THE ICONOGRAPHY OF THE *FELIX CULPA*

Victor Y. Haines

It is still some hours before dawn. In the dark church the con-
gregation assembles for the crowning moment of the Christian year. The
Easter liturgy of the mediaeval Church is beginning. In the churchyard
outside a small group looks on as fire is struck from a flint to light
a flame. At the church door the priests take up their place to receive
the new flame, which is blessed in remembrance of the pillar of fire
that led Moses out of Egypt, of the light of the world, and of the eter-
nal glory of heaven. The flame is used to ignite the paschal candle,
which moves to the front of the church in procession. The light from
this candle breaks the darkness like the new light from the risen Christ.
The deacon begins to chant the *Exultet:* "Exultet iam angelica turba. .
. ." In the hymn he proclaims this night as the night our fathers were
led out of Egypt. This is the night the pillar of fire dispelled the
darkness of sin. This is the night in which Christians, separated from
the murk of sin, are restored to grace. This holy night dispels all
evil. Let this Easter candle mingle with the lights of heaven to dis-
pel the darkness of this night. At the climax of the hymn, in the midst
of such exalted paradoxes he exclaims:

> O certe necessarium Adae peccatum, quod Christi morte deletum
> est! O felix culpa, quae talem ac tantum meruit habere

Redemptorem![1]

This is the liturgical source for the doctrine of the *felix culpa* as
it is still celebrated in the Catholic Church, although the Latin has
been replaced by the vernacular.

This teaching, illustrated in the images and text of the Easter
liturgy, grows out of a complex tradition which was widely represented
in the literature and art of the Middle Ages. Its representation in
literature has been examined by Arthur O. Lovejoy in his seminal essay
"Milton and the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall," but its representation
in the visual arts seems to have been overlooked. That such a wide-
spread doctrine should have been largely ignored after the Renaissance
and recalled almost as a surprise by Lovejoy[2] in the twentieth century
is an indication to the art historian, as well as the literary critic,
that the tradition may be an unrecognized background and significance
of certain mediaeval works dealing with the Fall of Man. Since an un-
derstanding of the iconography of the *felix culpa* in the visual arts
cannot be divorced from a study of images used to portray it in litera-
ture, in this essay I shall review the concept as it is represented in
both.

An understanding of the *felix culpa*, as distinct from the mere Fall
of Man, may be seen to grow out of a basic concept of the whole Judaeo-
Christian tradition from its origins in the Exodus. One cannot return
from exile without having been in exile; there could be no Exodus with-
our slavery in Egypt. I do not know of any case in which a rabbi has
gone to the logical extreme and exclaimed "O fortunate bondage!" On
the feast of Passover, however, when the *matzahs* are uncovered, the
Seder plate is lifted, and all present say:

> This is the bread of affliction which our ancestors ate in
> the land of Egypt. Let all who are hungry come and eat. Let
> all who are in need come and celebrate Passover. This year
> we are here: next year, in the land of Israel![3]

The bread of affliction has become the centre of a joyous feast and
celebration, which even next year in the land of Israel will presumably

be celebrated. The very centre of our affliction becomes the means of
our salvation. The *maror* or bitter herb, eaten in memory of bitter
slavery also becomes necessary for the joyous feast and may be assoc-
iated with the water the Israelites had to drink when they left Egypt
-- the bitter spring at Marah which Moses sweetened by immersing a tree
in it. Legend identifies that tree as the bitter laurel, providing for
a tradition of commentary that God employs the same means in curing
pain as in inflicting it.[4] Legends identifying the forbidden fruit in
Eden as the grape permit, moreover, an association for the wine with
the joyous wine of paradise and certain rabbinic commentary that the
fruit which brought sin into the world will become a healing in the
world to come.[5] Without the bread of affliction, the *maror*, and even
the wine, there could be no feast which looks to Israel in remembrance
of salvation from bondage -- a bondage which may be associated with
guilt even beyond legends of the grape. Joseph's bones are finally
brought out of Egypt as a reminder, perhaps, that he too had been sent
there in slavery by his own brothers, who subsequently found it neces-
sary to go to Egypt where they had to beg his forgiveness. The Hebrew
tradition that exile is associated with God's judgement means that the
Christian development of the doctrine of the *felix culpa* is fairly co-
herent with Hebrew tradition. In the joy of returning from exile one
cannot logically wish that one had never gone into exile for then it
would be impossible to have that very joy of returning.

In the Genesis account of mankind's exile from Eden, reference is
made to a similar idea in the curse on the serpent. The woman's off-
spring will bruise the serpent's head. The account, written in exilic
or post-exilic times, alludes at this point to the Messiah, who would
defeat the forces of evil and return God's people to peace in their
homeland. Out of defeat and exile comes the hope of victory and res-
toration. The Fall of Adam makes possible the coming of the Messiah
and his salvation. Thus, in the Genesis account itself is the seed of
Man's Fortunate Fall.

Jesus himself is not recorded as having said anything about Adam
or the *felix culpa*. As a man who never had any sin to confess, he em-
phasized the demons of temptation rather than the Fall as the way to

understand evil. He was not prepared to say that man, or the Son of
Man, is inevitably a sinner, and one may assert that it was indeed
possible for Jesus to achieve freedom from all sin, at least insofar
as a man may act without sharing in the sins of his society. As a
perfect man finding his way out of the history of human sin, his aware-
ness of the *felix culpa* would be through his sharing God's work in it
rather than as one of the Redeemed, so that by his own example and re-
surrection he even made his own crucifixion fortunate.

It was left to Paul of Tarsus in the first century of the Chris-
tian Era to develop special ideas of sin and law in a way that would
favour an explicit understanding of the *felix culpa*. If sin is master
everywhere, Paul said with characteristic loyalty to Jesus, then that
is fortunate because "in this way the promise can only be given through
faith in Jesus Christ and can only be given to those who have this
faith" (Gal. 3:22).[6] Obviously, in order to have this promise it was
necessary that sin be master. "When law came, it was to multiply the
opportunities of falling, but however great the number of sins committed,
grace was even greater" (Rom. 5:20). Paul, of course, does not mean that
we are saved by this grace whether we like it or not. He is considering
sin after the fact, so that only retrospectively in the light of a hoped
for Redemption can it be considered fortunate. "Adam prefigured the One
to come, but the gift [Jesus] itself considerably outweighted the fall"
(Rom. 5:15). The prefigured One implies a retrospective view. We may
not contemplate doing evil beforehand in order that it become fortunate.
"Does it follow that we should remain in sin so as to let grace have
greater scope! Of course not" (Rom. 6:11). From a view in eternity
God's intention will have included all events, but from a view within
time God's mercy can only make sense after he has something to forgive.
"God has imprisoned all men in their own disobedience only to show mer-
cy to all mankind" (Rom. 11:31). Paul does not mean that God initially
wanted man to sin; the disobedience came first and it is important to
see that redemption is retrospective and cannot be planned on. As we
may see in these famous chapters of Romans, Paul's method of focusing
the ideas inherent in the dialectic of Fall and Redemption is to con-
trast the first and second Adam, a contrast which he repeats in I Cor.

15:45-49. Such contrasts were to become characteristic of Christian hermeneutics.

From the second century on, elements from the Fall were frequently contrasted with elements from the Redemption. In the second century Justin Martyr developed the comparison of the virgin Eve and the Virgin Mary.

> He was made man of the Virgin, that by the same way in which
> the disobedience which proceeded from the serpent took its
> rise, it might also receive its destruction. For Eve when a
> virgin and undefiled conceived the word of the serpent and
> brought forth disobedience and death. But Mary the Virgin,
> receiving Faith and joy, when the angel Gabriel told her the
> good news that the spirit of the Lord should come upon her .
> . . answered, Be it unto me according to thy word.[7]

Slightly later in the same century Irenaeus elaborated on the same contrast between the first and second Adam, the virgin Eve and the Virgin Mary, and in doing so added to it the contrast between the death-bringing Tree of Knowledge and the life-giving Tree of Life in the Cross. In his treatises *Adversus Haereses* and *Demonstratio* he repeatedly refers in the context of such comparison to the same wood in each Tree.[8] We sinned by wood, and by wood we are saved, and his words are echoed in a number of Christian writers.[9]

There is a gradual development of the irony through all these comparisons and/or contrasts that adjuncts of the Fall become part of the Redemption. In the fourth century, for example, Saint Ambrose contrasts the Tree of Knowledge with the Tree of Life, which was to be the Cross, emphasizing the fact that they were both wood. In his commentary on Psalm 35, he refers to Jeremiah's being led like a trustful lamb to slaughter by enemies who said, "Let us destroy the tree in its strength" (Jer. 11:19), or in a Greek version, referred to in the *Jerusalem Bible*, "Let us put wood on his bread" (Jer. 11:19, notes). Ambrose identifies this wood as the Cross from the Tree of Life on which Jesus is put as Bread to appease the interminable appetites whetted by the Tree of Knowledge: "per lignum coepimus esurire, quoad caro suum accepit alimentum.

Ideo dominus in Christo carnem iunxit et lignum, ut fames antiqua cessaret, vitae gratia redderetur."[10] Elsewhere Ambrose tries to separate the two trees in the garden so they have nothing in common, except that the point of his wit is they are both still trees. "Lignum vitae in medio paradisi Christus est in medio Ecclesiae suae. Lignum autem scientiae boni et mali quod et ipsum in medio paradisi fuisse dicitur, diabolum significat."[11] The presence of the Redeemer and the Cross in the Garden as the Tree of Life before Adam took the forbidden fruit makes it easy, however, to confuse the eternal with a temporal point of view. Ambrose perhaps does not sufficiently avoid this danger when he dashes off a pithy pun on the forbidden fruit: "fructuosior culpa quam innocentia,"[12] or when he comments that God knew Adam would fall "ut redimeretur a Christo. Felix ruina, quae reparatur in melius!"[13] At the centre of this paradox Ambrose does, however, hit on the phrase "felix ruina!"

It was about this time and in this tradition that the *Exultet* was composed with its explicit reference to the *felix culpa*. Some experts on the liturgy suggest that its style indicates Ambrose was the author. Tradition generally has it that the author was Ambrose's contemporary, Saint Augustine.[14] Augustine's thought certainly has affinities with the concept of the *felix culpa*, and it may well have been a phrase from his pen, although no conclusion is possible from the extant manuscripts.[15] In *Rebuke and Grace* Augustine's celebrated distinction between unfallen man's ability not to sin "posse non peccare" and redeemed man's inability to sin "non posse peccare" subtly slants our vision toward the present advantages of redeemed man over unfallen man.[16] Such affinity of thought, associating the influential writings of Augustine and Ambrose with the conception of the *Exultet*, indicates that a perspective on Adam's fall as the *felix culpa* was inherent in Christian doctrine, manifesting itself with the great theologians of the fourth century so as to become a permanent and influential paradox.

One would expect this perspective on the *felix culpa* to become apparent exactly where it does in the liturgy when the juxtaposition between Fall and Redemption is sharpest. Before dawn on Easter Christ is remembered in Hell enveloped in the murk of sin that has spread

inexorably over human community. It is night. In this night the single
flame of the paschal candle anticipates the imminent glory of the resur-
rection remembered at dawn. The night is juxtaposed to the day. Christ
has risen. Out of darkness comes light, and even the night itself be-
comes blessed. In the general exultation the ethical perspective be-
comes clear: the horrible Fall has turned out to have been lucky be-
cause we have been redeemed from it by such a glorious Redeemer.

The juxtaposition of the Fall and Redemption in such a way as to
give a perspective on the *felix culpa* re-occurs from time to time in
the writings of other Church Fathers. Pope Leo I, in the century after
Ambrose, argued, "ampliora adepte per ineffabilem Christi gratiam quam
per diaboli amiseramus invidiam."[17] Later, Gregory the Great compares
the Fall and Redemption this way: "Magna quippe sunt mala, quae per
primae culpae meritum patimur, sed quis electus nollet peiora mala per-
peti, quam tantum Redemptorem non habere?"[18]

From the sixth century on, such theology was reinforced by the
widespread use of Fortunatus' hymns "Pange Lingua" and "Vexilla Regis,"
in which the Cross is chosen as a way of atoning for the sin of the
first Tree:

> de parentis protoplasti fraude factor condolens,
> quando pomi noxialis morte morsu conruit,
> ipse lignum tunc notavit, damna ligni ut solveret.
>
> hoc opus nostrae salutis ordo depoposcerat,
> multiformis perditoris arte ut artem falleret
> et medellam ferret inde, hostis unde laeserat.[19]
>   ("Pange Lingua," 11.4-9)

The "Vexilla Regis" refers to a version of Psalm 95:10, "regnavit a
ligno Deus:"

> arbor decora et fulgida,
> ornata regis purpura,
> electa digno stipite
> tam sancta membra tangere.[20]   ("Vexilla Regis," 11.17-20)

In both hymns the apparatus of our Fall wittily becomes the structure
of our Redemption, so that a perspective on the *felix culpa* is encour-
aged. The hymns are found in most mediaeval Breviaries and Missals
and were frequently appointed for use during the week before Easter.
Their popularity at this point in the liturgical year indicates how a
perspective on the *felix culpa* was anticipated in the days before the
Easter vigil, when it is explicitly indicated in the words of the *Exultet*.

Elements from the Fall and Redemption become juxtaposed on a popu-
lar level after the tenth century with the proliferation of legends
which traced the wood of the Cross back to the Tree of Knowledge and/
or the Tree of Life in Paradise. Jewish apocrypha had for centuries
referred to a journey of Seth to Paradise to get a supernatural cure
for his father -- the Oil of Mercy flowing from the Tree in the Garden.
The archangel Michael refuses Seth but promises that it will be given
to the holy people at the end of time. The Tree was usually believed
to be the Tree of Life, not the Tree of Knowledge, so there is not a
very focused juxtaposition of Fall and Redemption; yet the pattern is
implicit, for the promise of salvation is given as a remedy for Adam's
sin in eating from the Tree of Knowledge. With the increasing Chris-
tian attention to the crucifixion after the tenth century legends of
the rood wood became popular and soon incorporated this quest of Seth
into a more focused juxtaposition of Fall and Redemption, as it is
found developed in the highly influential combined "Legende" of Seth
and the Holy Cross of the thirteenth century.[21] In this legend Seth
goes back to Paradise looking for the Oil of Mercy and sees three vis-
ions there: a leafless tree in a beautiful garden; a serpent about a
leafless tree; a tree elevated to heaven with a baby in the top branches.
An angel gives him seeds of the apple Adam ate which he is to plant
under his dead father's tongue. They sprout and wood from them is even-
tually used for the Cross. The legend is an ingenious juxtaposition of
elements from the Fall and Redemption. Mary was frequently identified
as the Tree of Life,[22] so the fruit of her womb in the branches of her
arms may be seen as a repair for the damage caused by the fruit on the
original Tree. As sin, moreover, went in Adam's mouth from the for-
bidden Tree, so the source of salvation comes out of it from seeds of

the same Tree. In a study of the legend and its analogues, E.C. Quinn notes that the inclusion of Adam in stories about the rood tree was inevitable because of the Christian association of the rood tree and the forbidden Tree.[23] Her book is reviewed with the complaint, however, that "nowhere does the reader find a suggestion as to why this story was of such great importance in the late Middle Ages or, more significantly, why this story declined so markedly in popularity."[24] An answer to both these questions would become apparent through a greater stress on the Christian association of elements from the Fall and Redemption as a way of emphasizing a providential perspective on the Fortunate Fall -- which was so popular in the late Middle Ages and then gradually declined in the Renaissance and after. Why this perspective itself faded is, of course, a more general question which I shall attempt to answer later.

Similar to the juxtaposition of the two trees in the Seth legends is a literal grafting in *Le pèlerinage de l'âme* by Guillaume de Deguilleville, a fourteenth-century Cistercian monk.[25] In a dream the poet sees some pilgrims playing with apples underneath a leafy green tree which stands beside a withered one (1. 5591). The withered tree cries out to the Creator for him to restore its fruit. The poet is aware that these are the two trees which stood in the Garden of Eden. A gardener, who is the Creator, takes a branch from the Tree of Life; this is the rod of Jesse; he then grafts it onto the Tree of Knowledge. At another point in the long poem, Justice takes her sword to the top of the Tree of Life and cuts off the apple, which is Christ, and puts it on the Tree of Knowledge. In both incidents, as Frederick Hartt says, "the Tree of Knowledge comes fruitful again, and through the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross the *knowledge* of good and evil becomes the source of *life*."[26]

Dante could regard these legends of the Cross and the Tree of Knowledge as being so widespread and current that reference could be made to the tradition quite allusively. In the climactic procession at the end of *Purgatorio*, the griffin (Christ) draws out a pole (the Cross) from the chariot he is pulling (the Church) and binds it to the withered tree which then sprouts and flourishes.[27] In the context of such triumphal progression forward and Dante's own progress, the backward perspective

on the *felix culpa* is, however, easily overlooked, and one needs, per-
haps, to be reminded of its dialectical presence. But the lesson is
clear: from the very withered tree, whence came our sin in its forbid-
den prime, now Redemption comes, proceeding in a way that would have
been impossible without that self-same tree.

Another widespread development in the juxtaposition of Fall and
Redemption is the late mediaeval contrast of the First Eve with the
Second Eve in what might be called a Marian *felix culpa*: Mary is the
glorious gift of Grace with her reign in heaven. This focus on Mary
rather than Jesus in such a Marian *felix culpa* may be associated with
an important influence on the mediaeval appreciation of the paradox in
the Scotus controversy and the writings of Thomas Aquinas. In his dis-
cussion of the "Fitness of the Incarnation," Aquinas posed the question
"Whether if Man had not sinned, God would have become incarnate" (*Summa
theologiae* 3, 1, 3). He argues:

> Nihil autem prohibet ad aliquid majus humanam naturam produc-
> tam esse post peccatum; Deus enim permittit mala fieri ut in-
> de aliquid melius eliciat. Unde dicitur *Rom., Ubi abundavit
> iniquitas, superabundavit et gratia* (5:20). Unde et in bene-
> dictione Cerei Paschalis dicitur, *O felix culpa, quae talem
> ac tantum meruit habere Redemptorem!*[28]

Here Aquinas has established that the Incarnation did not have to take
place for unfallen man simply to even the balance and bring him up to
the state of redeemed man; he uses the concept of the *felix culpa* to
show that sin does not prevent a higher state afterward. What Aquinas
has not established is that the Incarnation could not have taken place
for unfallen man. This is rather easy to miss in the total context of
the article, where, in the *responsio*, he has just expressed the opinion:
"Unde, cum in sacra Scriptura ubique incarnationis ratio ex peccato
primi hominis assignetur, convenientius dicitur incarnationis opus or-
dinatum esse a Deo in remedium peccati, ita quod, peccato non existente,
incarnatio non fuisset." It is perhaps easy to take from this declaration

an impression that Aquinas is arguing for his preference as a demon-
strable conclusion so that his following remarks about the *felix culpa*
are meant to show that the Incarnation could only have taken place if
man had sinned. Aquinas' next sentence shows, of course, that he is
making no such claim: "Quamvis potentia Dei ad hoc non limitetur, pot-
uisset enim, etiam peccato non existente, Deus incarnari." There is
no telling if a mistaken train of thought filtered down into popular
tradition from these ideas which Aquinas discusses; however, the idea
that without sin there could have been no Incarnation is readily sugges-
ted by the ballad "Adam lay I-bowndyn," which would assume a folk-aud-
ience for whom the paradox was popular:

> Adam lay I-bowndyn, bowndyn in a bond,
> fowre þowsand wynter þowt he not to long;
> And al was for an appil, an appil þat he tok,
> As clerkis fyndyn wretyn in here book.
>
> Ne hadde þe appil take ben, þe appil taken ben,
> ne hadde never our lady a ben heuene qwen;
> Blyssed be þe tyme þat appil take was,
> þer-fore we mown syngyn, "deo gracias"![29]

The logic of the ballad perhaps goes beyond the bounds of strict ortho-
doxy in its implicit assumption that Mary could not be queen simply as
the mother of Jesus but that she has to be Mother of the Redeemer as
well. Aquinas' point that "even had sin not existed, God could have be-
come incarnate" means that Mary could have been the mother of Jesus if
the apple had *not* been taken. If such motherhood in an unfallen race
is enough to guarantee Mary Queenship, then, of course, this contradicts
the song. The poet may simply have never thought of the point Aquinas
makes and mistakenly assumed that without sin there could be no Incarna-
tion, or, more likely, have actually been prompted by the current devo-
tion to Mary and theories of her immaculate conception to feel that our
Lady's unique part in the Saviour's work of Redemption was necessary for
her Queenship. Such a feeling may be partly responsible for the popular-
ity of a Marian *felix culpa* in secular poetry at this time.

The blurring of the distinction between Redemption and Incarnation in such a Marian *felix culpa* may also have been the result of its effectiveness in refuting the doctrine of Duns Scotus, that the Incarnation was predestined whether or not man fell. The paradox of the *felix culpa* from the *Exultet* alone is enough to deny Duns Scotus' position that the Incarnation had to happen since, as Aquinas argued, using the *felix culpa* as illustration, a higher state can result after sin. Therefore, a sinless state would not have to be raised higher by an incarnation, and an incarnation need not have occurred in an unfallen race. Certainly the extension of the paradox to Mary's reign, moreover, would also confute Scotus, and perhaps in the general confutation the victory was extended to the (invalid) conclusion that without sin there would have been no Incarnation. One could then argue without question that if the apple had not been taken Mary would not have been "heuene qwen." It would seem, in view of the closeness of these strands of thought, that the importance of the Scotus controversy may also lie behind the association of the Fall of Man with Mary in a Marian *felix culpa* which became increasingly well known in the later Middle Ages.

The association of sinful and fallen man with Mary in a Marian *felix culpa* may also be developed from an ambiguous expression of the paradox of the *felix culpa* in the "Dies irae" of the *Missa pro Defunctis:*

> Recordare Jesu pie,
> Quod sum causa tuae viae:
> Ne me perdas illa die.[30]

In his terror the sinner hopes "causa" may be understood as an efficient cause, a *causa quod* by which some change is wrought; he overextends his case by suggesting that the Redemption was caused by his sin -- an error since God could have left Adam fallen. Yet Jesus could not have been a Redeemer without sinners, and if an incarnation could not have taken place in an unfallen race (contrary to Aquinas), Jesus could not even have lived. At least Jesus has sinners to thank for the glory of his redeeming life! He owes the sinner a favour and should save him. Less paradoxically, the sinner also means that he is the cause as a

final cause: the life of Jesus was for the cause of the sinner's bene-
fit and redemption. Therefore, the sinner pleads, Jesus do not forget
what you are supposed to do -- save me!

John Lydgate transposes this form of the paradox to a Marian con-
text, but gets at least part of it wrong in the transition when the sin-
ner as the final cause becomes the sin. In "Regina Celi Letare" he asks
the Virgin to remember how our sin got her her high station:

> Remember Lady, how synne was cause
> Of youre preferryng to hygh worthynes,
> Howe ye exclude by text outher clause
> They that causyd you all thys worthyness.[31]

Lydgate is so sure of the paradox that, somewhat like Ambrose, he even
obscures the non-causal relation between sin and redemption. It is
clear that sin did not cause Mary's preferment; God did. She would
have no reason to be grateful for any act of sin that has not been re-
deemed. In another poem, "On the image of Pity," Lydgate is more ortho-
dox, suggesting merely a Marian *felix culpa*:

> O wretched synner . . . Pray to that quene . . .
> With this conceyt, þat yf syn had not bene,
> Causyng our fadar Adam his grevous fall,
> Of heven had she not be crounyd quene.

The repetition of the paradox indicates that it was of interest to Lyd-
gate and his audience, and that it was an accepted part of meditations
on the Virgin in conjunction with the Fall of Man. It recurs in a fif-
teenth-century salutation to the Virgin:

> Mary, ihu darlynge dere.
> þus I thynke in my thoghte,
> Wele I wate if synne ne were
> Goddes moder ware þou noght.[32]

Again in a verse meditation on Mary written on the last page of a fif-
teenth-century book of hours the same point is developed:

Si pro peccato vetus Adam non cecidisset

Mater pro nato non exaltata fuisset.

Sed quia peccatum proprium sanare nequibat

Virgo parit natum per quem medicina redibat.

Ergo pro miseris interpellare teneris

Mater que Christi propter peccata fuisti.

O mater Christi tua dos est Anglia vere

Regnum cum rege prece virgo pura tuere.[33]

Here, again, if there were no sin Mary could not be exalted, implying
that since Mary is exalted there must have been sin: Mary could not be
exalted as the Mother of the incarnate Christ in an unfallen race.
There also seems to be an echo of the promise God makes to our first
Mother Eve in reference to the role her seed will play in the Redemp-
tion of mankind.

The frequent Marian twist in the *felix culpa* is also associated
with Sir Gawain, our Lady's Knight, who carries Mary's image on the in-
ner half of his shield in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Elsewhere
I have shown how, in the prologue and epilogue of this important romance,
the *Gawain*-poet uses the technique of juxtaposition of Fall and Redemp-
tion to allude to the *felix culpa*.[34]

It would seem in the Middle Ages that the tradition of juxtaposing
elements from the Fall and the Redemption in order to facilitate a back-
ward perspective on the *felix culpa* (as well as the obvious forward one
on the Redemption) was well established in the medium of language where
theology, legend, and the liturgy could make it clear. But what about
mediaeval iconography? Can the *felix culpa* be portrayed in the visual
medium as well? It is perhaps not immediately obvious how one could
display the *culpa* as *felix* by visual means alone. What scene could
limn the horror of that sin showing, at the same time, its glorious
comedy? Illuminators could not very well portray Adam and Eve joyfully
biting into the fruit or with some contemporary creature in the garden
looking on in recognition of the fortunate occasion. Indeed, there are
many pictures which present only the Fall with no aid to its signifi-
cance. Of course, in order to know the Christian significance of a

naked couple eating fruit from a tree with a serpent in it a person
had to know Christian doctrine. Portrayals of the Fall were meant
with reference to all other aspects of the Christian context, including
the Redemption, just as portrayals of the Redemption alone are meant
with reference to all other aspects of the Christian context, including
the Fall, the Exodus, the Covenant with Abraham, the Nativity, and so
on. But an isolated portrayal of an event in salvation history with-
out any explicit juxtaposition to another event can hardly refer to
anything more specific than this total history. One could not say that
because the Redemption implies the Fall a picture of the Crucifixion is
therefore a "literal" picture of the Fall. Nor could one say that a
picture of the Fall is a portrait of the Crucifixion. And since the
felix culpa involves more than just the Fall, a picture of the Fall can
never be a complete picture of the *felix culpa*.

Since history moves forward, naturally, the perspective in such
portrayals may be often only forward looking. This proleptic perspec-
tive frequently seems to be the only perspective that is intended and/
or perceived in the Renaissance and Modern period. A modern point of
view sees only that pictures of the Fall "introduce the scheme of Re-
demption by explaining the need for it,"[35] not, conversely, that pic-
tures of the Redemption show how the Fall was needed for the Redemption
and, thus, was fortunate. In an exclusively forward-looking perspective
one tends, thus, to regard the Fall and think it's too bad it had to
happen. Then its necessity may be seen as only an inevitable stage in
human progress, as Vetter seems to see it in his study of Mediaeval and
Renaissance depictions of the Fall, "Necessarium Adae Peccatum."[36]

There is, nevertheless, in the visual arts a way of implying a truly
happy perspective on Adam's Fall. As one would expect from the juxta-
position of Fall and Redemption in literature and legend, a similar tech-
nique of juxtaposition is employed when a perspective on the *felix culpa*
is indicated in the iconography. Images from the Fall are worked into
a scene from the Redemption and, conversely, images from the Redemption
are worked into a scene from the Fall, or pictures of the two are placed
side by side. For example, on the outside of the Malvagna triptych by
Mabuse, Adam and Eve entwined together reach up to grasp hold of the fruit

with their expulsion in the background, while on the inside Mary holds
the fruit of her womb with the saints in Paradise.[37] In his comment on
this juxtaposition J.B. Trapp concludes, "Reference to the Redemption
in picturings of the Fall, then, may be taken to be always present."[38]
This is fairly evident so long as the context is Christian, whether or
not the picture involves an actual portrayal of some element of the Re-
demption juxtaposed. The Christian dialectic that the Fall implies a
need for Redemption is so basic that a forward-looking juxtaposition of
the two in this way is always faintly or strongly implied in all icono-
graphy of the Fall. And when the two are in fact closely juxtaposed in
the iconography, the perspective is even sharper. Trapp notes that the
soteriological implications of the Fall are more forcefully present in
mosaic cycles than in scenes represented on successive pages of an illus-
trated Bible.[39] Since Christian art which portrays the Fall forms part
of a cycle of Redemption, "there must always be a more or less explicit
proleptic reference to Redemption and/or Judgement."[40] What I want to
point out here is that in such juxtapositions there is also a "postlep-
tic" reference to the Fall itself -- a view of it in retrospect as some-
thing in the past which might not have happened, with all the changes
this would make in the present. When the Fall is depicted in juxtaposi-
tion with the Redemption, the viewer is encouraged to draw his own con-
clusions as to the perspective in which this puts the Fall. The per-
spective is perhaps not obvious until one has had it explained verbally
as in the *Exultet*, but once such a suggestion has been made it could be
readily picked up in the iconography.

From the eleventh to the thirteenth century a number of *Exultet*
rolls were prepared in Southern Italy with large illustrations (about
45x20 cm.) up-side-down to the text so that as the deacon read the text
from the *ambo* the roll could hang over the other way for the congrega-
tion to see. There are 28 known *Exultet* rolls (or fragments), and in
all there are six portrayals of the Temptation; five of them illustrate
the words "O felix culpa" and one the words "Ade debitum."[41] Trapp says
that these are "the first known pictures of the Fall which specifically
illustrate the theme of *Felix culpa*"[42] and proceeds to discuss the de-
tails of the pictures. But how do they illustrate it? Simply by being

a picture of the Fall? They cannot specifically illustrate the theme
or idea of the *felix culpa* in that way or else all pictures of the Fall
itself would equally illustrate it, and there would be no way in which
these pictures specifically illustrate it. Trapp does not, in fact, say
how they illustrate the *felix culpa*. His immediately previous remark,
however, is about the portrayal of the whole nature of the cycle of
Fall and Redemption in mosaic cycles and bronze doors and how juxtaposi-
tions found in such portrayals accent the "soteriological implications
of the Fall." The forward perspective of soteriology is close to the
backward one of fortune, and Trapp was perhaps implying that juxtaposi-
tion and not just portrayals of the Fall itself are involved in illus-
trating the idea of the *felix culpa*. This is, in fact, how the pictures
do illustrate the *felix culpa*, and the device is important enough to
study and make explicit as the central technique in iconography of the
felix culpa.

The technique of juxtaposition of the Fall and Redemption is used
in all the *Exultet* roll illustrations of the text "O felix culpa." In
the third *Exultet* roll in the Cathedral Archives, Troia (Troia 3),[43] a
large Cross is portrayed directly above the Tree of Knowledge. As the
stream of blood from Christ's side is collected in a drinking vessel
above, Eve below accepts the fruit from the streaming red tongue of the
serpent (fig. 1). Here is direct evidence that such juxtapositions
illustrate the *felix culpa* with a "postleptic" view from the Redemption
to the Fall as well as the proleptic one from the Fall to the Redemp-
tion. In the Fondi Roll[44] the sequence of pictures uses the same jux-
taposition. A picture of the Descent into Hell with Christ bringing
Adam and Eve out is followed by the betrayal of Jesus by Judas. Then
a picture of the Fall: Adam and Eve on either side of the Tree cover
their pudenda with one hand and reach out to the serpent with the other.
Then follows, as the roll is unrolled, a picture of Christ ruling in
glory. The juxtaposition, and not simply the picture of the Fall alone,
illustrates the words "O felix culpa." Similarly, in the Pisa 2 Roll[45]
a sequence of scenes from Christ's life culminates in a picture of the
victorious Christ in the initial "V" surrounded by the Symbols of the
Evangelists, then a picture of the Fall without which none of this would

have happened, and then a picture of the candle being censed.

In two rolls, Troia 3 and Pisa 3, a picture of Adam and Eve comes earlier in the text to illustrate the words "Ade debitum."[46] Here the *felix culpa* is not being directly illustrated and there is a less focused juxtaposition of the Fall and Redemption. Both are preceded by a picture of God's power, God the Father in Troia 3 and Christ in a mandorla in Pisa 3; both are followed by a picture of the Passover Lamb being slain and other scenes from the Passover. The Lamb, however, is a type for Christ and anticipates the more focused juxtaposition of the *felix culpa* to be found as the song develops in the next few verses.

In the two earliest rolls, of the eleventh century from Montecassino, the British Museum Roll[47] and the Barberini Roll,[48] the sequence to illustrate the text "O felix culpa" is a clearly focused juxtaposition of Fall and Redemption. Christ, having broken the chains of death, brings Adam and Eve and all the saved out of Hell. Next Adam holds Eve's arm as she offers him the fruit, while the snake winds round her ankles and up the Tree. Then Christ appears resurrected in the garden requesting Mary of Magdala not to touch him for he has not yet ascended to the Father. In the hope of resurrection and redemption the Fall appears fortunate.

Ernst Guldan, in his comprehensive study *Eva und Maria: Eine Antithese als Bildmotif*, briefly mentions these two pictures in relation to a pair of medallions from the *Bible moralisée*.[49] In the upper medallion Satan appears before God to request permission to tempt an unprotected Job. In the lower medallion Eve takes the fruit from Satan juxtaposed to Gabriel and Mary, who holds up her hands to receive from God's hands in heaven the Christ child holding in his hand a wafer or sphere. The text reads: "Hoc significat quod deus permisit diabolo hominem incitari ad peccandum ut hac de causa filium suum mitteret in mundum ut sua passione hominem a morte liberaret." Guldan notes the relation of this train of thought to the *Exultet* and comments that "die mittelalterlichen Exultetrollen illustrieren diesen Abschnitt der Auferstehungsproklamation durch den Sündenfall, eingeschoben zwischen die Bilder der Höllenfahrt und des Noli me tangere."[50] ("The *Exultet* rolls of the Middle Ages illustrate this aspect of the Resurrection proclamation

by the Fall placed in between pictures of the Descent into Hell and the
Noli me tangere.") Guldan agrees that in these two pictures, at least,
a juxtaposition of Fall and Redemption illustrates the *felix culpa*.
The same thing, moreover, is done in another way by the maker of the
Bible moralisée:

> Der Konzeptor der Bible moralisée beschritt einen anderen Weg,
> um die Schuldverstrickung des Menschen als "notwendige" Ur-
> sache der Erlösung darzustellen. Die zitierte Hiob-Exegese
> wird im Bildmedaillon durch des Nebeneinander von Versuchung
> und Verkündigung erläutert. Die altchristliche Rezirkula-
> tionsidee von der spiegelbildlichen Wiederkehr alles Gesche-
> henen unter gleichsam umgekehrtem Vorzeichen, dieser heils-
> geschichtliche Kreislaufgedanke ist hier erstmals im Rahmen
> eines Bildes an Eva und Maria demonstriert worden. "Sic con-
> traria contrariis curarentur."[51]
>
> (The maker of the *Bible moralisée* takes another way in order
> to show the sin entanglement of Man as "necessary" cause of
> the Salvation. The cited Job-exegesis is illustrated in the
> medallion by showing a juxtaposition of the Temptation and
> Annunciation. The old Christian recirculation idea, of the
> recurrence of all that happens like mirror images, under the
> opposite sign as it were -- this salvation-history idea of
> circulation was demonstrated here for the first time within
> the frame of a single picture of Eve and Mary. "Contraries
> are thus run together with contraries.")

If this medallion illustrates the train of thought associated with
the *felix culpa* by a juxtaposition (*Nebeneinander*) of Mary and Eve, then
other juxtapositions of Mary and Eve would be capable of suggesting it
also. But not a word does Guldan say of this. He does not make explicit
a major point in hundreds of other juxtapositions of Mary and Eve. Per-
haps he felt it was obvious and too elementary to mention. But I do not
think for modern eyes it is so obvious.

It is quite possible to look at a juxtaposition of Mary and Eve with

only a forward perspective on the glory of the Redemption with no back-
ward perspective on the fortune of the Fall. This fortunate perspec-
tive may not even occur to the artist, who may only see the forward
perspective in a juxtaposition of the Fall and Redemption. This seems
to be the case with portraits of the Fall such as those by Hugo van der
Goes or Lucas Cranach which are placed beside Mary tragically grieving
for her crucified son (Guldan, Plates 75-78). The message seems to be
only: this sin was committed and this is the horrible outcome. A
single-minded portrayal of the forward perspective may be seen even in
quite complex juxtapositions of the Fall and Redemption. In a diptych
painted in Westphalia in the early fifteenth century by a follower of
Conrad von Soest,[52] the Madonna and Child on one panel face Christ on
the Cross on the other. On the Cross's left, emblems of the old order
are lined up and paired off with symbols of the Redemption on the right:
a small figure of Eve giving Adam a skull to eat beside Mary giving the
Christ child to a pope; a skull with a serpent in it beside a church;
an animal for sacrifice beside a sacrificial lamb; the Synagogue, por-
trayed quite large, as a blind man with a broken banner beside Ecclesia.
Because such emphasis is given to the passing away of the "old" order
and its replacement little attention is given to the fact of the Fall.
The point almost seems to be in the new order to forget about it; it has
been replaced. There is little view of the Fall as an historical fact
that will always remain as such. If the Fall is to be given little em-
phasis it can hardly be seen as fortunate. It is quite possible, then,
for an artist to have only a forward-looking view and not have the *felix
culpa* in mind, just as it is possible viewing a picture to have no ink-
ling of the backward perspective on the Fortunate Fall intended by an
artist.

Since pictures juxtaposing the Fall and Redemption are found beside
the text of the *Exultet* in which the *felix culpa* is explicitly mentioned,
however, such juxtapositions must be examined for at least the possible
backward perspective on the *felix culpa* they imply.

These juxtapositions usually involve the contrast-comparison be-
tween the first and second tree and/or the first and second Eve.

Since the point of comparison in the first and second trees is that

they were both wood, and wood was used in both the Fall and Redemption, there can be no complete dissociation of the Tree of Knowledge and the Tree of Life, just as there can be no complete dissociation of the Fall and Redemption. In some rood-tree juxtapositions the Tree of Life is the only tree referred to. The Great Cross of the Lateran Baptistery in Rome, an early Christian mosaic, shows the Cross over the Tree of Life in the Heavenly City. Perched in the branches of the Tree is the Phoenix, symbol of Christ.[53] The Throne of Saint Mark in Venice portrays the empty Cross above the Tree of Life upon a hill from which flow the four rivers of Paradise; over the trunk of the Tree is carved a Lamb.[54] The association of the two trees in the Garden as both trees, nevertheless, frequently brings them together in a dialectic with the Tree of the Cross. In the Fulda sacramentary of the late tenth century, for example, the serpent twines round, not the Tree of Knowledge in Eden, but about the upright of the Cross of Golgotha, while Adam and Eve come out of their tombs underneath.[55] In the tenth century Evangelary in Kassel the Cross again shows the serpent at the base while Mother Earth lifts Adam up toward the crucified Christ.[56] The crucifix of Adalbero shows Adam and Eve seated in sorrow on either side of the Tree beneath the Cross.[57] In the Munich manuscript of *De laudibus sanctae Crucis*, Adam and Eve wearing skirts of leaves look away from the Tree of Knowledge to the Cross which is sprouting leafy branches behind which stands Ecclesia.[58] Once established, this association between the two trees in the garden may grow so they intertwine or are even grafted together as in *Le pèlerinage de l'âme*, discussed above.[59] In the fourteenth-century Paupers' Bibles of Benediktbeuern and Tegernsee, God judges the snake while standing in a tree himself.[60] The illustration of a fifteenth-century French book of hours shows Adam and Eve eating from the Tree on which Jesus is being crucified.[61] In his painting "The Mystery of the Fall and Redemption of Man," Giovanni da Modena shows Christ on the Tree of Knowledge while Adam and Eve eat the fruit below.[62] Christ is portrayed crucified on the Tree of Life in paintings by Pacino de Bonaguido[63] and Simone dei Crocifissi.[64]

Gustav Ludwig has shown that Giovanni Bellini's picture the "Earthly Paradise" in the Uffizi at Florence is associated with *Le*

pèlerinage de l'âme and the allegory in which the Tree of Jesse, taken
as a branch from the Tree of Life, is grafted onto the Tree of Know-
ledge, although whether it is a direct illustration of the *Pèlerinage*
is in dispute.[65]   The scene in which the pilgrims are playing with
apples under the two trees was represented in numerous manuscripts of
the *Pèlerinage*, as was the scene in which Justice on top of the Tree of
Life cuts off an apple to replace on the Tree of Knowledge. In Bellini's
picture Justice is replaced by the Virgin on top of the Tree. The fruit
of her womb from the Tree of Life restores the Tree of Knowledge, and
from this fruit Mankind will eat for his salvation as he once ate for
his damnation.

This sort of juxtaposition of the two trees is frequently combined
with a juxtaposition of the two Eves, another traditional sort of con-
trast which implies the *felix culpa*. In a miniature from the Burgundian
Missal (c. 1513), the Tree of Knowledge stands by the Tree of Life
(Guldan, Plate 159). In the Tree of Knowledge are cone-like fruits and
skulls with Satan plucking a fruit while Eve brings down one of the
skulls to feed to a kneeling prince. In the Tree of Life are clusters
of grapes and white circles of the Host. Mary in one hand holds the
Child as he picks grapes and in the other holds the Host ready to feed
it to a kneeling King, while under her foot she has Satan's head pinned
to the ground. In the portrayal by Hans Schäufeleing (1516), the trunks
of the two trees are intertwined (Plate 158). In the earlier portrayal
by Johannes von Sittau (c. 1420), there is only one trunk while Mary
holds a crucifix in the tree (Plate 156). Similarly, in a miniature
from the Book of Hours of Catherine of Clèves, the two trees are one
(Plate 157). This union of the two trees prepares for the famous "Tree
of Death and Life," a miniature by Berthold Furtmeyer from the missal
of the Archbishop of Salzburg (1481), the frontispiece for both Guldan's
and Cook's texts (fig. 2). On the same tree grow both green apples and
white circles of the Host. Beside a skull in the tree, Eve takes apples
from the mouth of the Serpent and feeds them to people on their knees
behind whom stands Death. Mary feeds the Host to the devout beside a
cross hung in the Tree. As simply a picture in space such an image is
Manichaean -- good balanced by evil -- but put in the context of mediaeval

chronology, the temporal separation of the two actions is assured. The whole image becomes a forceful juxtaposition of the Fall and Redemption, with a perspective going both ways from a ruinous Fall to a merciful Redemption and backwards from a glorious Redemption to a fortunate Fall.

As the second Eve, Mary's association with both trees in the garden is reinforced, moreover, by her association with two other trees: the Tree of Jesse, in which she is the major genealogical link, and the Burning Bush, which is a type for Mary and the Annunciation. Typologically, God descends into the bush without consuming it to announce to Moses that he shall bring forth the children of Israel from captivity; an angel announces to Mary that God will descend into her womb and she will give birth to a child who will deliver mankind from captivity in sin. Yet her virginity is not consumed by lust. Harris shows that this typological connection was traditional and explains Nicholas Froment's picture in which elements from the two scenes are transposed: Mary appears on top of the burning bush holding the fruit of her womb, and the angel announces the event to Moses.[66] The angel wears a medallion portraying Adam and Eve with the Tree of Knowledge while the infant Christ holds a mirror reflecting the Virgin and himself. Here the Tree of Knowledge, as Harris says, "finds its counterpart in the Tree of Salvation in the centre of the picture."[67] Around the picture in the Tree of Jesse are twelve ancestors of Christ who in number look forward to the apostles and the Redemption on the Tree of the Cross. In such complex juxtapositions Mary is at the centre of a number of associations with trees in which a backward perspective on a fortunate Fall is implicit as part of the whole story of captivity in sin and deliverance.

The perspective is more restricted to the *felix culpa*, however, when the first and second Eve are directly juxtaposed. In her introduction to *The Visconti Hours*, Edith Kirsch states that "Pictorial allusions to original sin as the occurrence which resulted in the need for redemption are not uncommon in Hours of the Virgin, and this association is made explicit in the *Visconti Hours* by the facing miniatures which portray on one side the Coronation of the Virgin and on the other the Fall of Adam and Eve."[68] The borders around the miniatures which portray the Fall in this book of hours are, moreover, always embellished

gloriously with emperors, kings, and the Visconti patrons, suggestive
of the fruits of redemption in the descendants of Adam.

The variety of juxtapositions of Mary and Eve may be most compre-
hensively studied in Guldan's study, noted above: *Eva und Maria: Eine
Antithese als Bildmotiv.*[69]   Satan seducing Eve is frequently portrayed
in close juxtaposition to Gabriel speaking to Mary (for example, plates
39, 40 with 41, 50, 52, 58 with 59, 60, 62, 63, 64, 66, 67, 69, 74).
Such a juxtaposition implies a perspective on the *felix culpa* and speci-
fically illustrates Justin Martyr's comparison between the virgin Eve,
who conceived the word of the serpent and brought forth disobedience
and death, and the Virgin Mary, who conceived the word of God announced
to her by the angel Gabriel and brought forth our Redeemer.[70]   Satan is
thus confounded: the very means by which he sought our eternal damna-
tion becomes the means of our salvation. In a similar sort of juxtapo-
sition a scene of the Expulsion from Eden is framed with a picture of
the Annunciation (for example, plates 51, 52, 53, 56, 57, 65, 68, 70,
71, 92 with 93 and 94, 95 with 96). The Annunciation may also be framed
with Mary as the woman of messianic future in the Tree of Knowledge, a
second Eve with her foot sticking out to bruise the serpent's head
(plates 32, 34). God originally announced to Eve that her seed would
bruise the serpent's head with its heel. This was interpreted in Gene-
sis as a reference to the Messiah. Now an angel announces to Mary that
her very own child will be holy and his reign will have no end. One
annunciation is associated with painful judgement; the other is the joy-
ful fulfillment of that judgement in the coming relief of the Messiah.

The closeness of the two annunciations and the seed of Eve in Mary
was also underlined by frequent use of the palindrome found in the ninth-
century hymn "Ave maris stella," in which Eva becomes the "Ave" of the
Annunciation: "Sumens illud Ave/ Gabrielis ore,/ funda nos in pace,/
mutans nomen Evae."[71]   The point of the palindrome is not only the anti-
thesis between Eve and Mary but also the witty one-way reversal, so that
from the *source* of our perdition comes salvation. In the glorious pair-
ing of the two, Eve is no longer hatefully rejected but becomes a neces-
sary and paradoxically joyful part.

Mary and Eve may also be juxtaposed without any direct portrayal of

Eve by having Mary or her child delight in holding an apple (fig. 3).[72]
In this frequent motif the fruit of knowledge is paired with the fruit
from the Tree of Life with which Mary and her Son are frequently identi-
fied and in which she is often depicted enclosed by its branches.[73]
Christ as the fruit of her womb is to become food on the Tree of Life
nailed to the limbs of the Cross. Seen after it has all happened, when
one can look back on it all, the image is a joyous, even fruitful, source
of such reflection. The widespread use of this apple-child motif with
the Second Eve would influence the even more frequent and prior globe-
child motif in which a sphere signifying the world is held by the child.
In addition to the simple message that Christ will rule the world, a
perspective on the fallen world and worldliness is also suggested. It
is not just a world that Christ will have to rule but a fallen world,
brought into sin through the apple and then redeemed by Him. A striking
early example of such significance may be found in the portrait of the
Fall with Christ in glory on facing pages of the Codex Vigilanus (976).[74]
On one page Eve takes a small round fruit from the serpent's mouth and
Adam holds another one between thumb and ring finger while on the oppos-
ite page Christ in glory holds a small round world, like the Host, in
his hand poised like Adam's. The inscription declares that the Lord
holds the weight of the earth, "molem arbae," in three fingers and con-
trols every thing above, on, and under the earth. The Lord's power is
affirmed despite the presence of evil. Out of evil God brings forth
good. The forward perspective to glory is powerfully present, but so
is the backward perspective on the fortune of the Fall. The very same
round circle Eve takes in the wrong way is a central part in the glory
of Christ's dominion as he balances the redeemed world in his fingers.

In addition to juxtapositions of the Fall and Redemption, the *felix
culpa* may be suggested by another sort of juxtaposition. Once the *felix,*
or fortunate, perspective is given, it may be seen in the iconography of
the Fall through the portrayal of the original nobility and sanctity of
Adam and Eve, the crowning work of God's creation. The greater the Fall,
the greater the Redemption. This aspect of the iconography of the
felix culpa is mentioned explicitly by Trapp as the theme of the *"felix
culpa* wrought to its highest pitch."[75] It may be communicated by an

explicit portrayal of Adam and Eve's noble innocence beside their griev-
ing guilt, fully or partially clothed. Usually, however, the picture
of Mankind fallen in present sin has to be supplied by the imagination
as a contrast to the noble innocence of Adam. Such contrasts in the
mind's eye are, perhaps, not as vivid as an actual juxtaposition of
some element from the Redemption with the Fall.

In all the numerous ways elements from the Fall may be juxtaposed
with elements from the Redemption there is always a perspective on the
Redemption as seen from the Fall. The converse perspective on the Fall
as seen from the Redemption may not always come to mind, although it is
always dialectically present and, once pointed out verbally by mention
of the *felix culpa*, it would become obvious. The presence of this dia-
lectic is, moreover, reinforced by the frequent irony in all the juxta-
positions that props for the Fall scenario become props in the Redemp-
tion. Without the Fall one would not have these props which occur again
in the Redemption: the two fruits, one from the Tree of Knowledge, the
other from the Tree of the Cross; the two Eves; the two trees; the first
and second Adam. In all this iconography the implication is that, at
least on a picture level, the Redemption could not be portrayed without
images intrinsic to the Fall. Without the Fall one could not have the
Redemption as we know it. In other words, the Fall was necessary. Such
logic in the iconography draws the attention to Adam's "peccatum neces-
sarium" and the more profound logic of good and evil in that "necessary
sin."

The strength of this whole tradition of juxtaposing elements from
the Fall and Redemption suggests that the *felix culpa* is an important
significance to be considered in mediaeval art as distinct from portray-
als of the mere Fall. From the vantage point of the twentieth century,
moreover, special attention is required to detect the tradition because
by and large we have forgotten about it. References to the paradox are
frequent enough in the Renaissance,[76] but they soon peter out.

The widespread awareness of the *felix culpa* in the Middle Ages was
not encouraged by the changing world view of the Renaissance. One ob-
vious factor in the decline of the concept of the *felix culpa* is the
Reformation and the desuetude of the *Exultet* in Protestant churches.

Another factor is the change from the mediaeval tendency to see history in a providential perspective as it will look from the end of history. One might speculate that in a providential perspective where history is spread out synchronically like a tapestry the Fall and Redemption would seem closer to each other than in a view of day-to-day morality. As religious allegory became moral allegory the concept of the *felix culpa* would get lost in the moral emphasis on the Fall as a warning against the present sins of cupidity and disobedience.

Another factor in the decline of the paradox may have been confusion about the paradox itself and unsolvable, theological difficulties it seemed to lead to. In the late fourteenth century both Langland and Wyclif, for example, referred to the paradox in the difficult context of theodicy. In *Piers Plowman* Repentance vindicates God's permission of sin: "al for the best, as I beleue . what euere the boke telleth, / O *felix culpa*!"[77] John Wyclif cherished this same concept as it appears in a Christmas sermon preached in the 1380's. In an outburst of sweeping optimism he seems to leave logic behind until only at the last breath it catches up.

> And so, as many men seien, all thingis comen for the beste;
> for all comen for Goddis ordenance, and so thei comen for God
> himself; and so all thingis that comen fallen for the best
> thing that mai be. Moreover to another witt men seien, that
> this world is bettered bi everything that fallith thereinne,
> where that it be good or yvel . . . and herfore seith Gregori,
> that it was a blesful synne that Adam synnede and his kynde,
> for bi this the world is beterid; but the ground of this good-
> nesse stondith in grace of Jesus Christ.[78]

Both Langland and Wyclif use the paradox to deduce God's justice in a way that may not have suited the later age of enlightenment and reason. Even Milton's God in *Paradise Lost* seems officially to deny the paradox before the heavenly synod: Man would have been "Happier had it sufficed him to have known / Good by itself, and evil not at all."[79] These words, however, are spoken right after the Fall and are, indeed, true up until the Redemption; they are not a contradiction of the *felix culpa*, affirmed

elsewhere in *Paradise Lost*. But God's statement does show the diffi-
culty of looking at the Fall from within the "historical" context when
it happened and seeing the Fall in any way as Fortunate or Happy. When
it happened it was *not* Fortunate! Or was it? Such questions as they
could be comprehended in the changing world view after the Renaissance
were difficult, perhaps impossible, and people stopped asking them. The
doctrine of the *felix culpa* did not mean much and was more or less ig-
nored.

Whatever the complete set of factors to account for this history of
the concept, we must realize that, in fact, our own background in the
twentieth century does not train us to recognize the concept of the
felix culpa. If we are to read the record of mediaeval art correctly
we must be on the lookout for techniques of iconographic juxtaposition
which allude to what was a widespread and popular doctrine of the *felix
culpa*, distinct from portrayals of the mere Fall.

Dawson College

<div align="center">NOTES</div>

1 "O assuredly necessary sin of Adam which has been blotted out by
the death of Christ! O fortunate fault which has merited such and so
great a Redeemer!" (PL 72.269). See also "Exsultet," with bibliography,

New Catholic Encyclopedia, and the Easter Vigil in the Roman Missal, which still follows the mediaeval ordinary.

[2] "Milton and the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall," in Arthur O. Lovejoy, *Essays in the History of Ideas* (Baltimore 1948) 277-95. The modern lack of awareness of the *felix culpa* may be judged by the need Lovejoy felt to explain Milton's use of it: "To many readers of *Paradise Lost* in all periods the most surprising lines in the poem must have been those in the Twelfth Book in which Adam . . . ." (p. 277); cf. n. 79 below.

[3] *Haggadah,* trans. Chaim Raphael in *A Feast of History* (New York 1972) 233.

[4] Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia 1911-38) VI, 14, n. 82.

[5] Ginzberg, V, 98, n. 70.

[6] Translations of scripture are taken from *The Jerusalem Bible* (New York 1966).

[7] Justin Martyr, *Dialogue,* ch. 100 (PG 6.709-12), trans. from Greek by N.P. Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin* (London 1927) 174. For a comprehensive treatment of the Mary-Eve comparison in the Fathers see L. Cignelli, *Maria nuova Eva nella Patristica greca* (Assisi 1966).

[8] Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* V. xvi. 2; V. xvii. 4, 17, 19, in *Contre les hérésies* 11, ed. Adelin Rousseau (Paris 1969), and *Demonstratio* 33, 34, in *Démonstration de la Prédication Apostolique,* trans. L.M. Froidevauz (Paris 1971).

[9] Tertullian, *An Answer to the Jews,* in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids, Mich. 1951) III, 170. Julius Firmicus Maternus, *De errore profanarum religionum* (PL 12.1037-38). Augustine, *Sermo 1,* ch. 4; *Sermo 84,* ch. 3 (PL 39). For the tradition which identified the Tree of Life and the Cross see Romuald Bauerreiss, *Arbor Vitae, der "Lebensbaum" und seine Verwendung in der Liturgie* (München 1938).

[10] "By wood we began to hunger until wood took his own flesh for food. The same Lord joined flesh and wood in Christ that the old hunger might pass away and the grace of life might be restored." Saint Ambrose, "Explanatio Psalmi 35," ch. 3, *Opera,* ed. M. Petschenig, CSEL, LXIV

(Leipzig 1919) 51.

[11] "The Tree of Life in the middle of Paradise is Christ in the middle of his Church. But the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, which itself too is said to be in the middle of Paradise, signifies the Devil." Saint Ambrose, *Expositio super septem visiones libri Apocalypsis* (PL 17.778).

[12] "Sin is more fruitful than innocence." *De Jacob*, Bk. 1, ch. vi, 21 (PL 14.607).

[13] "In order that he might be redeemed by Christ. Fortunate ruin which is repaired to advantage!" *In Psalmum XXXIX*, 20 (PL 14.1116). Other texts in which Ambrose expresses a similar idea include: *De institutione virginis*, 104, "Amplius nobis profuit culpa quam nocuit: in quo redemptio quidem nostra divinum munus invenit" (PL 16.331); *Ep. 73*, 9, "Crevit quidem culpa per Legem sed et culpae auctor superbia soluta est, idque mihi profuit; superbia enim culpa invenit, culpa autem gratiam fecit" (PL 16.1253).

[14] B. Capelle, "L'*Exultet* Pascal oeuvre de Saint Ambroise,"*Miscellanea Mercati* I, 219-246; *Nouveau Petit Larousse* (1969) s.v. "felix culpa," which gives Augustine as the author. For a review of recent discussion on the authorship of the *Exultet*, see G.M. Lukken, *Original Sin in the Roman Liturgy* (Leiden 1973) 218 f.

[15] A. Franz, *Die kirchlichen Benediktionen im Mittelalter* (Freiburg im Breisgau 1909) 534.

[16] *Rebuke and Grace; Saint Augustine* (Paris 1836-9) X, 1307.

[17] "We have come to more good through the ineffable grace of Christ than we came to misery through the envy of the Devil." *First Sermon on the Lord's Ascension* (PL 54.396).

[18] "Great, indeed, are the evils we deservedly suffer in consequence of the first sin; but who of the elect would not willingly endure still worse evils, rather than not have so great a Redeemer?" *In Primum Regum Expositiones*, 4, 7 (PL 79.222).

[19] "Grieving because of the infidelity of the first created man, when by eating of the fatal fruit he rushed headlong to death, the Creator himself even then chose the tree that would undo the harm of the (former) tree. This work the plan of our salvation demanded, that divine craft

might foil the cunning of the many shaped deceiver, and bring forth a
remedy from the *same source* whence the enemy has inflicted the wound."
A.S. Walpole, *Early Latin Hymns* (Cambridge 1922) 168.

[20] "Tree, brilliant and decorated, ornamented with king's purple,
I consider you worthy, selected to touch such sacred limbs" (Walpole,
p. 176).

[21] For a review of all the rood-tree legends, see E.C. Quinn, *The
Quest of Seth for the Oil of Life* (Chicago 1962) with extensive biblio-
graphy; for the Jewish background, see R.H. Charles, ed., *The Apocrypha
and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (Oxford 1913) 123-54.

[22] Ferdinand Piper, "Der Baum des Lebens," *Evangelischer Kalender*
(1963) 1-94. Trans., "The Tree of Life," *Journal of Sacred Literature,*
N.S. 4 (1864) 393; 6 (1865) 27-28; 8 (1866) 59-60. Mary is hailed as
the Tree of Life in mediaeval hymns: "Ave, virgo, lignum mite,/ Quae
didisti fructum vitae/ Salute fidelium." ("Hail virgin, luscious tree,
which gives the fruit of life for the health of the faithful." Guido
Maria Dreves, ed., *Analecta hymnica medii aevi*, XXXV (Leipzig 1900) 137.
"Ave, Virgo, vitae lignum," ibid. 172.

[23] Quinn, p. 74.

[24] C. Witke, review of *The Quest of Seth, Speculum,* 47 (1966) 361.

[25] Guillaume de Deguileville: *Le pèlerinage de l'âme*, ed. J. J.
Stürzinger (London 1895).

[26] Frederick Hartt, "*Lignum Vitae in Media Paradisi*, the Stanza
d'Eliodoro and the Sistine Ceiling," *Art Bulletin*, 32 (1950) 138; Mir-
ella Levi D'Ancona, *The Iconography of the Immaculate Conception in the
Middle Ages and Early Renaissance*, Archaeological Institute of America
and the College Art Association of America, Monographs on Archaeology
and Fine Arts, No. 7 (New York 1957) 49-50.

[27] *Purgatorio* XXXII. 49-51; see Charles S. Singleton, trans., *The
Divine Comedy; Purgatorio*, 2, Commentary (Princeton 1973) 788-89.

[28] "Nothing, however, stands in the way of human nature's being
lifted to something greater, even after sin; God permits evil that he
might draw forth some greater good. Thus the text in Romans reads,
'Where wickedness abounded, grace abounded yet more'; and in the bless-
ing of the Paschal Candle, 'O happy fault that has merited such and so

great a redeemer!'" (3, 1, 3 ad 3). "Everywhere in sacred Scripture,
however, the sin of the first man is given as the reason for the Incar-
nation; thus it is preferable to hold that the work of the Incarnation
is ordered by God as a remedy for sin, in such a way that if there had
been no sin, there would have been no Incarnation. Divine power, of
course, is not limited to this, for God could have become incarnate
even if there had been no sin" (3, 1, 3 Resp.). R.J. Hennessey, *St.
Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, Latin text and English translation*
(New York 1976) XLVIII , 18-21.

[29] *Religious Lyrics of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Carleton Brown
(1939; rpt. Oxford 1952) 120.

[30] "Remember kind Jesus/ how I am the cause of your life./ Do not
destroy me this day." *The Liber Usualis*, ed. Benedictines of Solesmes
(Tournai 1956) 1811.

[31] *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate*, ed. H. N. MacCracken, EETS, E.
S. 107 (London 1911) 293, and "On the image of Pity," p. 298.

[32] Brown, No. 15, p. 30.

[33] "If on account of sin the Old Adam had not fallen/ The Mother
could not have been exalted on account of the Child;/ But because she
could not remedy her own sin/ The Virgin engendered a child by whom the
remedy could be applied./ Therefore, for the unfortunate you must inter-
cede/ [Thou who] wast Mother of the Christ on account of our sins./ O
Mother of Christ, Anglia is truly your dowry;/ Protect the Kingdom and
its King, O Virgin, through a pure prayer." MS 129, Library, St. John's
College, Cambridge. I am grateful to Father Raymond-M. Giguère of the
Institut d'Etudes Médiévales, Montréal, for help with transliteration
and translation of these previously unpublished verses.

[34] Victor Yelverton Haines, "Allusions to the felix culpa in the
Prologue of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," *Revue de l'Université d'
Ottawa*, 44 (1974) 158-78.

[35] M.R. James, introd., *Speculum humanae salvationis, being a repro-
duction of an Italian MS of the fourteenth century* (Oxford 1926) 8.

[36] Ewald M. Vetter, "Necessarium Adae Peccatum," *Ruperto-Carola*, 39
(1966) 144-81.

[37] Palermo, Galleria Nazionale della Sicilia, Inv. no. 75; R. Delogu,

La galleria nazionale della Sicilia (Itinerari dei musei, gallerie e monumenti d'Italia) (1962), plates 71-72; *Jan Gossaert genaamd Mabuse,* Catalogue of the Exhibition at Rotterdam and Bruges (1965), plates 1a-c.

[38] J.B. Trapp, "The Iconography of the Fall of Man" in *Approaches to Paradise Lost,* ed. C.A. Patrides (London 1968) 226.

[39] Ibid. p. 238.

[40] Ibid. p. 224.

[41] Myrtilla Avery, *The Exultet Rolls of Southern Italy* II (Vol. I not published)(Princeton 1936); Guglielmo Cavallo, *Rotoli de Exultet dell'Italia Meridionale* (Bari 1973).

[42] Trapp, p. 238.

[43] Troia, Cathedral Archives, *Exultet* Roll (3); Avery, plate clxxix.

[44] Paris, Bibliothèque nationale (Nouv. acq. lat. 710). *Exultet* Roll; Avery, plate lxxvii.

[45] Pisa, Museo Civica. *Exultet* Roll (2); Avery, plate xcii.

[46] Pisa, Museo Civica, *Exultet* Roll (3); Avery, plate ci.

[47] B.M. Add. MS. 30337. *Exultet* Roll; Avery, plate xlix.

[48] Rome, Biblioteca Vaticana (Vat. Barb. Lat. 592). *Exultet* Roll; Avery, plate cl.

[49] Ernst Guldan, *Eva und Maria: Eine Antithese als Bildmotiv* (Graz-Köln 1966), plate 30.

[50] Ibid. p. 60.

[51] Ibid. p. 60.

[52] Reproduced in Alfred Stange, *Deutsche Malerei der Gotik* (1938; rpt. Liechtenstein 1969). For interpretation of the allegory see Rose-marie Bergmann, "A German Nativity Miniature and its Iconographic Significance," *RACAR*, 4 (1977) 11-12.

[53] Reproduced in Roger Cook, *The Tree of Life: Symbol of the Centre* (London 1974), plate 46.

[54] Ibid. p. 103.

[55] Göttingen, Universitätsbibliothek, cod. theol. 231, fol. 60; A. Goldschmidt, *Die deutsche Buchmalerei* (1928) II, plate 106.

[56] Kassel, Landesbibliothek, cod. theol. 2°, 60, fol. 1; A. Goldschmidt, *Die deutsche Buchmalerei* (1928) I, plate 82; *Kunst und Kultur im Weserraum*, 800-1600, Catalogue, Exhibition, Corvey, 1966; Catalogue,

Münster/Westf., 1966 (ii), no. 173.

[57] About 1000, Metz, Bibliothèque de la ville. See A. Goldschmidt, *Die Elfenbeinskulpturen der karolingischen und sächsischen Kaiser, viii-xi Jhdt*, I (Berlin 1914), no. 78.

[58] *Reallexikon zur deutschen Kunstgeschichte*, I (1938), s.v. Adam, Abb. 19; Guldan, plate 38.

[59] See note 25 above. For typical illustration of the two trees in the *Pèlerinage*, see Bodleian MS. Douce 305, fol. 45, 55v. (c. 1420).

[60] Guldan, plates 48, 49.

[61] B.M. Sloane MS. 2471, fol. 102v; Mirella Levi D'Ancona, *The Iconography of the Immaculate Conception in the Middle Ages and Early Renaissance*, Archaeological Institute of America and the College Art Association of America, Monographs on Archaeology and Fine Arts, No. 7 (New York 1957), fig. 39.

[62] Cook, p. 121.

[63] Ibid. plate 49.

[64] Ibid. p. 106.

[65] Gustav Ludwig, "Giovanni Bellinis sogenannte Madonna am See," *Jahrbuch der preussischen Kunstsammlungen*, 33 (1902) 163 f; and G. Robertson, *Giovanni Bellini* (Oxford 1968) 99.

[66] Enriqueta Harris, "Mary in the Burning Bush," *Jour. Warburg Inst.* 1 (1937-38) 281-86; C. Minott, "A Note on Nicolas Froment's 'Burning Bush Triptych'," *Jour. Warburg Inst.* 25 (1962) 323-25.

[67] Ibid. 284.

[68] Millard Meiss and Edith W. Kirsch, eds., *The Visconti Hours* (New York 1972), LF50v, 51.

[69] Note 49 above.

[70] Note 7 above.

[71] "Receiving this Ave from the mouth of Gabriel, found us in peace reversing the name of Eve." F.J.E. Raby, ed., *The Oxford Book of Medieval Latin Verse* (Oxford 1959) 410; Guldan, p. 45.

[72] See the several plates in Leonhard Küppers et al, eds., *Marienbild* (Essen 1968); Ernst Günther Grimme, *Deutsche Madonnen* (Köln 1966); Maurice Vloberg, *La Vierge et l'Enfant dans l'art français*, 2nd ed. (Grenoble 1934) II, 23 f.

[73] Note 22 above; D'Ancona, fig. 31, 36, 38, 39, 40.

[74] *Codex Vigilanus;* Reproduced in Gérard de Champeaux, *Introduction au monde des symboles* (Saint Léger Vauban, Yonne 1966), plates 109 and 110.

[75] Trapp, p. 257; Sigrid Esche, *Adam und Eva: Sündenfall und Erlösung* (Düsseldorf 1957) 34.

[76] For example: John Donne, *LXXX Sermons preached by that learned and reverend divine, John Donne* (London, Richard Royson and R. Marriot, 1640) 171; DuBartas, *La seconde semaine,* "L'imposture," 1. 497 f., in *The Works of Guillaume De Salluste Sieur Du Bartas,* ed. U.T. Holmes, L. C. Lyons, and R.W. Linker (Chapel Hill, N.C. 1940) III, 42; Giles Fletcher, *Christ's Triumph over Death,* in Giles and Phineas Fletcher, *Poetical Works,* ed. F.S. Boas (Cambridge 1908) I, 61; St. François de Sales, *Traité de l'amour de Dieu* Bk. 2, ch. 5 (Paris 1925-26) 58.

[77] *Piers the Plowman,* B-text, passus V, 11. 490-92, ed. Walter W. Skeat (1886; rpt. London 1954) I, 176.

[78] *Select English Works of John Wycliff,* Sermon XC, I, ed. Thomas Arnold (Oxford 1869) 320-21.

[79] John Milton, *Paradise Lost,* XI. 88-89, ed. Alastair Fowler (London 1971). Lovejoy discusses the *felix culpa* in XII. 469-78; it also occurs in I. 162-65 and 211-15, II. 14-16, 385-86, and VII. 613-17.
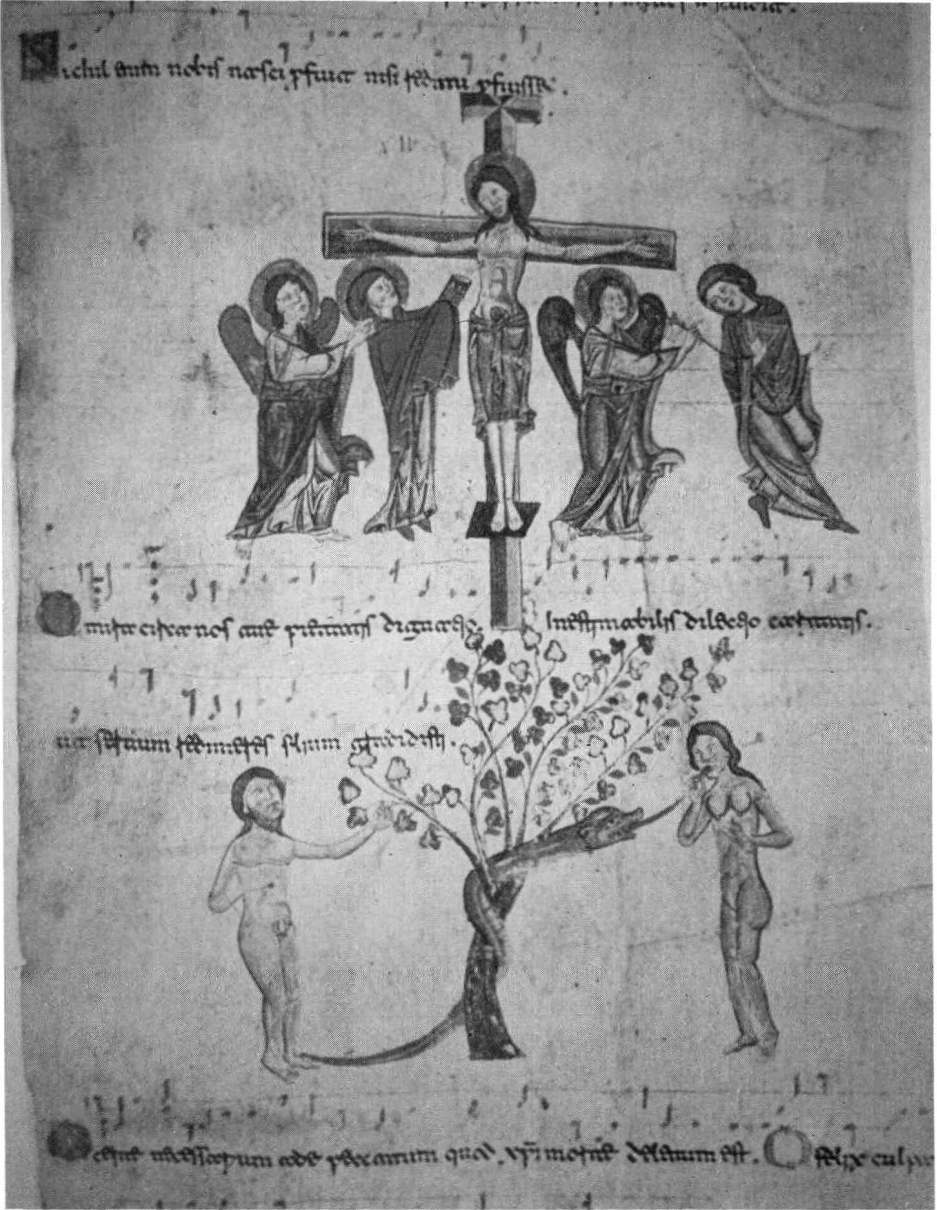
Figure 1
Exultet Roll, c. 1200
Troia, Cathedral Archives, *Exultet* Roll (3)

THE TREE OF LIFE

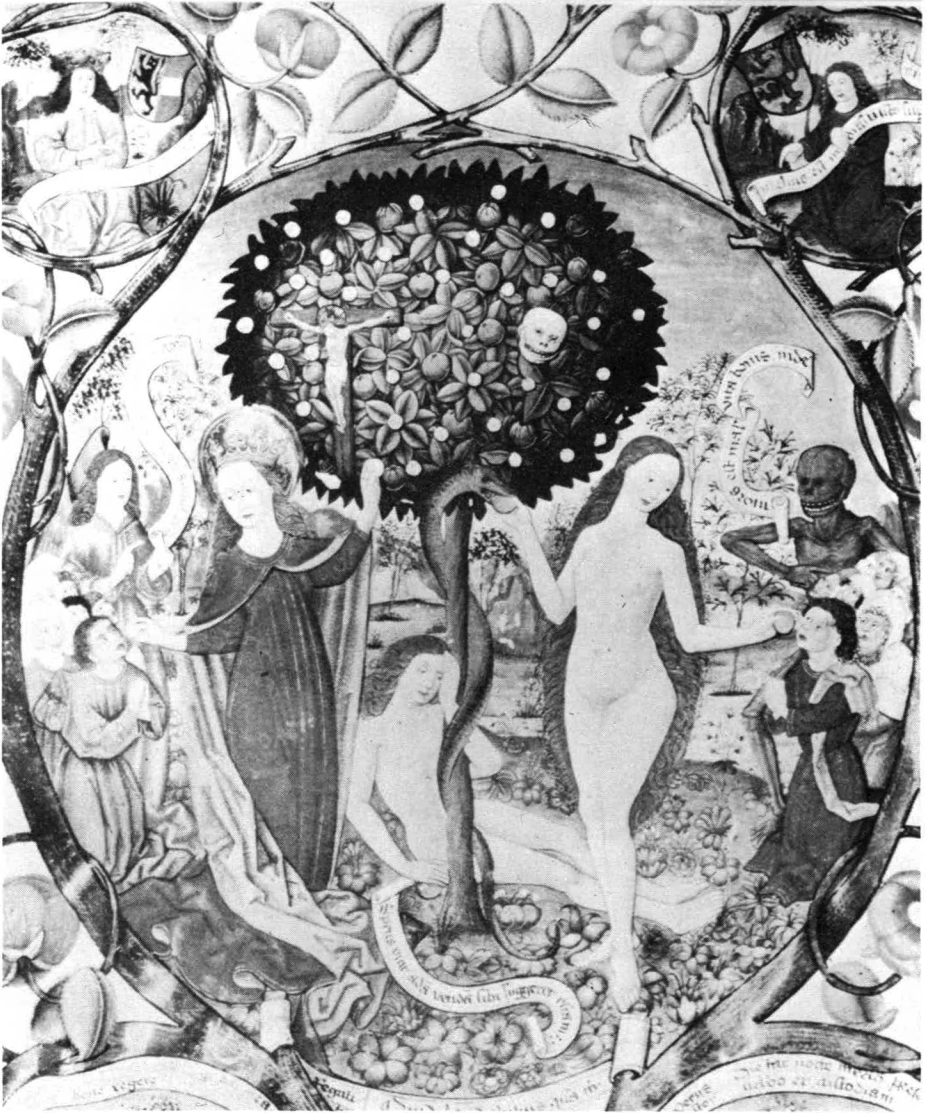### Symbol of the centre   Roger Cook

Figure 2
"Tree of Life and Death," Berthold Furtmeyer (1481)

Figure 3
"Beautiful Madonna" from Seeon am Chiemsee (c. 1430)
Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich