

Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw  
Institute of Philosophy  
Center for Ecology and Ecophilosophy

STUDIA  
ECOLOGIAE  
ET BIOETHICAE



20/2 (2022)

## Gardens of the Bible as a Place of Encounter between Man and God

### Ogrody Biblii miejscem spotkania człowieka z Bogiem

**Justyna Wawrzyniak**

Christian Theological Academy in Warsaw, Poland

ORCID <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8791-5865> • [jwawrzyniak@student.chat.edu.pl](mailto:jwawrzyniak@student.chat.edu.pl)

Received: 11 Apr, 2022; Revised: 16 Jun, 2022; Accepted: 20 Jun, 2022

**Abstract:** This article combines two goals. The first is to show the gardens of the Bible as the background settings for the most important encounters between God and man, and the second is to define the *genius loci* of these places. The challenge was to isolate the physical features of the gardens of the Bible as carriers of spiritual aspects. The introduction presents the role of nature and the garden as the theatre of God's Glory (mentioned by Calvin). It explores moreover the sacred aspects of historical gardens and then describes the nature of individual gardens of the Bible and the events that took place there, closing with the results of observations ordered by parameters that make up the western-defined *genius loci* (spirit of the place), such as: things, earth, sky, order, and character. At the end of each description of a garden, the challenge of defining its spirit was taken for the first time. The inspiring phenomenon of gardens and the conscious use of selected elements will meet not only aesthetic expectations but also the spiritual exploration of contemporary people.

**Keywords:** garden, Bible gardens, Eden, garden Songs of Solomon, Gethsemane, the garden at the tomb of Jesus, New Jerusalem, *genius loci*

**Streszczenie:** Niniejszy artykuł łączy dwa cele. Pierwszy z nich to ukazanie ogrodów Biblii jako tła dla najważniejszych spotkań Boga z człowiekiem oraz drugi, zdefiniowanie *genius loci* tych miejsc. Podjęto wyzwanie wyodrębnienia fizycznych cech ogrodów Biblii, jako nośników duchowych treści. We wstępie przedstawiona została rola natury i ogrodu jako teatru Bożej Chwały (wspomniana przez Kalwina). Ta część zawiera także aspekt *sacrum* w kontekście ogrodów historycznych. Następnie opisano charakter poszczególnych ogrodów Biblii oraz wydarzeń, jakie miały w nich miejsce. Zakończono przedstawieniem wyników obserwacji porządkowanych przez parametry składające się na zdefiniowany przez kulturę zachodu *genius loci* (duch miejsca) takie jak: rzeczy, ziemia, niebo, porządek i charakter. Na koniec każdego opisu ogrodu po raz pierwszy podjęto wyzwanie zdefiniowania jego ducha miejsca. Inspirujący fenomen ogrodów oraz świadome zastosowanie wyodrębnionych elementów spotka nie tylko estetyczne oczekiwania, ale także duchowe poszukiwania współczesnego człowieka.

**Słowa kluczowe:** ogród, ogrody Biblii, ogród Eden, ogród Pieśni nad pieśniami, Getsemani, ogród przy grobie Jezusa, Nowe Jeruzalem, *genius loci*

## Introduction

“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the sky above proclaims His handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them He has set a tent for the sun” (Ps. 19:1-4)<sup>1</sup>. God created the world to manifest His glory in it and through it. John Calvin, in his *Commentary to the Letter to the Hebrews*, writes “The world is a divine work of art that we are to admire with delight” (Visher 2009, 12). The biblical gardens can be presented as *Theatrum Gloriam Dei*, i.e., the theatre of God’s glory (Jarmulak 2018, 56).

The research topic has a dual nature, balancing between the worlds of theology and those of nature. R.C. Sproul writes that theology should draw both from the Bible and from the natural world, as the source of the revelation of both is God himself. These two types of revelation are not contradictory, both reflecting the harmony of God’s self-disclosure (Sproul 1997, 20).

Man’s delight is to direct his deepest longings towards God and lead to the adoration of the Creator in response to His glory revealed in creation. John Calvin sees creation primarily as a mirror of God’s glory, “(...) in which we can contemplate the invisible God.” His divine powers, that is, “wisdom, justice, majesty, order and goodness.” This knowledge is to lead man to worship God and shape his proper attitude to nature (Jarmulak 2018, 55-56).

A garden is an organized form of nature. A human being, as an actor on this live scene, can look for the answers to the question of how everything works and is constantly being reborn, as well as to the more sublime queries concerning the essence and origin of beauty, goodness, and truth. These considerations can result in openness

to meeting God and His action in a dialogue that takes place in the spiritual and sensory sphere through various means of sensory communication, including sound, tactile and visual ones. Simon Chan, who deals with “liturgical theology”, calls it a playful game that consists in the overlapping of the spiritual and the physical spheres. “In this way, the extraordinary meets the down-to-earthness of everyday life” (Dec-Michalska 2018, 237-262).

Penetration of spiritual elements generated by nature into the physical reality was planned by the Creator before He brought man to life. All nature exists not only in order to arouse admiration or to regenerate, but also to point to its Creator. Through exploring nature, man recognizes and experiences the attributes of the Creator Himself. Under these circumstances, human creative abilities are released, allowing man to face the reality, look for new solutions, create and fully expand his cognition and awareness. The garden is therefore not only a place characterized by a specific physical composition of plants and architectural elements but also a place where man can seek mystical experiences. “The garden is a tamed and fenced space in which nature is ordered and selected. Therefore, the garden (...) is a symbol of God’s activity and, at the same time, of human consciousness, and thus also of happiness, beauty, and life. Quite frequently, the garden theme has also a different meaning, symbolizing human secret thoughts and soul, sometimes presented as a place of refuge and seclusion. In the garden, man has contact with the source of life, and his existence is not threatened by anything” (Uglorz 2008, 101-102).

Therefore, it is worth considering the specifics of the garden as a safe and orderly place where man, under favourable conditions, can calm his mind, get away from everyday life and experience the coming of the Lord in a gust of wind like the biblical Elijah (1 Kgs. 19:11-13). Referring to the cult of the deity and to the selected gardens of the Bible, the question can be

1 All the Bible passages in this study are taken from the New American Standard Bible, available on the website: <https://www.bible.com/versions/59-esv-english-standard-version-2016>.

asked as to what elements of infrastructure are conducive to the creation of such a *genius loci* – the spirit of the place that transforms a garden into a place where one can experience intimacy with God. Providing a precise answer here seems a difficult task because the above-mentioned descriptions of gardens do not contain many details, hence the conclusions are probably based on guesswork rather than on facts. Nevertheless, these places were special by definition since they were chosen for the encounter between man and God, and it is worth taking a closer look at their specificity. As Pożarowszczyk writes: “The spirit of a place depends on sensitivity, not on objective scientific definitions. The value of the space of the distinguished landscape does not depend on material attractiveness or on functional perfection, but on the power, the ability to trigger, stimulate the imagination, reflection, individual experiences.” This spirit, depending on the features that define and evaluate individual categories of a place (things, order, light, time, character), takes the form of one of the described spirits of the place – romantic, classical, cosmic, or the spirit of complexity which is the result of combining features characteristic of various spirits of a place (Pożarowszczyk 2017, 107; Norberg-Shulz 1979).

By its etymological definition, the garden as a fenced place was separated from the wild nature which posed a threat to humans and remained on the outside of the wall, fence, or hedge. Gardens that existed in antiquity could have been an inspiration for the authors who described both them and the events that took place in the Bible. While taking a look at the past, one can notice that they represented a new quality – a safe, civilized nature that had been subdued by humans and subsequently served them; the transformed nature that became a part of culture. Green enclaves began to be important not only for purely functional reasons such as cultivation of vegetables, fruits, and medicinal herbs as well as for the shade and microclimate they offered,

thus allowing residents to experience relief during the heat, which was especially valuable in the hot stone cities of the south. They also served to meet the growing aesthetic and spiritual needs of man. The unique elements, functional layout, and spatial forms of gardens varied during different historical periods. They were shaped according to the social needs of those times and the artistic views prevailing in a given period, or the culture, customs, and beliefs of a given society (Majdecki 1978, 9-10).

The first great civilizations of antiquity successfully harnessed wildlife by creating rural settlements and cities with gardens. The most magnificent gardens were those located at the temples and those accompanying the palaces of the pharaohs. The earliest mentions of gardens come from around 3100-2133 B.C.E. and can be found in the temples and tombs of Egypt. One of the permanent elements of these places were sacred lakes which were necessary for the purposes of religious worship. A park was often associated with the temple complex. The mention of “holy gardens” in places of worship comes from this time. In Mesopotamia, there were the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, counted among the 7 Wonders of the Ancient World and founded during the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar II (604-562 B.C.E.). The Assyrian gardens display interference in the terrain and the creation of terraced structures and artificial hills-mounds on which altars or small temples in the form of pavilions were situated. When recalling the themes of the gardens of antiquity one cannot forget the paradise gardens of ancient Persia, which were the main part of the residences. Surrounded by a wall and irrigated, they formed oases with a large variety of fruit and ornamental trees. The water in the Persian garden was intended to represent the system of four rivers that, in the tradition of the Middle East, flowed around the world, and the owner had in his garden a reflection of the garden of paradise presented in the Quran.

In ancient Greece, gardens were the domain of the private as well as the public and religious spheres. These were places dedicated to gods or heroes. In addition to trees, their elements were often springs, streams, or grottos, and with time, also altars of deities, where passers-by could make an offering (Sosnowski 2008, 37). Greek culture was an important factor in shaping the culture of the ancient Rome. Roman gardens contained elements of religious architecture for the private use of the owners, such as chapels, statues of gods, or family tombs. The atrium (inner garden) usually contained a pond with a sculpture or a fountain. The Romans, who developed polytheism, had a multitude of minor house deities who looked after all aspects of their lives. No wonder, therefore, that they had *genius loci* – the spirit of the place – which was then understood as a guardian spirit, often depicted in the form of a serpent protecting not only the objects of the sacred zone but also all others belonging to the profane zone (Łakomy 2010, 6).

The term *genius loci* has survived to our times and currently means a certain set of factors that determine the unique atmosphere or spirituality of a given place. It also appears in landscape architecture, where it signifies the aura of a given place, its identity, and its tradition (Łakomy 2010). In addition to their functional and strictly aesthetic importance, the gardens of antiquity had also a *sacred* dimension, whether in the public sense as temple gardens or in private, when the garden surrounding the property was a reflection of paradise for its owner. It was then a place of seeking contact with a widely understood deity, whose altars, chapels, or statues were part of the garden's architecture.

When analysing the components of the gardens of ancient times described above, we can conclude that the elements that make up their specific spiritual layer; were a unique vegetation typical for a given climate (herbs, olive trees, pine grapevines, plane trees, box trees, laurels), often cut and formed (especially in Roman gardens),

various types of water installations, the elevation of the area, sometimes artificially made, and the surrounding of the area with a fence as a clear demarcation of ordered nature from the chaos of the outside world.

The issue of non-biblical gardens as a place of religious worship and the creation of a sacred space as such should be elaborated separately taking into account specific religious (non-biblical) traditions.

The next part of this article provides a closer look at specific gardens in the Bible, mentioned as places of encounter between humans and God. By specifying the elements of their construction and interactions that took place in them, one can conclude how they could look like and what *genius loci* they could have, and finally, to what degree and in what way they could be the expression of human desire of God. This may provide an inspiration for future landscape architects who may refer to biblical gardens in the present times, designing gardens which people can visit around the World.

As Jeremi Królikowski writes “Contemporary architects, including landscape architects, no longer look for the spirit of a place, they no longer notice, or recall it. Architecture has lost its initial word arche-source from its term. Only the cardboard remained – a mere packaging” (Królikowski 2011).

## 1. The Garden of Eden

When talking about the garden as a special place for human encounters with God, it is worth taking a closer look at the place of the first meeting presented by the narrator of the Old Testament, which is a kind of definition of a garden. In the Book of Genesis, it is written: “then the Lord God formed the man out of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the East, and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food.

The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers. (...) The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it" (Gen. 2:7-15). "The garden was separated by God from the space created by Him, closed, isolated, and protected, and the people and objects in the garden gained additional, absolute value, thus elevated to the rank of *sacred*. From its very beginning, paradise was a *sacred* area, because God walked in it" (Kobiellus 1997, 79).

The Garden of Eden is a model of a space where a person can find the Creator Himself and have a close, natural relationship with Him. There is no temple here because there is no need for a specially designated meeting place, man is with God in the entire area of the garden. In this first garden, man discovers God, meets Him, talks, and hears the rustling of His steps. At the same time, he gets to know nature, the names of the plants that grow there and eats their fruits. He looks after the animals that live in harmony here. However, it is not only a place of idyll and immaculately beautiful space and an ideal existence but also in the context of a relationship with God, a place of fall, failure, and sin. By eating the forbidden fruit from the tree, placed as a prohibition sign in the middle of the garden, man crosses the boundary set by God. The first man covers his nakedness with the leaves of the fig tree, the only tree species in the Garden of Eden mentioned by name. Adam and Eve begin to hide (behind the tree) from God, avoid meeting Him, and finally learn the consequences of their fall. As a spiritual meeting place with God, the garden of Eden is full of extremes. First comes the experience of unconditional love, closeness to God, and then the punishment of disobedience to God's command, resulting in a separation. All the time, however, man is cared for, and still loved by God, despite the new state of sin into which he falls. From now on, the human heart will always

struggle with the desire to put itself above the will of God, and wrongdoing will entail God's punishment (Farmer et al. 2000, 280).

Man expelled from paradise will think of it as a lost place, will miss it, and create its substitutes so that he can return to it even if for a moment and experience the original relationship with God. There is a spiritual experience taking place in the Garden of Eden, the consequences of which are presented in the Bible in stories, many of which take place in the gardens. What created the unique atmosphere of this garden? These were four rivers, beautiful trees (including the fig, the leaves of which Adam and Eve used to cover their nakedness), cultivated fields (also open space), edible fruit, numerous and diverse species of plants and animals, and a close, similar creature accompanying man. The composition of the garden was emphasized by the tree of life growing in the central part and the tree of knowledge of good and evil, which was an inspiration for later garden arrangements.

Looking at this garden in the context of *genius loci*, it could be deduced that the light in the garden can be described as sufficient, the time is dynamic, and the main rhythm is subordinate to work (due to the field being cultivated and to the task of naming plants), its identity is specific, and the character is naturalistic and slightly nostalgic. One can notice a logical structure, an absolute order of space, a rich structure of the ground, and an accessible sky. Most of these elements point out that the Garden of Eden had a cosmic spirit.

## 2. The Garden in the Book of Songs of Solomon

Another Old Testament garden is the one we read about in the Book of Songs of Solomon. It is described as beautiful, sensual, and surrounded by a wall. It is both a scene and a person (Song 4:12-5, 1; 6:1-3; 6:11-12; 7:11-14), filled with countless plant species such as pomegranates, cypresses, narcissus, saffron, myrrh, aromatic reed, aloe, fig, henna as well as apple, ebony, and bulbous plants.

The vineyard in its area is also mentioned several times. In literature, we find numerous interpretations of the meaning of this garden and the events that take place there. A young woman – the Bride, identified with the Church in early Christian commentaries, who is at the centre of the lyrical dialogue, searches for her Bridegroom, that is, Christ.

In the Jewish tradition, however, the poem depicts a symbolic relationship between Israel and God. “Several themes are cited in endless variations of presence and absence; searching and finding; desire and mutual possession; the voice of a loved one, sleep, and awakening, eating and drinking; or, finally, the uniqueness of a loved one. These themes are developed with vivid images that appeal to the imagination and the senses: sight (Song 4:1), hearing (Song 2:8), taste (Song 4:11), smell (Song 4:11), and touch (Song 4:11)” (Farmer et al. 2000, 781-782).

The person of the Bride is likened to the unique closed garden of paradise (Song 4:12; 4:15), which symbolizes the fact that she belongs exclusively to the Bridegroom, but she is also compared to a garden that is constantly regenerating itself and fruitful (Farmer et al. 2000, 789). The Bride is described in terms of the flora: the rose of Sharon, the lily of the valleys (Song 2:1), or the flowers of the lily among the thorns (Song 2:2) (a symbol of holiness, grace, virginity, and innocence), her temples to pomegranates (Song 4:3c; Song 6:7) (a symbol of fertility, beauty, abundance, and harmony) and her belly to a heap of wheat surrounded by roses (Song 7:3), but also to the fauna: breasts for deer (Song 5:1; Song 7:4) or dates (Song 7:8b), hair for herds of goats (Song 6:5b), eyes to pigeons (Song 6:9), and teeth to a flock of sheep (Song 6:6), the whole figure to a slender palm tree (Song 7:8), and even to a building: its neck to a tower (Song 4:4) or to phenomena: aurora, moon (Song 6:10b) or the sun (Song 6:10c). On her search for the beloved one, the woman asks the people she meets if they have not seen him (Song 3:1-4). The lover is compared to a magnificent cedar (Song 5:15) and is

found outside the city, in his garden among walnut trees, pomegranates, vineyards, and flowers of fertile trees, in a forest covered corner of the garden.

“The repetition of images and motifs plays a greater role than just parallelism or ‘echo’. Using this means of expression, the poet points to the transforming power of love, thanks to which a person resembles a loved one, he begins to profess the same values, has the same desires, feelings, and with time even external features. The stylistic means used by the poet thus subtly shows the strengthening bond between the spouses” (International Commentary on the Holy Scriptures 2000, 788). This is an inspiration and a guideline how to create the spirit of the place through the richness of flora, trees bearing good fruit such as palms, figs (and thanks to them also shade), useful plants – vines, herbs, the presence of fresh water and spices (Song 4:15-16). This garden, with complex *genius loci*, intimate and contradictory at the same time, remains in relation to the city.

The garden in the Book of Song of Solomon has an allegorical character although there appear some characteristic elements of gardens (such as a vineyard). In the earth category – the soil is simultaneously unchanging and varied, and the sky is within reach. The garden is adequately illuminated, surprising, and somewhat unstable, its main rhythm is subordinate to the communication, a bit irrational and contradictory with polyphonic, changeable character, sad but also joyful. Most of the features of this garden point to its romantic spirit.

### 3. The Garden of Gethsemane

This place is described in the New Testament, in Matthew 26:6-46; 56; Mark 14:32-42; Luke 22:39-46; John 18:1-12. It is located near the city, on the west side at the foot of the Mount of Olives, a place where Jehovah was worshiped in the past. Thus, the garden of Gethsemane, overlooking the eastern part of the Temple Mount, was a special place for Jesus to choose for

prayer and for conversation with his disciples. The olive trees located there, known for their longevity, were a symbol of eternal life, election and anointing by God, and making peace between God and man because the olive branch brought to Noah by a dove meant God's forgiveness and the withdrawal of the flood waters (Włodarczyk 2011, 150). The Mount of Olives was also called the Mountain of Anointing because the oil from the trees growing there was used to anoint kings or priests (Włodarczyk 2011, 152). This time it becomes the scene of an exceptional encounter between man and God. After eating the last supper with his disciples, Jesus leaves the safe upper room. Because they left, the sacred zone created in the *sacrum* becomes unspoiled by Judas' transgression and subsequent events. Jesus enters the Olive Garden, which here serves as a buffer zone between the sphere of the sacred and of the profane.

The Evangelist John says that in order to reach the Olive Garden, Jesus "(...) went out with his disciples over the Kidron Brook. There was a garden into which He and His disciples entered. Also, Judas, who betrayed him, knew this place, because Jesus and his disciples often gathered there" (Jn. 18:1-2). There Jesus, having retired to a quiet part of the garden, a stone's throw away (Lk. 22:41), in a moment of fear, prays: "Father, if you wish, take this cup from me" (Lk. 22:42).

Jesus as a human being, facing the coming suffering and death, meets God, his Father. On the one hand, this garden belongs to the sacred zone, because it becomes a place of Jesus' prayer and meeting with the Father, and on the other hand, it is profanum zone as a place of betrayal and handing over the Messiah to passion and death.

As for the elements that make up the *genius loci* of the Garden of Gethsemane, one should mention the hill, the stream, and the olive trees, possibly all creating an intimate atmosphere, thus allowing Jesus to pray in private despite the relatively short distance from the city. The events described took place on a chilly evening, which underlines

the gloom of that moment. It is the saddest of the studied gardens, and the characteristic of being a safe place, in this case, does not follow the description of the garden as such. The way of the mythical understanding of the landscape of the Garden of Gethsemane in terms of *genus loci* results from the original experience of the natural space that a mountain is. It belongs to the earth, but it rises to heaven. "Mountains are places whose landscape creates the structure of the revelation of Being. In addition to these properties of mountains, there is also the hardness and constancy of the stone as a material. Rocks and stones were of fundamental importance in many cultures due to their indestructibility" (Królikowski and Rylke 2010, 183).

As regards the Garden of Gethsemane, there is a certain grouping of things – the ground is mainly uniform in character with only slight differentiation. The heaven cannot be seen because of the darkness resulting from the late hours of the day (the time of the prayer and arrest of Jesus). It is omitted as an irrelevant or, simply, a natural element. The mention of the torches in the text may suggest that the natural lighting of the place is at least insufficient (Jn. 18:3). As regards the parameter of time, it is varied and quite stable, the character is polyphonic, concrete, rather naturalistic, and sad. The atmosphere of the garden indicates a cosmic spirit.

#### 4. Garden by Jesus' tomb

The Evangelist John writes "Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in it a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. So, because of the Jewish day of Preparation, since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there" (Jn. 19:41-42). This is an extremely important place where people meet with God, and the events of the resurrection morning are described in great detail in the Gospel of John (Jn. 20:11-18). After Jesus was crucified, Joseph of Arimathea came to Pontius Pilate and asked him for Jesus' body to be buried in



a new rock-cut tomb that he had prepared in the event of His death. Here, the tearful Mary comes looking for the body of her Master, instead of that she meets with the living, resurrected Jesus. When John describes the scenes taking place after Jesus' resurrection, he calls this place a garden, and from the fact that Mary Magdalene takes Jesus as a gardener, it should be concluded that the garden where Jesus' tomb was located was taken care of by a properly educated person. The women who come here at dawn, when they see the empty tomb, feel fear. Aware of what has already happened, they experience God's power, Jesus' being brought back to life. They are overwhelmed with amazement, confusion, and uncertainty, so there is silence. "Dawn for biblical authors is not only the moment when the light struggles with and overcomes darkness, but also a moment of mighty interventions by God. As the night is conquered by the sun's light, so evil is conquered by God's grace. Jesus is resurrected at dawn. Death, which is a consequence of sin, is overcome" (Rosik 2004, 35).

In the tomb, Mary looked for the physical, human body of Jesus. Meanwhile, the risen Christ, standing behind her back, first calls her "woman", later by the name "Miriam", that is, He uses the name by which she was referred to by those who know her, which suggests a close relationship. The woman gradually turns towards the speaker, not recognizing Him as the Teacher at first. The gradual recognition of the "gardener" becomes for the evangelist the paradigm of the believer's journey from confusion to Easter joy. This transition from the state of sadness to the state of joy, from ignorance to recognition of Jesus, is shown on the basis of the model of changing Mary's position towards Jesus and towards the grave (Rosik 2004, 126).

Turning to Jesus, Mary has her back to the tomb. This change, according to Rosik, suggests a new beginning in her life. "Death is already behind the back, it has been left behind, while the source of life stands in

front of her" (Rosik 2004, 127). This garden is a place of confrontation and a question that can be asked: Does God know your name? Has there been a turning away from the past, sin, and unbelief toward Christ? If a man finds himself in it and is accompanied by relief and joy (like that of Mary Magdalene's), it may mean that he has met a living God. "Both in the narrative about paradise in Genesis 2-3 and in the story about the empty tomb in John 20, the same or similar motifs and threads appear, among which some of the most important is the garden theme, the search thread related to the name motif, celestial beings or the motif of covering the body" (Rosik 2004, 113).

This short description of the garden contains references to neither the fence nor the vegetation or the water. The only thing that is certain here is the grave. Does this call into question the fact that the place is a garden? Probably not, for it does not mean that those elements were not there. What has been given may be used in order to try and define the spirit of the place. The *genius loci* of this garden is associated with the time of day and light, dawn, with the grotto as an ordered and geometric element creating a spatial order, and with the interior which has limited access to light, creating an atmosphere of reverie and nostalgia. The components of this place point to the classical spirit. The search for and meeting of man with God are first marked by sorrow and then turn into inexpressible joy. It can be said that the separation that man experienced in the Garden of Eden is finally brought to the end in this garden.

## 5. New Jerusalem

The last garden is the New Jerusalem. The city garden is described in Revelation chapters 21 and 22. "(...) only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Rev 21:27b). It is a future place, full of harmony and perfect balance, permeated with light and the presence of God. "There is no temple in the city in question because God Himself came here to live with His people,

the whole city is, therefore, a temple, that is, the presence of God" (International Commentary on the Holy Scriptures 2000, 1703).

Likewise, there was no temple in Eden because God walked freely in it. In the centre of the New Jerusalem, from under the Throne of the Lamb (Rev 22:1), a river of life shining like crystal will flow, with a tree of life growing on both banks (Rev 22:2), bearing fruit twelve times a year, covered with leaves with healing powers for the nations. The description of the New Jerusalem in Revelation (21:10; 22:1-2) characterizes the *genius loci* and confirms that the most basic elements of sacred places are a microcosm of rock, water, and trees. The presented place is logical in its entire structure (Rev 21:12-21). It is surrounded by a wall adorned with every kind of jewel and twelve gates built out of pearls. It is full of light, the source of which is God Himself (Rev 22:5b), and there will be no night there (Rev 22:5). The *genius loci* connected with the Earth here is created by the very rich structure of the ground, golden roads, the earth under trees, and the river. Reading the descriptions, it is clear that they fit into the absolute order of the space. As regards the category of 'time', the main rhythm is subordinated to the *sacred*. The landscape has an expressive, joyful urban character. Such places are never chosen by man, they reveal themselves to him (Królikowski and Rylke 2010, 183).

The New Jerusalem is supposed to be the final place of man's encounter and abode with God at the end of time, where the history of the salvation of man who has left paradise and will return to paradise will make a full circle. "He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" (Rev 21:3b-4). By taking the risk of naming the *genius loci* of the New Jerusalem, one

may risk subordinating it to the classical spirit.

## Conclusion

Although undoubtedly all nature reveals the glory of its Creator and many of His attributes, the gardens of the Bible are special places for this manifestation. The Bible shows a garden as the place of human first and final encounter with God. The place where man is created by God at the beginning of his history, which he then leaves through disobedience, where he meets God in love, like the Bride with the Bridegroom, where he seeks solace in the hour of trial and meets God in the face of suffering and death, like Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Finally, the garden is a place where the deceased is mourned, but also where the mourning are consoled thanks to the encounter with the living Jesus, as it happened to Mary Magdalene. The New Jerusalem, which the prophet Isaiah had already foretold, is also depicted as a garden (Is. 65:17-25).

One can undertake a discussion about the nature of the gardens examined here. The aim of the analysis was to trace the presence of such elements as a fence, water in the garden or nearby, the presence of ornamental and/or fruit trees and vegetation, the rock grottos, and hills encountered in it, as well as the time in which people met with God at its territory.

In conclusion, there are no universal parameters or elements that are present at the same time in all the gardens mentioned in this article. Referring to the above-described encounter of man and God in the gardens of the Bible, it can be said that each of these meetings carries an inner vision of these gardens. In particular, the Garden of Eden, as a lost paradise, seems to represent the subconscious longing of mankind to return to a perfectly designed world. Heavenly *genius loci* is, therefore, something that a man looks for when he thinks of a garden as being sacred.

When perceived as an inspiration for creating a space with a desirable atmosphere for man to meet God, one should take into account the above-mentioned biblical context, and include as many elements of *genius loci* as possible from one of the gardens. Such a garden may become a safe place of inspiration and abundance similar to the species-rich Eden. A joyful backdrop for a blossoming love may be achieved through the use of a colour palette and a wealth of species plants drawing inspiration from the garden from the Song of Solomon, or, maybe a place of contemplation, just as the surroundings of Jesus in the orchard of Gethsemane or the rock in the garden at his tomb. Finally, another inspiration may be provided by the place permeated with a sense of stability and eternal fulfilment presented in the vision of the New Jerusalem. Quite simple, rich in a variety of materials but well arranged. Creating an inspirational place of contemplation should be preceded by contemplating the inspiration of creation.

God Himself placed man in the garden, He decided that this was the best place for him. This should answer the question “where is it possible to experience His presence?” Why was the garden and not just the mountains or the desert the place where man began his life? A garden separated from the vastness of space, arranged by God, gives a sense of security, care, abundance, and an opportunity to see its borders and notice what is in it. Perhaps also the awareness of the near presence of God may increase within the borders of a garden and not necessarily in the vast space that is difficult to embrace. Or maybe, it increases by the fact that God was in this place first? In the garden of Eden, Gethsemane, at the tomb, or in New Jerusalem, He was there first, waiting for man. He sanctified the ground on which he walked. Or maybe because maintaining a garden and its crops requires work and is an opportunity for spiritual development?

After all, perhaps because of its proximity and greater accessibility, the garden slightly surpasses the natural landscape. God is in

the garden and if man is looking for Him, he will find Him. While searching, he will look after the garden, and during the time spent in it, when he puts his thoughts under the action of the Holy Spirit, he will open up and get to know Him better. *Genius loci* – the atmosphere of a place can help man to tune himself in, to focus and it will enhance his delight. The atmosphere in Eden encouraged man to discover the world, name the animals, pursue his work, obey and experience the natural presence of God. The atmosphere of abundance and wealth in the garden of Song of Songs fuelled admiration, love, and a desire to meet, and share this beauty with Him, aroused the spirit of closeness, and longing for God. The *genius loci* of the dark Garden of Gethsemane, the simplicity of the dry olive orchard, but also the seclusion of the place help to calm down and listen to God’s will. The circumstances of the garden next to the empty tomb led to concentration, reflection, and a great discovery of identity. A personal, intimate conversation with Jesus helps to realize not only His but also one’s own identity. The prospect of God’s omnipresence in the New Jerusalem, a perfectly arranged landscape, in balance, with the life-giving, crystal-clear water and healthy, fertile, constantly fruiting trees, whose leaves have healing properties, simple but enchanting with richness, safe, stable, and a perfect place where time does not matter. The atmosphere emphasizes the attributes of the Creator.

All these places were gardens. Was it possible to get to know these attributes of God only here? Probably not. God is not limited by the wall of the garden; He is a sovereign. It is man who may need limitation and concentration to get to know the Creator. Apparently, it is easier for God to communicate this in places where a person expects Him than elsewhere. Just as walking around the Holy Land, being there for the first time, the awareness that Jesus Christ walked on it, may deeply move a person and induce the feeling of expectation of His special presence. It makes people more open

to the experience of the Creator. God who walked in the gardens, sanctified it, perhaps more than a forest, a mountain, a sea, or a desert. Often more accessible than the sea, mountains, or desert, they offer space available and possible to contemplate at almost any moment by practicing what they all have in common, the manifestation of love and mindfulness.

It is impossible to create a universal place where God will come. There is no temple, man is the temple (1 Cor. 3:16-17). Only, humans can be in a place of internal readiness for such a meeting. This article is an attempt to answer what external conditions influence the opening of human actions, analogous to the meetings in the gardens of the Bible. In the era of a crisis of faith, perhaps creating a similar space will induce a person to stay in a place where *genius loci* – the spirit of the place meets the Holy Spirit and works in the temple which is the human soul. Further research could develop in the direction of how a given garden space influences the spiritual experience of the recipient.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Not applicable.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

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