

Re-discovering Paradise

“Saving Paradise” is a book about the first thousand years of the Christian experience. During that time, according to research done by Brock and Parker, there were no artistic depictions in the churches and cathedrals of the Middle East of Jesus’ death, nor of the crucifixion.

Instead, the focus was on the gifts of “Paradise” that God had given as an act of love. Wonderful pastoral murals of the Paradise of this world filled the sacred spaces where people gathered to worship. They were constant reminders that, if worshippers got their hearts and minds in tune with these gracious gifts, they could experience the fullness of what the faith had to offer.

It was a theology founded on peace, justice and love – of the earth and of each other.

Even for those who faced burdens and hardships, it was believed the pain could be part of their faith formation. Ultimately they, too, could find deeper ways to experience Paradise (which was always fully of this world).

It was Charlemagne, with his campaigns of conquest, who instigated elements of sin, judgment and death. This spread through the Western Church. The first crucifix was created in 965 A.D.

The book focused on how theologians turned their backs on Paradise, and institutionalized the faith in ways that debilitate the basic message of the Spirit’s love, generously given.

Is it time we consider reclaiming the meaning that was built into the Paradise theology? The simplicity of the message gives wonderful food for thought.

James Forbes writes of this book, “We need to recover a world view that is life-transforming and earth affirming. (This) biblical perspective does not preserve paradise for the dead, but invites the living to find grace, justice, peace and compassion – here and now – amid the jangling discord of violence and war.”

(by Joyce Sasse)