Biblical Imagery and Educational Imagination: Comenius and the Garden of Delight

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The main aim of this chapter is to explore how a particular image from the early chapters of the Bible influenced a particular understanding of education that has in turn significantly influenced modern Western educational thought and practice and is well placed to speak afresh to our situation. The image in question is the “garden of delight” of Genesis 2, and the educational thinker in question is the great 17th-century Moravian John Amos Comenius, sometimes referred to as the father of modern education. Comenius’ reflections on the classroom, the teacher, and the learner as “gardens of delight” offer a rich case study of a biblically informed imagination at work. They also, as I will suggest in the closing sections of the chapter, have relevant things to say to current educational debates. Before turning directly to the garden of delight, however, I will first briefly sketch a further reason for taking an interest in Comenius’ musings, on having to do with how the connection between faith and learning is pursued.

1. Faith, Learning and Metaphor

Some accounts of the relationship of the Bible to learning have regarded that relationship as basically a matter of rightly understanding relationships between propositions. On the one hand, we have a set of propositions forming the content of Christian belief. On the other hand, we have the actual or potential propositions that provide the substance of the disciplines. Christian scholarship, then, involves tracing and stating the logical connections or discontinuities between the two sets of propositions. Alvin Plantinga, for instance, once stated the task of the Christian scholar in terms of working out and stating “a large number of propositions, each explicating the bearing of the faith on some part of the discipline in question.”¹ Given this starting point, further debate focuses upon the kinds of relationships that hold – deduction, induction, permission, requirement, commendation, comportment and the like.² This emphasis supports the desire to distinguish intellectually defensible points of contact between Christian theology and other disciplines from “pseudointegration,” where biblical references and images are used for the purposes of illustration or analogy but have little logical bearing on the scholarly topic under discussion.³ Careful Christian scholars understandably wish to avoid propagating imagined connections between Scripture and scholarship grounded in rhetorical flights of fancy rather than theoretical sophistication.

One factor that greatly complicates this picture is the renewed recognition over the past several decades of the constructive role of imagination in framing inquiry, and in particular the renewed recognition that metaphors can be theory-constitutive rather than

¹ Alvin Plantinga, The Twin Pillars of Christian Scholarship (Grand Rapids: Calvin College and Seminary, 1990) 60.
merely decorative, and that a great deal of our theorizing is rooted in and organized by imagery that both guides and obscures our reflections. To understand the world is in many cases to see it as fundamentally this kind of thing rather than that kind, to see, for instance, the mind as a kind of computer or knowledge as a house with foundations or schools as marketplaces. In many areas of discussion, especially those dealing with basic questions of orientation, a significant part of what we do as scholars is to propose imagery to one another, imagery that invites shifts of viewpoint and bids to guide our collective perception of the matter at hand. This is very broadly the case, but perhaps shows up most forcefully in our attempts to understand intangible and normative matters such as love, knowing, spirit, mind, teaching, responsibility, virtue, and so on, matters which we are often greatly helped to see at all by seeing them as something other than themselves.

Not surprisingly, both theological and educational discussion has partaken richly of this metaphorical practice. Groups of metaphors drawn, for instance, from the economic sphere (schools as factories or marketplaces, teachers as managers, learners as consumers, the curriculum as a delivered product), the domestic sphere (teachers as parents, schools as families) or the horticultural sphere (teachers as gardeners, learners as plants, learning as natural growth) have given rise to and sustained distinct patterns of educational theory and practice. In education, as in other disciplines, the idea that metaphors are not merely decoration, but rather help to constitute and direct our thinking, has been widely noted.

Given ongoing discussion from various points on the theological map of the role of metaphor and imagination in theological reflection, this invites an obvious question in the present context: what happens if imagery drawn from a biblical context migrates into educational discussion and begins to organize ideas there? What if theological imagination and educational imagination become intertwined? That this has happened at various points in educational history seems quite clearly the case – consider, for instance (in addition to the example discussed at length below), the tendency in British educational discussion to discuss extra-curricular concern for the emotional and moral wellbeing of students as “pastoral care” (there is even a journal titled Pastoral Care in Education which has nothing directly to do with ecclesiological concerns, still less with

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sheep and hillsides). But “has happened” does not entail “should happen”; is this merely “pseudointegration” or something more substantial?

I would freely grant that such practices may very often, if not most of the time, be dubious. It is possible to borrow images more or less at random from the Bible and use them in educational contexts, but this practice may have little, if any, theological or educational legitimacy, for several reasons. The Bible takes its images and metaphors from human experience, and there seems to be no reason to suppose that the images found in the Bible are in themselves specially authorized as images, apart from their particular discursive role in the thought-world of Scripture. In the Bible God is described as a fortress - but there seems little reason to suppose that thinking of the school teacher or the math worksheet as a fortress would necessarily be an especially ‘biblical’ thing to do. The particular force of a metaphor is, furthermore, conditioned by its textual context. An image may be used in a particular educational discourse, and may also happen to occur in the Bible – but the educational use in context may express meanings quite foreign to those of the biblical text. It should also be noted that harvesting imagery at will from the Bible may not be automatically helpful. The fruitfulness of a metaphor in one context is no guarantee that it will be illuminating in a different context. Even if a metaphor works powerfully in communicating a sense of how we should view some aspect of salvation, it may turn out to stimulate no particularly helpful lines of thought if we try to use it as a way of seeing, say, a school timetable. Taken together with the unfortunate tendency in certain kinds of Christian school textbooks to leap cheerfully from, say, the mechanics of short division to the need to flee worldly concerns because the time is short (an actual example from a middle-school math text), under the apparent impression that some meaningful connection exists by virtue of mere word association, these concerns give legitimate grounds for circumspection.7

Granting all of this, however, there do seem nevertheless to be instances where the metaphorical rope connecting biblical and educational discourse is woven of tougher strands. It is commonly noted that metaphors do not simply make single feature comparisons, but open up broader webs of meaning that become transferred to new areas of perception.8 It is also often the case that these webs of meaning depend not only on our personal experiences of the world, but on our experiences of other texts. For most modern, Western readers, for instance, the field of meaning opened up by “The Lord is my shepherd” is not rooted in direct experience of shepherds and sheep, but is mediated by commentary, preaching, the wider biblical context and various forms of general knowledge from various media; ideas and images from these other texts inhabit the resonances to which this metaphor gives rise when we encounter it. Sometimes metaphors that emerge from the Bible come to be used to talk about education in systematic ways that continue to evoke the webs of meaning associated with them in biblical interpretation, thereby causing at least some of the normative concerns of the biblical text and its commentators to become active in the educational imagination. This, I shall argue, is what happened with the garden of delight.

2. The Garden of Delight as a School

Comenius embraced his own equivalent of current notions of theory-constitutive metaphor, arguing for the necessity of three forms of inquiry: analysis, synthesis and syncrisis. The last of the three involved the making of apt comparisons in order to gain insight into the interconnectedness of reality. A central cluster of imagery in his writings on education has to do with gardens and the processes of gardening. He sees both the school and the learner as a garden, the teacher as one who waters, cultivates and prunes, the learners as grafts and saplings, and suggests that school textbooks should be named after parts of a garden. I have discussed Comenius’ appropriation of garden imagery in more general terms elsewhere; in what follows I would like to consider in more detail how the trail led from the biblical text to early modern educational theory.

The Great Didactic, one of Comenius’ most influential texts, is prefaced by a dedicatory letter that opens with extended and overtly theological commentary on the garden of delight:

“God, having created man out of dust, placed him in a Paradise of desire, which he had planted in the East, not only that man might tend it and care for it, but also that he might be a garden of delight for his God.

For as Paradise was the pleasantest part of the world, so also was man the most perfect of things created. In Paradise each tree was delightful to look at, and more pleasant to enjoy than those which grew throughout the earth. In man the whole material of the world, all the forms and the varieties of forms were, as it were, brought together into one in order to display the whole skill and wisdom of God. Paradise contained the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; man had the intellect to distinguish, and the will to choose between the good and the bad. In Paradise was the tree of life. In man was the tree of Immortality itself; that is to say, the wisdom of God, which had planted its eternal roots in man.

And so each man is, in truth, a Garden of Delights for his God, as long as he remains in the spot where he has been placed. The Church too, which is a collection of men devoted to God, is often in Holy Writ likened to a Paradise, to a garden, to a vineyard of God. But alas for our misfortune! We have at the same time lost the Paradise of bodily delight in which we were, and that of spiritual delight, which we were ourselves. We have been cast out into the deserts of the earth, and have ourselves become wild and horrible wildnesses.”

This passage prefaces an extended (and historically important) treatise on education in which the image of the garden of delight is regularly used to frame ideas about teaching.

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11 The extant English translation cited here both abridges this letter and omits the biblical cross-references included in the Latin text.
and learning. In keeping with the opening passage just cited, in which human beings are seen both as placed in a garden of delight and as themselves being a garden of delight, Comenius goes on to figure both the learner and the educational institution as called to be ‘gardens of delight’ – the learner, like the first humans in paradise, is not only to inhabit a garden of delight in the guise of the justly ordered classroom, but also to be a garden of delight insofar as he or she grows in erudition, virtue and piety through learning.

We might easily leap to the conclusion that we have here a variant of the familiar Romantic appeal to nature in opposition to civilization – learners as little plants that will blossom on their own if exposed to the air and sun. We would be wrong; such a picture does not reflect Comenius’ thought. Although his own experiential delight in gardens does play a role, the image is first and foremost intertextual. Tracing its sources illuminates its particular shape, and the influence of Scripture on Comenius’ educational imagination.

Creation and Fall

The first and most obvious source is the description of the Garden of Eden in the opening chapters of the Hebrew Scriptures. The “garden of delight” is in fact identical with the Garden of Eden. The overt initial point of contact is Genesis 2:15, rendered in modern English translation as “The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.” The word “Eden” is, however, also a Hebrew noun for delight, and the phrase “Garden of Eden” can therefore be translated instead as “garden of delight.” This phrase in Genesis 2:15 is in fact rendered in Latin translations as “paradisum voluptatis”, or “paradise of delight”; this is the phrase that appears repeatedly in the Latin of Comenius’ *Great Didactic*. Talk of the “garden of delight” is thus a directly biblical allusion, reflecting Comenius’ extensive first-hand immersion in Scripture as a bishop and theologian.

This does not explain, however, the shift from the image of being placed in a garden to the idea that each of us is a garden. This shift can already be found early in Christian interpretation of Genesis 2. Saint Augustine’s literal commentary on Genesis provides a striking example. Augustine’s discussion of Eden shifts smoothly from the image of Adam cultivating the garden to that of God cultivating Adam. Commenting on Genesis 2:15, our key verse, Augustine offers the following translation: “The Lord God took the man whom he had made and placed him in Paradise to cultivate him (that is, to work in him) and to guard him.” This is (at least in linguistic terms) a legitimate translation from Augustine’s sources – the Greek and Latin pronouns can point to the person or the

14 Genesis 2:15 is explicitly cited in the opening sentence of the Latin edition – the reference is omitted in the English translation - and the invocation of Eden is extended in the Latin original with description of the four rivers flowing from the garden and a parallel drawn between these and the living waters of the Holy Spirit giving spiritual gifts to humans. See Klaus Schaller, ed., *Johann Amos Comenius: Ausgewählte Werke*, vol. 1 (Hildesheim/New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1973) 19. All biblical quotations in this chapter are taken from the New International Version.
garden, “to guard it” or “to guard him.” The garden thus ends up functioning both as an environment that the human creature cultivates and as a figure for the human creature being (in Augustine’s words) “made just” as he is cultivated by God: Adam is in a garden and he is a garden.

It seems likely that the choice of “him” over “it” was aided by the allegorical approach to the early chapters of Genesis adopted by Augustine’s teacher Ambrose and also found in other church fathers and in Philo. Ambrose maintained that “by Paradise is meant the soul of man”, that the serpent represents the pleasures of the body, the woman is the senses or emotions, the man is the mind, the beasts are the irrational senses, the birds are idle thoughts, the fruits on the trees are the virtues, and so on. The allegorical meaning of Genesis 2:15, with its talk of Adam cultivating the garden, is thus roughly that we are charged with cultivating our souls by exercising mastery over the body and the emotions in order that virtue might grow. The common use of imagery of trees, gardens and irrigation to portray the spiritual growth and general wellbeing of persons later in the Bible in the wisdom literature (see e.g. Job 8:16, Psalm 1, Song of Solomon 4:14-16, among other passages), no doubt did much to support this line of thinking, both for Ambrose and for Comenius. The conjunction of literal and allegorical readings together with the presence of ambiguous pronouns gives us the image of the human creature both being in a garden and being a garden, both cultivating and being cultivated.

A further factor helped to connect Eden with teaching. Ambrose, with other early commentators, notes that Eve was not present when the original command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was given by God, and infers that the command must have been taught to Eve by Adam. Since Eve’s recollection of the command when questioned by the serpent appears faulty (she adds a detail about not touching the tree, Genesis 3:3), something may have gone wrong with the teaching and learning process, with disastrous results. The association of the serpent with false teachers that can be found in 2 Corinthians 11:2-3, where Paul worries that false preachers and apostles will deceive the Corinthian Christians “as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning,” and in 1 Timothy 2:12-14, where Paul says that women are not to teach since “the woman was deceived,” was also not lost on patristic commentators. Jager points out further the relevance of the desire to resist Gnostic teachings, according to which the serpent was the source of secret wisdom which was transmitted to Adam by Eve, resulting in the gain of God-like knowledge by both. On this heretical view, Eve represented a higher spiritual principle that first awakened Adam, or the soul, to awareness of its spiritual nature, and the serpent was commonly referred to as her “Instructor”. Patristic authors felt it necessary in response to emphasize the opposite teaching hierarchy, in which the male bishop is the source and guardian of correct teaching and there is no place for female teachers. In connection with this interpretation

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of Eden in terms of the legitimation of clerical teaching, paradise came to figure the church as well as the individual soul.\textsuperscript{19}

If we add as final garnishes the tendency to see various details of Eden, whether the river or the tree of life, as representing Wisdom, and the influence of the classical idea of the garden as a place of philosophical dialogue, then we have a recipe formed from a potent mix of exegesis, allegory, heresy and history for thinking of the Garden of Eden as a school and for thinking of learners both as being gardens and as being in gardens. The story of the Paradise of Delight and the Fall into sin comes to include an \textit{educational} drama occurring in a morally and religiously charged site of instruction. The use of imagery of the garden to figure the spiritual growth of the believer continues to appear in later Christian writers (as, for instance, in Bernard of Clairvaux’s discussions of the “garden of the heart” in his sermons on the Song of Solomon\textsuperscript{20}), and continues to be associated with instruction, as in the twelfth century quasi-encyclopedia authored by the Abbess Herrad of Hohenbourg for the instruction of her nuns and titled \textit{Hortus Deliciarium, or Garden of Delights}.

In the \textit{Great Didactic}, Comenius comments: “It is evident...that even before the Fall, a school in which he might make gradual progress was opened for man in Paradise”;\textsuperscript{22} here he explicitly works out of the tradition just sketched and transfers the imagery from the church to the day school classroom. In keeping with his wider turn to the world of experience in his pedagogy, he does not reproduce the patristic focus on correct transmission of doctrine, but instead draws from the Eden narrative the point that humans must learn from experience. With more experience, Eve would have known that snakes do not talk and would have suspected deception.\textsuperscript{23} Although the emphasis has shifted, however, Comenius does invoke here both the tradition of paradise as a school and the connection between the Fall and failed learning. Careful education is, he goes on to argue, even more necessary after the Fall, now that corruption has taken hold and opposes growth. Recall the emphases of the passage already cited from the dedicatory letter: since the Fall both the school classroom and the individuals in it fail to exist naturally as gardens of delight and are always caught up in the tension between garden and wilderness. This imagery and its biblical context frame key aspects of Comenius’ educational theory. His insistence, for instance, that erudition, virtue and piety cannot be separated, and that teaching and learning have to be conceived as always essentially moral and spiritual as well as cognitive enterprises, comports well with the tradition of the school as an echo of Eden.\textsuperscript{24}

\textbf{Shalom}

\textsuperscript{19} Jager, \textit{Tempter’s Voice} 27.
\textsuperscript{22} Keatinge, \textit{Didactic} 53-54.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
Before going further into Comenius’ ideas, however, there is more to be said about the biblical origins of his use of the garden of delight, and about ways in which it goes beyond the account sketched thus far. Another strand of interpretation of Eden can be found within the Bible, in the writings of the Hebrew prophets, in which the garden functions as an image not of pre-social innocence, conservative hierarchy or the individual soul growing in virtue, but of society ordered by peaceful relationships and characterized by flourishing. In the book of Joel, for instance, a metaphorical account of military invasion says of the incoming armies “the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness” (Joel 2:3), offering a basic opposition of garden and wilderness that is echoed in Comenius’ rhetoric. In Ezekiel, prophecies of restoration echo this opposition in reverse:

“On the day I cleanse you from all your sins, I will resettle your towns, and the ruins will be rebuilt. The desolate land will be cultivated instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass through it. They will say, “This land that was laid waste has become like the garden of Eden; the cities that were lying in ruins, desolate and destroyed, are now fortified and inhabited” (Ezekiel 36:35).

These passages do not use the garden as an image of unspoiled nature; they refer to land that is cultivated to sustain human community. As suggested by the emphasis on human cultivation in Genesis 2:15, intentional, formative human activity has a key role in shaping the community of peace, or making it desolate. While God sends judgement, it is soldiers who will ravage the fields. While God promises to resettle, rebuild and cultivate it will be human hands that dig the furrows and lay the bricks. The land is like the garden of Eden when the fields are diligently cared for and produce good food, when people live together without fear of violence, when cities prosper. This state of communal wellbeing, in which relationships are well ordered and can produce delight, is brought about in significant measure by the care and diligence of people.

A related echo of Eden occurs without the war association of the above passages in the fifth chapter of Isaiah, where Israel is pictured as a vineyard planted with vines by an owner who hoped for a plentiful harvest. When he returned at harvest time, however, he found only bad fruit. In response the vineyard owner declares:

“I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns will grow there.” (Isaiah 5:5-6)

Here we see the same contrast as in the other passages: a garden, carefully pruned and fenced and cultivated, will because of hardness of heart turn into a wilderness, a place without shape or comfort or fruit. The passage continues:

“The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the house of Israel,”
and the men of Judah
are the garden of his delight.
And he looked for justice,
but saw bloodshed;
for righteousness,
but heard cries of distress.” (Isaiah 5:7)

This is a tantalizing passage for present purposes, since the phrase rendered in English as “garden of delight” is in Latin versions not paradisum voluptatis but germin delectabile, and so it is difficult to be fully certain whether Comenius had this passage specifically in mind alongside Genesis 1 as he wrote the preface to his Great Didactic. I suspect, however, that it played a role in his thinking, largely because of the close similarity between its ideas and images and those of the preface (the sought-for garden of delight become a wasteland), and it is a clear candidate for being one of the passages he was referring to when he noted in the preface (expanding his own terminology) that “the Church too, which is a collection of men devoted to God, is often in Holy Writ likened to a Paradise, to a garden, to a vineyard of God.”

Two points are particularly interesting about this passage. First, the tale is allegorical and the garden of delight is used as a metaphor for the men of Judah – here we have an antecedent within Scripture for at least some aspects of the patristic move of seeing the garden of delight both as the context within which people are placed by God and as an image of people themselves being cultivated by God. This does not necessarily justify the patristic exegesis of Genesis 2:15; it does suggest, however, that whatever the status of that specific piece of exegesis they were on to something that is part of the larger biblical tapestry. Second, however, note that the central point at issue in the contrast between the garden of delight and the unfruitful vineyard is not whether the individual soul is growing in virtue or whether there is spiritual growth in the inner life, but whether there is justice or violence in social relationships. This chapter of Isaiah continues with examples of the “wild grapes” that are leading to judgement; the first example in the list is a critique of land distribution, in particular the marginalization of the poor as wealthy landowners buy up increasingly large tracts of land: “Woe to you who add house to house and join field to field till no space is left and you live alone in the land” (Isaiah 5:8). The focus here is more on economics than spirituality, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that economics and spirituality are not regarded as separate or separable concerns. The garden of delight is a society of shalom, and that means a just society marked by ethical attentiveness and care for the distressed rather than by selfish acquisition and the flourishing of the powerful. This strand too is present in Comenius’ appropriation of the garden of delight for educational purposes, as we shall see presently.

3. The School as the Garden of Delight

All of the preceding is by way of unpacking the point that Comenius’ use of the garden of delight image is shaped by prior texts, and in particular by biblical imagery. It remains only a sketchy account in historical terms, and is far from exhaustive, but it will suffice

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25 Keatinge, Didactic 11.
for present purposes. When Comenius framed his thoughts on education with meditations on the garden of delight this was not merely because he happened to look out of the window and enjoy the roses, still less because he was a proto-Romantic who thought that learners are little flowers that should be left to blossom in their own fashion. He was invoking a complex tradition of interpretation of Genesis 2:15, both within and subsequent to the biblical canon, and establishing it as a lens through which to view schools, a lens that focuses attention on spiritual and moral growth and the establishment of a just community. This was one of the central ways in which Christian theology influenced his understanding of teaching and learning. In this section I will give some substance to this claim by briefly illustrating how the garden of delight image becomes active in Comenius’ educational reflections.

For Comenius, the ‘garden of delight’ image connects the inner state of the individual, the social setting of the classroom, and the wider social realities of the world at large. The preface to the *Great Didactic*, cited above, lamented that “We have at the same time lost the Paradise of bodily delight in which we were, and that of spiritual delight, which we were ourselves. We have been cast out into the deserts of the earth, and have ourselves become wild and horrible wildernesses.”

The restoration of the self as a garden of delight is to take place through simultaneous and interdependent growth in erudition, virtue and piety – immediately after quoting Genesis 1:26 in connection with the aims of education, Comenius states:

“…it is plain that man is situated among visible creatures so as to be (i.) a rational creature. (ii.) The Lord of all creatures. (iii.) A creature which is the image and joy of its Creator. These three aspects are so joined together that they cannot be separated … From this it follows that man is naturally required to be: (1) acquainted with all things; (2) endowed with power over all things and over himself; (3) to refer himself and all things to God, the source of all. Now if we wish to express these three things by three well-known words, these will be (i.) Erudition. (ii.) Virtue and seemly morals. (iii.) Religion or piety.”

Note the inseparability of these three aspects for Comenius. In brief and somewhat crude summary, Comenius’ view was that as soon as understanding becomes linked to the power to affect other creatures, then reason and ethics are necessarily connected; once thinking affects behavior and behavior affects those around us and the creation we inhabit, then reason and virtue cannot be isolated from one another. Both of these lack the context that would give them point and direction without the further addition of piety – and Comenius defined piety in terms of delight, with explicit reference to garden imagery. He explains that while piety is the gift of God, the Holy Spirit works through human agencies, including parents and teachers who “plant and water the grafts of Paradise.” Piety means “that (after we have thoroughly grasped the conceptions of faith and of religion) our hearts should learn to seek God everywhere…and that when we have

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26 Keatinge, *Didactic* 12.
28 Keatinge, *Didactic* 218.
found Him we should follow Him, and when we have attained him [we] should enjoy Him.”

While the seeking and the following correspond loosely to the exercise of reason and will in Comenius’ schema, the element most distinctive of piety is to “enjoy God by so acquiescing in His love and favour that nothing on earth appears to us more to be desired than God himself.” Piety is thus closely tied both to paradise and to delight, and provides the ultimate reference point for erudition and virtue – the garden of delight thus frames the aims of learning.

Noting the injunctions in Scripture to raise godly children, Comenius reasons that with the participation of God’s Spirit it must be possible for educational agencies to become a means of restoring the garden of the self in place of the personal wilderness. In the *Pampaedia*, a later systematic treatise on education, he poses the question of how we can further human development so that people come to recognize and enjoy the good life. His answer is that “we require an imitation of the School of Paradise, where God revealed the whole choir of His creatures for man to behold.” The ultimate aim of this school of paradise is that the human learner should be led through all of creation to God as its pinnacle and “consent to be captivated, carried away and absorbed by Him (with God’s help).” The original garden of delight forms the point of reference, piety as delight informs the ultimate purpose.

There are practical consequences: if schooling is to lead to the creation of gardens of delight, Comenius argues, then the school itself must change. “Schools”, he writes, “will then be planned to such pleasant effect that they all become gardens of delight.” The school is consequently to be a place that seeks pleasure. It could not serve as a garden of delight without playfulness, and accordingly play comes to take on an important (and historically innovative) role in Comenius’ approach to learning. He is careful to distinguish his use of the term from what he calls “mere amusement,” but gave specific attention to the role of enjoyment in learning in his advocacy of attractive, illustrated learning materials for the classroom, of humane teaching methods, including dialogues and plays, and of literal gardens with animals where young students could take refreshment during the day. It is noteworthy that the prayer that prefaces the Pampaedia is couched in terms of God’s play with us and us learning to play with God and with each other:

“Do thou, everlasting wisdom, who dost play in this world and whose delight is with the sons of men, ensure that we in turn may now find delight in thee. Discover more fully unto us ways and means to better understanding of thy play with us and to more eager pursuance of it with one another, until we ourselves finally play in thy company more

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29 Keatinge, *Didactic* 218.
30 ibid.
31 A. M. O. Dobbie, *Comenius' Pampaedia or Universal Education* (Dover: Buckland, 1986) 29.
32 ibid.
33 Dobbie, *Pampaedia* 56.
34 Keatinge, *Didactic* 251.
effectively to give increasing pleasure unto thee, who art our everlasting delight! Amen!”

In the Great Didactic, Comenius goes as far as to describes the purpose of human existence as being “that we may serve God, his creatures and ourselves, and that we may enjoy the pleasure to be derived from God, from his creatures and from ourselves.” Schooling, accordingly, is to pursue this threefold service and delight as its goal, fostering, for instance, a sense of the attractions of disciplined absorption in the intricacies of creation. Pleasure in self is defined as “that very sweet delight which arises when a man, who is given over to virtue, rejoices in his own honest disposition, since he sees himself prompt to all things which the order of justice requires.” In the midst of this meditation on the relationships between delight, learning and justice we again find explicit reference to paradise as the framing image – a chief reason for focusing on delight, the same passage notes, is that God prepared for the first humans a “paradise of delights.”

The connection between piety, pleasure and “the order of justice” points us outward beyond the individual to social relationships. Delight may not become narcissistic; Since spiritual, rational and ethical growth are not to be separated and are all bound up with our human responsibility for our neighbor and for creation, the restoration of the garden of delight in the individual has to be reflected in the way in which the neighbor and the rest of creation are attended to and treated. The basic aims of education include for Comenius learning “how far our neighbour’s interests should be consulted.” Youth must be taught from the beginning, he urges, “that we are born not for ourselves alone, but for God and for our neighbour, that is to say, for the human race.” This concern, based as it is in creation, extended specifically to members of other cultures. Comenius writes in his Panegersia:

“Bias towards persons, nations, languages and religious sects must be totally eliminated if we are to prevent love or hatred, envy or contempt, or any other emotion from interfering with our plans for happiness…How utterly thoughtless…to hate your neighbour because he was born in another country or speaks a different language …”

Not only people, Comenius notes, but also the rest of creation has suffered from human misuse and longs for deliverance. “It is desirable”, he urges, “…that this hope and longing of creatures should be fulfilled, and that everything everywhere should advance correctly, and that all creatures should have cause to join us in praising God.”

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35 Dobbie, Pampaedia 16.
36 Keatinge, Didactic 72.
37 Keatinge, Didactic 73.
38 ibid.
39 Keatinge, Didactic 37.
40 Keatinge, Didactic 214.
41 John Amos Comenius, Panegersia, or Universal Awakening, trans. A. M. O. Dobbie (Shipston-on-Stour: Peter I. Drinkwater, 1990) 70.
42 Dobbie, Pampaedia 26.
words, an ecologically rooted and distributed delight will not come into being without learning that focuses on ethically motivated and informed service and on the maintenance of just relationships. This conjoining of individual, social and creational wellbeing is summed up, again using the ubiquitous garden image, in Comenius’ statement that the ultimate aim of the school being reformed in imitation of the school of Paradise is that “the entire world will be a garden of delight for God, for people and for things.” All are called to realize their humanity in such a way that they not only become gardens of delight themselves, but in doing so contribute to the realization of the garden of delight as a wider social and ecological reality. Individual piety and social justice are regarded as part of the same larger whole. As education comes to make its contribution to the redemptive process of restoration, there should be a co-dependence between holiness within us and justice among us, peace in our hearts and peace in our society and between societies.

Finally, Comenius argued with explicit reference to the common creation of all humans in the image of God that education had to be provided in common to both rich and poor, to those of both greater and lesser intellectual ability, and to both boys and girls, lest false distinctions of worth between these groups should lead to pride. One of his hallmark commitments is to universal education; this commitment both underlies the title and fills the opening chapter of his *Pampaedia*, where he declares:

> “Firstly, the expressed wish is for full power of development into full humanity not of one particular person, but of every single individual, young and old, rich and poor, noble and ignoble, men and women – in a word, every being born on earth, with the ultimate aim of providing education to the entire human race regardless of age, class, sex and nationality.”

He goes on to explain that this is necessary because “they are all human beings with the prospect of the same future life in the way appointed by heaven yet beset with snares and obstructed by diverse pitfalls.” The chapter culminates with the characteristic appeal to garden imagery to frame the point:

> “I had this consideration in mind when I put the symbol of the art of the tree pruner in the frontispiece to this Deliberation, showing gardeners grafting freshly-plucked shoots from the tree of Pansophia into rooted layers in the hope of filling God’s whole garden, which is the human race, with saplings of a similar nature.”

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43 Dobbie, *Pampaedia* 29.
44 For recent discussion of this matter in relation to education, see David I. Smith, John Shortt and John Sullivan, eds., *Spirituality, Justice and Pedagogy* (Nottingham: The Stapleford Centre, 2006).
45 Keatinge, *Didactic* 61-69.
Much more could be said about the detail of Comenius’ educational vision and practice, including its limitations; I have been restricting my focus here to key points at which the basic image of the garden of delight, informed by a long tradition of reflection on particular passages from the Bible, frames his educational deliberations and tethers them to biblical interpretation. Comenius habitually thinks against a Scriptural backdrop, and the way that this backdrop enters his educational thinking is both through doctrinal reasoning (such as appeal to the creation of all in God’s image or the nature of the future life) and through an imaginative indwelling of biblical metaphor. Innovations for which Comenius is justly famous – the focus on play, the reform of learning materials, the establishment of approaches to teaching and learning suited to children’s capabilities and interests, the turn to the exploration of the empirical world, and so on – are rooted in and nurtured by this imaginative indwelling. A biblical metaphor comes to be used as an educational metaphor in such a way that a cluster of emphases associated with the image in the context of biblical interpretation come to inform the educational reflections and their consequences.

4. The Garden of Delight Today

As an admirer of Comenius I find all of this inherently interesting; I would like to conclude, however, by suggesting two broader reasons why this exploration of Comenius’ mental habits might be appropriate material for reflection today. These have to do first with the enduring nature of questions of basic educational vision and second with the bearing of Comenian imagery on present day educational research.

Pedagogy and Vision

Many aspects of Comenius’ writings seem to retain considerable relevance to discussions of how we should view the purposes and central emphases of teaching and learning, especially in relation to faith. I have been struck by the degree of similarity between Comenius’ account and that offered more recently by Nicholas Wolterstorff. Wolterstorff seeks to ground our vision of education in the Hebrew conception of *shalom*. While no direct debt is indicated, the following summary by Wolterstorff could, allowing for a shift in idiom, equally well have been written by Comenius:

“There can be no shalom without justice…In shalom each person enjoys justice…Shalom goes beyond justice, however. Shalom incorporates right relationships in general, whether or not those are required by justice: right relationships to God, to one’s fellow human beings, to nature, and to oneself. The shalom community is not merely the *just* community but is the *responsible* community, in which God’s laws for our multifaceted existence are obeyed. It is more even than that. We may all have acted justly and responsibly, and yet shalom may be missing: for the community may be lacking delight…shalom incorporates *delight* in one’s relationships. To dwell in shalom is to find delight in living rightly before God, to find delight in living rightly in one’s physical surroundings, to

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49 See further Daniel Murphy, *Comenius: A Critical Reassessment of His Life and Work* (Blackrock, Co. Dublin ; Portland, OR: Irish Academic Press, 1995), Smith, "Gates."
find delight in living rightly with one’s fellow human beings, to find delight even in living rightly with oneself.”

I think it is fairly clear from the passages considered above that Comenius would have heartily agreed with all of this, and I suspect that the chief reason for this agreement is a common debt to the Hebrew prophets. We need to labor, both authors counsel, for the restoration of relationships with God and with others, with our selves and with the world, that are characterized by justice, responsibility and delight. This is what it means for the wilderness to become a garden, and talk such as “the shalom community” or “the garden of delight” might serve some purposes less directly served by epistemological argument. What I have particularly in mind is the firing and shaping of teacherly imagination and pedagogical practice. To my mind’s eye, while nether renewing the garden of delight nor educating for shalom comes close to telling me exactly what to do, both nevertheless point compellingly to a pedagogical journey informed by the ethical and spiritual horizons of the Scriptures.

This draws us back to a consideration of the role of educational imagination and its relationship to biblical metaphor. What Comenius’ and Wolterstorff’s accounts share is a focus on the normative horizon that is to guide the shape of teaching and learning practices. This may both clarify and complicate the role of biblical metaphor in thinking about teaching and learning. Nothing in this essay is intended to suggest that images from the Bible will provide Christian educators with automatically correct theories about education, or function as esoteric data regarding learning processes. It would, moreover, be rash to suggest that the garden image was the sole or sufficient cause of Comenius’ various educational innovations, or that the Bible was the only influence on his thinking. Much educational debate, however, whether of the academic or popular varieties, is debate about how we should educate, and is ineluctably tied to wider conceptions of the good life and of how we might best promote some conception of human flourishing. It does seem that the garden image played a significant role in pointing Comenius’ imagination in certain directions, in making certain issues attractive ones for him to pursue because of their connection with his passionately held vision of human flourishing, and in linking that vision to Scripture.

The need for basic orienting metaphors has not gone away in the intervening centuries. Bill Johnston, writing outside of any Christian discussion, has recently summarized some of the reasons why broad questions of moral and spiritual orientation remain basic to the discussion of teaching. Teaching, he writes, is "value-laden, in at least three crucial ways. First, teaching is rooted in relation, above all the relation between teacher and student; and relation in turn - the nature of our interactions with our fellow humans - is essentially moral in character....Second, all teaching aims to change people; any attempt to change another person has to be done with the assumption, usually implicit, that the change will be for the better. ... Third, although "science" in the form of research in various disciplines (second language

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acquisition, education, sociology, etc.) can give us some pointers, in the overwhelming majority of cases it cannot tell us exactly how to run our class. Thus, the decisions we make as teachers ... ultimately also have to be based on moral rather than on objective or scientific principles: That is, they have to be based on what we believe is right and good. .... We recognize that our deepest and best instincts as teachers arise from belief or faith rather than from pure logic.”

Our basic individual, communal and cultural metaphors for educational wellbeing speak to this need more than to our need for, say, empirical data on how people acquire conversational fluency. David Purpel notes this in his critique of the trivialization of talk about teaching, arguing that in discussions of schooling “the primary language is the technical and bureaucratic one of control, task, and engineering”, and that there is an urgent need to recapture an engagement with vision and wisdom. He suggests that “the language of this vision belongs to the moral and religious family of language, for it is the function of moral and religious language to provide the essential dimension of education – a language of meaning.” Insofar as biblical imagery continues to address our visions of what it means to flourish, it remains relevant to the essential question of how we can prepare people for the good life in classrooms.

Vision and Scholarship

Put this way, however, the distinction is too sharp, for our basic metaphors also play a significant role in guiding the kind of data that we look for when engaged in more empirically oriented kinds of investigation. One of my reasons for becoming particularly interested in Comenius’ garden metaphors is a shift from technical to ecological metaphors that is going on within my primary discipline of second language pedagogy – a discipline of which Comenius, alongside his influence on education more generally, is considered a very significant early modern instigator. I will briefly describe this shift as a more specific example of possible connections between the imagery that I have been exploring and current research in education.

For most of the 20th century, mainstream discussion of modern language education relied heavily on an underlying metaphor of teaching as a form of technology. Discussions of how to teach were couched in terms of the quest for the most efficient teaching method, and the best method was to be established by empirical experiment. This implied a view of teaching as a collection of “routines of efficiency” that could be applied to students universally, regardless of local contingencies such as time, place, beliefs, gender or culture and would, if applied correctly, lead to reliable and repeatable outcomes. This is, of course, what a technology is supposed to do – you do not expect to find, for instance,

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51 Bill Johnston, Values in English Language Teaching (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2003) 4-5, 9.
that your new battery shaver does not work for people with southern accents. Learners’ minds have commonly been pictured as computers – influential sectors of the literature have analyzed language learning processes as consisting of the reception and processing of input and the generation of output. Ellis describes this brain-as-computer approach as the “dominant metaphor” of second language acquisition research.\textsuperscript{55} This view of teaching as ideally consisting of an efficient technology practiced on machine-like learners with universally reliable outcomes reflects wider 20\textsuperscript{th} century cultural commitments to empirical science and technology as core sources of truth and effective practice.

In parallel with growing concern in the wider culture about the negative effects and epistemological limits of modern science and technology, there has been widespread criticism of ‘method’ talk in scholarly discussions of language education since the early 1990s.\textsuperscript{56} As a result, there has been an increased openness in recent years to alternative metaphors that promise a more adequate map of the pedagogic landscape. A prominent emerging candidate pictures the language classroom as an ecology, that is, a complex environment in which a very wide range of factors interact with one another to bring about particular local patterns.\textsuperscript{57} This image implies that effects may not be traceable to single, linear causes – since factors interact, it may be very difficult to say in any clear-cut or empirically valid fashion that teaching technique A led to learning increment B. It also implies that there may be significant variations rooted in the peculiarities of local contexts, and that this is normal rather than something to be overcome.

It might help to picture the difference if we think of a medical analogy. Consider on the one hand the kind of modern medicine that has relied on universally and objectively applicable chemical and surgical procedures to produce health – the medical problem is isolated, the appropriate drug or incision is applied, and if everything is handled correctly then recovery should follow. This has commonly happened in abstraction from other aspects of the patient’s experience – we have a specific technology targeted at a specific condition in isolation, and it is assumed that the problem has a single cause and will therefore be removed if that cause is dealt with. Compare this to the more recent emphasis on wellness, on taking into account the patient’s lifestyle, the patient’s beliefs

\textsuperscript{55} Rod Ellis, \textit{Second Language Acquisition} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) 89.


and cultural preferences, the patient’s relational context and so on as factors affecting health. Once one begins to take such contextual factors into account as possible causes of failure in medical care, the list of potential factors becomes long and unpredictable – the doctor’s bedside manner, for instance, becomes a potential medical factor rather than an incidental quirk. Current newspaper articles regularly provide examples. In one recent case, the cause of a woman’s distress upon being admitted to hospital was discovered to be that the bed assigned to her was pointing toward the door – in her culture this was considered a sign that she would die in hospital. Another report described recent research suggesting that a person suffering a verbal attack is three times more likely to become ill during the following two weeks, since verbal abuse causes similar rises in stress hormones to those caused by physical abuse. Some time back I read of a study showing that increasing natural light and the number of plants in doctors’ waiting rooms led to a decrease in the number of symptoms reported by patients. Even physical illness, it seems, is firmly embedded in a much larger complex of interacting factors – how much more the various interpersonal learning processes that take place among groups of teachers and learners in schools?

In a broadly similar fashion, much past research on language learning has sought to isolate particular (linguistic and psychological) facets of learning, test interventions under controlled conditions, and establish causal relationships between particular teaching procedures and particular outcomes – if the teacher does X, then learning increment Y will follow. Once the classroom is viewed as an ecology, in which an open-ended range of contextual factors may interact to affect outcomes, this becomes problematic. Perhaps a certain technique only works in a certain way if the weather is good and the students trust the teacher. There are clear signs in ecological studies of language classrooms of a desire to increase the range of factors taken into account. Van Dam, for instance, in a recent book on the topic, stresses the need for “minimal a priori assumptions about what can be ignored.”

Placing this development (in which there have actually been occasional discussions of the classroom as a garden) in relation to Comenius’ use of garden imagery both reveals convergences and suggests under-explored avenues in the contemporary debate. Comenius also understands the classroom as an environment in which multiple factors are inseparably at work and processes beyond the narrowly cognitive are an important part of the overall picture. He is himself very fond of method talk (in this respect he is every bit a child of the seventeenth century) and willing to use technological metaphors for the learning process (albeit with an import rather different from that typical in more recent times). The focus on the garden of delight, however, helps to underscore the

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60 When Comenius uses technological images such as the clock or the printing press to describe learning, they are closely associated for him with harmony and wonder; the significance of these images is not for
inseparability of erudition, virtue and piety and of self and society. To understand classrooms, he would say, we need more than study of technique and cognitive processes; we would have to keep track of what is going on spiritually and ethically both within and between individuals, and in relation to the wider world. It is precisely at this point that Comenius’ writings present a challenge to the present discussion of classroom ecology. If little can be ignored in terms of potential factors interacting to influence classroom realities, then not only the already traditional categories of power, race, gender and socioeconomic factors need to be consulted, but also matters of faith, spirituality and commitment as they influence both individual and institutional identity. There is little sign as yet of systematic attention to these matters as they affect language learning, although there are some scattered signs of a relevant mainstream literature emerging\(^6^1\) - one recent study, for example, suggested a connection between a conservative Muslim student’s religiously informed attitude towards the interpretation of written language and her behaviours during a pair work activity during language learning (Platt). My own involvement in seeking to develop this line of discussion is indebted to, among other things, my longstanding interaction with Comenius.\(^6^2\)

5. Coda: Of Math, Grammar and Reconciliation

I have sought in this paper to show some interconnections between what may at first appear to be rather disparate concerns – neither Ambrose nor the Bible are commonly referenced in current academic debates about language pedagogy, and discussions of biblical hermeneutics do not frequently revolve around educational theory. Perhaps this represents a failure of imagination. The relationship between faith and learning, I have suggested, can work by no means exclusively but nevertheless legitimately through imagery that is rooted in biblical interpretation. Although incidental use of biblical metaphor may be little more than decorative, there are occasions when metaphors more deeply expressive of aspects of the worldview of Scripture enter discourse outside theology in such a way as to make that worldview fruitfully active within disciplinary reflection. I have described Comenius’ use of the garden of delight image and some of its sources in order to illustrate this process at work. In Comenius we find an example of biblical imagery shaping an important Christian view of teaching and learning. Finally, I have suggested that Comenius’ project can still speak to us, both because of the enduring nature of the questions regarding human flourishing that must undergird any thoughtful pedagogy and because of the complex relationships between these basic questions of orientation and even the more technical forms of present day scholarship on learning processes. I wish to close with two stories, one told to me recently by a colleague, the other from my own classroom, that ground in a still more practical way the continued relevance of Comenius’ contention that the classroom is a place where the biblical wilderness and garden are in tension.

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A colleague of mine, Jim Bradley, teaches mathematics. Recently a student enrolled in a compulsory college statistics class approached him with concerns about whether he could pass the class. He had the student take a diagnostic test, designed to show what mathematical concepts the student had internalized. The results astounded him – the results of the test suggested that the student did not have even the most basic mathematical concepts. At a loss to understand how a student who was this far off the scale had even made it to college, Jim sat the student down for a conversation about his past learning experiences. What emerged from this was that years earlier the student’s mathematics teacher had held his homework up before the rest of the class as an example of how not to go about mathematics homework. The student had been so angry that he had vowed to himself that he would never learn mathematics. He spent the rest of his schooling learning enough to pass necessary tests and then deliberately forgetting the material. Jim advised the student that the first thing he needed to do was consider forgiving his former teacher. He asked the student about this the next day; the student’s surprised reaction suggested that he had not taken the suggestion seriously. A few days later, however, the student came and told him that he had been thinking and praying about what he had said and had forgiven his teacher. He scored 69% on his first test, 95% on the next, and 99% on the third.\(^\text{63}\)

I suspect that no amount of carefully applied technique could have brought about significant progress with Jim’s student in the absence of forgiveness and reconciliation. I also wonder whether Jim’s solution would have occurred to anyone but a Christian teacher, or at least one for whom forgiveness and reconciliation were of conscious significance. The success of the solution, moreover, depended on the exercise of certain beliefs and dispositions in the student that had nothing to do with mathematical aptitude or processing. What Jim ran into was a broken relationship rooted in a past injustice that continued to poison present learning in an area as apparently technical as the learning of statistical procedures. What he set out to do was to restore wholesome relationships, to restore a little of the garden of delight, and learning flourished as a result.

My second story comes from my own experience a few years ago. In an intermediate German class, I had my students read in German the passage from Deuteronomy that begins “Hear, O Israel” (Deuteronomy 6:4). I commented briefly that this kind of hearing is the opposite of autonomy and basic to Israel’s identity, and that one of my aims for my German students was that they should learn to hear others who do not speak their language. There has been a big emphasis on speaking and getting your message across, I told my students, in recent language education, but you are not in my class just so that you can bless more of the world with your opinions. You are here to learn to hear what others want and need to say to you. I said this, moved on, and forgot all about it. Over a year later I received a phone call from Matthew, a student who had been in that class and was now bursting with excitement. He was in Germany, studying for a semester in Marburg. That morning he had boarded a bus, sat down next to a German man, and noticed that he seemed dejected. He started a conversation and discovered that the man had just lost his job. “I remembered what you said in class,” Matthew said (what did I say in class, I wondered?), “about hearing people instead of just speaking, and I just listened...”

to him talk. By the end he seemed really relieved to have been able to talk to someone about it. I offered some words of encouragement and he thanked me for listening. I just got home and I had to call you.”

Again, this is not a case of repeatable technique – I don’t know of any teaching trick that will consistently cause American students to go to Germany and choose to listen to and console unemployed Germans. The result did, however, follow from a conscious choice of text, carefully chosen words to my class, and indirectly from long reflection on the spiritual and moral dimensions of language learning. Observation of classroom behavior would have offered few clues to what was going on in Matthew, as he took a particular teacher utterance to heart and made it part of his own discipleship. Matthew’s response is another small example, I think, of the kind of thing Comenius had in mind, where learning German grammar takes place in the context of spiritual and ethical concern and leads to moments of shalom in a world of broken relationships, budding signs of the garden of delight. I submit that if we were to let Comenius’ biblically rooted images play in our teacherly imaginations we might increase the chances that such moments will multiply.

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