

JESUS THE TREE OF LIFE

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Theological Perspective of the Tree of Life

The Tree of Life, a rich theological metaphor, first appears in Genesis 2:9 and Genesis 3:22-24; representing God's eternal life and divine wisdom. However, after the fall of man due to sin in Genesis 3, humanity was barred from accessing it, symbolizing separation from eternal life and divine wisdom -setting the stage for the Christological fulfilment in the New Testament. According to Ryken (1998, p.862) and Ladd (1993, p.666), the Tree of Life in Christian theology is interpreted typologically as a reference to Jesus Christ, especially, when considering the redemptive theme throughout the Scripture; affirming Jesus to be the fulfillment of what the Tree of Life symbolized in the garden of Eden, eternal life, divine wisdom, union and communion with God.

Whereas typology in biblical theology refers to how persons or events in the Old Testament prefigured Christ, Jesus Himself said in John 14:6, "I am the way and the truth and the life." According to Galatians 3:13 and Acts 5:30, Jesus' death on the cross (tree) becomes the means through which eternal life (the Tree of Life) is offered to humanity, restoring access to eternal life lost through Adam's sin (Romans 5:12-19).

According to Beale (2004, pp. 111–112), the Tree of Life represents "the eternal life that comes from intimate communion with God, a communion restored in and through Christ." And in agreement with Beale's assertion, Wright (2008), draws a strong connection between Jesus and the Edenic symbols, emphasizing Jesus as the one who restores humanity to God's presence and eternal life. Similarly, Wright (2008, 52) asserts, "Jesus becomes the source of life, just as the Tree of Life symbolized in Eden... He is the beginning of a new creation." According to Walvoord (1966, p. 311), the Tree of Life is both literal and symbolic in the book of Revelation, pointing to Christ's provision of life, asserting that "The Tree of Life in the eternal state is the eternal manifestation of Christ's life-giving power."

Gleaning from the aforementioned biblical assertions, and scholarly asseverations, the Tree of Life is a metaphor for Jesus, the source of eternal life and healing, whose salvation in the past (sanctification), and present (justification) redemptive works will give access to the realities of salvation in the future (glorification); an eschatological Tree of Life mentioned in Revelation 2:7 and Revelation 22:2 & 14. Be that as it may, Jesus as the Tree of Life is a theologically rich motif that connects Eden, the Cross, and the New Creation. Through Christ, humanity regains access to the life lost through sin, fulfilling the promise of the Tree of Life.

Textual Analysis of Jesus the Tree of Life

Jesus, the Tree of Life, music composed by Blessing Ebruba Ichofe, and lyrics by Richard Hutchin and Blessing Ebruba Ichofe, is a hymn consisting of three stanzas and two refrains, with meter and rhyme aiding memorability, rooted in evangelical theology and biblical imagery. Imagery such as trees, fruit, shadows, beauty, and healing are all biblical metaphors tied to Christ. Each stanza consists of quatrains of iambic tetrameter, repeated with a different lyric to reinforce a meditative (except for stanza three), steady rhythmic lyrical flow. The chorus is a theological and emotional anchor, summarizing key themes of redemption, healing, grace, sanctification, spiritual hunger, peace, and eternal hope. The hymn has a reverent, reflective, hopeful, and worshipful tone.

Stanza One

This stanza, which spans from measure 17 to measure 25, displays symbolic imagery, contrasting poetic figurations, and Christological theological insights. This stanza introduces a visionary encounter with Christ as the Tree of Life, full of fruit (abundance spiritual blessings) which is "ever green" indicative of something eternal or ever-living, depicting all other earthly or "natural" trees (a metaphor for worldly sources of fulfillment) fruitless when compared to Jesus; reflecting Psalm 1:3 and Jeremiah 17:7–8, where righteous persons are trees that flourish by God's grace.

The term "perfect tree" implies Jesus' sinlessness, sufficiency, wholeness, and suitability as the only source of life, implying that the Ineffability of Christ's Glory and beauty surpasses human comprehension, echoing Isaiah 53:2 ("no beauty...") and 2 Corinthians 3:18 (beholding His glory), displaying the doctrinal anchoring of the Christian faith which is built on nothing else but Christ Jesus (Sola fide) and aligning with Ephesians 2:8–9, capturing the transformative awe of beholding Christ through the portal of faith.

Analysis of the First Refrain

The first refrain spans measures 26 to 34 and measures 44 to 52, and is poetically figured with themes of repetition, invitation, redemptive theology, and eucharistic echoes.

The refrain projected eucharistic echoes that suggest an invitation to "eat" from Christ. The idea of "eating" the tree may hint at sacramental language, paralleling John 6:51 ("I am the living bread") and Revelation 22:17, "Come... take the water of life freely." The chorus is a universal call to communion, partaking of Christ's saving grace.

Furthermore, the Redemptive Theology: "He heals," "purifies," and "justifies" all refer to Christ's atonement and sanctifying work (Isaiah 53:5, Romans 3:24). The refrain repeated the phrase "perfect tree" to reinforce the completeness and sufficiency of Jesus for salvation, healing, and righteousness.

Stanza Two

Stanza which spans measure 35 to measure 43, speaks of a spiritual confession that reflects a testimony of conversion, life spent chasing vain pleasures until Christ was found (Ecclesiastes 2:1–11), and God's Grace realized, echoing the tone of Augustinian and Wesleyan confessions which states that: all joy apart from Christ is fleeting and false, emphasizing that rest, refuge and peace can only be found in Christ, alluding to Matthew 11:28, “Come unto me... and I will give you rest.” Contrasting spiritual toil and striving with the peace of justification and union with Christ. Furthermore, the phrase “Under the shadow” used in this stanza symbolizes protection and intimacy (cf. Psalm 91:1; Song of Solomon 2:3, “I sat down under his shadow with great delight”).

Stanza three

Stanza three spans measure 61 to 68. In stanza three, the fruit (Jesus’ grace, word, and Spirit) represents ongoing grace that revives, strengthens, and sustains the believer's faith, so that the believer can bear fruits resembling those the Apostle Paul describes in Galatians 5:22-23. Furthermore, this stanza emphasizes the believer's perseverance and eschatological yearning to be with Christ Jesus, reflecting the believer’s earnest desire for eternal union with Christ beyond this terrestrial ball (cf. Philippians 1:23).

Final Refrain (Expanded Version)

The final refrain spans from measure 69 to measure 80, emphasizing a direct echo of scripture from the Gospel according to Saint John in the book of John and Revelation. The expression(s): ‘Let he who’s hungry come and eat’ and ‘let he who’s thirsty come and drink’ is an invitation to eat and drink from Jesus, the one from whom wholeness and eternal satisfaction are found, echoing the theme of John 6:32-35, where Jesus publicly declares Himself as the bread of life and the one who quenches eternal thirst (also see John 4:10- 13), whose finished works on the cross had freed humanity from the curse of the law; making the same partaker of the blessings of Abraham and carrier of the Holy Spirit, according to Galatians 3:13-15.

Additionally, the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come’, from Revelation 22:17, signaling a universal invitation to meet with Christ Jesus, who is the rock (1 Cor. 10:4) that gave water in the wilderness (John 6:32-33), heralding His second coming, where He will reign in justice and righteousness. The reiteration of Jesus as the perfect tree unifies the imagery of the tree with the rock, portraying Jesus as both sustainer and redeemer.

Musical Analysis of Jesus the Tree of Life

Jesus, the Tree of Life begins in the key of Bb major and is a strophic arrangement, written in binary form (AABB), with each stanza followed by a repeated refrain. This homorhythm homophonic (pure homophony) structured composition spans 80 measures.

The music began with a piano prelude spanning 16 measures, creating interest, the preparedness to sing, and establishing the tonal center of the music. Within the preludes, there

were non-harmonic tone, some of which are chromatic pitches domicile at the fundamental register (measures 3-7), and a few at the melodic register (measures 4, 7, and 12), lurking within the harmonic minor mode, a Picardy third at measure 5 & 13, creating some tonicization which eventually resolved at a perfect authentic cadence ($V^7 - I$), ushering the vocal line up on measure 17 on a Bb major tonality.

The fundamental harmony of the prelude follows this progression: $I - IV - ii - V - V^{4/2} - I^6 - V^{6/4} - V/ii - V/ii - ii - V/vi - vi - I^{6/4} - IV - I^6 - V^{6/4} - : I - IV - ii - V - V^{4/2} - I^6 - V^{6/4} - V/ii - V/ii - ii - V/vi - ii - V - V^{4/2} - V^6 - I$

The cantos fermis follow a sequential pattern which oftentimes moves stepwise upward and downward intermittently, reaching its climax at the refrain, projecting the dire need for everyone to eat from Jesus, the sole tree of life. The melodic phrases are four measures long throughout the piece, forming a period every eight. Each phrase ends on a half cadence (e.g., measure 20), with the period ending on the authentic cadence (e.g., measure 24).

Although the vocal harmony has some nonharmonic tones embellishments, the fundamental vocal harmony for each stanza follows this progression: $I - ii^{4/2} - I - vi^7 - V^7 - I - I - ii^{4/2} - I - ii^{6/4} - vi^7 - V^{6/4} - I^{SUS2} - V - I - ii^{4/2} - I - vi^{6/4} - V^{4/2} / ii - ii^{6/4} - ii^{6/4} - V^{6/4} / ii - ii - V^7 - I$. while there is a $V/V - V/vi$ (e.g. pick up to measure 26) progression constantly introducing the refrain, the fundament harmony for the refrain of stanza one and two follows this progression: $vi^7 - V - vi - V^{4/2} - I - IV - V - vi - I^6 - V^6 - I - V - vi - V - vi - vi - V^{4/2}/ii - ii^{6/4} - V - ii - vi - IV^{6/4} - I - V^7 - I$. However, the harmonic progression of the refrain of stanza three has a slight alteration due to some chromatic notes introduced from measures 77 and 78 in the piano and voice harmony ($IV^7 - V/V - V/vi - V/ii - V/vi - V/ii - ii - IV^6 - I^{4/2} - IV^6 - V - IV^7 - vi^7 - vii^{o6/4} - V^7 - I$).

After the second stanza and the refrain, a piano interlude was announced, spanning measures 53-60, which borrows its progression from the established piano prelude. However, while the interlude was shorter than the prelude, the tonality of the music was changed by the piano interlude (see measures 59-60) from Bb major to C major, preparing stanza three to begin on the tonality of C major, creating a more intentional sense of persuasion geared towards the beckoning of those spiritually hungry and thirsty to eat and drink from Jesus the one who truly satisfies. More so, the modulation depicts the eagerness of the faithful saints to be with their Lord, a transition into a realm where pain, sorrow, death, and all other sorts of wickedness will not be found, a realm where God has promised to wipe every tear from our eyes (Revelation 21:3-5).

Generally, the piano accompaniment follows the rhythmic and harmonic patterns of the vocal line, creating a homorhythm homophonic block harmony with the voice line, except that there are extra notes on the fundamental and melodic register of the piano line that forms a hoquet with the voice line at the pick-up of almost every new measure (see pickup to measure 18, 19, et al.) through the music.

Dynamic markers employed in the piano line include mezzo forte (e.g., measures 1-8), piano (e.g., measures 9-12), and forte (e.g., measures 26- 34). Also, ornamentation employed within the piano line-up includes turns (e.g., measure 2), inverted turns (e.g., measure 4), and reversed turns (measure 6). Dynamic markers applied to the voice line include mezzo-forte (e.g., measures 17–25) and forte (e.g., measures 26–34).

There was a ritardando at measure 78 to appeal to and convince in the grandeur of His power, driving the message of Jesus, the perfect tree, who, by His Spirit and the Church, invites anyone hungry and thirsty to eat and drink from Him who truly satisfies the needs of the human soul. The music ended at 79 with a perfect, authentic cadence on C major.

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(Revelation 2:7; 22:2,14)

Richard Hutchin & Blessing Ichofe

Blessing Ichofe

Doh is Bb

Piano

13

The tree of life my soul hath seen,
His beau-ty non can com-pre- hend:

The tree of life my soul hath seen,
His beau-ty non can com-pre- hend:

The tree of life my soul hath seen,
His beau-ty non can com-pre- hend:

The tree of life my soul hath seen,
His beau-ty non can com-pre- hend:

19

la - den with fruit that's ev - ver green the tree of na - ture fruit-less be com-pared with Christ
 my faith is built on no-thing else the glo-ry which i now be-hold is Je - sus Christ

la - den with fruit that's ev - ver green the tree of na - ture fruit-less be com-pared with Christ
 my faith is built on no-thing else the glo-ry which i now be-hold is Je - sus Christ

la - den with fruit that's ev - ver green the tree of na - ture fruit-less be com-pared with Christ
 my faith is built on no-thing else the glo-ry which i now be-hold is Je - sus Christ

la - den with fruit that's ev - ver green the tree of na - ture fruit-less be com-pared with Christ
 my faith is built on no-thing else the glo-ry which i now be-hold is Je - sus Christ

24

the per-fect tree the per-fect tree the tree of life oh must i eat He's filled with grace
 the tree of life oh come and eat He heals the wound -

the per-fect tree the per-fect tree the tree of life oh must i eat He's filled with grace
 the tree of life oh come and eat He heals the wound -

the per-fect tree the per-fect tree the tree of life oh must i eat He's filled with grace
 the tree of life oh come and eat He heals the wound -

the per-fect tree the per-fect tree the tree of life oh must i eat He's filled with grace
 the tree of life oh come and eat He heals the wound -

29

that sets men free the tree of life the gift from God Je-sus the Christ the per-fect tree
 eth bro-ken soul He pu-ri-fies and jus-ti-fies

that sets men free the tree of life the gift from God Je-sus the Christ the per-fect tree
 eth bro-ken soul He pu-ri-fies and jus-ti-fies

that sets men free the tree of life the gift from God Je-sus the Christ the per-fect tree
 eth bro-ken soul He pu-ri-fies and jus-ti-fies

34

the per-fect tree For ha-ppi-ness i long have sought and plea-sure dear-ly i have bought:
 the per-fect tree I'm wea-ry with my for-mer toil, in Christ i've found the per-fect peace

the per-fect tree For ha-ppi-ness i long have sought and plea-sure dear-ly i have bought:
 the per-fect tree I'm wea-ry with my for-mer toil, in Christ i've found the per-fect peace

the per-fect tree For ha-ppi-ness i long have sought and plea-sure dear-ly i have bought:
 the per-fect tree I'm wea-ry with my for-mer toil, in Christ i've found the per-fect peace

39

m . *m* : *f* . *s* :- . | *d* . *r* : *m* . *f* :- . | *f* . *f* . *m* . *d* :- . | 1. *m* . *r* . *d* . *d* :- | 2. *m* . *r* . *d* . *d* :- .

i missed of all: but now i see tis found in Christ the per fect tree the per fect tree
un - der the sha - dow i will be of Je - sus Christ

s . *d* : *r* . *m* :- . | *l* . *l* : *d* . *r* :- . | *r* . *d* . *l* . *l* :- . | *d* . *t* . *s* . *s* :- | *d* . *t* . *s* . *s* :-

i missed of all: but now i see tis found in Christ the per fect tree the per fect tree
un - der the sha - dow i will be of Je - sus Christ

s . *l* : *f* . *s* :- . | *m* . *f* : *s* . *l* :- . | *l* . *l* . *s* . *f* :- . | *s* . *f* . *f* . *m* :- | *s* . *f* . *f* . *m* :- .

i missed of all but now i see tis found in Christ the per fect tree the per fect tree
un - der the sha - dow i will be of Je - sus Christ

d . *d* : *d* . *d* :- . | *d* . *d* : *t* . *l* :- . | *l* . *l* . *d* . *r* :- . | *s* . *l* . *t* . *d* :- | *s* . *l* . *t* . *d* :- .

i missed of all but now i see tis found in Christ the per fect tree the per fect tree
un - der the sha - dow i will be of Je - sus Christ

44

d . *t* : *d* . *d* :- . | *d* . *t* . *s* . *m* :- . | *d* . *t* : *d* . *d* :- . | *d* . *t* . *s* . *s* :- . | *d* . *t* : *d* . *d* :- .

the tree of life oh must i eat He's filled with grace that sets men free the tree of life
the tree of life oh come and eat He heals the wound - eth bro - ken soul He pu - ri - fies

s . *s* : *l* . *l* :- . | *s* . *s* . *m* . *d* :- . | *s* . *s* : *l* . *l* :- . | *s* . *f* . *m* . *r* :- . | *s* . *s* : *l* . *l* :- .

the tree of life oh must i eat He's filled with grace that sets men free the tree of life
the tree of life oh come and eat He heals the wound - eth bro - ken soul He pu - ri - fies

m . *r* : *m* . *m* :- . | *d* . *r* . *d* . *d* :- . | *f* . *m* : *r* . *m* :- . | *d* . *r* . *l* . *t* :- . | *m* . *r* : *m* . *m* :- .

the tree of life oh must i eat He's filled with grace that sets men free the tree of life
the tree of life oh come and eat He heals the wound - eth bro - ken soul He pu - ri - fies

l . *s* : *d* . *d* :- . | *l* . *f* . *s* . *d* :- . | *l* . *s* : *d* . *d* :- . | *m* . *r* . *d* . *s* :- . | *l* . *s* : *d* . *d* :- .

the tree of life oh must i eat He's filled with grace that sets men free the tree of life
the tree of life oh come and eat He heals the wound - eth bro - ken soul He pu - ri - fies

10

mf [C.r]

60 | : : || [fe]m .m :f .s :- . | d .d .r .m :- . | m .f :s .l :- . | l .s .r .r :- .
 This fruit doth makes my soul to thrive, it keeps my faith in God a-live;

| : : || [l]s .d :r .m :- . | s .l .t .d :- . | m .r :m .f :- . | m .r .d .t :- .
 The fruit doth makes my soul to thrive, it keeps my faith in God a-live

| : : || [l]s .s :fe .s :- . | m .f .fe .s :- . | s .l :t .d' :- . | d' .t .l .t :- .
 The fruit doth makes my soul to thrive it keeps my faith in God a-live

| : : || [r]d .d :d .d :- . | l .l .s .d :- . | d .d :d .l :- . | l .l .s .s :- .
 The fruit doth makes my soul to thrive it keeps my faith in God a-live

11

65 | m .m :f .s :- . | d .r :m .f :- . | f .f .m .d :- . | m .r .d .d :- . | d' .t :d' .d' :- .
 which makes my soul in haste to be with Je-sus Christ the per-fect tree Let he who's hun -
 The Spi - rit and

| s .d :r .m :- . | l .l :de .r :- . | r .d .l .l :- . | m .r .d .d :- . | s .s :l .l :- .
 which makes my soul in haste to be with Je-sus Christ the per-fect tree Let he who's hun -
 The Spi - rit and

| s .l :t .s :- . | m .f :s .l :- . | l .l .s .f :- . | s .f .f .m :- . | m' .r' :m' .m' :- .
 which makes my soul in haste to be with Je-sus Christ the per-fect tree Let he who's hun -
 The Spi - rit and

| d .d :d .d :- . | d .d :t .l :- . | l .l .de .r :- . | s .l .t .d :- . | l .s :d' .d' :- .
 which makes my soul in haste to be with Je-sus Christ the per-fect tree Let he who's hun -
 The Spi - rit and

70 | d' .t .,s .m :- . | d' .t :d' .d' :- . | d' .t .,s .s :- . | d' .t :d' .d' :- .

gry come and eat the bride say come let he who's thirs come eat and drink from Christ the Rock while on the cross He pro-mised He'll

s .s .,m .d :- . | s .s :l .l :- . | s .f .,m .r :- . | s .s :l .l :- .

d' .r' .,d' .d' :- . | f' .m' :re' .m' :- . | d' .r' .,l .t :- . | m' .r' :m' .m' :- .

l .f .,s .d :- . | l .s :d' .d' :- . | m .r .,d .s :- . | l .s :d' .d' :- .

gry come and eat the bride say come let he who's thirs come eat and drink from Christ the Rock while on the cross He pro-mised He'll

74 | d' .r' :m' .f' :- . | f' .f' .,m' .d' :- . | m' .r' .,d' .d' :- .

He paid it all be back a - gain Je - sus the Christ the per - fect tree

l .l :de' .r' :- . | r' .d' .,l .l :- . | d' .t .,s .s :- .

m' .f' :s' .l' :- . | l' .l' .,s' .f' :- . | s' .f' .,f' .m' :- .

l .l :s .f' :- . | s .l .,l .l :- . | s .l .,t .d' :- .

He paid it all be back a - gain Je - sus the Christ the per - fect tree

14

rit. .

77 ^{2.} m' .r' .,t de' .r' m' | f' .f' .,m' d' .r' m' | m' .r' .,d' .d' :- | - :- :-

the per - fect tree Je - sus the Christ says come and eat

t .l .,se | r' .d' .,t .l .:t .d' | d' .t .,s .s :- | - :- :-

the per - fect tree Je - sus the Christ says come and eat

m' .fe' .,se' l' .f' m' | f' .f' .,s' f' m' l' | s' .f' .,f' m' :- | - :- :-

the per - fect tree Je - sus the Christ says come and eat

f' .r' .,m l' :- t de | r .l .,s l' :s f | l .f .,s .d :- | - :- :-

the per - fect tree Je - sus the Christ says come and eat

rit. .