured that all these wonderful things are awaiting them. Those who find the life of faith tiring and dispiriting can, according to Bernard, take comfort and encouragement from this vision of the

New Jerusalem, and thus keep going on the road that leads to the celestial city.

Bernard's powerful appeal to the baptized imagination in evoking a mental picture of the heavenly city was echoed throughout the early Middle Ages. The popular depiction of the New Jerusalem is best seen from the famous "Apocalypse tapestries" of the late fourteenth century, now housed at the castle of Angers, the capital of the ancient province of Anjou. In 1373, the French King, Charles V, lent his brother, the duke of Anjou, an illustrated copy of the Apocalypse. The duke was so impressed by the illustrations that he commissioned the master weaver Nicholas Bataille to produce a massive tapestry, to include as many of these scenes as possible. Bataille managed to incorporate 105 apocalyptic vignettes in his 144 meters of tapestry, of which 67 have been partially or completely preserved. One is an illustration of the New Jerusalem, which depicts the city as a classic medieval castle, complete with moat, walls, gate, and towers.

The rise of the medieval city state in Italy led to cities such as Florence becoming models for their heavenly counterparts and archetypes. This process can be seen most clearly in the visionary writings of Gerardesca of Pisa (1212–69), which depict heaven as a city surrounded by seven castles and other minor fortresses, enfolded within a vast uninhabited parkland. Gerardesca clearly recognizes a hierarchy within this celestial paradise. Although she insists that all the saints are inhabitants of the New Jerusalem, her vision places saints of the first rank, including the Virgin Mary, in the central city, and lesser saints in its outlying fortresses.

The *Pelerinage de Vie Humaine* ("Pilgrimage of Human Life"), written by Guillaume de Deguileville in the period 1330–1, opens with the poet describing a vision of the New

Jerusalem, which rapidly becomes the goal of his life. The poem sets out an understanding of human life as a pilgrimage from birth to death, and focuses particularly on the role of the “three summoners” – age, illness, and death. These figures play an important role in the popular devotional literature of the Middle Ages. They are viewed as harbingers of final divine judgment, forcing individuals to evaluate their spiritual states and make appropriate adjustments. The vision of the New Jerusalem thus becomes a stimulus for personal repentance and renewal. To see the heavenly city is one thing; to be allowed to enter it is quite another.

Further medieval speculation focused on the clothes worn by those fortunate enough to enter the celestial city. While some argued that the inhabitants of the New Jerusalem would be naked, most regarded this as undignified and vulgar. The citizens of the New Jerusalem would be clothed, with the precise manner of clothing being in accord with their dignity. Abbess Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179) insisted that the saints were “dressed in garments of silk, wearing white shoes.” Hildegard’s reflections on the New Jerusalem are best seen in her canticle “*O Jerusalem, aurea civitas*” (“Jerusalem, the golden city”), which depicts the city as “robed in royal purple.” While Hildegard’s imagery is clearly derived from Revelation, she effortlessly melds familiar Gospel images with its fabric to yield a rich spiritual tapestry.

Many writings of this period are saturated with the hope of heaven, often coupled with ambitious and occasionally highly experimental reflections on the urban geography of this celestial city – for example, as in Giacomo da Verona’s *On the Celestial Jerusalem* (1260), and the “Vision of Thurkil of Essex” (1206), which is probably the work of Ralph of

Coggeshall. Perhaps most importantly, *The Visions of the Knight Tondal* tells the story of a wealthy and errant Irish knight, whose soul goes on a journey through hell to paradise with an angel for a guide. Originally written in Latin at some point around 1150 by Marcus, an Irish monk in Regensburg, the story was later translated into 15 vernacular languages. In several ways, the work can be seen as an anticipation of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. The story of Tondal rapidly became one of the most popular in a long tradition of visionary and moralizing literature. As a result of his experiences, Tondal is spiritually transformed and vows to lead a more pious life. The foretaste of the joys of paradise and the pains of hell are enough to persuade him to amend his life so that he may enjoy the former and evade the latter.

Pearl and the New Jerusalem

One of the finest accounts of the New Jerusalem in English literature is found in the fourteenth-century work generally known as *Pearl*. This poem belongs to a group of four fourteenth-century poems, also including *Cleanness*, *Patience*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. These poems, all written in the dialect of the northwest English Midlands, are believed to have been written by the same unknown author. While *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* has been hailed as one of the most splendid works of medieval English literature, mingling the values of chivalry with more romantic themes, *Pearl* is of especial importance to our explorations of the theme of the New Jerusalem. It contains what is arguably the finest account of the New Jerusalem to have been written in the English language.

The poem opens with the narrator coming to terms with the loss of his “pearl” maiden, and rapidly moves on to offer a meditation on the nature of heaven, and the means by which it is entered. In his vision, the poet finds himself in an Eden-like garden, from which he glimpses the maiden across a river. She seeks to answer his many questions about the new realm in which she finds herself, and console him over her loss.

Pearl opens with the poet mourning his beloved, whom he describes as a “priceless pearl.” Her face now sheathed in clay, she has returned to the earth from which she came. The poet cannot bear the thought of her physical decay and disintegration. Yet in a vision, he sees his beloved Pearl once more. She is now a “bride of Christ,” adorned with precious pearls. The dreamer is astounded; how could someone who died so young have so elevated a place in heaven? The maiden replies that the same reward was promised by Christ to all, irrespective of how long they labored in the vineyard. Where earthly society is rigorously stratified, there are no such distinctions in the New Jerusalem.

The maiden goes on to tell the dreamer of the two Jerusalems – the historical Jerusalem in which Christ was condemned and martyred, and the heavenly Jerusalem described in the Book of Revelation. A redeemed people must, she argues, live in a redeemed city. Just as those who have been cleansed by the redeeming death of Christ are spotless, so heaven takes the form of a “spotless” New Jerusalem, without the flaws and sins of earthly cities, including Jerusalem itself. “As [Christ’s] flock is without a blemish, so is his city without stain.” The dreamer asks to be allowed to see Pearl’s new home. She gently chides him; only those who have been made perfect can enter the New Jerusalem. At best, he can see it from a distance.

“Spotless maid so meek and mild,” I said to that lovely flower, “bring me to that pleasant dwelling and let me see your happy abode.” The fair one said, “That God will forbid; you may not enter his stronghold, but I have permission from the Lamb as a special favour for a glimpse of it. From outside, you may see that bright cloister, but you may not place a foot within it; you have no power to walk in the street unless you are clean without stain.”

There then follows a scene strongly reminiscent of one of the most dramatic moments in the Old Testament, in which Moses is permitted to catch a glimpse of the Promised Land over the River Jordan. He can never enter it, and will die and be buried outside its sacred bounds. By ascending Mount Nebo, Moses is able to peer into a land he will never enter. *Pearl* consciously develops this imagery, as the dreamer is led up a hill from which he has a clear view of the heavenly Jerusalem – a city that he cannot hope to enter in his present state.

As John the apostle saw it with his own eyes, I saw that city of great renown, Jerusalem so new and royally adorned, as if it were light that had come down from Heaven. The city was all of bright gold, burnished like gleaming glass, adorned below with noble gems; with twelve tiers, each beautifully constructed and garnished with separate precious stones.

The poet then lists these precious stones individually, partly as a paraphrase of the biblical text on which his vision is based, and partly to allow his readers to develop an enhanced appreciation of their significance.

As John named these stones in Scripture, I knew them from his account. The first jewel was called jasper, which I saw

on the first base: it glinted green in the lowest tier. Sapphire held the second place; chalcedony without flaw in the third tier showed pale and clear. Fourth was the emerald with surface so green; sardonyx the fifth; the sixth was the ruby. . . .

These precious stones possessed a far greater significance to their medieval readers than is often appreciated. The “lapidaries” of this period offered detailed spiritual interpretations of these stones, allowing us to understand at least something of what the *Pearl* poet understood by his vision of the New Jerusalem. Typical spiritual associations of these stones include treating jasper as a symbol of faith, sapphire of hope, chrysolite as the preaching and miracles of Jesus Christ, and beryl as the resurrection.

As the vision unfolds, we find the basic features of the New Jerusalem, as set out in Revelation 21, explored with exquisite care, as if each was charged with spiritual significance. The poet is clearly captivated by this vision of the heavenly city, and longs to enter its portals.

Beneath the moon might no mortal heart endure so great a wonder, as I saw when I observed that city, so wondrous was its form. I stood still, like a startled quail, in amazement at this spectacle, so that I felt neither rest nor toil, so greatly was I enraptured by its pure radiance. I dare say with clear conscience that if any mortal had experienced that great boon, no doctor could preserve him; his life would end beneath that moon.

Overcome with joy and anticipation, the dreamer throws himself into the river so that he may swim to its far side and enter this beautiful city. With this action, his dream ends; he awakes to find himself in the same place in which

he had settled down to mourn his Pearl – but now content in the knowledge that she is safe. His vision moves him to reflect on what he must do if he also is to enter the New Jerusalem in his turn.

The poem is remarkable in many respects, not least in its use of imagery to depict the heavenly realm and its masterly reflection on the theme of consolation in the event of death. While there is no evidence to suggest that John Bunyan knew about, or drew upon, the *Pearl* poet's vision of the New Jerusalem, there are clear affinities between this classic of the fourteenth century and perhaps the most famous English literary depiction of the New Jerusalem – *The Pilgrim's Progress* – to which we now turn.

John Bunyan's Heavenly City

John Bunyan (1626–88) is perhaps one of the best-known Puritan writers of the seventeenth century. He was born in the English county of Bedfordshire, and became involved with the Puritan cause during the English Civil War. With the establishment of the Puritan commonwealth, Bunyan turned his attention to preaching, and became the minister of an independent congregation in Bedford. His Puritan sympathies caused him to be out of favor when the English monarchy was restored in 1660, with the result that he spent many years inside Bedford jail. Bunyan used his time in prison to write his autobiography *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, and begin work on his best-known work, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the first part of which appeared in 1678, and the second in 1684.

The Pilgrim's Progress was read both as an adventure story – foreshadowing the modern novel – and as an allegory of

the struggles, temptations, sufferings, and final salvation of the human soul. The central narrative of the book focuses on its hero Christian, initially bowed down with a burden of sin upon his back, who flees from the City of Destruction and seeks eternal life. He thus sets out on a long and arduous pilgrimage, which leads him from the mire of the Slough of Despond up the straight and narrow path of the Hill of Difficulty, down into the Valley of Humiliation, where he battles with the foul fiend Apollyon, and into the terrifying Valley of the Shadow of Death. He passes through Vanity Fair with all its worldly allurements, is held captive by Giant Despair in Doubting Castle, and at last, after crossing the bridgeless River of Death, is received in the Celestial Jerusalem. The characters that Christian meets along the way embody abstract qualities and defects, virtues and vices, each designated by their names – such as “Faithful,” “Hopeful,” and “Mr. Worldly Wiseman.” These are almost certainly modeled on the men and women that Bunyan knew, using the simple, lively, humorous language of ordinary people. Perhaps it is no surprise that the work went on to become one of the most widely read works in the English language, reaching the height of its popularity in the Victorian period.

Although the theme of the Christian life as a pilgrimage had been used by many writers before Bunyan, there are no reasons for suspecting that he was aware of these, or made any use of previous treatments in his own writing. *Pilgrim's Progress* is best regarded as a brilliant and highly original narrative, incorporating biblical ideas and imagery without the mediating filter of previous writers. The only literary source that may be identified with any certainty for Bunyan's masterpiece is the King James translation of the Bible, which appeared in 1611, and is known to have had

a deep impact on the shaping of the imagery and vocabulary of modern English.

The tension between two such cities – earthly and heavenly – had been the subject of much reflection within the Christian tradition prior to Bunyan – for example, in Augustine’s *City of God*. Yet Bunyan succeeded in establishing the journey from the “city of destruction” to the “heavenly city” as a framework for making sense of the ambiguities, sorrows, and pains of the Christian life. His powerful appeal to imagery, coupled with a masterly use of narrative, ensured that the imagery of the New Jerusalem would have a profound and permanent effect on popular Christian spirituality.

The narrative tells of how Christian and his friends travel through the “wilderness of this world” in search of the heavenly city. The hope of finding and entering this city dominates the narrative. The vocabulary and imagery of Bunyan’s narrative draws extensively on the New Jerusalem tradition from the Book of Revelation. This can be seen from the tantalizing description of the heavenly Jerusalem offered by the “Shining Ones” – angelic beings who reassure Christian and his traveling companions concerning the final goal of their quest.

The talk they had with the Shining Ones was about the glory of the place; who told them that the beauty and glory of it was inexpressible. There, said they, is the “Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, the innumerable company of angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect” (Hebrews 12:22–24). You are going now, said they, to the paradise of God, wherein you shall see the tree of life, and eat of the never-fading fruits thereof; and when you come there, you shall have white robes given you, and your walk and talk shall be every day with the King, even all the days of

eternity (Revelation 2:7; 3:4; 22:5). There you shall not see again such things as you saw when you were in the lower region upon the earth, to wit, sorrow, sickness, affliction, and death, “for the former things are passed away.”

Bunyan’s account of the New Jerusalem shows some significant parallels with that of *Pearl*, not least in the fusion of the imagery of the entry into the Promised Land with that of the New Jerusalem. A river separates us from the heavenly city, just as the River Jordan was placed between Israel and its promised land. It is only by crossing this river that access to the city can be gained. In the closing pages of his narrative, Bunyan tells of how Mr. Steadfast prepared to cross the river from this life to the next, trusting that the trumpets would sound for him on the other side:

This river has been a terror to many; yea, the thoughts of it also have often frightened me. Now, methinks, I stand easy, my foot is fixed upon that upon which the feet of the priests that bare the ark of the covenant stood, while Israel went over this Jordan (Joshua 3:17). The waters, indeed, are to the palate bitter, and to the stomach cold; yet the thoughts of what I am going to, and of the conduct that waits for me on the other side, doth lie as a glowing coal at my heart. I see myself now at the end of my journey, my toilsome days are ended. I am going now to see that head that was crowned with thorns, and that face that was spit upon for me.

Yet the reader of *Pilgrim’s Progress* is left with many unanswered questions. What appearance would Mr. Steadfast possess in his new home? Would his friends recognize him when their turn came to cross the cold and bitter waters of

the river of death? Such musings have always been part of Christian reflections on the nature of heaven, and we may turn to consider them in what follows.

The Shape of the Heavenly Body

The New Testament affirms that Christians are “citizens of heaven.” But what do citizens of heaven look like? If heaven is to be compared to a human city, what are its inhabitants like? The New Testament has remarkably little to say on this, in that it hints at such matters as a mystery, rather than disclosing them as facts. The image of a seed, used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, was taken by many writers to mean that there was some organic connection between the earthly and heavenly body. Resurrection could thus be conceived as the unfolding of a predetermined pattern within the human organism. Yet even this image had to be treated with caution. Where some theologians took the view that this obliged them to treat such matters with restraint, others appear to have seen themselves as liberated from the traditional constraints imposed by the biblical text, and launched into the most stratospheric of theological speculations.

One possibility would be to imagine the streets of the New Jerusalem as inhabited by disembodied souls. On this model, the human being consists of two entities – a physical body, and a spiritual soul. Death leads to the liberation of the soul from its material body. This view was commonplace within the Hellenistic culture of the New Testament period. However, this idea was vigorously opposed by most early Christian theologians. The most significant minority voice in this matter belonged to Origen, a highly creative theologian with a strongly Platonist bent, who held that

the resurrection body was purely spiritual. This view was contested by most Christian writers, who insisted that the phrase “the resurrection of the body” was to be understood as the permanent resurrection of both the body and the soul of the believer.

But what do citizens of heaven look like? We have already seen above how medieval writers enjoyed reflecting on the clothing of the saints in heaven; this interest also extended to their physical appearance. Many early Christian writers argued that the “citizens of heaven” would be naked, recreating the situation in paradise. This time, however, nakedness would neither give rise to shame nor sexual lust, but would simply be accepted as the natural and innocent state of humanity. Others, however, argued that the inhabitants of the New Jerusalem would be clothed in finery, reflecting their status as citizens of God’s chosen city.

It was clear to many writers that the final state of deceased believers was not of material importance to their appearance in heaven. The issue emerged as theologically significant during a persecution of Christians in Lyons around the years 175–7. Aware that Christians professed belief in the “resurrection of the body,” their pagan oppressors burned the bodies of the Christians they had just martyred, and threw their ashes into the River Rhône. This, they believed, would prevent the resurrection of these martyrs, in that there was now no body to be raised. Christian theologians responded by arguing that God was able to restore all that the body had lost through this process of destruction.

Methodius of Olympus offered an analogy for this process of reconstitution which would prove highly influential in discussing this question. The resurrection could, he argued, be thought of as a kind of “rearrangement” of the

constituent elements of humanity. It is like a statue that is melted down, and reforged from the same material – yet in such a manner that any defects or damage are eliminated.

It is as if some skilled artificer had made a noble image, cast in gold or other material, which was beautifully proportioned in all its features. Then the artificer suddenly notices that the image had been defaced by some envious person, who could not endure its beauty, and so decided to ruin it for the sake of the pointless pleasure of satisfying his jealousy. So the craftsman decides to recast this noble image. Now notice, most wise Aglaophon, that if he wants to ensure that this image, on which he has expended so much effort, care and work, will be totally free from any defect, he will be obliged to melt it down, and restore it to its former condition. . . . Now it seems to me that God's plan was much the same as this human example. He saw that humanity, his most wonderful creation, had been corrupted by envy and treachery. Such was his love for humanity that he could not allow it to continue in this condition, remaining faulty and deficient to eternity. For this reason, God dissolved humanity once more into its original materials, so that it could be remodelled in such a way that all its defects could be eliminated and disappear. Now the melting down of a statue corresponds to the death and dissolution of the human body, and the remoulding of the material to the resurrection after death.

A similar argument is found in the *Four Books of the Sentences*, the masterpiece of the great twelfth-century theologian Peter Lombard. This book, which served as the core textbook for just about every medieval theologian, took the view that the resurrected body was basically a reconstituted humanity, from which all defects had been purged:

Nothing of the substance of the flesh from which humanity is created will be lost; rather, the natural substance of the body will be reintegrated by the collection of all the particles that were previously dispersed. The bodies of the saints will thus rise without any defect, shining like the sun, all their deformities having been excised.

The twelfth-century *Book of the Dun Cow* (*Leabhar na Uidhre*) – so-called because the vellum upon which it is written is supposedly taken from the hide of St. Ciaran’s cow at Clonmacnoise – raises a further question concerning the nature of the resurrection body. What happens if the believer is *eaten*? The *Book of the Dun Cow* – presumably responding to genuine pastoral concerns at this point – argues that the various fragments of humanity, however scattered and variously decomposed they may be, are “recast into a more beautiful form” by the “fire of Doom.” However, the work recognizes the locational importance of the precise place at which the believer dies.

Those who have been devoured by wild animals and dispersed in various locations will arise according to the counsel of the Lord, who will gather them together and renew them . . . In this case, they will arise at the place at which they were devoured and dispersed, for this is what is reckoned to be their tomb.

A similar issue arose in the twentieth century, when the practice of cremation became increasingly common in Christian nations, partly on account of the increasingly prohibitive cost of burial, raising the question of whether cremation was inconsistent with belief in the resurrection. Perhaps the most influential answer to this question was offered by

the famous American evangelist Billy Graham, who wrote thus in a nationally syndicated newspaper column:

The aspect of cremation that worries some Christians is the thought of the total annihilation of the body. We need to get our thinking in a right perspective here. The body is annihilated just as completely in the grave as it is in cremation. The graves of our ancestors are no longer in existence, and soil in which they were buried has long since been removed elsewhere. We must therefore accept that what happens to the body or to the grave cannot be of any significance so far as the resurrection is concerned. . . . In Corinthians 5, Paul makes the contrast between living in a tent, a temporary home that can be pulled down and put away, and living in a permanent home that will last forever. Our bodies are our temporary tents. Our resurrected bodies will be our permanent homes. They are similar in appearance but different in substance. Cremation is therefore no hindrance to the resurrection.

A final question that has greatly vexed Christian theologians concerns the *age* of those who are resurrected. If someone dies at the age of 60, will they appear in the streets of the New Jerusalem as an old person? And if someone dies at the age of 10, will they appear as a child? This issue caused the spilling of much theological ink, especially during the Middle Ages. By the end of the thirteenth century, an emerging consensus can be discerned. As each person reaches their peak of perfection around the age of 30, they will be resurrected as they would have appeared at that time – even if they never lived to reach that age. Peter Lombard’s discussion of the matter is typical of his age: “A boy who dies immediately after being born will be resurrected in that form which he would have had if he

had lived to the age of thirty.” The New Jerusalem will thus be populated by men and women as they would appear at the age of 30 (the age, of course, at which Christ was crucified) – but with every blemish removed.

In this opening chapter, we have explored one of the great icons of heaven – the celestial city. Yet alongside the image of the New Jerusalem, Christian theology sets another – an image that evokes a very different set of resonances and associations. The Christian Bible closes with the image of the New Jerusalem; it opens, however, with the image of paradise. We now turn to consider the great theme of paradise as a similitude of heaven.