A Conceptual Analysis of the Adam and Eve Myth and Its Manifestation in Political Rhetoric

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A Conceptual Analysis of the Adam and Eve Myth

and Its Manifestation in Political Rhetoric

Katie Bullock

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

A Conceptual Analysis of the Adam and Eve Myth and Its Manifestation in Political Rhetoric

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The Adam and Eve myth has long captured the attention of Christian and non-Christian minds alike. Tropes of paradise, serpents, fruit, and fallenness appear in works such as Milton’s Paradise Lost, Shakespeare’s Hamlet, Golding’s Lord of the Flies, Emily Dickinson’s “Awake ye Muses Nine,” Walt Whitman’s “Great are the Myths,” and Joyce Kilmer’s “The Snowman in the Yard.” Religious commentary on Adam and Eve is equally pervasive; most notably the theology of St. Augustine, whose work may well be considered the most influential in Western Christianity. Even though a story as old as this one may not seem relevant in a first-world culture where newness is both expected and valued, the legacy of the Adam and Eve myth has not diminished. Linda Shearing writes, “Whether they realize it or not, Americans spend a great deal of time negotiating their world with Adam and Eve.” To test Shearing’s assertion, this essay seeks to illuminate the ways in which Americans negotiate Adam, Eve, and Eden in political rhetoric and how assumptions of marriage, family, labor, sacrifice, fallenness, redemption, and morality are used by political leaders as a persuasive appeal to encourage their audiences to join with them in recovering a state of purity and innocence.

Keywords: political rhetoric, conceptual analysis, Adam, Eve, Eden
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Introduction

Jack Katz states, “in the West, Genesis, as conveyed through official teachings, folklore, and artistic conventions, has found primordial appeal across enormously varied cultural turfs” (1). With how saturated our culture is with the effects of the Adam and Eve myth, it is somewhat surprising that relatively little research has been done on its influence in politics. Many Biblical myths, tropes, and teachings have been extensively studied in political rhetoric. Scholars have examined connections between the words of Jesus in the gospels and their implications on modern politics, such as Richard Bauckham’s work, which explores the implications of Jesus’s teachings on taxes and modern connections and allusions to those biblical teachings within rhetoric. Jeremiah W. Jenks looks at a wide variety of ways in which Jesus’s teachings proved “practical in politics” (vii). Jesus’s teachings on caring for the poor also play a major role in political rhetoric, as do Judeo-Christian tropes of redemption, law, obedience, rebirth, light, truth, and sacrifice (e.g. Jenks, Pagels, Thistlethwaite, Kahn). Stephen Stein and Sacvan Bercovich, in their introduction to The American Jeremiad, states that the jeremiad “helped sustain a national dream through two hundred years of turbulence and change” (xi). Yet, the Adam and Eve myth, the biblical story of the founding of the human race, remains understudied in political rhetoric.

This essay recognizes that there are compelling reasons to undertake an explicit, close study of how the Adam and Eve myth has informed American political rhetoric and, in turn, helped to shape the culture of American politics. Thistlethwaite asserts,

The story of Adam and Eve has been interpreted time and again, even very recently, to encourage us to view our lives in certain ways. The different interpretations have huge consequences...The same story can be told in very different ways and thus lead
individuals and whole societies to make different choices about what they think is right or wrong, moral or immoral, good or evil. (19-20)

Similarly, Linda Shearing writes, “Eden, Eve, Adam, and the God who created them are such familiar figures to Americans that people routinely appeal to them to justify any number of practices… Whether they realize it or not, Americans spend a great deal of time negotiating their world with Adam and Eve” (3). If the Adam and Eve myth has such significant consequences on individuals, societies, and social and political morality, and if that myth is used to “justify any number of practices,” including political ones, then it seems helpful to explore how politicians use the Adam and Eve myth to gain persuasive influence. I will argue that the Adam and Eve myth is prevalent in political rhetoric and that the Adam and Eve myth’s universality makes it a particularly strong rhetorical strategy.

The Adam and Eve myth has universal appeal because it is about beginnings—the beginning of Earth, beginning of humanity, and beginning of sin. This feature of the Adam and Eve myth contributes to the human preoccupation with myth generally. Joanne Wright writes, Fascination with and curiosity about origins in general, and an interest in the beginnings of human societies, human life, and indeed the cosmos itself, lie at the heart of religious, scientific, and philosophic inquiry…religious creation stories claim the existence of a causal force that is responsible for the composition and ordering of all things from the cosmos to human relations. (3)

Since the Adam and Eve myth explains origins, beginnings, and “composition and ordering of things,” it plays a significant role in Christian paradigms, and, because American politics are intertwined with Christianity, it plays a significant role in American politics as well.

Thistlethwaite explains that the political role of the Adam and Eve myth acts as a
foundational consultant for relationships, paradigms, and identities that exist in society during times of political and social unrest:

Running through our public lives are stories—deep scripts that tell us who we are as individuals and as a society…our ultimate concern is especially visible at times of national crises such as domestic unrest regarding race, economic problems, and foreign wars. Particularly in times of distress, people often want to ‘go back to their roots,’ and as has been noted, the story of Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden is one of the root stories of humanity; it is story ‘A.’ (20)

Here Thistlethwaite implies that the Adam and Eve myth is significant because it is foundational to our humanness, our meaning, and our purpose. Thistlethwaite’s observation of the role of the Adam and Eve myth is similar to Stephen Stein’s and Sacvan Bercovich’s observation that indicates the jeremiad also played a significant role in political rhetoric during times of turbulence and change. Like the jeremiad, which is composed of a set of assumptions and used as a theoretical lens through which to critique political rhetoric, scholarly literature reveals a number of assumptions about the Adam and Eve myth that may help to answer this question: what exactly is in the Adam and Eve myth that is so foundational that it functions as a “root story” in American culture?

In order to determine assumptions from the Adam and Eve myth and identify them in texts, I will follow James Jasinski’s notion of close reading-based conceptual criticism. Jasinski describes this approach as “a discussion of theoretical sources that eventuated in the explication of a critical perspective or Method…followed by an effort to apply the perspective or method to some object in order to illustrate its analytic, interpretive, and in a few cases evaluative potential” (253). My use of his method consists of three main steps. First, it requires a close
reading of the Adam and Eve myth in the Bible to identify key words or feature that are unique or central to the myth followed by extensive research on literature about the Adam and Eve myth. This step is not sequential, but rather iterative and reflexive, so that the final assumptions are well situated in both the biblical text and the literature of the Adam and Eve myth. The assumptions that emerge from this analysis allow Adam and Eve myth to function as a type of “critical perspective or Method” (Jasinski 253).

Second, a concept-driven approach includes representative artifacts to be used for analysis. Thistlethwaite indicates that people turn to origin stories like the Adam and Eve myth during times of “national crises such as domestic unrest regarding race, economic problems, and foreign wars” (20). To select artifacts, I gathered speeches from historical periods when the United States was engaged in war, economic issues and strained racial relationships. I looked at artifacts that had the highest combination of Thistlewaite’s requirements and demonstrated the most straightforward manifestation of the assumptions. The three presidential speeches that I chose not only met my own observations of a combination of social issues and an obvious manifestation of the assumptions from the Adam and Eve myth but were identified by scholars and critics as touchstone artifacts that met these same assumptions.

Third, this method necessitates a close reading of the artifacts using my assumptions from the Adam and Eve myth as a critical lens through which to view political discourse in order to interpret its persuasive appeal. This step aligns with Jasinski’s instructions to “apply the perspective or method to some object in order to illustrate its analytic, interpretive, and in a few cases evaluative potential” (253). Due to the length constraints of the thesis, this will not be a comprehensive discussion of the assumptions found in the Adam and Eve myth, the diverse implementations of the assumptions in political rhetoric, or of the many artifacts that manifest
these assumptions. Rather, my intent is to examine key rhetorical artifacts that will help me introduce and demonstrate the breadth of the Adam and Eve myth in American political – specifically, presidential – discourse and to incite further interest in its prevalence, flexibility, and persuasive appeal. In the spirit of introducing the application of the Adam and Eve myth as a rhetorical device, I opted to order the following three artifacts in terms of complexity based on scholarly observations on how the Adam and Eve myth is used, identified, and referenced to by the public.

Kahn states, “Adam and Eve are cast out of Eden because they chose to do wrong…If evil brought us to where we are, then the Western religious tradition tells us that our essential task as individuals and communities is to overcome the evil in our nature...we must recover Eden” (1). This concept of innocence, sin, fallenness, and redemption, and the potential for sin, fallenness, and redemption, is a foundational assumption of the Adam and Eve myth and is a component of other assumptions from the Adam and Eve myth. The assumption of falling from Eden (fallenness or potential fallenness due to sin or temptation) and recovering Eden (seeking redemption or maintaining innocence) acts as a measure by which people try to conduct and justify themselves and their actions. I will be using this assumption as an indicator for how a given political rhetor uses the Adam and Eve myth. Rhetors will reveal themselves as fallen with language marks of guilt and shame as well as an acceptance to undertake the consequences of guilt or shame (labor and sacrifice) or they will reveal themselves as innocent with language markers of transparency and blamelessness. In addition to this first assumption (innocence and sin) which will operate in all parts of the analysis, this thesis will focus on three key assumptions conceptualized in the Adam and Eve myth and demonstrated in three touchstone texts: marriage and family, labor and sacrifice, and morality and immorality.
Foundational to humanity is the desire for partnership, and the Adam and Eve myth exemplifies the most intimate partnerships. After God creates Adam he states, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him” (*King James Bible*, Gen. 2.18). Roseann Benson explains the significance of this event in her book, *The Marriage Covenant of Adam and Eve*, by asserting that God did not call His creation of humanity good until he created woman. Furthermore, she explains, the relationship of Adam and Eve was not one of co-existing, but one of a covenant marriage in which “God as the creator gives commands that they must follow” (56). One of God’s commands was that Eve was to remain with Adam, which is demonstrated in God giving Eve to Adam as a help-meet, and in His reiteration of this commandment after they are expelled from the Garden of Eden that “thy desire shall be to thy husband” (*King James Bible*, Gen. 3.16). Adam accepts the terms of a monogamous marriage in his statement, “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (*King James Bible*, Gen. 2.24). This same marriage covenant is later referred to by Christ in the New Testament. Speaking to the pharisees of the depth of a marriage covenant, Christ said, “Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (*King James Bible*, Matt. 19.4-6). Again, Christ not only reiterates the depth of a marriage covenant, but also indicates that God was the one who joined them together.

The implication here is not only a model for what a marriage should look like, and how a marriage relationship should function, but also that marriage between a man and woman is
moral, or good. Elain Pagels writes, “For centuries Jewish teachers built from this passage the basic laws of marital behavior. Certain rabbis actually turned these lines from Genesis into a code of sexual conduct” (13). Linda Shearing and Valarie Ziegler argue that though not everyone views the myth of Adam and Eve as scripture, people “do recognize, however, that the Garden account is a good story. And, like good narratives everywhere, it has power based on its ability to address issues that shape how people understand themselves” (8). One of the most powerful messages from the Adam and Eve myth is the deep commitment and moral law surrounding marriage.

The assumption defined in this literature is that Adam and Eve are a model for marriage, family, and familial commitment. For this assumption, I will be looking for language, stories, or references to marriage and family that are associated with moral language or judgments. Kahn says, “The text [Adam and Eve myth recorded in Genesis] figured dramatically in the construction of rules regulating not just marriage and divorce, but homosexuality, adultery, public displays of nakedness, childbirth rituals, and gender hierarchy” (71). Evidences of each of these categories appear in political rhetoric; sometimes literally, as with the LGBTQ movement during the Obama administration when the adage “Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve” became a popular retort to the pro-rights movement, but more often metaphorically as I am about to demonstrate with Clinton’s apology of his affair with Monica Lewinski.

When Clinton took office in 1993, the nation was experiencing a significant financial deficit and was just emerging from the Cold War, which ended shortly before Clinton took office. Despite these national issues, the state of American economics and foreign affairs was comparably temperate. During the early portion of Clinton’s presidency, the economy improved; the United States experienced a budget surplus and unemployment rates were low. On a national
political spectrum, the United States was doing relatively well. On the surface, it would appear that Thistlethwaite’s parameters (domestic unrest regarding race, economic problems, and foreign wars) for turning to the Adam and Eve myth, were, at this point in time, irrelevant.

However, conflicts and unrest were not absent from Bill Clinton’s personal life, and due to his position as President of the United States, those conflicts became public business. Before becoming President, Clinton invested in the Whitewater Development Corporation. The Whitewater Corporation went bankrupt and shortly after Clinton became president, Ken Starr was assigned to investigate Clinton’s connection to the Corporation and the associated fraud suspected in the Whitewater Corporation. Starr’s investigation of the Whitewater Controversy broadened when he encountered accusations of sexual assault by Paula Jones and later heard of Clinton’s affair with Monica Lewinski. These accusations, which came to a head during 1998, ultimately created a form of domestic unrest and lead to Clinton’s infamous impeachment. During his impeachment trial, Clinton’s statement before the Grand Jury about his affair with Lewinski and other scandal investigations were deceitful and highly problematic. Once details of his dishonest testimony and indisputable evidence that he had a sexual relationship with Monica Lewinski, reached the public, Clinton’s reputation was damaged even more. On August 17, 1998, in response to the mounting criticism against his actions and character, Clinton gave a speech addressing his testimony before the Grand Jury. One critic noted, “Future historians will likely evaluate not just what Clinton did, but also what he did not accomplish, because he was tied-up in a second-term struggle for political survival” (Riley). To negotiate his personal circumstances with the public, Clinton turned to the Adam and Eve myth to frame who he was and how he related to society.

In order to understand how Clinton approached the publicization of his affair with
Lewinski, it is beneficial to observe the mythic behavioral patterns that result from sin. When Adam and Eve “heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden…Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden” When God called Adam and Eve after they had partaken of the fruit, Adam responds to God’s inquiry of where he was by saying, “I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself” (King James Bible, Gen. 3.10). Because Adam and Eve knew they had sinned, they were not forthcoming when God called them. Instead they hid because of fear, guilt, and shame. According to the Adam and Eve myth, hiding and refusing responsibility are signals of sin, and sin is accompanied by guilt and shame.

Looking at Clinton’s testimony before the grand jury reveals nearly identical behaviors and language to the Adam and Eve myth. While Bill Clinton did not literally hide himself from the public, he did hide behind technicalities and legalities: “While my answers were legally accurate, I did not volunteer information… I know that my public comments and my silence about this matter gave a false impression” (Clinton). Clinton admits that he also “hid” by not being forthcoming with his relationship with Monica Lewinski when the affair was initially discovered because he says, “I was motivated by many factors: first, by a desire to protect myself from the embarrassment of my own conduct. I was also very concerned about protecting my family” (Clinton). He also hides behind another political scandal that coincided with the affair: “In addition, I had real and serious concerns about an Independent Counsel investigation that began with private business dealings 20 years ago” (Clinton). In both Adam’s and Clinton’s responses, they were motivated to hide because of shame, embarrassment, and fear and they were not forthright, about their guilt until they were called out of hiding by those with moral authority. In the case of Clinton, the moral authority rested in those who were legally assigned to
investigate the history of his finances and his relationships.

After Adam and Eve reveal themselves to God, they admit that they partook of the fruit. In Adam’s confession, he makes the assertion that he partook of the fruit because he could not separate himself from Eve. He presents himself to God not as an individual, but as a husband, and they stand before God as a couple: “And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. And the Lord God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat” (King James Bible, Gen. 3.12-3). Even though Adam and Eve were both guilty of disobeying God’s commandments, it is important to note that the myth implies that it is better to face judgment with a partner, particularly in the case that the partnership meets moral requirements.

Clinton also admits his sin after he is caught. In his August 17, 1998 Statement Before the Grand Jury, Bill Clinton says, “I did have a relationship with Ms. Lewinsky that was not appropriate. In fact, it was wrong” (Clinton). And, like Adam, Clinton chooses to present himself before the public to be judged not as an individual, but as a couple and a family: “Now this matter is between me, the two people I love most, my wife and our daughter, and our God” (Clinton). The concept of fallen people presenting themselves in the presence of God again hearkens back to Genesis, when Adam and Eve are called to God’s presence after they have partaken of the forbidden fruit. In this case, Bill Clinton places himself in the position of Adam, a fallen man standing before God and waiting for both the consequences of and redemption from his behavior. While his wife and daughter did not engage in morally wrongful behavior in this case, they still suffered from a fallenness of the ideal marriage and family, and, to some extent, political and social favor because of Bill Clinton’s actions. In addition to implying that he and his family are working through Clinton’s sin with God, and that God is the ultimate judge of the
situation, Clinton is also presenting himself, with his family, to be judged by the American people.

Of course, lying in court is morally wrong activity, but here marital fidelity takes precedence over honesty. His morally wrong decision comes from breaking a commandment given in Geneses, to “cleave unto his wife: and…be one flesh” (*King James Bible*, Gen. 2.24). To signify a return to cleaving to his wife and again becoming one flesh, Clinton claims, “I intend to reclaim my family life for my family” (Clinton). But reclaiming his family life and restoring his public image of a moral family man requires reconciliation. Clinton implies that he will undergo this reconciliation in his statement, “Now this matter is between me, the two people I love most, my wife and our daughter, and our God” (Clinton). The pattern of his language, and the emphasis on the affair over his deceit in court, reinforces the concept of morality in marriage and family. This shifts Clinton’s reconciliation to the public from being a dishonest, corrupt politician, to a reconciliation of his personal morality and commitment to his marriage and family. His course of action then becomes reconstructing a morally acceptable image of marriage and family that meets the public’s expectation; an expectation that is based in the myth from which the marriage covenant is first given to Adam and Eve.

*The Atlantic* cited Clinton’s relationship with 22-year old Monica Lewinski as a ‘gross abuse of power’ (Graham), implying that Bill Clinton used his position as the President of the United States to manipulate Lewinski into a sexual relationship. Even presently, the emphasis of that White House scandal does not rest on the actual charges he was impeached for (perjury and obstruction of justice), but the affair. During the height of the #metoo movement, Clinton was contacted by several news stations to comment on his affair with Monica Lewinski. On Politico he was quoted having said, “Here’s what I want to say: It wasn’t my finest hour, but the
important thing is that was a very painful thing that happened 20 years ago and I apologized to my family, to Monica Lewinsky and her family, to the American people…I meant it then, I meant it now. I’ve had to live the consequences every day since” (Morin). Ultimately, in one sense, Clinton’s affair did not directly impact the American people. Yet Clinton felt compelled to publicly apologize for a behavior that was not illegal, not violent, and one that left an overall insignificant impact on the lives of the American people, and the emphasis of his presidency remains focused on this scandal. Bill Clinton’s infamous legacy regarding the affair makes Hillary Clinton’s campaign more interesting.

During Hillary Clinton’s presidential campaign, it is significant that she considered the image of her and Bill together more persuasive to the American people than presenting herself alone despite Bill Clinton’s controversial past. In fact, in an effort to regain the trust of the American people, Hillary Clinton spent time during the 2016 Democratic convention discussing the long history of their marriage, emphasizing the hurt and the healing: “Bill, that conversation we started in the law library 45 years ago is still going strong. It’s lasted through good times that filled us with joy, and hard times that tested us” (Clinton, Hillary). Here, Hillary Clinton implies that she and Bill have continued cleaving to each other, have worked and labored together to preserve and build their marriage and that they have a good marriage. Adam sinned to stay with Eve by partaking of the forbidden fruit and Hillary forgave Bill in order to preserve their marriage. But both actions indicate that marriage is a commitment that matters most.

**Labor and Sacrifice in Barack Obama’s 2009 Inaugural Address**

The Adam and Eve myth is also a powerful explanation for the imperfect, unfair, volatile state in which humanity finds itself. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God’s commandment and partook of the forbidden fruit, they fell from innocence and immortality, and they were cast out
of the Garden. The consequence of this fall was a life that included labor, pain, sin, and sorrow. Thistlethwaite states, “The deeper truth found in the story of Adam and Eve concerns a loss of innocence. We are ‘fallen,’ which means that we can be tempted and we sometimes do things we know we shouldn’t do. That’s the human condition in a nutshell. Sometimes, we sin” (19). For society and individuals, this human condition, fallenness, provides yet another reason to look back at the root story of Adam and Eve for solutions.

After they were expelled from Eden, God gave Adam and Eve new variations of the commandments he had originally given them in the Garden. Instead of “keeping” the Garden, God commanded them to labor for their food and sacrifice (King James Bible, Gen. 3.17-9). Kahn explains that “without labor, the world will produce nothing. It remains ‘dust’” (184) and that labor functions to offset death. Not only will the world produce nothing without labor, but the world requires sustained labor in order to be maintained: “Labor ties us to death. Adam cannot save himself no matter how well he performs the task of labor. He can do no more than pass on this task to the next generation” (Kahn 191). Labor produces meaning, but that meaning is lost when the laborer dies. Regardless of the imminent end that mortality prescribes to humanity, labor is essential to redemption because it demonstrates contriteness and humility for submitting to God’s commandment in a state of fallenness. Labor becomes a moral obligation and the only way to produce sustenance. However, labor alone does not merit redemption.

Kahn makes this distinction when he says, “Labor’s end is to alleviate pain, to minimize resistance to production. The end of sacrifice is not to alleviate the pain of labor but to transcend to conditions of labor” (189). When Cain and Abel offer sacrifices, it is with the intent to transcend the conditions of labor though sanctification of their sacrifice. When God accepts and sanctifies their sacrifice, it not only provides a way to redemption, but gives meaning and legacy
to their labor. Kahn declares that “we do not find ourselves to be an image of God as laborers, for labor ties us to death. Adam cannot save himself not matter how well he performs the task of labor…only through sacrifice…are being and meaning one and the same…[sacrifice] becomes a point for the showing forth of the sacred” (191).

If Adam and Eve and their posterity kept the commandments to labor and sacrifice, they would receive redemption from their sins. Again, Kahn asserts that Adam and Eve are expelled from Eden because of their sin, but that “our essential task as individuals and communities is to overcome the evil in our nature...we must recover Eden” (1). The concept and pattern of recovering Eden, or a state of harmony, happiness, and perfection, through labor and sacrifice, is pervasive in political rhetoric. What Kahn points out about fallenness, labor, and sacrifice, describes a version of the Western view of political progress. When citizens find themselves in a state of political pain, a political leader will identify labor as a response to fallenness. And, oftentimes, a political leader will even request what Kahn calls “political sacrifice.” In this way, the Adam and Eve myth is a driving force that shaped, and continues to shape, Western politics.

This literature points out another assumption from the Adam and Eve myth—labor and sacrifice. Labor and sacrifice are required because of fallenness, but, if obeyed, they result in redemption. In Barack Obama’s 2009 Inaugural Address, I will be looking for language that indicates a requirement to labor and sacrifice for the government or the good of the country in order to obtain redemption, or a return to Eden.

Obama’s Inaugural Address is a helpful artifact in which to examine this assumption because it meets, and in some cases exceeds, the context of Thistlethwaite’s social conditions (racial issues, economic problems, and foreign wars) that provoke a return to “root stories.” The United States was barely coming out of what is considered by many to be the worst national
financial crises since the Great Depression. Obama references this crisis in his address. “That we are in the midst of crisis is now well understood… Our economy is badly weakened” (Obama). The United States was still in the midst of the war on terror and political opinion surrounding the war was becoming increasingly heated. These domestic and international exigencies are part of what contributed to one of the largest physical and digital audiences ever, setting a record for the most attended event in Washington D.C. and one of the most observed events by a global audience. As part of an outreach campaign, tickets to the inaugural address and the inaugural ball were subsidized in order to allow ordinary people to attend the events.

However, there is also a unique personal context of Barack Obama becoming America’s first black president. The inaugural address was held the day after Martin Luther King Jr. Day and the 200th anniversary of Abraham Lincoln’s birth year. Both of these events were incorporated in his inauguration and contributed to the significance of Obama’s achievement. His victorious presidency came with high expectations. In addition to inheriting the late 2000’s financial crisis, Obama inherited expectations due to his younger age (he became president at 47 years old) and ethnicity. *The New York Times* reported, “Mr. Obama, the son of a black man from Kenya and a white woman from Kansas, inherited a White House built partly by slaves and a nation in crisis at home and abroad” (Baker). Obama’s identity as the first black president, in contrast with a nation partially built by slavery, is, in a way, representative of a nation attempting a path to redemption from a state of fallenness.

In his speech, Obama had to continue his promise for change, renewal, and security: “His scant record of achievement at the national level proved less important to voters than his embodiment of change” (Baker). His audience anticipated solutions for the economic and social slump of America. Interestingly, *The New York Times* claimed, “Mr. Bush and Mr. Clinton
likewise called for responsibility at their inaugurations, but Mr. Obama offered little sense of what exactly he wanted Americans to do” (Baker). Perhaps he offered little on what Americans needed to do, but he did offer hope in another way. Baker reported Bill Clinton stating, “This is a time when we’re clearly making a new beginning. It’s a country of repeated second-chances and new beginnings” (Baker). The following analysis agrees with Clinton’s evaluation of Obama’s inaugural address. By turning to the Adam and Eve myth, a root story about second-chances and new beginnings, Obama illustrates how American can find redemption.

Obama’s opening statement seems deceptively simple. In response to the economic and social turmoil, Obama first acknowledges that by accepting the presidency he is taking upon himself the expectations of American citizens to revitalize America. However, instead of taking that responsibility on just himself, he includes his audience by saying he is “humbled by the task before us” (Obama). By choosing to unite himself with the audience, he disperses the responsibility of the government onto the shoulders of the American people and creates a sense of shared responsibility to labor in order to rebuild the economy and address the social turmoil of the nation. He follows this statement with an expression of gratitude for the trust of the people and ends his statement with a recognition of the sacrifice of the political ancestry of the United States. The reference to labor and sacrifice in his opening statement sets the theme for the rest of his speech.

In the third and fifth paragraphs of the speech, Obama begins to establish a justification for why he can request the labor and sacrifice from the American people by outlining details of national crises. First, he sets a general tone of gloom and uncertainty by asserting that he is taking the oath of presidency “amidst gathering clouds and raging storms” (Obama). He then specifics what these clouds and storms are:
Our nation is at war, against a far-reaching network of violence and hatred. Our economy is badly weakened...Homes have been lost; jobs shed; businesses shuttered. Our health care is too costly; our schools fail too many; and each day brings further evidence that the ways we use energy strengthen our adversaries and threaten our planet. (Obama)

His goal in these two paragraphs is to establish that the United States is no longer in “rising tides of prosperity and the still waters of peace” (Obama), but rather that America has fallen from what is used to be into a decline that will not be possible to overcome without the combined labor and sacrifice of the American people. Obama moralizes this national decline by attributing it to “consequence of greed and irresponsibility on the part of some, but also our collective failure to make hard choices and prepare the nation for a new age” (Obama). Like the fall of Adam and Eve, America has fallen from its utopian potential because of wrong decisions on the part of its people.

In his sixth paragraph, Obama transitions between describing the fallenness of the nation to presenting the audience with a course of action. He reminds the people that they are gathered because “we have chosen hope over fear, unity of purpose over conflict and discord” (Obama). With this concept, Obama seeks to persuade his audience that there is a way out of the fallen state of the nation, and that there is hope for a restoration of prosperity and peace.

In paragraphs seven through twelve of his speech, Obama reminds people of the legacy and the pattern that early American’s followed to find prosperity and peace and makes the assertion that this is the legacy and pattern that must be continued in order to restore America. He states that greatness isn’t given, “It must be earned” (Obama) and that the journey of Americans has never been one traversed by those who “prefer leisure over work” but “the doers, the makers of things -- some celebrated, but more often men and women obscure in their labor --
who have carried us up the long rugged path towards prosperity and freedom” (Obama). In paragraphs nine and ten, Obama gives examples of the labor and sacrifice of early Americans and in paragraph eleven transitions into the relevance of his examples for his audience. In order to offset the consequences of the fall, the American people must engage in immediate, consistent labor. Obama requests, “Starting today, we must pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and begin again the work of remaking America” (Obama).

Mirroring his earlier strategy of citing laborious tasks of American ancestors, Obama lists responsibilities that are required of his audience in order to restore America including, “Create new jobs,” “lay a new foundation for growth,” “build the roads and bridges, the electric grids and digital lines” “restore science,” “raise health care's quality and lower its cost” “responsibly leave Iraq to its people, and forge a hard-earned peace in Afghanistan,” and “work tirelessly to lessen the nuclear threat.” He also includes international political labor, pledging to “work alongside [people of poor nations] to make your farms flourish and let clean waters flow; to nourish starved bodies and feed hungry minds” (Obama). By engaging in these assignments, his audience will also engage in the process of redemption.

What is perhaps most compelling in Obama’s speech is not necessarily his outline of tasks that the American people should commit themselves to, but the defining of labor, particularly labor for the American government, as virtuous. Obama declares that political labor is “the source of our confidence — the knowledge that God calls on us to shape an uncertain destiny” (Obama). Obedience to God’s commandment to labor produces confidence in the outcomes of that labor. Obama refers to this moral standard of labor when he categorizes hard work as “values upon which our success depends” (Obama) and demands a return to hard work, or labor, as part of a “quiet force of progress throughout our history” (Obama). He even declares
that political labor is “satisfying to the spirit,” implying a spiritual satisfaction of following God’s direction to labor, and “defining of [their] character” (Obama). In speaking of other nations, Obama says, “know that your people will judge you on what you can build, not what you destroy” (Obama). Here, Obama is not only assigning virtue and obligation to Americans laboring, but also implying that labor is a measure by which other countries should judge their value as nations. By aligning God’s mandate to Adam to labor and his mandate to American citizens to labor, Obama encourages a moral obligation for the American people to take responsibility for the fall of America and labor to offset political death.

Kahn claims that “we do not find ourselves to be an image of God as laborers…only through sacrifice…are being and meaning one and the same…[sacrifice] becomes a point for the showing forth of the sacred” (191). Likewise, Obama acknowledges the role of sacrifice in the restoration of prosperity and peace. He does this in two distinct ways. First, he memorializes sacrifices that have already been made, as he did in his opening statement when he reflects that he is “mindful of the sacrifices borne by our ancestors” (Obama). In his recounting of the labor of our ancestors in paragraphs nine and ten he explicitly mentions instances of political sacrifices. “For us, [men and women] fought and died, in places like Concord and Gettysburg; Normandy and Khe Sanh…Time and again these men and women struggled and sacrificed and worked till their hands were raw so that we might live a better life” (Obama). In the latter part of his speech, he spends considerable time on this concept. In paragraph twenty-five, Obama memorializes the fallen heroes of Arlington. In paragraphs thirty and thirty-two, Obama alludes to George Washington’s army in the revolutionary war, following Kahn’s philosophy that political sacrifice transcends physical death, preserves and redeems the nation, and functions as an essential component for returning to Eden.
Obama’s allusion to past sacrifices serve as a model for his audience to follow. This is the second way in which he uses the concept of political sacrifice in his speech. Obama spends the majority of the last several paragraphs of his speech calling on Americans to remember the sacrifices of their forbearers and asserts that his audience should have the same dedication to the nation; the same attitude of sacrifice so that the nation can be redeemed from its fallenness:

As we consider the road that unfolds before us, we remember with humble gratitude those brave Americans who, at this very hour, patrol far-off deserts and distant mountains. They have something to tell us today, just as the fallen heroes who lie in Arlington whisper through the ages. We honor them not only because they are guardians of our liberty, but because they embody the spirit of service; a willingness to find meaning in something greater than themselves. (Obama)

Honoring both past and current individuals who have made, are making, or will potentially make blood sacrifices, or choose to die for the United States, creates an opportunity to request the same commitment from those who are not currently making political sacrifices, or sufficient political sacrifices. To these listeners, Obama asserts that “it is precisely this spirit [of sacrifice] that must inhabit us all” (Obama). By inhabiting a spirit of sacrifice, Adam, Eve, and their posterity were able to find redemption and sanctification. Likewise, Obama ends his speech with the notion that America can reach the same outcome of redemption by cultivating that same spirit.

Moral Dichotomies in Richard Nixon’s Checkers Speech

The Adam and Eve myth not only illustrates the concept of fallenness, but also illustrates the circumstances that create potential for fallenness. When Adam and Eve were introduced to the Garden of Eden, God gave them the commandment to not partake of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Obeying this commandment ensured that they could remain in the
Garden, while disobeying this commandment meant that they would fall from their state of paradise and encounter illness, pain, sorrow, and death. Not only did this introduction to human decision create a dichotomy, but there was also an implied morality around the decision. Obeying God was good, while disobeying Him was evil. Dichotomies are common in political rhetoric because they reduce the burden of decision making. However, what is significant here is that the Adam and Eve myth moralizes the dichotomy in a particularly compelling way. If there are two choices, the Adam and Eve myth dictates that one is a good or right choice and the other is a bad or wrong choice. If the wrong choice is made, fallenness, or negative consequence, will result and the agent will have to engage in the pattern of labor and sacrifice to find redemption, while good choices will lead to the retention of paradise, innocence, and Eden. The moral pressure that the Adam and Eve myth assigns to Christians is well explained by Kahn: “To comply with law is to maintain the divine order of creation…That which was required of him in Eden is still required: to obey the divine command. A failure to follow law replicates Adam’s fall” (70). Like Wright, Kahn points out that order is a central focus of turning to foundation myths. Hetherington and Weiler also assert that order is a catalyst of the polarization of current politics. Particularly in matters of social issues such as race relations, gender, gay rights, and crime, controversy stems from “notions of the proper societal order and threats to it” (9).

Ordering society in a morally compliant way, and the pressure to ensure that political views are morally compliant has become even more prevalent over the years: “Rather than debates about more versus less or sooner versus later, political debates are increasingly about right and wrong and good versus evil” (Wolak 191). In addition to the issues themselves being moralized in political rhetoric, the pressure to choose the morally right decision has also increased. Kahn says, “[man] should seek to follow God’s law even in his fallen state. That is not
just the best he can do; it is all he can do. Nothing else has any value” (70). As politicians and
the public continue trying to navigate perspectives, justification, and alignment with what is right
and wrong in politics, we can easily find rhetoric that points to the moralization of people who
are on the “right” or “wrong” side of the political spectrum. If you are on the “right” political
side, you are morally good. If you are on the “wrong” political side, you are morally
incompetent.

Kahn explains why this moralization around politics is present, and it’s not that political
leaders are trying to compensate for an immoral public. Rather, he says, “man longs not just to
be good—to follow the law—but to be a part of the sacred” (Kahn 83). Kahn claims that it is the
nature of humans to want to be good and follow the law, and politicians use that desire to
moralize their arguments in order to persuade their audience. This leads to the final assumption
discussed in this essay: The Adam and Eve myth reinforces the perceived notion of black-and-
white thinking and moralizes both decisions (good and bad choices) and identities (if you choose
good, you remain innocent and righteous. If you choose bad, you suffer fallenness and the
subsequent consequences). Indications that this strategy is being used will be marked with the
presentation of a decision with language the indicates morality around the decision, or the
morality of people associated with one worldview or another.

The pressure to ensure that political views are morally compliant becomes even more
prevalent during times of “domestic unrest and….foreign wars” because people want to trust that
they are aligning themselves with the right ideologies, particularly when those ideologies directly
impact relationships with other nations. Especially in speeches about war, political leaders
moralize America’s engagement in conflicts in order to secure support and morale. In other
cases, political rhetoric moralizes or immoralizes political parties and the people associated with
those political parties. Again, Kahn points out that one of the reasons that this is an effective persuasive technique is because “man longs to be good” (83). Perhaps in addition to wanting to be good, humans also want to see others as good, which contributes to the effectiveness of moralizing dichotomies. Thistlethwaite states, “The extraordinary polarization of American politics today comes from competing and contradictory religious stories about who people really are and whether change is really possible…these are stories of sin and salvation, of innocence and guilt, and they are being played out right there in front of us in the ordinary stuff of our new culture” (9). Though many speeches would suit this analysis, I have selected Richard Nixon’s speech, Checkers, because Thistlethwaite specifically points out that Nixon used this strategy in his rhetoric. “More and more, the country is starting to resemble the 1960’s when the politics of anger, invented (and some would say perfected) by Richard Nixon, hopelessly divided the country” (9).

When Richard Nixon delivered his Checkers speech to one of the largest television audiences of the time on September 23, 1952 the nation was experiencing several international conflicts, which coincides with Thistlethwaite’s observation of exigencies that call for a return to origin stories. America was in the middle of the Cold War and the Korean War, and during the early 50’s America was in the midst of the Second Red Scare. Wars and the threat of communist factions and political leaders led American people to live in fear and suspicion of each other, political figures, and foreign governments. McCarthyism led to domestic unrest and behaviors which were compared by some as “Witch Hunts” such as in Arthur Miller’s play, The Crucible. These events and ideologies contributed to distrust among politicians and the American people.

Nixon became a recipient of the distrust and cynicism of voters during his campaign for the vice presidency. During Nixon’s time as a senator, he frequently spoke against government
corruption crusaded for public integrity, to the point of calling for Guy Gabrielson’s resignation for a loan scandal (Morris 643-44). Since he was exceptionally vocal about integrity and transparency from government figures, the backlash he received from the public about his political funding was particularly damaging. During his time in the senate and his campaign, Nixon’s backers continued to raise money for him to pay for his political and campaign expenses. Though it was not illegal, when his use of the “fund” was leaked, spread, and embellished, he faced severe public criticism that eventually threatened his candidacy as vice president.

Nixon’s task in his Checkers speech was to soothe the fears and suspicions of the American people toward politics and political figures, restore his public image as moral and trustworthy, and to extend that trust to the Republican party. Nixon said, “I feel that the people have got to have confidence in the integrity of the men who run for that office and who might obtain it” (Eidenmuller). Nixon’s speech reclaimed political support for himself and the Republican party, and, since his speech was one of the first televised political speeches, it also set a new president for political campaigning. In order to reestablish this trust, Nixon returned to the Adam and Eve myth by creating moralized dichotomies to restore his reputation and the reputation of the Republican party.

First, Nixon immediately frames his speech as a moral issue, not a political one, in his opening statement. “I come before you tonight as a candidate for the Vice Presidency and as a man whose honesty and -- and integrity has been questioned” (Eidenmuller). If the audience missed that he intended his speech to be about his morality, Nixon makes this explicit shortly after:

Now, was that [taking $18,000 from supporters] wrong? And let me say that it was
wrong. I'm saying, incidentally, that it was wrong, not just illegal, because it isn't a question of whether it was legal or illegal, that isn't enough. The question is, was it morally wrong? I say that it was morally wrong -- if any of that 18,000 dollars went to Senator Nixon, for my personal use. I say that it was morally wrong if it was secretly given and secretly handled. And I say that it was morally wrong if any of the contributors got special favors for the contributions that they made. (Eidenmuller)

After establishing the charges brought against him and framing this incident as a moral issue that exceeds even the boundaries of legalities, Nixon refutes that he committed any immoral act. In order to support this claim, Nixon spends the rest of his speech being almost overwhelmingly detailed in his actions, his motivations, and his intentions. However, unlike Clinton who must be forthcoming about his sin because he was caught doing something wrong, Nixon chooses to be forthcoming about his actions, motivations and intentions as a way to establish his innocence.

One of the ways he claims innocence is by stating that he is not being secretive. This is important because secrecy, as demonstrated in the Adam and Eve myth and the Clinton example, is indicative of sin and shame. In contrast, openness and forthrightness indicates innocence. Nixon explains this in his fifth paragraph of the speech, right after he discusses the morality of the charges brought against him:

It was not a secret fund. As a matter of fact, when I was on “Meet the Press”…Peter Edson came up to me after the program, and he said, "Dick, what about this ‘fund’ we hear about?" And I said, “Well, there's no secret about it. Go out and see Dana Smith who was the administrator of the fund.” And I gave him [Edson] his [Smith's] address. (Eidenmuller)

In his sixth paragraph, Nixon continues his transparency by stating, “No contributor to this fund,
no contributor to any of my campaigns, has ever received any consideration that he would not have received as an ordinary constituent…And the records will show that, the records which are in the hands of the administration” (Eidenmuller). The denial of secrecy, and the assertion that there are open records that verify the earnestness and legality of Nixon’s actions, are followed by a detailed description of how government funding works. Again, the descriptions and questions that Nixon answers in the seventh, eighth, and ninth paragraphs serve to reveal a system that may have been hidden, misunderstood, or unknown to the public before. By revealing how government funding and his own personal funding works, Nixon is establishing a tone of frankness and forthrightness which sets him up for his first turn in paragraph eight.

Paragraph eight is pivotal in Nixon’s strategy for creating a moral dichotomy. He has just spent seven paragraphs of his speech to establish a perception of himself as being open, forthright, and innocent of the charge brought against him. In other words, he is metaphorically presenting himself as naked, but without guilt and shame. In paragraph eight, Nixon contrasts his innocent and virtuous politics with his opponent:

Let me say, incidentally, that my opponent, my opposite number for the Vice Presidency on the Democratic ticket, does have his wife on the pay roll and has had it -- her on his pay roll for the ten years -- for the past ten years. Now just let me say this: That's his business, and I'm not critical of him for doing that. You will have to pass judgment on that particular point. (Eidenmuller)

In this pivotal moment, Nixon sets up the comparison between him and his Democratic opposite and reinforces the political dichotomy between Republicans and Democrats. But he has also moralized this dichotomy by presenting himself to the public as innocent. This is an important moment because at the beginning of his speech Nixon admits that the charges brought against
him were legal charges and that, if those charges were verified, he would be accountable to the law. However, by making this a moral issue, he evades the legal consequences and refocus his situation on moral issues which are much less definitive to an audience. Thus, when he makes this comparison, it isn’t a contrast between legal behaviors and illegal behaviors, but rather moral behaviors and immoral behaviors. Nixon claims that his actions, and his wife’s actions, are more moral than Sparkman’s, whose actions are permissible, but, in the way Nixon has contextualized them, not honorable. He says, “I just didn't feel it was right to put my wife on the pay roll” and then follows with “my opponent, my opposite number for the Vice Presidency on the Democratic ticket, does have his wife on the pay roll and has had it -- her on his pay roll for the ten years -- for the past ten years.” His repetition of the position of Sparkman and the repeated emphasis on the length of time Sparkman’s wife had been on the payroll, reinforce the moralization of the opposition and Nixon’s morality.

It might initially seem that it is not Nixon’s intention to create a moral dichotomy between himself and his opponent when he states, “That's his business, and I'm not critical of him for doing that” (Eidenmuller). However, Nixon has presented himself and his wife in a vulnerable, or naked state and made a defense about his innocence. He then exposes his opponent before the public and made implications that Sparkman and his wife have questionable morals. By stating that he does not want to judge his opponent, Nixon removes himself from a position of making a judgment, to a position of being judged. After he does this, he places the responsibility of judgment on the public saying, “You will have to pass judgment on that particular point” (Eidenmuller). So it isn’t that Nixon is trying to eliminate the morality of a choice, but rather that he is trying to displace the judgment of that decision onto the public. He is putting pressure on man’s desire to follow the law and return to Eden through making morally
right decisions.

In the next several paragraphs, Nixon continues explaining in detail his personal history and personal finances, again, to appear transparent and trustworthy. In the twenty-sixth paragraph of his speech, Nixon begins his concluding points with the statement, “It isn't easy to come before a nationwide audience and bare your life, as I've done” (Eidenmuller), again, making reference to being exposed, or naked, before the public. In the rest of paragraph twenty-six and twenty-seven, he reiterates the contrast between himself and his opponents by casting doubts on the morality of their characters by accusing them of mis-using funds and Sparkman keeping his wife on the payroll, which Nixon established earlier as morally questionable. In paragraph twenty-seven Nixon says that he is “going to suggest some courses of conduct” (Eidenmuller). His suggestion is that “I think that what Mr. Stevenson [and Mr. Sparkman] should do should be to come before the American people, as I have” (Eidenmuller). This suggestion puts Stevenson and Sparkman in a difficult situation. Because Nixon bared himself before the public to be judged, he appears, and asserts he is, innocent. By contrast, if Stevenson and Sparkman decline baring themselves before the public like Nixon does, their actions would be untrustworthy, since it would appear that they are hiding sin from the public. Nixon repeats the sentiment that Stevenson and Sparkman should come before the public two more times and explicitly states after his suggestion of conduct that “if they don't it will be an admission that they have something to hide” (Eidenmuller).

Just as he did earlier, Nixon again allocates the responsibility of making judgments about his actions and the actions of his political opposition to the public. He repeatedly declares that he does not condemn his opposition for their actions, but that their moral character will be in question until they expose themselves before the public the same way Nixon did. Putting the
audience in the place of God, that is, a place where they must judge the moral character of opposing politicians, is a powerful move because it plays on Kahn’s observation that “man longs not just to be good—to follow the law—but to be a part of the sacred” (83). In order to be good in this situation, man must make the right judgment of character.

Nixon capitalizes on the idea of making the right judgment about character: “Why do I feel …the necessity for a man to come up here and bare his soul as I have -- why is it necessary for me to continue this fight?...Because, you see, I love my country. And I think my country is in danger” (Eidenmuller). In this statement, Nixon is asserting that the country is in danger of falling if it ends up in the wrong hands of leadership, and that he feels it is his responsibility, as a moral leader, to prevent that from happening. But at this point Nixon also extends this responsibility and condition from just himself and his situation to the broader scope of the election and the Republican party: “And I think the only man that can save America at this time is the man that's running for President, on my ticket -- Dwight Eisenhower” (Eidenmuller).

Nixon is creating a moral dichotomy by presenting himself as innocent, and his opposition as suspicious at best, but guilty in comparison, because it will increase the likelihood that the public will see Nixon as good and choose to pardon the questions raised against him. If the audience feels that they have made a morally good choice, then they will have avoided fallenness, and perhaps feel that they have prevented the fallenness of their country by not voting for morally corrupt politicians. Thus, they will, with Nixon, remain innocent in the Garden.

The remaining parts of his speech continue to focus on the broader context of the election. Nixon villainizes his opponents by blaming the unsettling current events on the Democratic party and the leadership of the Democratic party. He ends his critique with pointed criticism of the Democratic candidates and asserts that the country will remain in this state of
fallenness if the Democratic party is re-elected. Thus Nixon’s critique continues to moralize the political dichotomy by accusing the political opposite of corruption and distrust:

Take the problem of corruption. You've read about the mess in Washington. Mr. Stevenson can't clean it up because he was picked by the man, Truman, under whose Administration the mess was made. You wouldn't trust the man who made the mess to clean it up. That's Truman. And by the same token you can't trust the man who was picked by the man that made the mess to clean it up -- and that's Stevenson.

(Eidenmuller)

After he has spent most of his speech creating a climate of moralized dichotomies in the American election and government, Nixon ends his speech by calling on the Republican party and his audience to make a judgment about himself and the election: “I am submitting to the Republican National Committee tonight through this television broadcast the decision which it is theirs to make. Let them decide whether my position on the ticket will help or hurt. And I am going to ask you to help them decide” (Eidenmuller).

**Conclusion**

As mentioned previously, these examples demonstrate just three of the assumptions from the Adam and Eve myth. However, there are still numerous ways in which we can observe these assumptions and additional assumptions from the Adam and Eve myth. The breadth of application of the Adam and Eve myth points to the flexibility of using this myth as a rhetorical tool, while the power in evoking the Adam and Eve myth in political rhetoric is its universality. The Adam and Eve myth is connected to a universality of human desires and circumstances – marriage, partnership, family, sexuality, temptation, sin, fallenness, mortality, morality, and an unconquerable desire to return to Eden. Caroline Merchant says of the Adam and Eve myth:
It is perhaps the most important mythology humans have developed to make sense of their relationship to the earth…For many Americans, humanity’s loss of the perfect Garden of Eden is among the most powerful of all stories. Consciously at times, unconsciously at others, we search for ways to reclaim our loss. (2)

As people try to order and make sense of their lives and identity, they return to the Adam and Eve myth because it is the utopian beginning; if humanity can reclaim that, they will experience a rebirth into the same place of perfection, harmony and simplicity.

There are many citizens of other faiths, and even many Christians, who are unfamiliar with the teachings of Jeremiah, and even the gospels. However, the simplicity and wide-spread conversation around the Adam and Eve myth keeps it accessible to the public. Even those who reject the story of Adam and Eve as a literal origin story, “nevertheless find themselves engaged with its moral implications concerning procreation, animals, work, marriage, and the human striving to ‘subdue’ the earth and ‘have dominion’ over all its creatures” (Pagels xx). Pagels brings up a significant point in her assertion that even those who don’t believe in the Adam and Eve story as part of their personal narrative still are influenced by the implications and interpretations of the Adam and Eve story. This is because the larger, social culture has established the Adam and Eve story as the “group” or community origin story which individuals must negotiate in American culture.

Having such a universal narrative has many benefits as a rhetorical tool. The Adam and Eve story it establishes common ground by focusing on a narrative that is accepted by the American public as part of their social narrative. This allows politicians to create a more intimate connection with their audiences. The Adam and Eve story creates contexts of shared experiences. This could be the shared experience of battling the “fallen man” and temptation, it could be the
shared experience of working together to achieve a type of redemption, or it could be joining together as a nation in opposition to a political rival. In each case, whether referencing an internal battle against evil or an external one, the rhetor is still able to establish a sense of shared experience and purpose with the audience. Finally, using the Adam and Eve story alludes to a transcendent experience achieved by labor and sacrifice. And ultimately, it draws upon the human desire and the human hope to return to Eden.
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