CHAPTER 3: Biblical Redemption

When he wrote *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde did not limit himself to motifs exclusive to the struggle in Eden. In the Genesis account the man and woman lost their place of dominion and their fall was followed by expulsion from Eden and separation from God. There is, in both Wilde’s and the biblical narrative, the common strand of an idyllic existence that came to a tragic, irreversible close. As Hart observes “[f]rom the moment Dorian leaves the lost security of his creator’s garden to become a wanderer in the London which rumbles outside, he is caught up in a world of half-dream, half-reality; a world of nightmare and death” (9). London is the east side of Eden to Dorian Gray. We do not see Dorian in Basil’s studio-garden after he has made his wish and discovered the inner life of the portrait, although in Dorian’s case, it seems a matter of self-imposed withdrawal. In Chapter IX, Basil asks Dorian to sit for another portrait but Dorian refuses. He will not have himself painted again but agrees to come to tea:

I can’t explain it to you, Basil, but I must never sit to you again. There is something fatal about a portrait. It has a life of its own. I will come and have tea with you. That will be just as pleasant. (*Dorian Gray* 112)

Wilde, however, does not sketch out a tea scene within Basil’s domain and we are left with the impression that Dorian never does return to the artist’s studio-garden. In fact, when Lord Henry mentions Basil’s disappearance, we are informed that Dorian and Basil had “ceased to be great friends” (204). Moreover, even while physically within the studio, Dorian is “estranged from his environment as he stands in front of the finished portrait” (*D’Alessandro* 61-2).
In the early chapters of the novel the consequences of Dorian’s awakening and his inclination to sin appear less serious than those suffered by Adam and Eve whose expulsion from Eden and exposure to sin’s consequences were more immediate. Dorian leads a life of pleasure; he gains popularity and becomes an icon of fashion. Men are attracted and deceived by his outward appearance of unsullied beauty and innocence:

For the wonderful beauty that had so fascinated Basil Hallward, and many others besides him, seemed never to leave him. Even those who had heard the most evil things against him, and from time to time strange rumours about his mode of life crept through London and became the chatter of clubs, could not believe anything to his dishonour when they saw him. He had always the look of one who had kept himself unsullied from the world. Men who talked grossly became silent when Dorian Gray entered the room. There was something in the purity of his face that rebuked them. His mere presence seemed to recall to them the memory of the innocence that they had tarnished. They wondered how one so charming and graceful as he was could have escaped the stain of an age that was at once sordid and sensual. (Dorian Gray 123-4)

Dorian is not at all what he appears to be. His outward beauty is a cloak and his purity of countenance a mask for the sinful inner man. Wilde ensures that readers are aware from the point of Sybil’s Vane’s death when “the first changes in the picture, [stress] Dorian’s malignity” (González 7) of the differences between appearance and reality, which D’Alessandro points out is “a problem […] brought into focus by Lord Henry”2 (61). Lord Henry succeeds much as the serpent triumphs in exposing the differences between Eve’s outward acceptance and her inner dissension against God’s express commands3. Once Eve’s inward disobedience has compelled her to eat the forbidden fruit, she exerts influence upon Adam, and both lose their innocence and place in Eden. Similarly, once
Dorian loses his own innocence, his life becomes, as Hart describes it, "a dance of death, enacting the invisible movements of the modern experience: man's alienation and moral osses, the feeling of entrapment, a feebleness of will, the misuse of time, the predominance of destructive impulses that impel and guide" (9). Dorian Gray relives the first couple's experiences in a modern setting, which Wilde's readers, and even we today, can identify with. After his first act of moral failure with Sybil Vane, whom he has driven to suicide, he like Eve exerts an evil influence upon other people who associate with him. When Wilde informs us that men are rebuked by "the purity of his face" and that "[h]is mere presence seemed to recall to them the memory of the innocence that they had tarnished" the irony that Dorian is not what he is seems to intensify the tragedy of his inward spoiling. Also significant is the fact that Wilde asserts that the men are conscious that they themselves have tarnished their own innocence. These vile men "who talked grossly" are in fact a grade higher and finer than Dorian in that they at least are closer to a state of repentance than Dorian is simply because they recognize their own depravity. But Dorian vacillates between a consciousness of sin and blindness to his own faults. In Chapter XX Wilde writes that Dorian "knew that he had tarnished himself, filled his mind with corruption and given horror to his fancy; that he had been an evil influence to others, and had experienced a terrible joy in being so; and that of the lives that had crossed his own it had been the fairest and the most full of promise that he had brought to shame" (Dorian Gray 209). Moments later he rejects these convictions. "It was better not to think of the past. Nothing could alter that. It was of himself, and of his own future, that he had to think" (210). Dorian is incapable of accepting responsibility and being unselfish. When he considers at the novel's end that "Nothing that he could do would
cleanse him till he had told his own sin", his next thought is "His sin?" as if he doubted that he was guilty of sin. Dorian then "shrugged his shoulders" and we are told that the horrible, treacherous slaying of Basil who had been a friend in every way "seemed very little to him" (212). Dorian's vision darkens to the extent that he cannot accept the portrait's reflections of his own sin. Having left Hetty Merton without, as he imagines, spoiling her, the truth the portrait projects seems preposterous to him:

He was thinking of Hetty Merton. For it was an unjust mirror, this mirror of his soul that he was looking at. Vanity? Curiosity? Hypocrisy? Had there been nothing more in his renunciation than that? There had been something more. At least he thought so. But who could tell?" (212)

Dorian's thoughts reveal his self-centredness and his thoroughly selfish nature. He is, indeed, Paglia's "beautiful boy" who "is never deeply moved by the disasters he brings on his admirers since he is scarcely aware of anything outside himself (524). His thoughts reveal, as Mighall explains in his notes to Chapter XX, that "Dorian rebelled against the burden of conscience that the portrait had become, and sought to free himself from its reproaches" (Dorian Gray 253). It is freedom from reproach and not sin that Dorian desires. He seeks redemption on his own terms and his great disappointment is in finding that there are moral and divine laws in operation that he cannot circumvent by hypocritical acts of renunciation. Dorian manifests Adam's sin of denying responsibility for taking a bite of the forbidden fruit. When God asks, "Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?", Adam shifts the blame onto both God and Eve when he replies, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it" (Genesis 3:12). Yet, despite Adam's failures the Genesis story does not
and on a negative note of irredeemable loss; and notwithstanding the tragic death of its hero, neither does The Picture of Dorian Gray. The novel presents a parallel of the biblical argument for redemption on God’s terms.

The redemption of man was settled in the Garden of Eden. After the Fall, God made separate pronouncements to Adam, Eve and the serpent. He said to the serpent that it was cursed for having deceived the woman and that there would be enmity between it and the woman, its seed and hers: “And the LORD God said unto the serpent, ‘[...] I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Genesis 3:14-15, KJV)⁵. This battle between God and Satan for the soul of man was the favored theme of mediaeval drama and Marlowe explores it in Doctor Faustus. Oates argues that in The Picture of Dorian Gray, “[t]he consequences of a Faustian pact with the devil are dramatized, but the devil himself is absent, which suggests that the novel is an elaborate fantasy locating the Fall within the human psyche alone” (424). While other critics see Lord Henry as the devil of the novel, many agree that evil is inherent in Dorian. Certainly, Dorian’s fiercest struggles are with his conscience. The Genesis text however suggests the dangers of influence, and though it does not diminish man’s responsibility for the choices he makes, implies his frailty. The serpent of Eden, and Lord Henry in The Picture of Dorian Gray, both exert influence upon creatures with the right to choose between keeping a commandment or breaking it.

The divine redemption plan for man recorded by the apostle John in his gospel account⁶ and expounded by Paul in his letter to the Romans is linked to the pronouncement in the Garden of Eden that as the serpent had deceived the woman so
then her seed, the Messiah, would bruise its head. The NIV translation renders “he will crush your head”, which leaves little doubt as to the fate of the serpent. The New Testament position that the devil, who led man into sin, was defeated when Jesus died on the cross and became the atoning sacrifice for man’s redemption, freeing him from the curse of sin and its wages, eternal death, carries with it the imperative that men believe and accept the Messiah who purchased their salvation. And there’s the rub, for as Dorian shows us, the great obstacle for those who already have heard the gospel, is the inability to subscribe to it. The seeds of faith too often fall upon the stony ground of unbelief.

Christ’s death on the cross has its roots in the practice of sacrificing an unblemished lamb, “the LORD’s Passover” which served as atonement for the sins of the children of Israel from the time of Moses⁷ (Exodus 12:5,11). However, one may trace the first sacrifice back to the garden of Eden where Genesis 3:21—“The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them”—indicates that animals were sacrificed in order to provide Adam and Eve with coverings.

The divine provision of clothes is a symbol of grace and forgiveness. […] While the couple does not die, there is clear implication that part of God’s creation dies to provide clothes of animal skins for the couple. (Bratcher, “The ‘Fall’—A Second Look”)

The skins provided in Eden have their Wildean parallel in the portrait painted in the artist’s studio garden. An extraordinary work of art, it too emanates death while Dorian maintains his youthful beauty and innocent visage. Wilde’s novel follows the biblical blueprint so closely that it also shares the drawbacks of the Eden solution. While the animal skins served as a covering of nakedness, their sacrifice did not atone for the sin of
the man and his wife. They were a temporary provision while man waited for the final redemptive sacrifice announced by the prophet Isaiah. Dorian Gray, despite his appearance of purity is himself aware of his need for something that will restore the inner man. The demands of conscience are not satisfied by outward grace and beauty.

Isaiah’s account of Yahweh’s redemptive plan for man begins with Yahweh’s lament against his children, Israel, and Judah, who have wearied Him with their rebellion. Yahweh characteristically still seeks reconciliation and offers a way out: “Come now, let us reason together,” says the LORD. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool” (Isaiah 1:18). This plea by which Yahweh makes certain His desire for the redemption of Israel, Judah, and of the entire human race, is repeated by Basil when he tries to reform Dorian in Chapter XIII. When Yahweh suggests reasoning over the issue of man’s sin, what is required of man is that he repents in prayer. Basil suggests this at once and first recalls relevant parts of the prayer Jesus taught his disciples in Matthew 6:9-13 before he quotes the redemptive promise contained in Isaiah 1:18:

‘Pray, Dorian, pray,’ he murmured. ‘What is it that one was taught to say in one’s boyhood? “Lead us not into temptation. Forgive us our sins. Wash away our iniquities.” Let us say that together. [...]’

‘It is never too late, Dorian. Let us kneel down and try if we cannot remember a prayer. Isn’t there a verse somewhere, “Though your sins be as scarlet, yet I will make them as white as snow”?’ (Dorian Gray 151)

Basil’s reference to boyhood reminds us of Dorian’s lost innocence. His insistence that it is never too late to repent in response to Dorian’s tearful cry that it was, is founded on the biblical promise that “If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just and will forgive us
our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Dorian’s refusal shows his unwillingness to follow a path toward redemption contrary to one of his own making. He underscores his unbelief when he states, “Those words mean nothing to me now” (Dorian Gray 151). Focusing on the picture rather than on the prayer of redemption, he brings his own confession of being beyond prayer to fruition by murdering Basil Hallward. Wilde writes that

an uncontrollable feeling of hatred for Basil Hallward came over him, as though it had been suggested to him by the image on the canvas, whispered into his ear by those grinning lips. (151)

Wilde’s phrase “as though” indicates that Dorian is motivated by perceptions consequent to looking at the loathed picture. Dorian looks and then hates both the horrible image of his soul on the canvas as well as the creator of the picture, Basil Hallward. Wilde’s narrative is in agreement with 1 John 3:15, “Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him”. Dorian’s hatred culminates in murder. It ultimately costs him his own life.

Because the picture does taunt Dorian and accuse him of his sins, and it finally triumphs over him, it is no surprise that many critics\textsuperscript{10} see it as possessing power over Dorian. Seen in this light it is Dorian who appears to be the victim, the one to be pitied rather than the portrait. However, the portrait is so badly disfigured by Dorian’s sins that Wilde does show us another perspective:

Often on returning home [...], he himself would creep upstairs to the locked room, [...], and stand, with a mirror, in front of the portrait [...], looking now at the evil and aging face on the canvas, and now at the fair young face that laughed back at
him from the polished glass. The very sharpness of the contrast used to quicken his sense of pleasure. He grew more and more enamoured of his own beauty, more and more interested in the corruption of his own soul. He would examine with minute care, and sometimes with a monstrous and terrible delight, the hideous lines that seared the wrinkling forehead or crawled around the heavy sensual mouth, wondering sometimes which were the more horrible, the signs of sin or the signs of age. He would place his white hands beside the coarse bloated hands of the picture, and smile. He mocked the misshapen body and the failing limbs. (Dorian Gray 124)

What is very clear in this passage is Dorian’s absolute lack of remorse for the sins that have marred the once perfect canvas. He views the disfigurement of the canvas with delight, which Wilde qualifies as being both “monstrous” and “terrible”. He mocks the painting as the crowds mocked Jesus when he was nailed to the cross. In this sense, Dorian’s portrait corresponds with Isaiah’s Messiah who is both “a mighty Ruler and King” and “a suffering victim, meek and lowly” (Easton 348). The prophet’s image of humanity as fallen away from the ways of God matches Dorian Gray:

We all like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth; […] For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken. (Isaiah 53:6-8)

The portrait is stricken because of Dorian’s transgressions. It “suffers” in silence as Jesus did, fulfilling Isaiah’s prophecy when he stood meekly before his accusers, the high priests Annas and Caiaphas, and the Roman procurator Pontius Pilate. Jesus suffered violent treatment without any resistance (John 18-19). Because Jesus was human and a
portrait is not, our response is naturally different. There is certainly no comparison between the horror Jesus suffered from crucifixion and the hideous alterations befalling the changeling portrait. However, because the portrait is one of self, the effects of sins of the flesh upon the condition of one’s soul are more easily understood by minds that though less receptive of religious views might yet be amenable to instructions from art. Taking the form of objet d’art, the portrait is “an ever-present sign of the ruin men brought upon their souls” (Dorian Gray 93). Each of us, whatever our predilections, can similarly imagine what appearance our own portrait might take if we had such a one painted of us, as the fictitious Dorian Gray had. Writing as he did at a time when faith was very much challenged, if not actually diminished, Wilde’s employment of biblical images and motifs was a novel way of looking at religious issues of sin and retribution through art.

Though it is not human as Jesus was, Dorian’s portrait has “a life of its own” (112). Jesus was a man of flesh and blood, the portrait a two dimensional likeness of the young Dorian Gray. Yet one hesitates to describe it as an inanimate object. Having a life of its own, Wilde renders it capable at any rate of transformation, of change. In many respects the portrait functions like the Passover sacrifice. It serves Dorian in ways that are similar to Christ’s sacrifice for man. In the time of Moses the slaughter of the Passover lamb and the application of its blood upon the doorposts of the houses of the children of Israel prevented the death of the first born of each household. Even at the time it was first instituted, the Passover lamb was sacrificed to atone for sin. Pharaoh’s unwillingness to release the Hebrew slaves, a sin against Yahweh, cost him the life of his son and every male child in his household and those of his people. The Passover tradition has been
carried on in time by the children of Israel. As the wages of sin is death, the blood sacrifice redeemed the people from it. In AD 70 when the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans\textsuperscript{13}, these sacrifices were no longer offered as they had once been. As Easton indicates, the Passover was a type of the deliverance wrought by the Messiah for his people from the bondage of sin (524). There are many subtle hints that link Dorian Gray’s portrait to Christ, the final Passover Lamb.

In the novel, when Basil has completed the portrait, he cries, “It is quite finished” \textit{(Dorian Gray 26)}. This is perhaps a perfectly normal thing to say at such a time except that Basil’s cry echoes Jesus’ last words as he died on the cross. Jesus said, “It is finished” before “he bowed his head and gave up his spirit” (John 19:30). In his account of the gospel, John referred to Jesus as the Christ\textsuperscript{14}. Jesus’ declaration, “It is finished”, referred to the redemptive work that he had come to perform on man’s behalf. He was “the Lamb of God” slain for the sins of the world as John the Baptist pointed out by the Jordan (John 1:29). Jesus himself was in no doubt about it. Certainly, Basil’s cry is not in quite the same strain. While we might see it as prophetic, Basil himself was not aware of the exact nature of the strange power possessed by the portrait he had painted. Immediately after Sibyl Vane’s death, Basil, visiting Dorian out of concern, asks the lad if he “had noticed in the picture something curious”\textsuperscript{15} \textit{(Dorian Gray 110)}. The question startles and frightens Dorian who by then knew of the strange power of the portrait to reflect his sins. Basil had a secret—the passionate worship of the physical beauty and perfection he saw in Dorian Gray, which critics have identified as a manifestation of, among other things, homosexuality. He was, however, not aware at this point of the precise nature of the portrait. While it was in his studio, he was only conscious of “the
intolerable fascination of its presence” (111). One might argue that it was Dorian’s Faustian wish that gave the portrait life and that Basil was only the creator of the lifeless portrait and Dorian the giver of its life. The wish Dorian uttered was provocative—eternal youth and beauty in exchange for his own soul, certainly an exchange worth the notice of every minister of hell. But Basil undoubtedly had finished creating an object that works as a type, albeit imperfect, of the redemptive sacrifice. The portrait has a life of its own and it is the portrait that is marred with Dorian’s sins, that loses its perfect beauty as he slides into sin and degradation. Reminiscent in the “beautiful marred face” of the portrait (89) is Isaiah’s Messiah whose “appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness” (Isaiah 52:14).

After Dorian’s merciless rejection of Sibyl Vane, the portrait bears “lines of cruelty round the mouth” (Dorian Gray 88). Seeking reassurance in a mirror, Dorian finds “[no] line like that warped his red lips” (88). As Basil points out, Dorian himself continues to “look exactly the same wonderful boy who, day after day, used […] to sit for his picture” (105). When Dorian divines that “The portrait was to bear the burden of his shame” (102), we are again reminded of the image of Christ hanging naked and brutalised on the cross, bearing the shame of sinful man.

A further resemblance exists in the character or quality of the sacrifice. Levitical law required a perfect unblemished lamb. The sacrifice needed to atone for the sins of the children of Israel at every Passover had to be a “male without defect” (Leviticus 1:3). The apostle Peter vouches that Christ was “a lamb without blemish or defect” (I Peter 1:19). Dorian’s portrait once painted was a likeness of the young man in all the perfection of
beauty and youth—a male without defect. Basil says to Dorian that when he had seen
him and been overcome by the extraordinary influence of his personality, he “knew that
[he] had seen perfection face to face” (Dorian Gray 110). When Isaiah prophesied the
birth of the Son of God, he said, “[...] his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor
[...]” (Isaiah 9:6, KJV). Dorian’s portrait is described as “a wonderful work of art, and a
wonderful likeness” of Dorian’s youth and beauty. By revealing the young man’s
transgressions, the quiet unmistakable changes in its visage also counsel his conscience.
It is “the visible emblem of conscience” which cautions Dorian to “not sin”, to “resist
temptation” and to “not see Lord Henry any more” (Dorian Gray 89).

Referring to the image of the crucified Christ, Isaiah foretold that he, as Messiah,

hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we
should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and
acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised,
and we esteemed him not. (Isaiah 53:2-3, KJV)

As soon as the portrait commences its work of bearing “the burden of his passions and his
sins” (Dorian Gray 88) it becomes a loathsome image which suffers rejection. Wilde
reverses the scriptural pattern so that it is Dorian who ensures that the portrait is hidden
from men. “He [...] drew a large screen right in front of the portrait, shuddering as he
 glanced at it” (89); he does not allow Basil to see it and warns him, “If you try to look at
it, Basil, on my word of honour I will never speak to you again as long as I live” (108). It
leaves Basil “thunderstruck” because Dorian was actually “pallid with rage. His hands
were clenched, and the pupils of his eyes were like disks of blue fire” (108). Dorian’s
over-reaction is another indication of the steady loss of self-control he begins to
experience from the moment he first views his own image in the portrait and is
enamoured of it.

Both Dorian and Basil reject the portrait because it reveals their idolatry. Basil feels
that he must not exhibit it because it reveals his mad worship of Dorian Gray. Dorian
hides the portrait because it reflects sins rooted in self-love. As Paglia asserts, “What fills
him with ‘a strange idolatry’ is his own mirror-image” (525). Because Dorian himself
remains perfect in beauty, he enjoys a large following of admirers, not unlike Jesus.
While Jesus conducted his three year ministry, people crowded around him, some to
listen and follow, some to criticise and entrap\(^7\). When he was arrested in Gethsemane,
Mark records that “everyone deserted him and fled” (Mark 14:50). Hauled before the
high priests, Herod and Pilate, Jesus endured mocking, beating and sneering\(^8\). His
disciples had fled\(^9\) and there was no one with him to take his part against his accusers.
His position was precarious and even those who loved him, fearing crucifixion, stayed at
a safe distance away. He had become “despised and rejected by men” (Isaiah 53:3).
Easton notes that crucifixion “was regarded as the most horrible form of death, and to a
Jew it would acquire greater horror from the curse in Deut. 21: 23"\(^{10}\) (168). Dorian shares
a similar fate, though for entirely different reasons. He begins his adult life by charming
the crowds and ends with indictment so heavy against him that when he dies uttering a
cry “so horrible in its agony”, the two gentlemen who discover that it had issued from his
house “looked at each other, as they walked away, and sneered” (Dorian Gray 212-13).
The appalling transformation from the beautiful to the horrific is apparent in Dorian’s
portrait. What is at first a wonderful likeness of a young man of great beauty transforms

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into something quite revolting. Like the Messiah who bore man’s sins, griefs and sorrows on the cross, the portrait “[bears] the burden of his shame” (102).

So effective is the portrait’s assumption of Dorian’s sins that when Basil rushes to him for an explanation as soon as he has heard vicious rumours concerning his character, Basil insists that he cannot believe them:

[... I don’t believe these rumours at all. At least, I can’t believe them when I see you. Sin is a thing that writes itself across a man’s face. It cannot be concealed. People talk sometimes of secret vices. There are no such things. If a wretched man has a vice, it shows itself in the lines of his mouth, the droop of his eyelids, the moulding of his hands even. [...] But you, Dorian, with your pure, bright, innocent face, and your marvellous untroubled youth—I can’t believe anything against you. (143)

Later, Basil considers whether he really does know Dorian and concludes that he would first “have to see [Dorian’s] soul” and that “only God can do that” (146). Basil is on the point of discovering that the portrait has become the scapegoat for Dorian’s sins. The once perfect image has become hideous. After Basil’s murder, the alterations upon the portrait shock Dorian:

[...] he saw the face of his portrait leering in the sunlight. On the floor in front of it the torn curtain was lying. He remembered that the night before he had forgotten, for the first time in his life, to hide the fatal canvas, and was about to rush forward, when he drew back with a shudder.

What was that loathsome red dew that gleamed, wet and glistening, on one of the hands, as though the canvas had sweated blood? How horrible it was!—more horrible it seemed to him for the moment, than the silent thing that he knew was stretched across the table, the thing whose grotesque misshapen shadow on the
spotted carpet showed him that it had not stirred, but was still there, as he had left it. (165)

The portrait is stained with blood and the image has become so shocking that even Dorian who ordinarily is unmoved by horrors outside himself draws back with a shudder. Biblical redemption required a blood sacrifice; which is why Cain’s offering of “some of the fruits of the soil” was not favored (Genesis 4:5). In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus “being in anguish, [...] his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground” (Luke 22:44). Wilde’s description of the canvas, having sweated blood, was not careless but it in fact points us back to biblical redemption, especially the final sacrifice of Christ.

The apostle John recounts in the book of Revelation, a song sung to the Lamb which glorifies him for the victory of the cross: “because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Revelation 5:9). In the seventh chapter John describes a “great multitude [...] standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes” (Revelation 7:9). The multitude represent the men purchased for God by the blood sacrifice of Jesus, the Lamb of God. The white robes are symbolic of a sinner’s cleansed state after his sins are washed in the blood of the Lamb. Dorian’s “pure, bright, innocent face, and [his] marvellous untroubled youth” correspond to the white stain-free robes (143). These white robes of righteousness signify the transformation God promised in Isaiah 1:18 that man’s sins, though scarlet shall be white as snow. Jesus referred to Yahweh as “my Father” (John 16:23). He also said, “I came from the Father and entered the world” (John 16:28). Yahweh then sent Jesus as a gift to mankind and to be the scapegoat for sin; so likewise Basil is the giver of the portrait, which is the scapegoat for Dorian’s sins. Wilde, as
mentioned before, quotes Yahweh through Basil. The creative artist and friend tries
mainly to persuade Dorian to pray a prayer of repentance once he has seen Dorian’s soul
in the portrait he had painted. Basil in fact offers to say the prayer with Dorian, staking a
claim as he does so upon Jesus’ promise that “if two of you on earth agree about anything
you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven” (Matthew 18:19). He exhorts
his young friend:

Let us say that together. The prayer of your pride has been answered. The prayer
of your repentance will be answered also. I worshipped you too much. I am
punished for it. You worshipped yourself too much. We are both punished.
(Dorian Gray 151)

There are two ideas in Basil’s speech, both of which exemplify scriptural teaching.
Firstly, Basil identifies the root of Dorian’s wish for eternal youth and beauty, which is
pride. Pride, according to biblical teaching, “goes before destruction, a haughty spirit
before a fall” (Proverbs 16:18). Destruction is heaped upon Dorian’s portrait. It ages and
not at all gracefully. Its face is “hideous” and “there was something in its expression that
filled [Basil] with disgust and loathing. [...] Through some strange quickening of inner
life the leprosies of sin were slowly eating the thing away” (Dorian Gray 150-51).
Wilde’s reference to leprosy is again evidence of the biblical leanings of his work. The
word “leprosy” mentioned in the Bible is translated from the Hebrew tsėra ‘ath which
means “a ‘smiting,’ a ‘stroke,’ because the disease was regarded as a direct providential
infliction”, and clearly “as an awful punishment from the Lord (2 Kings 5:7; 2 Chr.
26:20)” (Easton 419)\(^2\). The portrait is thus being punished—smitten—on account of
Dorian’s sin.
Although the portrait functions as a scapegoat for visible sin, Dorian's outward appearance is no guarantee of his salvation, not even if we neglect the biblical connotations of the term 'salvation'\textsuperscript{22} and consider only his evasion of judgment by society. As Basil reports to Dorian, rumours\textsuperscript{23} abound: "[...] the most dreadful things are being said against you in London. [...] You don't want people to talk of you as something vile and degraded. [...] I hear all these hideous things that people are whispering about you [...]" (\textit{Dorian Gray} 143-44). Dorian's friendships are "fatal to young men", his friends "lose all sense of honour, of goodness, of purity", his name is "implicated in the most terrible confession" of a disgraced, dying socialite (144-46). Though Dorian is never taken away in cuffs or thrown into jail, society judges and condemns him. The Duke of Berwick "leaves the room of a club when [Dorian] enters it". Lord Stavely describes him as "a man no pure-minded girl should be allowed to know, and whom no chaste woman should sit in the same room with" and makes these accusations, not privately but "right out before everybody" (144). Basil sums the general concurrence quite bluntly: "They say that you corrupt everyone with whom you become intimate, and that it is quite sufficient for you to enter a house, for shame of some kind to follow after" (145). If nothing else, Dorian's reputation is well on its way towards destruction.

Scriptural teaching is also upheld when Basil acknowledges that they are both being punished for worshipping Dorian. Basil's admission implies his subscription to the Ten Commandments, the first of which prohibits the worship of anything or anyone but Yahweh\textsuperscript{24}. Basil has idolized Dorian and by painting his portrait he has "[made] for [himself] an idol" in the form of the portrait (\textit{Deuteronomy} 5:8). Confessing his secret in
Chapter IX, Basil admits to Dorian, "I worshipped you"; describes this worship as "mad"; that he had grown "more and more absorbed in [Dorian]"; calls the day he determined to paint the portrait as "a fatal day"; and his work on the painting as revealing his "secret" and "idolatry" (110-11). Richard Ellmann suggests that "Dorian sells his soul not to the devil but, in the ambiguous form of his portrait, to art" (qtd. in Poteet 245). Art then is also a type of idol to Dorian, something he becomes obsessed with. Paglia's analysis is that "In his secret pagan cult, Dorian is god, priest, and devotee, worshipping at his own graven image" (525). In "Dorian Gray And The Gothic Novel", Lewis J. Poteet contends that "Dorian tries by an extraordinary exercise of the will […] to become a work of art" (245); and that he is "both artist and work of art" (246). Hart concurs that "[a]s Dorian and the picture reverse their roles, so his life becomes his art" (5). There is a religious quality to Dorian's art or at least Dorian treats his life's purpose, to live a life of sensation as Lord Henry suggested, with religious zeal. In Chapter XI, Wilde writes that Dorian "sought to elaborate some new scheme of life that would have its reasoned philosophy and its ordered principles, and find in the spiritualizing of the senses its highest realization" but allows in the next paragraph that "[t]he worship of the senses has often, and with much justice, been decried, men feeling a natural instinct of terror about passions and sensations that seem stronger than themselves, and that they are conscious of sharing with the less highly organized forms of existence" (Dorian Gray 125-26). He then presents us with Dorian's perspective that men had failed to understand "the true nature of the senses" and to aim "at making them elements of a new spirituality" (126). Dorian's new Hedonism, a mode of life he has been "tempted into […] by a sort of 'devil,'" the aesthetic critic Lord Henry, who preaches […] the artistic possibilities of
multiple realizations of the self" (Poteet 245) is a new form of religion. One wonders if Wilde who struggled between what San Juan has called "the clash between pagan appetite and Christian morality" was not in fact exploring the possibilities of a life yielded to the flesh and in the final analysis veered on the side of morality (9). In Christian fashion, Wilde punishes both artists—Basil, who creates the portrait as an emblem of that which he already worships; and Dorian, who attempts as Poteet has suggested to become a work of art and in so doing seeks to be worshipped.

Apart from keeping him physically free from the destructive marks of his own sin, Dorian's portrait serves another significant function. It also bears the marks of time. When Dorian first notices the change in the portrait after his cruel treatment of Sybil, he remembers the wish he had made in Basil's studio:

Suddenly there flashed across his mind what he had said in Basil Hallward's studio the day the picture had been finished. Yes, he remembered it perfectly. He had uttered a mad wish that he himself might remain young, and the portrait grow old; that his own beauty might be un tarnished, and the face on the canvas bear the burden of his passions and his sins; that the painted image might be seared with the lines of suffering and thought, and that he might keep all the delicate bloom and loveliness of his then just conscious boyhood. Surely his wish had not been fulfilled? Such things were impossible. It seemed monstrous even to think of them. And yet, there was the picture before him, with the touch of cruelty in the mouth. (Dorian Gray 88)

Dorian's wish is granted for he does not look aged. He does indeed keep his youthful looks, while his portrait manifests all the decay that comes with time. He enjoys youth and might also have enjoyed immortality provided the portrait had been kept intact and safely in his keeping. In the Bible there is a correlation between sin and life and we see
this at work even in the lives of Adam and Eve. Prior to the Fall there was only one tree that man was forbidden to eat—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Genesis Chapter 2 records in verse 9, that "[...] In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil". And in verses 16-17, God said, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die". The tree of life then was also in the garden, and presumably, it was the fruit of this tree that gave the first man and woman the immortality they enjoyed while in Eden, for it is written that after the Fall the LORD God banished man from the Garden of Eden lest "he should reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever" (Genesis 3:22).

Adam and Eve made choices that removed from their table the fruit of the tree of life, not to mention the general ease of life in Eden. With their fall sin became more rampant. Dorian's portrait works for him as the tree of life would have done for Adam and Eve, had they not disqualified themselves from Eden. Sin put Adam out of the garden, and out of the reach of the tree of life, therefore numbering his days. Dorian lived so long as the portrait was intact. It gave him life, took on his sins and every mark of time that should have been registered on his body, so that James Vane was misled into thinking, at the end of Chapter XVI (when in fact, 18 years had passed since Sybil's death) that he was "little more than a boy" (Dorian Gray 183). James Vane's serpentine informant, who asserts that Dorian Gray had made her what she was, reminds the reader yet again of Basil's concern over reports that Dorian "corrupt[s] every one with whom [he] become[s] intimate" (145). Basil was uncertain about the truth of the reports. Even though she is a woman of questionable repute, the woman's testimony, being that of
someone who has directly come under Dorian's influence, bears witness against Dorian and corroborates Basil's earlier conjectures. Hart writes that "The destiny that insures Dorian's fall is woman, whose role in the novel is minor" (9). It seems fitting that having first wronged one woman whom he once described as "absolutely and entirely divine" (Dorian Gray 53-54), that another, quite opposite in nature, should rise up to accuse him.

Dorian assumes the role of serpent, tempter and destroyer of many women in the novel. Sybil, Lord Henry's sister, Lady Gwendolen, Lady Gloucester and Hetty Merton are all violated for knowing and loving Dorian Gray. James Vane's charge on behalf of Sybil is "You wrecked the life of Sybil Vane" (182). Basil chides Dorian, "you should not have made [Lord Henry's] sister's name a by-word" (145) and Lord Gloucester's wife's letter, written when she was "dying alone in her villa at Mentone", implicates Dorian "in the most terrible confession [Basil] ever read" (146). Lord Henry spells out the dark possibilities of Hetty Merton's fate when he asks, "how do you know that Hetty isn't floating at the present moment in some star-lit mill-pond [...]" (201). Sybil, the first woman to be destroyed by Dorian, combines noble blood (her father was a man of rank) with humble fortune. But the novel does not suggest that only women without fortune or rank are susceptible to violation. Aristocratic women are no less vulnerable than the serpentine women of the opium dens. Wilde would appear to corroborate patriarchal readings of Genesis that women are, as a sex, susceptible to corrupting influences, if not for the fact that the novel does have its fair share of male victims.

Dorian's propensity to corrupt those he associates with takes off with the yellow book Lord Henry sent to him. This book which many critics, including Paglia, say is loosely based on K.J. Huysmans' novel A Rebours, absorbs Dorian. He keeps "nine
large-paper copies... bound in different colours, so that they might suit his various moods and the changing fancies of a nature over which he seemed, at times, to have almost entirely lost control” (Dorian Gray 123). When Wilde introduces the book he devotes five paragraphs towards its description to stress its influence upon Dorian Gray. “It was the strangest book that [Dorian] had ever read. It seemed to him that in exquisite raiment, and to the delicate sound of flutes, the sins of the world were passing in dumb show before him” (120). The hero of the book “became to him a kind of prefiguring type of himself” (123). And, indeed, the whole book seemed to him to contain the story of his own life, written before he had lived it. The Faustian motif here is very obvious as the dumb show certainly brings to mind the pageant of the seven deadly sins that Marlowe’s Dr Faustus was treated to by Mephostophilis. Like Marlowe’s tragic hero, Dorian exercises his will in permitting the book to influence him. The book, having gained a hold, has its effects. Dorian loses control over his nature and later recognizes that it was with this book that Lord Henry “poisoned” him (208). Lord Henry’s argument that “The books that the world calls immoral are books that show the world its own shame” (208) extends the idea contained in the preface to The Picture of Dorian Gray. “There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all” (3). It allows anyone who embraces the idea to disconnect conscience. If one ceases to categorise things as either moral or immoral, then one is free to entertain ideas, imbibe influences, to act in any way that appeals to the heart without concerning oneself with retribution. It allows the Victorian dandy to forget for instance the apostle Paul’s stern warning, “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction”
(Galatians 6:7-8). When Dorian charges Lord Henry with poisoning him he is refusing accountability for his own failure to “guard [his] heart” which is scripturally defined as “the wellspring of life” (Proverbs 4:23).

Paul writes in 2 Timothy 3:15-16 that the influence of the scriptures prepares a man for “every good work”\(^{29}\). The yellow book influenced Dorian to lead a “double life” (Dorian Gray 167), one which left a trail of destruction in its wake, recounted by Basil upon his visit on that fatal night of his murder in Chapter XII. In “The Devoted Friend” Hans’ study of the notes he made of “all kinds of beautiful things about friendship” propounded by the Miller changes Hans into a truly devoted friend. The Miller’s sayings as Wilde indicates were “beautiful”, though he himself was a terrible hypocrite (Complete Works 307). The Miller reminds us of the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to test Jesus during his ministry. John the Baptist called them “You brood of vipers!” (Matthew 3:7); Jesus repeated the charge (Matthew 12:34) and added “You hypocrites!” (Matthew 15:7). His advice to the people was that they “must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach” (Matthew 23:3). While Jesus himself saw the Pharisees for what they were, his sacrificial death did not exclude these enemies\(^ {39} \). In “The Devoted Friend” as in “The Happy Prince”, Wilde clearly is in agreement with biblical teaching that good or beautiful influences lead to self-sacrifice. Goodenough writes “From this imaginative construct [of the fairy tales], he drew not only his flamboyant style and fatal boyish lover, but also his figure of Christ and the social conscience that compelled him to write on behalf of incarcerated juveniles” (340). There is an “incarcerated juvenile” in all of us and one
suspects that the youthful looks of Dorian Gray also serve to identify the existence of that child within\textsuperscript{31} that Wilde was often writing for, and about.

Dorian Gray maintains his youthful looks because of the portrait’s function as “a visible symbol of the degradation of sin” (\textit{Dorian Gray} 93). Paglia sees Dorian as being like the Aztec scapegoat, who is “privileged but doomed, destined for execution at the feet of an idol, his heart pierced by a knife. The painting is his divine double, the god who allows him to live like a prince but, thirsting for blood, demands his sacrifice” (527). The flipside is that Dorian’s once perfect portrait, the object with a life of its own, is the scapegoat for his sins. The portrait juggles two roles—that of scapegoat and idol. It is the portrait that loses its beauty, which should be no small loss from an aesthete’s perspective. It is also the portrait that is denied worship and adulation, cloistered as it is in a dusty schoolroom with a curtain drawn over it to hide it from the world’s eyes. Basil notices that, “the whole place was covered with dust, and that the carpet was in holes. A mouse ran scuffling behind the wainscoting. There was a damp odour of mildew” (\textit{Dorian Gray} 148). The rich pall covering the picture is described in Chapter X as “a large purple satin coverlet heavily embroidered with gold, a splendid piece of late seventeenth-century Venetian work that his grandfather had found in a convent near Bologna” (115). The portrait’s coverlet, significantly originating from a convent, also resembles the curtain separating the Holy of Holies, which is one of the two chambers of the tabernacle or temple of worship of the Jews (Easton 334). The Holy of Holies was the interior chamber, and “the veil separating these two chambers was a double curtain of the finest workmanship which was never passed except by the high priest once a year on the great Day of Atonement” to offer the annual sacrifice for sin (Easton 650)\textsuperscript{32}. The high

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priest who went in at the appointed time was in danger of being slain by the holiness of God if he did not carefully adhere to the divine guidelines for his service. There were strict instructions even for the garments he must wear: the robe of the ephod, a robe of blue cloth attached with gold bells, which Easton explains as “a sacred vestment” (232); “Aaron must wear it when he ministers. The sound of the bells will be heard when he enters the Holy Place before the LORD and when he comes out, so that he will not die” (Exodus 28:35). There were even instructions for linen undergarments for Aaron and his sons to “wear [...] whenever they enter the Tent of Meeting or approach the altar to minister in the Holy Place, so that they will not incur guilt and die” (Exodus 28:42). The constant warnings against death were serious reminders of the reverence due to Yahweh’s presence within the Holy of Holies. They imply also that no one, other than the High Priest may enter the Holy of Holies without meeting his death. Wilde roughly keeps this pattern in The Picture of Dorian Gray. Dorian is the portrait’s only devotee, the one high priest admitted into its presence. When Basil enters the room, he is slain. The portrait inspires a loathing in Dorian and he becomes the tool by which the religiously moral voice of Basil Hallward is silenced. Ironically, Dorian still recognizes Basil as “[t]he friend who had painted the fatal portrait to which all his misery had been due [...]” (Dorian Gray 152). As God showed himself a friend to man by giving His Son, Basil being the giver of the portrait remains in Dorian’s mind, a friend. The portrait is fatal not merely because it causes Dorian misery, but also because it is a figure of decay and dying. It reflects Dorian’s decaying soul and it is itself a thing that is dying. And as such it perfectly resembles the crucified Messiah whose battered body carried the sins of humanity.
On that final visit to the schoolroom in which he hoped to find some change for the better in the portrait, as a result of his leaving the village girl Hetty Merton “as flower-like as [he] had found her” (201), Dorian finds no change, save that in the eyes there was a look of cunning, and in the mouth the curved wrinkle of the hypocrite. The thing was still loathsome—more loathsome, if possible, than before—and the scarlet dew that spotted the hand seemed brighter, and more like blood newly spilt. [...] And why was the red stain larger than it had been? It seemed to have crept like a horrible disease over the wrinkled fingers. There was blood on the painted feet, as though the thing had dripped—blood even on the hand that had not held the knife. (211)

The portrait’s final appearance is a strong visual emblem of sins common to man. These are also the sins that fuelled the plot against Christ. Cunning and hypocrisy suggest Judas Iscariot who betrayed his master with a kiss (Matthew 26:49). Hypocrisy was the common sin of the Pharisees and Sadducees which Jesus continually decried. They were ironically teachers of the law who oftentimes failed to keep that law themselves. Cruelty, the first alteration visible on the mouth of the portrait upon Sybil Vane’s death, is implied by the fact that there was “no change” in the portrait. Dorian’s “first little bit of self-sacrifice” in leaving Hetty Merton is a form of cruelty for as Lord Henry points out to him, “the fact of having met you, and loved you, will teach her to despise her husband, and she will be wretched” (Dorian Gray 201). Like Eve’s serpent, Dorian has robbed Hetty of innocence and taken away the contentment she would have felt with “any one of her own rank” had she never met and loved Dorian, whom we know to be looking as he did at the onset of the novel, “a young man of extraordinary personal beauty” (5). The reference to the knife in the passage reminds us of the murder of Basil Hallward, a mortal
sin Dorian views too lightly: “The death of Basil Hallward seemed very little to him” (212). As a painted image of sin, the portrait at this point more than ever resembles the image of Christ bleeding on the Cross. The blood stained hands and feet suggest the nail pierced hands and feet of Christ. The image is present in “The Selfish Giant” in which the Giant’s “first little friend” who broke the shackles of selfishness off him, returns after a great spell of time, in winter to receive the aged Giant into Paradise. “On the palms of the child’s hands were the prints of two nails, and the prints of two nails were on the little feet” (Complete Works 299). The child describes his wounds as “the wounds of Love” (300), a fitting description of the work of Christ. Ironically, the wounds on Dorian’s portrait are the wounds of self-love for all his sins are motivated by a narcissistic love of self. Paglia sums the entire novel as “the fetish of a Romantic cult of self-love (525). Wilde’s employment of disease as a simile for the red stain on the wrinkled hand also satisfies the scriptural testimony for the Lamb “by [whose] wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5).

When Dorian “[drags] the purple hanging from the portrait” he displays a lack of reverence, which if viewed with its biblical overtones, must insist on the penalty of death (Dorian Gray 211). The tearing down of the curtain is also in keeping with the biblical account of the death of Christ. Luke records in his gospel account that “the curtain of the temple was torn in two” (Luke 23:45) before Jesus breathed his last and God’s presence went from the Temple to find a home in every believer’s heart. Paul asks the believers in Corinth “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price” (1 Corinthians 6:19). Paul was referring to the redemptive work of Jesus. His death on the
cross paid the full price for man’s sin. Dorian himself dies at the end of the novel when he rejects the portrait and turns against it. The slaying of the portrait results in its return to its original state of beauty. Wilde makes no mention of what becomes of the portrait afterwards but certainly with its original being dead, and he being the only one insistent on its internment, the portrait is free for public display.

In the biblical struggle between man, God, and the Devil, the Lamb of God is both the scapegoat and God. He comes as God incarnate, is found without sin, is sacrificed for many and is afterwards raised “from the dead and seated [...] at [God’s] right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet [...]” (Ephesians 1:20-22). In other words, having been the scapegoat who paid the price for man’s redemption by his suffering and death, Jesus, the Lamb of God, is resurrected and allowed to sit at the right hand of God, the Father. While Dorian’s portrait is as Paglia points out an “idol heavy with mana” (526), it is also a scapegoat and it follows the biblical pattern of deification of Christ, the Lamb of God, after his slaying. Dorian’s portrait is ripped by its original, “He seized the [knife], and stabbed the picture with it” (Dorian Gray 212). But the stabbing does not destroy the portrait. It is restored to its previous state of youthful beauty.

Dorian’s attempt to destroy the portrait results in his own slaying before the scapegoat/idol. Paglia gives a plausible explanation for Dorian’s slaying:

A peculiar mystical act occurs. Dorian stabs the painting but is found with a knife in his heart. [...] How does Dorian’s knife end up in his own heart? We do not ordinarily ask naturalistic questions of magical fictions. Dorian’s death is simultaneous with the blow he strikes. But if we were to expand that point of
time into a cinematic sequence—and Wilde’s novel encourages the deformation of time by imagination—I think we would see the portrait standing like a cruel, laughing god, plucking the knife from its body like an arrow caught in midflight, and hurling it back into the heart of its impious assailant. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* ends in a spectacle of perverse animism. (526-27)

The magical, mystical quality of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* illustrates Wilde’s premise in “The Decay of Lying” that “Art itself is really a form of exaggeration; and selection, which is the very spirit of art, is nothing more than an intensified mode of over-emphasis” (*Artist As Critic* 302). Thus we see Dorian in the exaggerated stance of a devotee; and his becoming, as Paglia argues, a sacrifice at the foot of the portrait he has worshipped is an adaptation of the biblical prescription for holiness, a prescription which all but the believer would see as a ritual rooted in myth. Jesus, the Lamb of God requires of his saints that they “Be faithful even to the point of death” (Revelation 2:10). The “loud voice” the apostle John hears after the war in heaven was fought says of the “brothers” who overcame Satan who is “the accuser of our brothers” that “They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death” (Revelation 12:7,10,12). The apostle Paul urges his converts “in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship” (Romans 12:1). The biblical command, of course, is to offer oneself as a “living” sacrifice unto God who came to give humanity an abundant life; it is quite opposite to Lord Henry’s notion that “self-denial […] mars our lives” (*Dorian Gray* 21) History bears record that martyrdom was a common feature among early Christians. However, we must note that Christian martyrs like Stephen died at the hands of other men, not at the hands of the God they
served, whereas we are tempted to assume that Dorian’s death was caused by his strange portrait.

Such sacrifices as are exhorted by scripture are renunciations expected of the believer who has come to terms with God, repented and accepted the redemption that comes through the saving grace of Jesus’ blood. They do not, in themselves, save a man from his sins. It is the blood of the Lamb that redeems the sinner. Dorian’s hatred towards Basil, the loathing inspired by the portrait which reminds him of his sins, and his brutal rejection of both giver and gift, mirror negative human responses to the Bible. Biblical redemption must be received in humility, which when absent, too often, inspires rejection and even revulsion against God who is presented as the author of the plan. Dorian undergoes two phases in the novel. He first rejoices in the use of the portrait as a scapegoat for his sins. David’s prayer, “O LORD, [...] Have mercy and lift me up from the gates of death, that I may declare your praises [...] and there rejoice in your salvation” (Psalm 9:13-14) suggests that rejoicing should follow salvation. However, in the second phase, as Dorian gives free rein to evil, the reflections of the portrait begin to condemn him. His conscience cannot endure its reports. Even so, a sinner who wants to keep his place in the biblical kingdom of God cannot wilfully continue in sin. Sacrificial renunciation of evil and obedience to the voice and command of God is required of a man who will call on Christ as his personal Saviour. He must carry his cross or his conscience will convict him until he either bows to it or rejects it altogether to live and die in torment. On the whole The Picture of Dorian Gray illustrates the biblical witness.
Notes

1 Hart’s assessment rings true: “His wanderings in East London, [...] serve rather as his luckless initiation into a world that reveals the emptiness of his vision; the confusions of his mind; the losses and defeats, the self-torture and pain, which he encounters; the death that finally overtakes him” (6).

2 “Wotton, in fact, responds to Hallward’s bewildered question, commenting that Dorian’s change has nothing to do with him, that Dorian is simply showing himself as he really is (’It is the real Dorian Gray—that is all’, p.92), and in so doing he introduces the concept of appearance and reality, as he does later when asking rhetorically, ‘before which Dorian? The one who is pouring tea for us, or the one in the picture?’ (p.94)” (D’Alessandro 61).

3 Dennis Bratcher’s interpretation of Genesis 3:2-6 suggests Eve’s inner dissension: “In verses 2 and 3 [of Genesis chapter 3] the woman begins to dialogue with the serpent concerning the single prohibition in God’s world. As she quotes the command of God, indicating that she knew exactly what the boundaries in God’s world were, she subtly but significantly distorts it. God had only said not to eat of the tree, but the woman narrows the command to not even touch the tree. She has twisted the command into a legalism, to an almost unreasonable demand. Unreasonable demands are easier to violate! The dialogue portrays that movement toward disobedience that begins with chafing at the unreasonableness of the boundary (vv.2-3), moves to contemplating a rationalization that nullifies the prohibition (vv. 4-5), and concludes with gazing longingly at the forbidden fruit (v.6)” (“The ‘Fall’—A Second Look”).

4 There is an abundance of scripture against froward speech as for example, “The lips of the righteous know what is fitting, but the mouth of the wicked only what is perverse” (Proverbs 10:32). See also Proverbs 4:24; 7:5; and 8: 8-9. Jesus said, “But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man ‘unclean’ ” (Matthew 15:18).

5 While the phrase “her seed” could mean just about anyone born of woman, it is generally agreed that this is the first biblical reference to the promised Messiah. In his book Evidence That Demands A Verdict, Josh McDowell cites what he calls “an interesting observation of David L. Cooper” regarding the seed of the woman: “In Gen. 3:15 we find the first prediction relative to the Saviour of the world, called ‘the seed of the women’. In the original oracle God foretold the age-long conflict which would be waged between ‘the seed of the woman’ and ‘the seed of the serpent’ and which will eventually be won by the former. This primitive promise indicates a struggle between the Messiah of Israel, the Saviour of the world, on the one hand, and Satan the adversary of the human soul, on the other. It foretells complete victory eventually for the Messiah” (154).
“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him” (John 3:16, 17).

“Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year: ye shall take it out from the sheep, or from the goats: and ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening. [...] And thus shall ye eat it, with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the LORD’s Passover” (Exodus 12: 5,6, 11, KJV).

Genesis records similar sacrifices made by the patriarchs. Abel’s first offering was “fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock” (Genesis 4:4). Cain failed to please God when he offered the produce of the fields rather than a lamb. Later, Abraham was tested by God who seemed to require the sacrifice of Isaac, the son of promise born to him by Sarah, his wife. To Isaac’s query, “The fire and the wood are here,[...], but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” Abraham replied, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son” (Genesis 22:7, 8). In Abraham’s case, God did indeed supply “a ram caught by its horns” (22:13). The four gospels point out the irony in Abraham’s reply — that God himself became the Lamb in the person of Jesus Christ, crucified. The Gospel of John records that John the Baptist “looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God!” (John 1:36, KJV). Jesus himself said, “I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep” (John 10:11, KJV).

In the time of Moses the seed of woman was yet to come. The tenth of the plagues that Israel’s God sent to force the Pharaoh of Egypt to release the Hebrew slaves, the plague of the firstborn son, which involved a smiting of all the firstborn sons of Egypt initiated the practice of sacrificing the Passover Lamb. God instructed Moses to have each Hebrew household slaughter a lamb, take its blood and “strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it” (Exodus 12:7, KJV), adding that: “On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every first-born —both men and animals—and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD. The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt” (Exodus 12:12-13). Thus, the Passover Lamb protected the Hebrew people from losing their firstborn sons on that terrible night of the plague. They were then told to commemorate the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month of their calendar (Leviticus 23:5). This yearly sacrifice was a pointer towards the final atonement that would be made by the Lamb of God, the Messiah of Israel and the world.

Hart writes, “Actually, in reflecting his mind and soul, the picture has become the critic, enjoying the power of the spectator who creates with his own impressions from perceived forms” (8); and Camille Paglia’s view is that “Killing Dorian, the painting achieves its ultimate vampirism, triumphantly regaining ‘all the wonder of [its] exquisite youth and beauty’ ” (526).
Easton’s entry for Passover states: “[...] It is called also the ‘feast of unleavened bread’ (Exodus 23:15; Mark 14:1; Acts 12:3), because during its celebration no leavened bread was to be eaten or even kept in the household (Ex.12:15). The word afterwards came to denote the lamb that was slain at the feast (Mark 14:12-14; 1 Cor. 5:7)” (523-24).

The feast of unleavened bread as it was also called, “was primarily a commemorative ordinance, reminding the children of Israel of their deliverance out of Egypt; but it was, no doubt, also a type of the great deliverance wrought by the Messiah for all his people from the doom of death on account of sin, and from the bondage of sin itself, a worse than Egyptian bondage (1 Cor. 5:7; John 1:29; 19: 32-36; I Pet. 1:19; Gal. 4:4, 5)” (Easton 524).

“[...]; in AD 70 the Roman general Titus systematically forced his way into Jerusalem, and destroyed the fortifications and the Temple” (Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship 756). “Until AD 70, Passover was celebrated in Jerusalem, in any house within the city bounds, and in small companies; the lamb was ritually slaughtered in the Temple precincts. When Temple and Palestinian nation were both destroyed by war, Passover inevitably became a domestic ceremony (Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship 1157).

John wrote, “But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31). Easton explains the word “Christ” as meaning “anointed—the Greek translation of the Hebrew word rendered ‘Messiah’ (q.v), the official title of our Lord, occurring five hundred and fourteen times in the New Testament. It denotes that he was anointed or consecrated to his great redemptive work as Prophet, Priest, and King of his people. He is Jesus the Christ (Acts 17:3; 18:5; Matt. 22:42), the Anointed One” (142-3).

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick notes Wilde’s repeated use of “curious” and “subtle” in Chapter 11 and observes: “Besides being almost violently piquant and uninformative, ‘curious’ shares with ‘subtle’ a built-in epistemological indecision or doubling. Each of them can describe, as the OED puts it, ‘an object of interest’ [...]. At the same time, however, each adjective also describes, and in almost the same terms, the quality of the perception brought by the attentive subject to such an object [...]. The thing known is a reflection of the impulse toward knowing it, then, and each describable only as the excess, ‘wrought’ intensiveness of that knowledge situation (174).

The Picture of Dorian Gray is as critics note, based on the Faustian motif. Oates recognizes it as being “as transparent as a medieval allegory and its structure as workmanlike as that of Marlowe’s Dr Faustus, to which it bears an obvious family resemblance, [...]” (419). Medieval allegory was often used to instruct and teach men the incomparable value of the human soul especially when weighed against temporal pleasures and power.
“When they heard all he was doing, many people came to him from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, and the regions across the Jordan and around Tyre and Sidon. Because of the crowd he told his disciples to have a small boat ready for him, to keep the people from crowding him. For he had healed many, so that those with diseases were pushing forward to touch him” (Mark 3:8-10). “The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and tested him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven” (Matthew 16:1). Jesus responded by calling them a “wicked and adulterous generation” (Matthew 16:4).

In Chapters 22 and 23, Luke gives a detailed account of Jesus’ sufferings from the time of his arrest to the point he draws he last breath. Peter, who had previously sworn that he was “willing to go with [Jesus] to prison and to death” (Luke 22:33) did indeed deny him three times before the rooster crowed, just as Jesus foretold he would (Luke 22:34;54-61).

Mark adds as an illuminating aside, the spectacle of the “young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment [who had been] following Jesus,” but “[w]hen they seized him, he fled naked, leaving his garment behind” (Mark 14:51-3) and thus illustrates the terror that Jesus’ disciples and followers felt during his arrest and crucifixion.

“... anyone who is hung on a tree is under God’s curse” (Deuteronomy 21:23).

Easton refers the reader to the lives of Miriam, Gehazi and Uzziah. Miriam suffered leprosy when she and Aaron spoke against their brother Moses. She was healed when Moses interceded on her behalf but not before she bore her disgrace seven days outside the camp (Numbers 12). Gehazi, the servant of the prophet Elisha brought the curse of leprosy upon himself and his descendents when he went after Naaman, the commander of the king of Aram’s army, for the gift Elisha had refused to accept (2 Kings 5). Uzziah was struck with leprosy when he “wantonly invaded the priest’s office (2 Chr. 26:17), and entering the sanctuary proceeded to offer incense on the golden altar” (Easton 682).

Easton defines salvation thus: “Salvation. This word is used of the deliverance of the Israelites from the Egyptians (Ex. 14:13), and of deliverance generally from evil or danger. In the New Testament it is specially used with reference to the great deliverance from the guilt and the pollution of sin wrought out by Jesus Christ—‘the great salvation’ (Heb.2: 3)” (Easton 595-6).

Dorian “is increasingly the subject of gossip and rumour because [...] he moves about secretly and is associated with debauchery and disaster” (Poteet 241).

Moses summoned all Israel and said: [...] (At that time I stood between the LORD and you to declare to you the word of the LORD, because you were afraid of the fire and did not go up to the mountain.) And he said: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I,
the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments” (Deuteronomy 5:1,5-10).

23 “[Dorian] is an artist in life, not only in paint or in words, for he tries to give his life the beautiful changeableness of the artist and artist-critic of Wilde’s dialogues” (Poteet 246).

26 It was when He warned Adam and Eve against eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that the LORD God told them that they would die if they ate it. Bratcher writes, “The command of God, the boundary set by God in His world, carried with it a consequence: ‘In the very day that you eat from [the tree], you will certainly die.’ The couple knew the penalty of crossing the boundary, of trying to live outside God’s order, yet they chose to violate it anyway. […] But here we learn that God is more than a God of justice bound to a law of judgment and retribution. The curses imposed in the previous verses are heavy, but they are not death. God does not carry out the death penalty” (“The ‘Fall’—A Second Look”).

27 Cain the elder son of Adam killed his brother Abel (Genesis 4:8). Adam had another son named Seth from whom Noah was descended. In Noah’s days God “saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time” (Genesis 6:5). Going by the account of Adam’s lineage, men lived for virtually hundreds of years. Adam lived 930 years, his son Seth 912, his grandson Enosh for 905 (Genesis 5: 5, 8, 11). In Genesis 6:3 however, God takes a negative view towards this longevity on account of man’s increasing propensity towards sin and says, “My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years”. God cut man’s life down to little more than a tenth of what it had been.

28 Marlowe’s Dr Faustus gets among other things, a stock of magical books, which Mephostophilis gives him for the right given to Lucifer to exact his soul after a period of 24 years. Various critics have recognized this motif, modified in The Picture of Dorian Gray. Dorian gets one book but he keeps “no less than nine large-paper copies of the first edition,[...] bound in different colours [...]” (Dorian Gray 123).

29 Paul exhorts Timothy to “continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:15-16).

30 Wilde writes in “The Ballad of Reading Gaol” that “God’s Son died for all” (Complete Works 856).
31 Goodenough observes that “contemporary novelists like Tim O’Brien in “The Lives of The Dead” (1960) and Frederick Buechner in The Wizard’s Tide (1987) illustrate how telling stories for a child within—oneself or an imagined other—can save us” (338).

32 God’s instructions to Moses for the Tabernacle is to “Hang the curtain from the clasps and place the ark of the Testimony behind the curtain. The curtain will separate the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. Put the atonement cover on the ark of the Testimony in the Most Holy Place” (Exodus 26:33-34).

33 Stephen’s death by stoning is recounted in Acts 7:54-60.