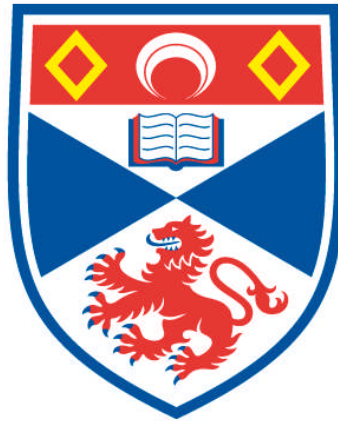


**THE FIRE THAT RECONCILES:
THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE DOCTRINE OF ETERNAL
PUNISHMENT, WITH SPECIAL CONSIDERATION OF
ANNIHILATIONISM AND TRADITIONALISM**

Shawn Bawulski

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews**



2012

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UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS

ST MARY'S COLLEGE



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THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE DOCTRINE
OF ETERNAL PUNISHMENT, WITH
SPECIAL CONSIDERATION OF
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TRADITIONALISM**

A THESIS SUBMITTED BY

SHAWN BAWULSKI

**TO THE FACULTY OF DIVINITY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF**

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ST ANDREWS, SCOTLAND

May 2012

Declarations

I, Shawn Bawulski, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 80,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

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Abstract

This study enters into the dialog within Christian theology between annihilationism and traditionalism on the nature of eternal punishment. The positions and issues within the topic will be examined theologically and analyzed doctrinally.

In my first chapter I will summarize the views and arguments in the debate, establish operating definitions, address preliminary issues, and provide some historical context. I will establish a thesis agenda with dual aspects: negatively, to examine and critique annihilationism on theological grounds, and positively to offer arguments for a modified traditionalism.

Chapters two, three, and four primarily serve the negative purpose. Chapter two critically considers annihilationism on exegetical and hermeneutical issues, concluding that the view is inferior to traditionalism. Chapter three examines annihilationism for consistency with other areas of Christian theology, concluding that the view generates major theological problems in Christology. Chapter four considers both annihilationism and traditionalism regarding the disproportionality problem of hell, concluding that annihilationism and two types of traditionalism can resolve the problem but of these three only one sort of traditionalism can do so whilst also satisfying other important theological criteria. Regarding the negative aspect of the thesis, I conclude that the severe theological problems in annihilationism constitute sufficient reason to reject the view.

In chapter five I accomplish the positive aspect of this thesis, offering six criteria of success for any view of eternal punishment. I then provide detailed argumentation for a modified traditionalism called reconciliationism, concluding it best meets these criteria and is the most theologically and exegetically satisfying view on offer. In the concluding chapter I state this thesis' contributions, suggest several areas for further research, and offer some implications for pastoral theology.

I finally conclude that annihilationism has seemingly insurmountable theological problems, but a modified traditionalism can succeed as a doctrine of hell.

Acknowledgements

Scotland and more particularly the small university town of St Andrews has provided an idyllic setting for thinking theologically about the gift of the Christian faith. This is largely because of extraordinary relationships we have had with fantastic people. In addition to the empowering support from our families, illumination and encouragement from a number of people have made the time researching this project in St Andrews so very enjoyable. Several deserve recognition.

The donors who have supported us through the Ministry and Education Foundation have proved invaluable. Without their prayer support, encouragement, and financial assistance this project would almost certainly not have happened. Such value and support of academic rigor wed with Christian commitment is truly exemplary.

It has been a privilege to participate in the St Mary's postgraduate community. These friends have provided a remarkably supportive and intellectually vibrant Christian environment. Special thanks to my colleagues from the Hadow room and all those in the Roundel who have sharpened my thinking, warmed my heart, and encouraged my faith. Further thanks are due to the spouses and families of colleagues who have shared in life and faith with my own family.

The worshipping community at the St Andrews Free Church of Scotland have provided a place for us to grow in our faith and put theology into practice. Special recognition of thanks is in order to Alasdair MacLeod and Grant Macaskill for affording me the opportunity to hone my preaching skills through regular pulpit supply.

The St Mary's faculty have been enormously helpful and supportive in this project and in my academic development. I am particularly thankful for the interaction given by the participants, both by faculty and students, of the Theology Research Seminar.

My thesis examiners, Dr. Mark Elliott and Professor Oliver Crisp, were extremely helpful in their critical remarks and provided a thorough, challenging, and stimulation engagement with my arguments during the examination.

While I am thankful to all of my postgraduate colleagues and their families, several merit specific mention for special assistance beyond friendship and support. Patrick Egan, Stephen Presley, Andrew Johnson, Allen Jones, Sheree Lear, Ryan Mullins, and Jim Watkins, amongst others, have been instrumental in my theological and academic development. David Sonju and Ian Church, in addition to being similarly instrumental to my development, deserve a heartfelt expression of gratitude for their personal and emotional support during the times the weight of this research topic became too heavy for one person to bear. In various ways they each have been to me on this quest as Samwise to Frodo, and for that I am grateful beyond words.

I am thankful for my friend John Feinberg, whose mentorship throughout my seminary training has provided the best of foundations for doctoral study. His wealth of experience, his excellence in theological thought, and his commitment to serving the church through academic ministry have illuminated the path I intend to follow; it is an additional pleasure that he continues to walk with me along this path as my friend.

My supervisor, Stephen R. Holmes, has exceeded all expectations in guiding me through this process. His theological insight, probing feedback, and tenacious encouragement

have brought me to where I am; his academic and intellectual rigor, theological acuity, and service to the local church are an example of what I aspire to be.

It must be said that my lovely wife Sara is the real heroine of this period of our lives. She worked several jobs to support us financially, bore our two daughters, and propped up our family with countless acts of service and love. Her support and perseverance through the chaos of young children and my erratic work schedule have made all the difference, and the depths of my gratitude for all she has done elude the proper expression she deserves.

Finally, I am thankful for my dog, Piper, who happily accompanied me on countless runs as I sought cathartic release from prolonged reflection on quite depressing topics. *You're a good boy.*

Dedication

To Sara; as the first could only be hers.

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Preface

I have fielded the question—if not explicitly then at least posed by a facial expression—“why would anyone do a PhD on hell?” too many times to count. Although a project like this involves much reflecting on the worst sort of pain and suffering, I did not choose it because I am a sadist. Similarly, although a project like this inevitably causes pain by taking an emotional and psychological toll on a researcher, I did not choose it because I am a masochist. I chose this topic for a few reasons. First, Scripture declares the reality of eternal punishment. Jesus teaches on it with great frequency; we find hell more on his lips than anywhere else in the bible. Second, the Christian witness has regarded the doctrine as crucially significant. Hebrews 6:1, 2 considers eternal judgment to be an elementary doctrine of the Christian faith. Most of the major church creeds mention universal resurrection, future judgment, or even everlasting fire. If we are to take Christian theology seriously, we cannot ignore eternal punishment. Third, on a more personal note, some self assessment led me to conclude that I have the psychological constitution to weather the hardships involved in a project on this topic (although I must admit I grossly underestimated the price it would extract). Within the topic of hell, I chose to focus on traditionalism and annihilationism for at least two reasons. First, it is likely the most heated debate in personal eschatology in the context of my background, North American evangelicalism. Second, even a passing scan of the literature on the topic will reveal the need for a substantial theological treatment of the topic, as much of it has stopped with exegetical arguments and word studies.

On a further personal note, about a year after beginning this project I discovered the Victorian defenses of a view of hell called reconciliationism, which I found persuasive. I then became convinced it was worthy of further academic pursuit. Shortly thereafter my wife was inflicted with a punctured eardrum caused by a nasty head cold. As I held her while she writhed in nearly unbearable pain and anguish, I distinctly remember concluding that the suffering in hell must be fundamentally different than what I was witnessing. Between discovering reconciliationism and witnessing my wife's suffering, a conviction coalesced in my thinking: existence in hell is so very awful because sin against a maximally good and holy God is so very awful. A corollary to this conviction is that suffering in hell must be appreciated as rightly theocentric by the reprobate. In other words, the flames of earthly fire are impersonal but the afflictions of hell are caused by a *living* flame, by the one who is a consuming fire. I began to regard the hell of a mediaeval torture chamber, taken literally, as unfathomable. However, the difference between my wife's writhing and the just suffering inflicted by God in the form of shame, remorse, and regret, all in proportion to one's wrongdoing, became a world of difference. This was a picture of hell that could be squared with the biblical depiction of the eternal state, with the victory of God, and with a God who is loving and just. The picture presented by reconciliationism, while making it no less difficult, made hell much more theological satisfying. My wife's affliction healed, mercifully, and my formation of a defense of reconciliationism began.

Chapter 1

Introduction

This project—a theology of hell—is of great academic significance, first and foremost because a substantial theological treatment is lacking in the discussion between traditionalism and annihilationism and in the topic of eternal punishment more broadly. In addition to meeting the need for theological engagement, a project like this has further merit. The doctrine of hell is offensive to the modern sensibilities of a world that cherishes a sentimentalized loving God as well as a commitment to religious pluralism, and yet Christian theology cannot neglect this topic in doing public theology. In a related aspect within pastoral theology, as a recent popular level book by a well-known pastor has demonstrated, the matter of personal eschatology is of great interest in the Christian church.¹ Also, in this work I argue for a view in the Christian tradition that has not received an adequate hearing, one that deserves broader consideration in theology.

Perhaps the project's ultimate importance is that one cannot dispose of the doctrine of hell without also doing great violence to other aspects of Christian theology. I contend that one cannot purge wrath from God without also purging the cross from Christ and a cross-less Christ is unable to bring salvation to sinners. Taking the wrath from God renders him mute in

¹ Rob Bell, *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2011).

the face of horrendous evil and makes the suffering of carrying one's cross in following Jesus utterly absurd and pointless.

I will defend the following thesis: annihilationism has seemingly insurmountable theological problems, but a modified traditionalism can succeed as a doctrine of hell. I will shortly explain how I am using these terms and will later state what qualifies as success for a doctrine of hell. When I claim that annihilationism's theological problems are "seemingly insurmountable," I am admitting that the case I present is not, and is not intended to be, the final word on the matter. Yet save for (largely trivial) truths of mathematics or logic, precious little meets this benchmark. Rather, I will argue that, as best as I can ascertain, annihilationism can only be retained at the cost of other, more crucial doctrines in Christian theology.

My strategy for defending this thesis consists of negative arguments and constructive ones. The negative arguments involve critiques of annihilationism. The first area of critique is within exegesis and hermeneutics, the second addresses theological inconsistencies in annihilationism, and the third is to refute the annihilationists' claim to superiority over traditionalism in matters of justice, severity of punishment, and God's love. Perhaps one could imagine these three supports of annihilationism—exegetical plausibility, doctrinal compatibility with the rest of theology, and a more just and loving hell—as legs of stool, which I will sweep out one by one. Once I have done so, it will be clear that the stool cannot stand, and the case for annihilationism will be dismantled.

Taking out the first support of annihilationism involves summarizing and engaging in the exegetical and hermeneutical debate. This terrain is well covered in the literature and the

journey through it will be a bit plodding; in many ways my treatment tours a thoroughly plowed field. Yet doing so is necessary because the conversation starts in this realm and it will lay the foundation for the subsequent theological discussions and arguments. My unique contribution in this field will involve refinement of a sometimes underdeveloped area: the meaning and interpretation of Scriptural metaphors used in describing eternal punishment. While debate has raged over the meaning of this language, the literature has evinced insufficient explicit reflection on the nature of metaphorical language; I add this. Regarding this first support, I will show that the exegetical case for annihilationism is not as impressive as many assess it to be and that the exegetical case for traditionalism is quite strong and has not been adequately refuted by annihilationists.

The second support of annihilationism regards doctrinal compatibility: I will show that annihilationism lacks theological coherence as it has unacceptable entailments for other doctrines. After the initial exegetical groundwork is laid in the first support, I will move on to doctrinal and theological arguments against annihilationism. My flagship argument raises a problem from the incarnation. In short, the annihilationist must say that death is essentially non-existence. Since all the major atonement models entail that Christ's death was of the same nature as fallen mankind, the annihilationist cannot escape the conclusion that Christ ceased to exist in his death. If Christ ceased to exist in his divine nature, the theological consequences, such as a temporary "binity," are devastating and obviously unacceptable. If Christ ceased to exist in his human nature then Chalcedonian Christology cannot be retained. Further, such a picture seemingly amounts to making Easter into a second incarnation. With this argument I demonstrate that annihilationism introduces an internal inconsistency into Christian theology and any theological system with logical contradiction has major problems

and should be rejected. This conclusion has implications for the exegetical debate: if the annihilationist position is incompatible with more fundamental doctrines, then that would constitute good reason—in addition to the exegetical case itself—to think the view’s interpretation is flawed and the exegetical conclusions are invalid.

The third support of annihilationism is the view’s supposed unique ability to resolve the disproportionality problem of hell. The problem, in short, claims that everlasting conscious punishment is unjust because it is disproportionate to any potential offense committed by finite and temporal creatures. Annihilationism usually posits a view of eternal punishment that involves finite punishment because eventually, after a period of suffering, the reprobate cease to exist. I address the disproportionality problem because annihilationists claim to avoid it while accusing traditionalism of foundering on it. I will show that the disproportionality problem can be avoided by both views, so in actuality it is not an argument in favor of annihilationism. Further, I will argue that while the disproportionality problem is not a liability for annihilationism, still the view fails on other important theological criteria.

By developing and presenting these critiques of annihilationism, I will have effectively dismantled the case for the view and achieved the negative aspect of my thesis. I will then offer constructive arguments for a particular type of traditionalism. This will achieve the positive aspect of my thesis.

In my positive arguments, I will show how a certain type of traditionalism best succeeds as a doctrine of hell. This defense of the view, which I will label “reconciliationism,” is perhaps the most exciting part of this project, so I will here provide a short summary. While some may present it as a fourth alternative, distinct from traditionalism, annihilationism, and universalism, I contend it is best to regard

reconciliationism as a modified traditionalism. Some forms of traditionalism have adopted various aspects of the view but at its heart is the idea that the reprobate are somehow included in the eschatological reconciling of all things to God. Reconciliationism retains much of the traditionalist understanding of hell, but modifies the view by insisting that all sinning ceases and in some sense the reprobate are ‘reconciled’ to God, but not salvifically (they do not experience the blessing of the saints).² The reprobate experience punishment, loss, shame, humiliation, pain, suffering, subjection, and lucidity of their wrongdoing and of God’s holiness and justice. They “are not in rebellion, but accept God’s sentence and by accepting turn it to his praise.”³ They glorify God, under and through punishment praising him for his justice, an ability brought by the lucidity of God’s right and their wrong.⁴ This view can

² For a helpful discussion on reconciliationism and sin ceasing, see Andy Saville, "Hell without Sin - a Renewed View of a Disputed Doctrine," *Churchman* 119, no. 3 (2005): 243-261. See also Andy Saville, "Reconciliationism - a Forgotten Evangelical Doctrine of Hell," *Evangelical Quarterly* 79, no. 1 (2007): 36.

By the phrase “not salvifically” I mean that the reprobate do not escape the due punishment for their sins; there are (very qualified) senses in which the reprobate are “saved”—for example, by no longer being able to sin, they are “saved” from the further self-harm that would come if they were allowed to continue in rebellion against God. As completely defeated, they are brought within the scope of the unopposed reign of God.

³ Saville, "Reconciliationism...": 38.

⁴ Saville says something similar; see *ibid.*, 38. By making a lucid awareness of God and of self a crucial part of the suffering of eternal punishment, reconciliationism seeks to avoid pictures of hell that involve unrelated and unusual punishment, a liability of some traditionalist views. In reconciliationism, eternal punishment is much more *theocentric*. Also, by glorifying God in their punishment, the reprobate do paradoxically fulfill the ultimate purpose of creatures, although they cannot ‘enjoy God forever’ as they are excluded from fellowship with him.

easily accommodate certain “universalist” passages, embracing a universal and cosmic reconciliation of all things to God that encompasses even the reprobate. The finally impenitent are part of a restored divine order—limitless shalom—not by receiving salvation but by their subjection and punishment. In short, reconciliationism seeks to bring theological harmony between eternal punishment and the rest of Christian theology.

Preliminarily, I will briefly answer some objections to the view, leaving a fuller treatment for chapter five. First, this is no disguised universalism, for the reconciliation is not salvation and the view in no way removes the punishment from hell. Second, the reprobate exhibit remorse but not repentance. In this life, remorse is not agreement with God unless accompanied by repentance. The remorse of hell is “remorse-in-agreement with God” spurred on by lucidity and defeat, but the reprobate cannot repent because repentance has a view towards the future.⁵ Remorse can only look backwards, and in hell, the opportunity for repentance has passed. Third, even though the punishment is never completed, the demands of justice do not go unmet.⁶ There is no longer a state of injustice in the cosmos once the wicked are defeated, judged, and the punishment of hell has commenced. It does not follow

See Blocher in Nigel M. de S. Cameron, ed. *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1992), 310.

⁵ Saville, “Reconciliationism...”: 47-48, quoting Blocher, ‘Everlasting Punishment and the Problem of Evil’ in Cameron, ed. *Universalism And...* 307. The remorse pictured here is not mere attrition, but is genuine regret for the evil deeds “done in the body,” recognizing them as *evil*—there will be no disagreement in the moral assessment of these deeds when God’s righteousness is fully and undeniably revealed in judgment.

⁶ This objection could apply to any view of everlasting hell, and the answer given here is not restricted to reconciliationism.

that justice has not been served merely because the penalty does not reach termination. As long as the punishment is never curtailed, the demands of justice are met once the sentence begins. A final objection has to do with the habitualness and hardening of sin: how do the reprobate change so they no longer continue in sin? This is an issue for the view, but the beginnings of an answer can be found in an appeal to the nature of the final judgment. In the final judgment the reprobate gain a lucid awareness of the severe holiness of God and of the infinite heinousness of their sins. They are defeated and brought to subjugation, and the truth about themselves can no longer be avoided or ignored. We must not underestimate how radically this might change the psychological makeup of a person.

In this thesis, I offer reconciliationism as a superior option to annihilationism: not only is annihilationism fundamentally flawed, but also a much better view is available. In this way the negative and positive objectives of my thesis work together, somewhat operating as opposite sides of the same coin. In short, my strategy for this thesis is to show that annihilationism is to be rejected and offer in its place a much better option.

Some of my presuppositions about Scripture should be here stated. I will operate with the assumption that Scripture (the standard sixty-six book Protestant Bible) is authoritative for Christian theology. I will adopt and utilize a historical-linguistic hermeneutic that takes full appreciation of genre considerations and that also has recourse to canonical and ultimately theological considerations.

The Views in the Debate

Before proceeding any further, a few words suggesting a taxonomy of views and some definitions are in order.⁷ There are many subspecies of annihilationism and also of traditionalism: David Powys recognizes twelve different positions.⁸ Much of my treatment of these two families of views will apply to the whole of each respective group—where distinctions among subspecies are relevant I will note as much. I define traditionalism (an unfortunate label as it is liable to suggest adherence to the view is indebted merely to its formidable presence in the tradition and not from Scripture) as any view that posits a populated hell of everlasting duration involving conscious penal suffering.⁹ I define annihilationism as any view that posits the (eventual) cessation of existence of those condemned to hell.

I will be using the term “annihilationism” to also represent the views of those who self-identify as conditionalists, so a word of explanation is in order. While it must be admitted that

⁷ For more on taxonomy, see Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Studies in Theology* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1932), 447-451 and Kendall Harmon in Cameron, ed. *Universalism And...* 196-199.

⁸ David Powys, *"Hell": A Hard Look at a Hard Question: The Fate of the Unrighteous in New Testament Thought* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998), 61.

⁹ My definition of traditionalism says nothing explicitly about the possibility of escape from hell through salvation, although in later chapters it will become clear that I reject doctrines of post mortem evangelism and post mortem salvation. I regard death to be the sealer of eternal destinies, but perhaps one could adopt the modified traditionalism argued later in this work and make necessary adjustments to allow for salvific escape from hell. Also, this work will not deal with the matter of purgatory in any detail; the title “The Fire That Reconciles” refers to the view argued in chapter five, not to any sort of purgatory.

conditional immortality and annihilationism are not identical views, I will use the latter to refer to views having this in common: the ultimate fate of the finally impenitent is that of literal and total non-existence. Conditional immortality is the view that humans are either not created with inherent everlasting existence or lost it at the fall, but this is given to those who respond to the gospel (and, in order to distinguish the view from traditionalism, it is specified that everlasting existence is withheld from the reprobate). Within conditionalism, there are two possibilities. The first is that physical death is the complete and permanent termination of existence (regardless if one is an anthropological dualist or monist), and is held today by very few, a notable exception being the Jehovah's Witnesses. The second is that physical death is not ultimate extinction: all humans will be resurrected; some will be resurrected for judgment and given a punishment that somehow ends in their non-existence (either immediately or after a period of suffering).¹⁰ Annihilationism proper is the view that by their nature souls will continue to exist unless made extinct by some external force (either the effects of sin or by divine judgment, or both). This is usually not regarded as a *natural* state of affairs: apart from sin, the human person is not doomed to non-existence.¹¹ Commonly in annihilationism proper, proponents hold that God actively brings about the non-existence of the reprobate in that humans are created with inherent everlasting existence but this undergoes penal revocation through annihilation. Other annihilationists are also conditionalists. Because adherents of this cluster of views differ on details like the time of judgment and the nature of

¹⁰ There is division in this category on the intermediate state, whether it is non-existence, "soul sleep," or a disembodied conscious existence.

¹¹ See B. B. Warfield, "Annihilationism," in "New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge," (New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls, 1908), 183-184.

punishment, because many do not even clarify these issues themselves, because these authors commonly blur these lines, and because they commonly cite each other in defense of their own position, I will use “annihilationism” to cover both conditionalism and annihilationism proper.¹²

I will now briefly justify my definitions of annihilationism and traditionalism. I will show that they map onto the debate as it has occurred, and that it is necessarily a binary debate.

First, my definitions align with the way the debate has consistently been framed in the literature.¹³ I could find no source that would contest or object to my defining of the positions. While certain details within each position are disputed, as I state them my definitions are broad enough to cover the internal diversity within each position.

Second, my definitions do not merely align with the debate but, given some commitments shared by both sides, are reflective of the only two binary options. In other

¹² See Christopher W. Morgan, *Jonathan Edwards & Hell* (Fearn: Mentor, 2004), 28. See also Millard J. Erickson, *How Shall They Be Saved?: The Destiny of Those Who Do Not Hear of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 219.

¹³ See, for example, Evangelical Alliance- Commission on Unity and Truth among Evangelicals- ACUTE, *The Nature of Hell: A Report* (London: ACUTE, 2000), 26-35, Edward Fudge and Robert A. Peterson, *Two Views of Hell: A Biblical & Theological Dialogue* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 11, Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, eds., *Hell under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents Eternal Punishment* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 12, Robert A. Peterson, *Hell on Trial: The Case for Eternal Punishment* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1995), 11-16, and Kendal S. Harmon’s chapter in Cameron, ed. *Universalism And...* 196-199.

words, my definitions are both descriptive and prescriptive and a binary taxonomy is the correct approach to the matter.

To begin to see why this is the case I will list several key commitments, areas where both traditionalists and annihilationists agree. Both views deny universalism, affirming that some people are actually consigned to hell. Both sides agree that hell will be subjectively negative—it will somehow involve suffering. Both views agree that hell is realized in the eschaton; it is not some metaphor for anything experienced in this life (which is, of course, not to deny that judgment may not be experienced in this life, only that final and ultimate punishment lies in the future).

Further, certain issues surrounding hell do not affect the debate between traditionalists and annihilationists. The matter of the possibility of escape from hell does not determine this debate, as post mortem evangelism could be held or denied by both views. The destiny of the unevangelized, the requirements of salvation, and the nature of saving faith do not settle much of anything in the debate: exclusivism, pluralism, or inclusivism could be (and are) held by proponents of either position. The literalness or figurativeness of the biblical imagery used to describe hell does not decide the issue, for the debate is about the duration, not the instruments or means, of eternal punishment. Views of Scripture do not settle matters and in fact many from both sides hold very high views of the authority of the bible. Millennial views decide little, as the matter in question resides in the final state. Finally, with the exception of Jehovah's Witnesses and a few other annihilationists, both sides in the debate hold to a universal resurrection of all people, where the reprobate are resurrected for judgment and punishment. None of these issues affect the debate between traditionalism and annihilationism in any significant way, if at all.

Given these points of agreement, and given the matters that do not decisively distinguish the views, it becomes clear that the two positions are mutually exclusive. No synthesis is possible between annihilationism and traditionalism, and there is no third option (without denying hell altogether, *à la* universalism). One then applies the law of the excluded middle: either it is the case that someone consigned to hell will cease to exist (annihilationism), or it is the case that someone consigned to hell will not cease to exist (traditionalism). Simply put, given the shared commitments, there are no other possibilities and the options are binary.

Some comments on the history of traditionalism and annihilationism should prove helpful. As the title suggests, traditionalism has substantial and impressive pedigree in the tradition.¹⁴ The list of its defenders includes Tertullian, Ambrose, Chrysostom, Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards, and B.B. Warfield. It is not too much to say that from the church fathers through the present day, the history of Christian thought—both in terms of breadth of numbers and stature of thinkers—has been characterized by a doctrine of hell as everlasting, conscious, penal suffering.

The history of annihilationism reveals less support from the witness of Christian thought.¹⁵ The two volume work of LeRoy Froom serves, in part, to uncover the support annihilationism received in the history of doctrine.¹⁶ Yet as even fellow annihilationist

¹⁴ See ACUTE, *Nature of Hell*, 53ff. and Peterson, *Hell on Trial*, 97ff.

¹⁵ For this brief summary I express my indebtedness to ACUTE, *Nature of Hell*, 60ff. and Morgan, *Edwards & Hell*, 28ff.

¹⁶ Le Roy Edwin Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers; the Conflict of the Ages over the Nature and Destiny of Man* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1965).

Edward Fudge notes, Froom frequently overstates his case in combing through history for advocates of annihilationism.¹⁷ Superior is Fudge's more chastened treatment in *The Fire That Consumes*. He rightly notes that in the patristic era there is not as much explicit support for annihilationism as advocates sometimes claim: often the language is vague, merely repeating phrases from Scripture or stock sayings.¹⁸ Nonetheless, there are a few: Justin Martyr has a handful of passages that might support annihilationism.¹⁹ Certain works of Ignatius and Theophilus of Antioch can be read to infer "embryonic forms of conditionalist thinking," while Arnobius of Sicca appears to be the first to discernibly state the view.²⁰

The Second Council of Constantinople (553AD) condemned annihilationism as heretical and after these few patristic figures the view was virtually non-existent until the Victorian age. For twelve centuries traditionalism was the dominant view in Christian theology, with universalism as a minority alternative. Christopher Morgan writes of his own research, "No clear, written defense of annihilationism could be found in the Medieval period, the Scholastic period, or the Reformation period."²¹ In the post-Reformation period annihilationism was not clearly advocated until the emergence of the Enlightenment. Noteworthy figures from this era include Samuel Richardson, Isaac Barrow, John Locke, and

¹⁷ Edward Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of Final Punishment* (Houston, TX: Providential Press, 1982), 386.

¹⁸ See *ibid.*, 314-316.

¹⁹ See *ibid.*, 325-326.

²⁰ ACUTE, *Nature of Hell*, 60.

²¹ Morgan, *Edwards & Hell*, 28 fn13.

the Socinians. In the modern period the view has seen growth in Christian theology, particularly in the last few decades. Modern and contemporary proponents include Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Edward White, Henry Constable, Emmanuel Petavel, Harold Guillebaud, Basil Atkinson, LeRoy Froom, John Wenham, Edward Fudge, Clark Pinnock, Stephen Travis, Michael Green, Earle Ellis, and Philip Hughes. Perhaps the most significant point in the contemporary discussion was the publication of a tentative endorsement of annihilationism by influential evangelical John Stott in 1989, which opened the door to the growth of the view in conservative circles.²²

Scouring the literature of annihilationist authors from all periods reveals a surprising uniformity of arguments for the view. As Morgan notes, "With minor exceptions, these annihilationists have presented the same basic case for annihilationism."²³ This uniformity permits me to forgo exhaustive treatment of every author; discussion will center on the work of Basil Atkinson, Harold Guillebaud, and especially Edward Fudge.²⁴ Any differences between the arguments of annihilationist authors will be distinguished as occasion requires.

²² David Lawrence Edwards and John R. W. Stott, *Evangelical Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 312-320.

²³ Morgan, *Edwards & Hell*, 58.

²⁴ John Wenham cites the works from these three authors, in addition to LeRoy Froom, as annihilationist writings in need of a reply from traditionalism. See John Wenham's chapter "The Case for Conditional Immortality" in Nigel M. de S. Cameron, ed. *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1992), 162, 164. Robert Peterson also lists these four as the best annihilationist works. See Robert A. Peterson, "A Traditionalist Response to John Stott's Arguments for Annihilationism," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37, no. 4 (1994): 553. Froom will not receive detailed treatment in the current work because his arguments are almost entirely reproduced in the others, especially in Edward Fudge.

Edward Fudge presents the most detailed case in his *The Fire That Consumes*; others rarely deviate from the arguments that he presents and thus he will be used representatively.

The Exegetical Debate

Much of the recent debate has been exegetical and involves word studies. While the standard passages are important, one must never forget that they cannot be considered in theological isolation. They need to be synthesized together systematically and then that needs to be synthesized with the whole of Christian theology. Insufficient theological work has been done on this issue; this project aims to correct that. Indeed, while most annihilationists contend that their view is clearly taught in Scripture, it cannot be denied that theological arguments and assumptions weigh heavily in their thought (the same, it should be said, is generally true of traditionalists), and this has not been entirely addressed by traditionalists. As Christopher Morgan observes, “Most defending endless punishment have failed to recognize that the arguments produced by the annihilationists in contemporary evangelicalism are primarily theological in nature. In doing so, they have neglected a much-needed theological approach.”²⁵ I view this current work as taking up the challenge, posed by Morgan, for a full engagement of systematic theology for a doctrine of hell.²⁶

This project will, in a sense, stand on the foundation of work already done in this discussion on the nature of hell. I will not reproduce the full exegetical treatments offered by

²⁵ Morgan, *Edwards & Hell*, 19.

²⁶ See *ibid.*, 98, 139.

both annihilationists and traditionalists.²⁷ Rather, I assume these, giving a brief summary (below) and interacting with particular texts as need arises.²⁸ After this summary I will note some theological issues relevant to this discussion, treating a few in detail here while leaving the rest for subsequent chapters.

I will now turn briefly to comment on some of the most crucial Scriptural texts that teach on eternal punishment. This list is not exhaustive and the aforementioned works should be consulted for a more complete exegetical treatment. In the OT, there are two key passages that relate to eternal punishment in addition to the usage of the Hebrew word שְׁאוֹל. The Hebrew concept of *sheol* initially meant “the grave” but later developed a sense that focuses on the negative existence of the wicked in the grave (ultimately developing into the concept of hell; see the section on progressive revelation in the next chapter).²⁹ The first of the two OT passages, Dan. 12:1-2, says (v. 2) “Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.”³⁰ Here the concept of hell is underdeveloped, certainly, but the passage speaks of a universal resurrection that includes the reprobate, who are resurrected to some sort of negative existence. The second passage, Isa. 66:22-24, reads (v. 24) “And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be

²⁷ For this, see Peterson, *Hell on Trial*, Fudge and Peterson, *Two Views of Hell*, Morgan and Peterson, eds., *Hell under Fire*, Fudge, *Fire That Consumes*, Powys, “Hell”, Ajith Fernando, *Crucial Questions About Hell* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994) and ACUTE, *Nature of Hell*, amongst others.

²⁸ Most of the passages listed below receive further treatment in the next chapter.

²⁹ See Peterson, *Hell on Trial*, 27-29.

³⁰ NIV. Hereafter all Scripture verses, unless indicated otherwise, are from the NIV translation.

loathsome to all mankind.” This is also underdeveloped when compared to the teaching on hell in the NT but this passage does suggest everlasting punishment (as will be argued in the next chapter).

Several NT passages are of importance for the topic at hand. First is the parable of the separation of the sheep and the goats in Matt. 25:31-46. Verses 41 and 46 read, “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’” . . . “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.” Traditionalists have rightly highlighted the parallel between eternal life and eternal punishment as quite telling. Also of importance in this passage is the idea that condemned humans share in the same fate as Satan and demons. The second passage is Mark 9:43-48. Hell is the “unquenchable fire,” where “their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.” Pointing back to Isa. 66, this passage suggests that hell involves everlasting existence because the instruments of punishment (worm and fire) are spoken in terms of everlasting existence. The third passage is Luke 16:19-31. This is a difficult passage: it is likely not a parable in the form of Jesus’ other parables; it probably draws from an established Near-Eastern folk tale. It is also not clear if this should be viewed as addressing the intermediate state, the eternal state, or both. Still, we can at least say that the postmortem fixity of one’s eternal destiny is taught. The fourth passage is 2 Thes. 1:5-10. It reads, in part, “God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you ...” and “He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty

of his power ...”³¹ Here, it is difficult to deny that retributive punishment is in view. The passage also states two other aspects of hell in addition to punishment: everlasting destruction and banishment. The fifth passage is Rev. 14:9-11. “... He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name.”³² The purpose of the imagery of

³¹ Vv. 6, 8, 9.

³² Vv. 10b, 11. As some key passages from Revelation will be used throughout this work, a few words on interpreting this apocalyptic book are in order. Revelation is full of vivid and strange imagery, stylistic and literary language, and a complex structure. What is the interpreter to do with this imagery and with the events depicted therein? Gregory K. Beale presents the various interpretive approaches to the book, convincingly arguing that the preterist and historicist fail to do justice—it is just too difficult to limit the referents of the language in Revelation entirely to the past. The pure idealist view denies any referents to the language in Revelation beyond a general conflict between good and evil—an equally difficult hypothesis as Revelation intends at least some of its symbols to be genuinely communicative of future events. His view, a hybrid of the futurist and idealist, focuses on a redemptive-historical approach to the book. While I find his amillennialism unconvincing, he rightly states that Revelation intends to depict future events, including the final judgment. See G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 44-49.

The purpose of the book of Revelation is to communicate by symbols (see *ibid.*, 50-52). The approach adopted in this work is to interpret Revelation as a piece of apocalyptic literature, with sensitivity to genre considerations. In so doing, we see that the figurative and pictorial language can be interpreted (see what I have to say on interpreting metaphor in chapter three), and the relevant passages do in fact speak of eternal punishment in the future.

burning and fire is to inflict pain (“tormented”), not merely or even primarily to destroy (in the sense of consume and annihilate). While literal interpretation of the imagery is misguided, its purpose seems clear enough: to communicate penal suffering. Further, the punishment is said to be ceaseless and everlasting. The final passage is Rev. 20:10, 14-15: “And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever. . . . Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.” The fate of reprobate humans is the same as the unholy trinity: everlasting penal suffering.

Two key terms employed in the texts on eternal punishment, γέεννα (*gehenna*) and ᾗδης (*hades*), merit a few comments.³³ The name *gehenna* is a transliteration from the Hebrew “valley of Hinnom” (*ge’hinnom*), located south of Jerusalem. This place had associations with

Two of those relevant passages merit comment here. First, Rev. 14:9-12 speaks of the future punishment awaiting those who worship the beast. The language of God’s wrath as wine has signification precedent in the OT and interacts with other elements in the context of Revelation (See Beale in Morgan and Peterson, eds., *Hell under Fire*, 113). That the wine is mixed in full strength indicates that final punishment, not earthly, is in view. That it is expressed in the language of fire indicates that it is indeed punishment. Since the imagery is meant to indicate that the beast worshippers in view share the same fate as the object of their worship, who also shares the same fate with all those whose name is not found in the book of life (Rev. 20:15), it is difficult to resist the conclusion that this is eternal punishment in hell. Second, Rev. 20:10-15 speaks of the future punishment of the satanic trinity, then goes on to state that the unrighteous will share in this fate. This fate is called the second death, the lake of fire. In both these passages, the fate in view is “torment forever and ever” where the inhabitants will “have no rest day and night.”

³³ For this discussion I am indebted to ACUTE, *Nature of Hell*, 42-47.

idolatry; it was where Ahaz and Manasseh offered their sons to Moloch in human sacrifice. Josiah desecrated the pagan altars located in the valley during his reform (2 Kings 23:10). Dead bodies and ashes were thrown there (Jer. 31:40). Isa. 66:24 likely invokes this valley, which will be the place of the dead bodies of those who rebelled against God—“their worm shall not die, and their fire shall not be quenched.” These associations—burning fire, judgment, death—with the valley of Hinnom led to the development of *gehenna* as place of postmortem punishment. *Hades* was a standard Greek term for the realm of the dead, often used to translate *sheol*. Like latter developments in the concept behind *sheol*, this term sometimes signified the place of all the dead but sometimes focused on the compartment of the realm of the dead reserved for the wicked.

An additional important term is αἰώνιος (*aionios*).³⁴ The word is used in several key passages: Matt. 25:46 (“eternal punishment”), Matt. 18:8 and Jude 7 (“everlasting fire”), Mark 3:29 (an “eternal sin”), 2 Thes. 1:9 (“everlasting destruction”), and Heb. 6:2 (“everlasting judgment”). I will give Matt. 25:46 consideration here. In this passage, eternal life is paralleled with eternal punishment. Eternal life is indisputably everlasting life—that is, involving unending existence. The adjective *aionios* is applied to both states, life and punishment, and traditionalists note that it is difficult to escape the idea that it means anything other than unending existence when applied to punishment. It seems implausible that the meaning of a word would change so drastically, without indication, in the context of a parallel placement like this. Faced with this passage so difficult for their position, the annihilationist

³⁴ For full discussion on *aionios*, see *ibid.*, 79, Morgan and Peterson, eds., *Hell under Fire*, 75-76, Powys, “Hell”, 291-292, D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 515-536, and an entire chapter in Fudge, *Fire That Consumes*, 37-50.

will insist that presuppositions do too much work for the traditionalist. First, they vehemently complain about traditionalism's supposed indebtedness to the Greek notion of the immortality of the soul (more on this shortly). Second, they contend that the sense of each adjective *aionios* should be controlled by the noun it modifies, and since "punishment" ought to be seen as destruction in the sense of non-existence, *aionios* means "eternal in effect" rather than duration (i.e., it is a permanent extinction). Taken thusly, the passage parallels "the life in the age to come" and "punishment in the age to come;" it is qualitative (pertaining to the age to come) rather than quantitative (everlasting). While this interpretation is perhaps possible, it becomes highly improbable when we compare this concept of eternality with that of Rev. 14:11 and 20:10 ("for ever and ever") and recognize that these and many other passages have the same referent in view—eternal punishment in hell.³⁵

In addition to the terms *gehenna*, *hades*, and *aionios*, several families of imagery are employed to describe eternal punishment. These will all receive more detailed treatment in the next chapter, but a brief summary now will prove helpful. The first is the language of death, destruction, and perishing. Annihilationists argue that the word ἀπόλλυμι and its cognates and synonyms like ὄλεθρος point to eventual extinction. Traditionalists point to the several uses of these words that do not mean non-existence, where they mean "lost" or "ruined" (Matt. 10:6, Luke 15:4, 6, 8, 9, 24, 32; 2 Thes. 1:9; 2 Pet. 2:3, etc.) and ask why the concept of annihilation is required in these more ambiguous and contested passages. Since word studies only establish the range of possible meanings, and since the passages in question

³⁵ D. A. Carson also points out that the traditionalist interpretation of this passage is how a first century Jew would have understood it. See Carson, *The Gagging of God*, 529.

seemingly do not decisively determine the meaning of these disputed words, appeal must (and will shortly) be made to inter-textual and theological matters.

The second family of imagery is that of fire and burning. The annihilationist argues that the common experience of fire is that it destroys and consumes. Yet the traditionalist rightly points out that in key verses the imagery of fire is qualified with adjectives such as *eternal* or *unquenchable* (and the worm is undying; see, for example, Mark 9:48) that modify our common-sense notions of fire.

The third family is that of sulfur and smoke. Rev. 14:10 speaks of burning sulfur and smoke rising for ever and ever, where there is no rest day and night for those tormented in hell. Traditionalists recognize this passage as one of the strongest in support for their view: seemingly, eternal punishment is spoken of in terms that indicate it involves everlasting existence. Annihilationists see the smoke rising forever as an everlasting memorial to God's judgment, leaving room for the eventual annihilation of the reprobate. The imagery of smoke draws from God's past judgments in the OT—Sodom in Gen. 19, Edom in Isa. 34, and Gog in Ezek. 38—where the cities are reduced to piles of burning sulfur but *as cities* are destroyed and cease to exist. Traditionalists note that it is *their* torment in this verse, as similarly it is *their* worm. This torment is possessive; it belongs to them, personally, and it is hard to see how the smoke can continue to rise if the torment, inextricably bound up with the impenitent (*their* torment), ceases to exist. This suffering is εἰς αἰῶνας αἰώνων, “for ever and ever,” the most emphatic way to express “forever” in the NT. In the end, the issue very much depends on progressive revelation and how we understand the OT imagery in interpreting what is said in these types of passages. Further, in Rev. 20:10, the members of the unholy trinity are βασανισθήσονται ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, “tormented day and night

for ever and ever.” The implication is that those humans who share in the same fate as these will experience the same punishment as these: unending and continuous conscious suffering. This language solidifies what is said in Rev. 14. The devil and his minions and followers are personal beings. Perhaps some entities thrown into the lake of fire are impersonal forces or institutions (Babylon in Rev. 18, or death and *hades* in Rev. 20:14, for example—but this is debatable; see the next chapter), but not all are. How does one torment a non-personal entity? Also, these verses are speaking of the same reality as Matt. 25:31-46, where clearly individual human persons are in view. However one handles the seemingly non-personal entities thrown into the lake of fire does not trump what is said about personal entities.

In addition to these families of imagery, there are others that are less determinative for the current issue, including darkness, weeping and gnashing of teeth, the cup of God’s wrath, judgment, and exclusion/banishment. While these speak to the awfulness of eternal punishment, they do not directly speak to this debate, so they will be addressed only as necessary.

Within the various imageries for eternal punishment, the question of sequence has been raised. The annihilationist seems to put a sequence on the way eternal punishment is described in Scripture: first, banishment, then a period of suffering, and finally, destruction understood as extinction. Several traditionalists make the point that this sequence seems imposed and destruction seems unduly overemphasized.³⁶ The texts portray these as different aspects of eternal punishment but there seems little reason to deduce a chronology. Better to see these as different aspects of one eschatological reality.

³⁶ For example, Kendall Harmon makes this point Cameron, ed. *Universalism And...* 213, as does D. A. Carson in Carson, *The Gagging of God*, 525-526.

Theological Arguments

While word studies and semantic arguments have constituted much of the debate, some theological arguments for annihilationism have also been offered. I will very briefly summarize them here in anticipation of fuller treatment later.

The first theological argument offered for annihilationism is that traditionalism is unjust, overly vindictive, and incompatible with God's justice. Traditionalism is accused of incompatibility with our moral sensibilities. Finite sins committed by finite creatures in no way warrant unending punishment, the argument is made, but annihilation is proportionate to the wrongs done by limited creatures. The second argument is nearly universally made and undergirds many if not most of the annihilationists other arguments: endless torment is incompatible with a loving God. Scripture teaches God to be a God of love, who deeply loves his creatures, and a truly loving God would never send someone to a hell of everlasting suffering. Eternal torment serves no useful purpose and is fundamentally unloving, but annihilationism poses no such incompatibility with the love of God. The third argument is equally as common as the second: traditionalism is unduly committed to the Platonic notion of the immortality of the soul. This import to Christian theology, the argument goes, explains the influence and prevalence traditionalism has had throughout church history, and it fails to do justice to a truly biblical anthropology which recognizes that man is only conditionally immortal, for God only has immortality. Strip away this commitment, so it is argued, and traditionalism begins to crumble. The fourth argument is an appeal to the suffering of Christ on the cross. Usually implicitly assuming some form of penal substitution, the annihilationist argues her view better fits with the atonement in that Christ suffered for a period and then died; he did not suffer endlessly. The fifth argument is that traditionalism, in positing the

everlasting existence of sin, unrepentant sinners, and suffering, creates an unacceptable and unbiblical eternal cosmological dualism. The hell envisaged in annihilationism, it is argued, is compatible with God's final eschatological victory over sin and evil; traditionalism's hell is not.

This summary begins to suggest which theological issues merit consideration. Some are of lesser importance or do not, in the end, greatly affect the outcome of this debate; others are more substantial. In the remainder of this chapter I will address four theological issues that are less important for the debate, taking up the remaining more important issues in latter chapters. The four issues addressed now are: the annihilationist argument that traditionalism is beholden to the concept of the immortality of the soul, the issue of hell as retributive punishment, the nature of suffering in hell, and the binary nature of eternal destinations.

The first theological issue to be addressed in this introductory chapter is the immortality of the soul. Annihilationists repeatedly rehearse the argument that the immortality of the soul is a Platonic import to Christian theology and is a doctrine incompatible with Scripture. Since this accusation is so common, I will treat it here. The annihilationist argues that immortality is God's alone (1 Tim. 6:16), is given as a gift (2 Tim. 1:10), and the Bible speaks of human immortality in reference to the future glorified body, not in reference to the present soul (1 Cor. 15:53). Only believers receive everlasting existence by virtue of being united with Christ; the reprobate, lacking this gift of immortality connected with salvation, will cease to exist.

Yet as even Clark Pinnock acknowledges, this does not preclude the possibility that everlasting existence (in *some* mode of existence) could be given to the reprobate for some

other purpose.³⁷ Thus the status of a “natural” immortality is actually more or less irrelevant if we have reason to think God will do so. As I will argue later, the redeemed are given immortality in that they experience the fullness of human flourishing in everlasting life; the reprobate are denied immortality in this regard—they experience *death*. Yet the matter of life and death is not one of existence vs. non-existence, but rather of one’s relational connectedness to God. In this sense, the reprobate are given endless existence but not, strictly speaking, immortality. They very much do die, but do not cease to exist: perhaps “living death” is an apt description.

At any rate, we must specify just what is meant by “immortality of the soul.” The Platonic idea of the immortality of the soul means that the human soul is necessary immortal, eternally pre-existent, cannot cease to be, and cannot be made non-existent even by God himself. No traditionalist holds this, as far as I can tell: a human person is created and has a beginning and the soul’s ability to persevere is derived from God.³⁸ From the beginning the

³⁷ See Pinnock in William V. Crockett, *Four Views on Hell* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 148-149.

³⁸ Note that many annihilationists appear to regard stating the metaphysical dependence on God of the immaterial component (soul) of a human for its continued existence to be a statement of conditionalism/annihilationism. Sometimes the church fathers are read this way in support of the view (see Warfield, *Studies in Theology*, 451). Yet nearly every traditionalist, when the issue is put in the above terms, would affirm this metaphysical dependence and deny the full platonic doctrine (although, admittedly, sometimes their language could have been more careful).

Some traditionalists have held too strong of a dualism that denigrates the physical body, but many have recognized that humanity is a composite whole, consisting of both an immaterial soul and a physical body; a true anthropology is a “dualistic holism.” See John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000).

accusation of invalid importation seems unimpressive. Further, there is much variety in “Greek” thought on this issue, such that it is not clear exactly which versions are the culprits. Even if Christian theology did draw from Greek sources, it clearly made major modifications in light of Scripture.³⁹ Also, the question of origin does not settle the matter of truth; the church can and does modify and baptize concepts in service of theology.⁴⁰

Robert Yarbrough notes that this argument can in fact cut the other way: that the early patristic writers took up biblical phrases for hell such as “everlasting fire,” et al, is significant in that many wrote in Greek and were converts from Hellenistic paganism.⁴¹ That they would use this language indicates not an indebtedness to Platonism but a decided departure from it on this issue. They held many doctrines from Scripture that were odious to Greek thought, including the uniqueness of Christ as divine and human, the requirement of faith in Christ’s death and resurrection for salvation, the resurrection of the body, creation *ex nihilo*, Christian millenarianism, the authority of Scripture over human reason, the grounding of ethics and morality in theology, humans as *imago dei*, the involvement of chosen Israel in salvation history, and the Fall and original sin.⁴² Certainly Christian thinkers are influenced by the thought patterns of their day—and this was no less true in the first and second century as it is today—but they are hardly subservient to it. As Yarbrough writes, “If they were following Plato’s doctrine of the immortality of the soul so close to the letter, they would not have

³⁹ Peterson, “A Traditionalist Response...”: 567.

⁴⁰ Erickson, *How Shall They Be Saved?*, 227.

⁴¹ See Robert Yarbrough’s excellent discussion in Morgan and Peterson, eds., *Hell under Fire*, 83-87.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 85-86.

believed in the resurrection of bodies to damnation in the first place.”⁴³ Much more than vague gestures at Greek concepts is required to justify taking these annihilationist arguments with any seriousness and thus far no such detailed case has come forth.

Perhaps the phrase “immortality of the soul” has caused so much confusion it should be eschewed.⁴⁴ Rather, does Scripture teach that mankind is created for everlasting existence? Not a necessary immortality, but a *de facto*? Yes but, seemingly, implicitly so.⁴⁵ Does Scripture teach continued existence after physical death, before the resurrection? Yes.⁴⁶ Does Scripture assert the everlasting existence of an impenitent human person in a holistic soul/resurrected (but non-glorified) body? I contend the answer is in the affirmative. I will argue that God grants continued existence to the reprobate in order to execute the demands of justice.

Having discussed the issue of the immortality of the soul, I will now turn to the second theological issue and briefly defend hell as retributive punishment.⁴⁷ This issue is generally not decisive in the matter of the duration of eternal punishment, yet since I will argue that a hell of *mere* separation from God, without any sense of retributive punishment, is inadequate, I must here defend divine retribution in hell. As I will argue in my fourth chapter, retributive

⁴³ Ibid., 86.

⁴⁴ Also, Morgan notes that the term “immortality” in Scripture has varied meaning, depending on context. See *ibid.*, 206.

⁴⁵ See ACUTE, *Nature of Hell*, 99.

⁴⁶ See Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting*.

⁴⁷ See Oliver D. Crisp, “Divine Retribution: A Defence,” *Sophia* 42, no. 2 (2003).

punishment points to the severe holiness of God and the heinousness and gravity of sin. The idea of retribution is essential to punishment; so much so it is almost tautologous. This strikes me as highly intuitive and also seems assumed in Scripture. Retributive punishment is the tradition in Christian theology and is in fact not a point of contention between annihilationists and traditionalists.⁴⁸ However, because it has had its detractors as of late, I will here defend it.⁴⁹

Divine retribution is a thoroughly biblical concept. As John Wenham rightly states, “Fundamental to the Bible, from cover to cover, is the notion that *God not only deters, but that he also punishes*. . . . If divine retribution is not accepted, there is, I believe, no hope of saving a view of God anything like that of the Bible and no hope of understanding what is happening in the world.”⁵⁰

Hell is punishment. This should be clear enough, as it is taught by every (or nearly every) NT author.⁵¹ Not only is hell punishment, it is *retributive* punishment. This permeates

⁴⁸ With the exception of Clark Pinnock, who rejects it.

⁴⁹ A significant detractor is Thomas Talbot; see Robin A. Parry and Christopher H. Partridge, eds., *Universal Salvation?: The Current Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003).

⁵⁰ John Wenham, *The Enigma of Evil: Can We Believe in the Goodness of God?*, Third ed. (Guildford: Eagle, 1994), 44. Italics original.

⁵¹ See, for example, Matt. 5:20-30; Mark 9:42-48; Luke 16:19-31; John 3:36; Rom. 2:5-8; 2 Thes. 1:5-10; Heb. 10:27-31; James 4:12; 2 Pet. 2:4-17; Jude 13-23; Rev. 20:10-15. I recognize the contention that every NT author teaches hell/future punishment/coming wrath assumes a more conservative view of most authorship issues in the field of NT biblical studies. If objection were raised on the matter of authorship, the statement could easily be qualified with “nearly every NT author” and my essential point would still stand.

the pages of Scripture, but a few examples shall suffice. God, in his justice, will “repay”/“pay back” (ἀνταποδοῦναι) punishment, “inflicting vengeance”/“dealing out retribution” (διδόντος ἐκδίκησιν) upon “those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus” (2 Thes. 1:6-8). Judgment is made according to what each individual had done and each receives what she is due (2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Tim. 4:14; Rev. 20:13, 22:12).⁵² As I will argue in chapter three, theologically speaking, the ultimate retribution for sin is death (Gen. 2:17; Rom. 6:23).

The crucial idea is that of desert. Punishment is deserved and merited suffering. It is an entailment of justice and of moral agency. Apart from the promptings of lawyers, most criminals, I suspect, would resent the imposition that they committed wrongs apart from their moral responsibility, as if they literally could not help it or were mere products of their environments. Saying such is to dehumanize the wrongdoer: a dog undergoes suffering to merely correct behavior (scolding for eliminating indoors), but not for moral wrongdoing; if we are to regard criminals, and also sinners, as humans, we must not exercise retribution from the concept of punishment.

The human administration of justice is, in a sense, incomparable to that of God's.⁵³ Perhaps most importantly, its authority and legitimacy is derivative from God's (Rom. 13:1-5). The primary concerns of human justice are to protect the community from the criminal, to maintain order in society, to deter further crime, and, when possible, rehabilitate the criminal and reintegrate her into society. This is not to say that there is no retributive aspect to human

⁵² These passages speak variously of retributive justice, both in reward and punishment.

⁵³ See John Wenham's helpful discussion in Wenham, *The Enigma of Evil*, 44ff.

justice—there very much is. Indeed, the retributive aspects of human justice serve as the foundation for the aspects of deterrence and reformation, and without the former the latter become twisted and disfigured. If justice is merely for deterrence and reformation, utilitarian logic seems inescapable, with all of its accompanying horrors (e.g., punishing an innocent man the public believes to be guilty in order to deter the type of crime he committed or imprisoning an impenitent man for decades for littering while releasing the rehabilitated and remorseful murderer after a few short months). Human justice is retributive only because it is a worldly extension of divine justice; it is in itself neither divine nor final justice. Judges and courts deal with crime, God deals with sin.⁵⁴ While there is overlap, the two must be kept conceptually distinct.

It is important to note that vengeance is the Lord's (Deut 32:35; Rom. 12:19; Heb. 10:30; 1 Thes. 4:6). We live in an age where repentance is still possible and we are to pray for those who wrong us rather than take retribution. Vengeance is ultimately not ours to take—but our forgiveness and forbearance of sins committed against us depend on a final divine reckoning. This is not to exclude the important matter of societal justice (indeed, criminal justice not only protects the goods of societal order and morality, but is sometimes the catalyst for the sinner to repent). Yet even the administration of human justice is an extension of divine retribution rather than revenge itself.

The third theological issue in this chapter regards the nature of suffering in hell. While annihilationists and traditionalists disagree on the duration of eternal punishment, both sides

⁵⁴ This is not to discount the very complicated nature of our ascertaining desert and responsibility in any particular situation, especially as individual acts are always related to previous acts and to matters of character; it is also not to deny the reality of corporate responsibility.

agree that the suffering is severe and both sides display a variety of opinion regarding the suffering itself. Since I will defend a view that sees metaphor in the descriptions in Scripture of the means of suffering in hell, I will address the question here. Is it literal fire, actual burning sulfur, physical furnaces of kinetic energy, immortal maggots, etc., or are these depictions to be read as metaphors? These two views are represented by John Walvoord and William Crockett, respectively, in *Four Views on Hell*.⁵⁵ Walvoord, despite an insistence on a strongly “literal” hermeneutic, admits “Scripture sometimes uses a language of appearance” but does not think this is the case with hell—he thinks it must involve literal fire.⁵⁶ He says that Scripture never challenges the idea that hell has literal flames and it never explicitly states that this language is metaphorical. Crockett points out the incompatibility of the images, taken literally, as a fatal problem for this view. He rightly wonders how literal physical flames could inflict pain on beings like Satan and demons, who are (presumably) spiritual beings.⁵⁷ The correct interpretation will regard this language as metaphorical while not dogmatically disallowing the possibility of literal flames at part of the suffering of hell. In interpreting the metaphors for hell in Scripture, most of my comments will go through what I present in chapter three about metaphors, meaning, and truth. While I there apply it to the atonement, the language of hell would be treated similarly, *mutatis mutandis*.

Vivid depictions of hell emerged in the wake of the patristic age. Moving far beyond the images utilized in Scripture such as fire, smoke, and undying worms, elaborate, sometimes

⁵⁵ Crockett, *Four Views on Hell*, 11-28, 77-81, and 29-31, 43-61.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 28.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 30.

macabre but usually gruesome pictures of hell were painted—both with words and with brushes. Extending the eye-for-eye principle of retribution, creative and troubling means of implementing torture were concocted to correspond with the sinner's particular vice (I will spare the reader the upset of encountering specific examples; the interested can see Crockett's chapter in *Four Views on Hell*).⁵⁸ This reached a pinnacle with Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy* (although it is not obvious how literally Dante intended his imagery of hell to be taken).

The depiction of hell as a mediaeval torture chamber is a cautionary example: the Scriptures give us little detail about the actual instruments of punishment. We can cautiously piece together some suggestions, as I do in chapter five, but this must always be done with the utmost humility and care. The metaphors are given to us for a reason—not as a rind to be discarded but not to be confused as the truth itself. Abstractions often do not serve to deliver the full force of the reality on the hearer, but metaphors are intended to point to something beyond themselves. We actually know little of what hell is like: that the wrath of God is coming is clear enough, and it will be dreadful beyond imagination; the experience of being under the wrath of God in hell is a shadow of which we are only given glimpses—one that, mercifully, is a knowledge one may avoid if one repents.

This is not to adopt a softer view, or to take the hell out of hell. In many ways the truths told behind the biblical imagery of hell when taken metaphorically (and appreciated theologically) are far more terrifying than when that language is read literally. Further, if these are metaphors and we misread them as literal statements, in preaching we risk distorting

⁵⁸ Ibid., 46-47.

the gospel and causing undue offense (the gospel is inherently offensive to the unbeliever, but causing offense improperly, on the wrong issue, impedes rather than advances kerygmatic proclamation).

Also related to the issue of the nature of suffering in hell is the question of implementation: is the torment in hell the result of the sinner's own sin, working within, or a torment inflicted from without? It is difficult to say, and perhaps a choice between the two is unnecessary. However, we must insist that God has some active role: "torment" implies a tormentor, if you will, and this comports with the passages that portray God as very much active in eternal punishment; see Rev 14:9-11, for example, where the torment occurs "in the presence of the Lamb." As I will argue with reconciliationism, it is not random suffering imposed from without, or even, as with medieval pictures, suffering and torment *from without* that somehow corresponds to the sin (e.g., gluttons are forced to overeat until the point of discomfort). The connection between sin and its punishment is of a perfect and fitting correspondence, like that envisaged in chapter five. It is a correspondence that even the creatively gruesome and horrific attempts of the medievals cannot match, one that is properly theocentric.

Even with recognition that the language of eternal punishment in Scripture contains metaphors, we must still ask if the suffering of hell is physical, spiritual/psychological, or both? *Poena sensus* or *poena damni*? Both must be affirmed if we take anthropological unity seriously—that human beings are both material and immaterial—in conjunction with Matt. 10:28, where it is said that God can destroy both body and soul in hell. As can be seen in chapter five, the psychological suffering envisaged in the traditionalism therein defended

makes it quite plausible that, in a resurrected unity, the physical sufferings in hell are caused by the reaction of the mind on the body.

The fourth and final theological issue in this chapter deals with the possibilities for eternal destinations. Again, both sides in the annihilationism/traditionalism debate are nearly unanimous in their assessment that a person's eternal fate is one of two options. Yet since outside this debate consensus is sometimes lacking, I will treat it here. It must be insisted that a binary distinction between the righteous and the wicked runs throughout all Scripture (see Ps. 1; Matt. 25:31-46; and Luke 12:8, 9 for just a few examples). This distinction extends to eternal destinies, that the possibilities are essentially binary. The determining factor at the final judgment will be whether or not the person is justified before God. However, there is some degree of gradation within these two options. Final judgment will take into account the merit of a person's works and the degree of guilt (Matt. 11:21-24; 16:27; 19:28-30; 25:31-46; Luke 12:47, 48; John 5:28, 29; Rom. 2:5-11; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 20:12). That good works do not secure justification and salvation does not render them superfluous or unimportant, and similarly, that any one sin incurs infinite demerit does not entail all sins are equal. Put simply, in the eschaton a person will either enter into a state of existence that is fundamentally very good or one that is fundamentally very bad.

While these four theological issues are less substantial or do not actually make much difference in the debate between traditionalists and annihilationists, other arguments are more crucial and require detailed treatment. In the subsequent chapters of this work I will discuss these arguments, in addition to some theological arguments for traditionalism. I have already mentioned several interpretive issues to be addressed in chapter two. In chapter three I will discuss the argument against traditionalism that Christ did not experience everlasting

conscious penal suffering in the atonement, and raise a major Christological problem for annihilationism. In chapter four I will address the annihilationist argument that eternal punishment in traditionalism is disproportionately severe but not so in annihilationism. In chapter five I will discuss several annihilationist critiques of traditionalism, including the accusation that it is morally repugnant, that hell in traditionalism is unloving, and that it conflicts with God's final eschatological victory.

In the end, the doctrine of eternal punishment comes back to the doctrine of God. While it also involves Christology, hamartiology, anthropology, the atonement, and eschatology, oft unspoken determining factors reside in theology proper. One's understanding of God is tremendously significant in this debate but such is not usually stated or explicitly recognized. Most of the debate thus far has focused on exegesis, but one never does exegesis in a vacuum or apart from one's theology. An objective of this project is to explore some of these doctrinal relationships.

On the matter of a doctrine of God, some annihilationists (Pinnock, Stott, and others) have rightly been accused of carrying a sentimentalized notion of God's love. Perhaps this is best illustrated in Pinnock's inflammatory language, which is disconcertingly common in annihilationist literature, saying things like

... I consider the concept of hell as endless torment in body and mind an outrageous doctrine, a theological and moral enormity, a bad doctrine of the tradition which needs to be changed. . . . Surely a God who would do such a thing is more nearly like Satan than like God, at least by

any ordinary moral standards, and by the gospel itself. . . . Surely the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is no fiend; torturing people without end is not what our God does.⁵⁹

And then later

Everlasting torment is intolerable from a moral point of view because it makes God into a bloodthirsty monster who maintains an everlasting Auschwitz for victims whom he does not even allow to die. How is one to worship or imitate such a cruel and merciless God?⁶⁰

While theology should never be cold and dispassionate, it is difficult to see a place for language like this in advancing the dialogue on this issue. As I insinuated in my preface, there is a weight to the doctrine of hell and it should never be denied. Yet our understanding of God ultimately depends on revelation and, as I will argue, God has revealed himself to be a God who takes sin quite seriously.

The two main operative issues are the love of God and the justice of God. I address these in chapters four and five, but here I can say that any notion that God would not inflict punishment that causes anyone pain, suffering, or displeasure is demonstrably false—after all, our God is the God who inflicted plagues culminating with his killing of every firstborn Egyptian, who caused Ananias and Sapphira to drop dead for lying to the apostles, and who will come on a white horse to judge and make war, smiting his enemies with the sword that comes from his mouth. In the Scriptures, God regularly inflicts severe penal suffering on people in judgment. Perhaps what the annihilationist intends to say is that God never unjustly inflicts undeserved or overly severe punishment, but both sides of the debate agree on this point and it

⁵⁹ Clark H. Pinnock, "The Destruction of the Finally Impenitent," *Criswell Theological Review* 4, no. 2 (1990): 246-247.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 253.

is only question begging for the annihilationist to commandeer it as an argument for their view (see chapter four on the severity of punishment).

Another issue worth mentioning here—the annihilationist seems to assume that God could have chosen an annihilationist hell or a traditionalist hell, and since a hell of non-existence is clearly preferable to and more loving than a hell of everlasting penal suffering, only a monster would choose the latter over the former. This is a fundamentally misguided approach to the issue, as I will explain in chapters four and five, where I will argue that the shape of hell is formed by God’s severe goodness, sin’s severe heinousness, and other eschatological and soteriological purposes and objectives. Yet here I can say this—the biblical picture is one in which culpable people choose sin freely and in so doing, choose hell freely. No one under eternal punishment can rightly claim their fate is undeserved.

Conclusion

In this first chapter I have stated the thesis of this work—that annihilationism has seemingly insurmountable theological problems but a modified traditionalism can succeed as a doctrine of hell. I have summarized the views in the debate, establishing operating definitions, provided some brief historical context, and summarized the debate thus far. In the second chapter I will critically examine annihilationism as found in one of the view’s best representations, Edward Fudge’s *The Fire That Consumes*. When necessary I will supplement this treatment of Fudge with consideration of other prominent annihilationists, including David Powys, Basil Atkinson, and Harold Guillebaud. I will then present four of my five arguments responding to and refuting the case for annihilationism. In the third chapter I will offer, in detail, the fifth: a major theological problem for annihilationism. I will argue that

proper understandings of the incarnation, Christology, the atonement, and the nature of death form a formidable argument against annihilationism from systematic theology. In the fourth chapter I will address the disproportionality problem, which states that in the Christian doctrine of hell the punishment is disproportionately severe in relation to the offenses committed. I will examine annihilationism and two types of traditionalism, considering not only the ability to resolve the disproportionality problem but also some additional criteria such as harmony with Scripture, tradition, and the rest of theology. I will argue that a modified traditionalism best succeeds. In the fifth chapter I will present a detailed case for a modified traditionalism called reconciliationism. In this chapter I will provide six criteria for success of any view of eternal punishment, showing how reconciliationism meets these. My extended presentation and defense of the view will cover the language of death and destruction in hell, universalism, divine love, and much more. In the concluding chapter I will state the contributions this work makes to the debate, suggest several areas for further research, and offer some implications for pastoral theology.

Chapter 2

Annihilationism, Metaphor, and Hermeneutics

The primary task of this chapter is to remove the first of three supports for annihilationism: its exegetical plausibility. In this chapter, I will examine and review annihilationism as found in one of its most prominent defenders, Edward Fudge (while also interacting with other important defenses of the position in the footnotes). I will summarize his most substantial work, *The Fire That Consumes*, putting forth the heart of his arguments. I will consider his methodology and his operating doctrine of Scripture, with particular attention paid to matters of metaphor and meaning. I will also address the nature of death in Scripture and the use of the Old Testament and Old Testament imagery in the New Testament passages on eternal punishment. Then I will present four of my five arguments against annihilationist interpretations of the language of eternal punishment in Scripture.

The Fire That Consumes: A Brief Summary

Edward Fudge is a leading evangelical spokesman for the annihilationist view of eternal punishment. He has several publications on the topic, including a 500-page book entitled *The Fire That Consumes* and the annihilationist view in *Two Views of Hell: A Biblical*

& *Theological Dialogue*.¹ *The Fire That Consumes* is his most substantial work on the subject and warrants detailed attention because of its irenic tone and thoroughness.

In *The Fire That Consumes*, the groundwork is initially set by establishing some methodological guidelines (to which I will later turn in detail). Next, Fudge's argument moves on to interpretive issues with αἰώνιος, concluding that the word can have both a qualitative and a quantitative aspect.² He then spends two chapters in which he rehearses the oft-repeated accusation that the traditional view is heavily indebted to the Platonic notion of an immortal soul imposed by later theologians and such commitments to Greek philosophy are not consistent with the view of the biblical writers or with the text itself.

Fudge then turns to the Hebrew word עוֹלָם, concluding it is essentially 'the grave' that everyone will experience, and while he speaks of it as being evil—for it is the state of affairs brought about by sin—he insists "it is not a place of punishment."³ Clearly for Fudge the idea of עוֹלָם reveals little about the nature of eternal punishment; yet despite this the Old Testament does play a crucial role in Fudge's overall argument. In detailed treatments of various passages that describe divine judgment, both generally and in specific instances, Fudge labors

¹ Edward Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of Final Punishment* (Houston, TX: Providential Press, 1982), 239 and Edward Fudge and Robert A. Peterson, *Two Views of Hell: A Biblical & Theological Dialogue* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

² Fudge, *Fire That Consumes*. Multiple times he considers the suggestion that we translate αἰώνιος and its cognates with some form of the transliteration *aionian* (pg. 37, 49, 195) but ultimately accepts the term *eternal* so long as it is may be understood qualitatively and/or quantitatively, depending on exegesis of the particular passage.

³ *Ibid.*, 85.

intensely and intently to show that the Old Testament teaches annihilation of the wicked; they are “destroyed,” “wiped out” or “wiped off the face of the earth.”⁴ The notion is that in historical judgments recorded in the Old Testament, especially in the exemplary judgments of the flood and destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis, people died and “were no more,” were totally destroyed and literally perished—in a word, they were annihilated.⁵ This becomes Fudge’s interpretive key for New Testament passages that deal with eternal punishment.⁶

Moving forward chronologically in his book, Fudge gives a brief survey of intertestamental literature, working to demonstrate rich diversity therein when it comes to eternal punishment and to set up the argument that such a lack of uniformity in this literature means that interpreters can assume neither Jesus’ audience nor the biblical author’s original recipients would have the framework of everlasting conscious torment when they heard

⁴ Ibid., 98.

⁵ In discussing those who, according to Fudge, “clearly” literally perished, were destroyed and died in the Genesis flood narrative, in a footnote he qualifies his annihilationist conclusions about the literalness of those terms: “Not their *final* end, in view of the resurrection and judgment to come, but one typical of it according to New Testament writers.” Ibid., 98. (*Italics original*)

⁶ For example, in Fudge’s treatment of the statement God “condemned” (κατέκρινεν) Sodom and Gomorrah “to destruction” (καταστροφῇ) by “reducing them to ashes” (τεφρώσας) in 2 Pet. 2:1-21, he says, “This is the same *picture* we met in Isaiah 66:24; Malachi 4:1-3; Matthew 3:10, 12 and other places in both Testaments. It portrays total destruction by fire from God, a scene strengthened by the adjectives ‘unquenchable’ (it cannot be stopped in its destruction) and ‘eternal’ (its effects will never be reversed).” (*italics original*) *ibid.*, 283. Here the hermeneutical method is evident: the language used in New Testament passages on eternal punishment is to be interpreted by the language of Old Testament judgments.

teaching on eternal punishment. Since we cannot use what first century audiences would have thought hell to be in interpreting the Scriptural witness on the topic, Fudge argues we should let the language of “destruction,” “death,” “perishing,” etc. carry much of its “natural” meaning when used to describe eternal punishment.⁷ Coupling this with being hermeneutically committed to viewing Old Testament judgments as archetypal—judgments he believes establish an annihilationist understanding—he exhaustively works through relevant New Testament passages, explaining how they ought to be understood to teach annihilationism.

He then turns to church history, admitting that the annihilationist view has been in the minority but insisting that it has nearly always had at least a few adherents. He concludes with some additional theological criticisms of the traditionalist position.

Fudge’s Methodology and the Underlying Doctrine of Scripture

In the conclusion of *The Fire that Consumes* Fudge says, “Our case rests on a detailed examination of many passages of Scripture. They are considered in context according to regular rules of hermeneutics, using, for the most part, tools either written by or generally accepted by evangelical traditionalists.”⁸ Essentially, Fudge thinks that if we would merely interpret the Scriptures consistently, using accepted hermeneutical methods and tools, we will

⁷ In fact, for Fudge, Jesus’ and the biblical authors’ supposed refusal to unambiguously use the language of everlasting conscious torment available in some of the intertestamental literature counts as evidence against the traditional view.

⁸ Fudge, *Fire That Consumes*, 434.

arrive at annihilationism. I later intend to challenge this conclusion, but first an examination of Fudge's doctrine of Scripture and hermeneutical method is in order.

With clarity Fudge's initial chapter (on methodology) cuts right to the issue. He says, "What one says about final punishment depends largely on where he stands in relation to other things."⁹ He then rightly raises the question of authority, considering some possible candidates.

. . . what will be his determining authority? Is he committed most of all to a particular Confession, to what he thinks "the church has always taught," to philosophy and reason, or to the words of the Bible itself? If he professes the last, does he reason from a specific truth—such as God's love, wrath or justice—or from an overall gathering and inductive weighing of passages on the subject from both the Old and New Testaments? What will be the final criteria when these various standards do not point the same direction—at times they might not.¹⁰

Fudge here is indirectly criticizing what he (in some cases rightly) considers to be abuses within the debate on the nature of eternal punishment: uncritical commitments to tradition over and against the Scriptural witness itself, the imposition of philosophical ideas foreign to the biblical text, reasoning from abstracted divine attributes in such a way that straightforward exegesis is crippled, etc. The implication is clear enough: one's ultimate authority on the question of eternal punishment ought to be the biblical testimony on that very subject.

With admirable humility, Fudge hangs his annihilationist conclusions on his exegesis of the biblical texts. He says

⁹ Ibid., 22.

¹⁰ Ibid., 22.

This book is written to be read—and argued with! I have no ax to grind and no cause to champion; I have tried to follow the ordinary methods of sound, biblical exegesis. Competent scholars and serious students are cordially invited to enter into dialogue. Check the statements made here. Weigh the evidence. Examine the arguments. Measure the work by every proper standard. All that matters is that we seek God’s truth for His glory and the salvation of sinners!¹¹

Such sentiments are worthy of a hearty “Amen!” As I take up his invitation to enter into this dialogue, may such humility be evident.

When it comes to the authority and inerrancy of Scripture, Fudge makes his position straightforwardly clear: “I am a theist, a Christian and an evangelical, persuaded that Scripture is the very Word of God written. For that reason I believe it is without error in anything it teaches and that it is the only unquestionable, binding source of doctrine on this or any subject.”¹² Certainly, Fudge is getting at the heart of evangelical views of Scripture and for that he is to be commended, but even the briefest survey of the literature on biblical hermeneutics will remind us that issues surrounding “the ordinary methods of sound, biblical exegesis” are more than a little complex. Most pertinent to the discussion of the nature of eternal punishment are questions that have to do with how Scripture teaches and how Scripture uses metaphor in teaching.

¹¹ Ibid., xv.

¹² Ibid., 22.

Fudge on Metaphors and Meaning: Identifying and Understanding Metaphor

The hermeneutical difficulties surrounding Scripture's usage of metaphors are not lost on Fudge and he rightly recognizes that one's understanding of the terms in question is critical to the debate between traditionalists and annihilationists. Regarding these terms he says

God could have inspired hundreds of pages of philosophical discussion about the exact meaning of 'destroy' and 'perish' and whether they signified 'annihilation' or merely 'making inactive.' Instead, He points back to what He has already done once, and He warns that it is an example of what the wicked may expect again. We will not press the point beyond that, but surely we can say no less.¹³

Yet as has already been mentioned, Fudge later does in fact press the point further; indeed a major principle in much of his exegesis involves pressing this point. Later I will argue that Fudge's appeal to the "ordinary" senses of the language in question does very little to strengthen his case: given the nature of metaphor, this is exactly what one would expect to encounter—an invoking of a familiar reality (physical death) to explain an unfamiliar one (spiritual death)—and a reality like eternal punishment is so beyond our everyday experience that the metaphor becomes indispensable.¹⁴ The crucial questions concern what the metaphor actually communicates and when that metaphor begins to break down. For now it is sufficient to note that Fudge at least superficially grasps the complexity of the issue and does well in repudiating those annihilationists who do not appreciate the intricacy of language by thinking

¹³ Ibid., 99.

¹⁴ For a good discussion on how to handle metaphor in biblical language, see Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985).

the whole issue can be solved by demanding that the terms surrounding eternal punishment be interpreted “literally” (although Fudge ultimately fails to escape this trapping).

Naturally, this leads to what it means to consider language to be “literal” or “metaphorical.” What does it mean to literally die, in contrast to a metaphorical death? We might consider literal death to be the cessation of biological life, where a metaphorical death might be something like being “embarrassed to death.” Similarly, we could think of one football team metaphorically destroying another in a game and contrast that to the owner of the football team literally destroying it by firing all the coaches, players, staff, etc., and bulldozing the stadium. While these examples seem relatively uncontroversial, things become much more difficult when the language of death and destruction is applied to eternal punishment. Compounded with the fact that *Scripture* uses this language to speak of the fate of the finally impenitent, the contentiousness of this debate seems hardly surprising at all, especially considering the stakes involved.

How does Fudge handle the use of metaphor in language? He does not address the issue in abstraction from discussions about eternal punishment but his views can be pieced together from the various instances in which he does broach the topic. Understandably, Fudge is primarily concerned with how metaphorical language is used in Scripture and how that factors into the debate on eternal punishment. At one point he does acknowledge that at times the words ‘perish,’ ‘destroy,’ and ‘die’ when used in Scripture “. . . may be poetic or metaphorical or figurative.”¹⁵ This is one of the few straightforward statements Fudge makes on the issue; a full answer to the question only comes from digging into his specific treatments of passages.

¹⁵ Fudge, *Fire That Consumes*, 98.

In addressing the criticism sometimes leveled by traditionalists that the imagery of burning, smoke, destruction, etc., does not involve strict physical annihilation (“literal” annihilation, we might say) and therefore the annihilationist cannot demand that meaning when it comes to the finally impenitent, Fudge gives a glimpse of how he thinks metaphors operate in Scripture.

We see no reason to regard biblical statements concerning ashes underfoot or smoke rising forever as literal, physical descriptions. We do believe that God uses these terms to convey to our emotions such feelings of dread, horror and finality which the actual scene will elicit. We also strongly urge that such biblical pictures come far closer to what really will take place than any of the many others which uninspired theologians have manufactured since. Human language is integrally related to human experience in the Present Age. All biblical teaching about the Age to Come must therefore be accommodative language to some extent, since it describes realities of an age which has none of the limitations of space and time that characterize the present creation. All the biblical language is true, though it is not intended to be analytical (a point missed by many traditionalists). We ought therefore to take it seriously though not literally (a point missed by many conditionalists).¹⁶

His statement about all biblical language describing eschatological realities being “accommodative language to some extent” is particularly revealing; a rigid literalness in at least this sort of language is not possible. Yet what does it mean to “take it seriously though

¹⁶ Ibid., 256-257. Elsewhere he says something similar, “We do not wish to commit ourselves to a literalistic view regarding the end of the wicked. To say that they finally corrupt [sic], are destroyed, die and perish is not to say that there will be physical fire. The future age will be qualitatively different from the present world of space and time, and we must allow it room for its own surprises.” Ibid., 434.

not literally”? Unfortunately, Fudge does not go into any detail on this matter; however, one can readily surmise that he considers his approach to be doing just that.

So how does Fudge think Scripture uses metaphors to teach truth? Here some passages must be considered at length and in detail. Again in the context of the objection about physical annihilation, Fudge says that the “ordinary meaning” of biblical language of the destruction of the wicked should not be jettisoned because of this objection. Of such language he says, “Scripture uses them to say *something*; surely that ‘something’ is not the precise *opposite* of their usual sense.”¹⁷ Fudge then accuses many traditionalists of doing this very thing because of an a priori commitment to an immortal soul, although he does temper this accusation with the recognition that the major thinkers in the tradition insist that God could bring about the non-existence of the soul. He then points out that “Scripture always attributes incorruptibility and immortality to the glorified bodies of the righteous in the Age to Come, never of ‘souls’ apart from bodies, of the righteous now, or of the wicked at any time.”¹⁸ What Fudge says next is very revealing:

There is no good reason, therefore, not to take Paul’s primary words in their most ordinary and common senses. He says the wicked will “perish,” “die,” be “corrupted” or be “destroyed.” Those terms have definite connotations to the most simple [sic] person. We need not suddenly become technical physicists worrying about material “annihilation.” When we speak of final punishment, we are speaking of a realm which transcends the present space-time world with all its laws of energy, matter and thermodynamics.

¹⁷ Ibid., 257. (Italics original.)

¹⁸ Ibid., 257.

We do not deny that all these key terms are used at times in a figurative or metaphorical sense.

Yet the very fact that a word can have such an extended sense presupposes an ordinary and literal sense in the first place. Furthermore, the ordinary sense gives meaning to the figurative or extended usage, not the other way around.¹⁹

The assumption seems to be that unless there is good reason to move away from the “ordinary and common” meaning of words, we ought to retain the connotations that “the most simple person” would have, even while recognizing that in other contexts these same words may be used more metaphorically. Essentially, for Fudge if literalness and metaphoricalness can be considered ends of a continuum we should assume the most literal understanding possible and should only move towards a more metaphorical understanding when we have very strong reason to justify the move and are, on pains of contradiction, required to do so.

Furthermore, for Fudge when we do move towards the metaphorical, the literal connotations have interpretive control as to how to understand the metaphor because the metaphorical use depends on the literal to have meaning at all. Fudge writes

¹⁹ Ibid., 257. Atkinson does something similar: he contrasts death as the “deprivation or extinction of life” with death as separation from God, saying that the former is the obvious and simple meaning of the word and the latter a strange imposition made by those who have a priori commitments to the immortality of the soul. He then says that the biblical usage of the Greek and Hebrew behind the English “to die,” “death,” and “dead” “... taken as a whole prove [that word] to bear its ordinary meaning.” Basil F. C. Atkinson, *Life and Immortality: An Examination of the Nature and Meaning of Life and Death as They Are Revealed in the Scriptures* (Taunton: Phoenix Press, 1969), 30. For a response (similar to mine, below) to this type of argument aimed specifically at Atkinson, see Robert A. Peterson, “Basil Atkinson: A Key Figure for Twentieth-Century Evangelical Annihilationism,” *Churchman* 111, no. 3 (1997): 210-213.

Even figurative usages depend on actual, literal sense of words. Whenever someone uses “death” as a figure, it is because he wishes to convey the feelings conjured by our literal understanding of the term. Nowhere does Scripture indicate that it uses these words in a figurative sense when it applies them to the end of the wicked. Few things are stated more often throughout the whole Bible than that the wicked will “die,” “perish,” “be destroyed,” pass away, be no more, and be forgotten forever.²⁰

In Fudge’s view, there must be some (explicit?) indication within the text itself that any biblical language ought to be understood figuratively if we are to do so. Absent of any

²⁰ Fudge, *Fire That Consumes*, 289. (See also Harold E. Guillebaud, *The Righteous Judge: A Study of the Biblical Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment* (Taunton: Phoenix Press, 1964), 15.) Fudge then goes on to approvingly cite Constable, who argues since we are talking about divine law and justice we have good reason to understand these words in their “most essential and ordinary meanings.” The idea is that legal language (supposedly universally, throughout all times and cultures) is intentionally and inherently as free as possible of metaphorical language. This is highly debatable and seems to impose a modern phenomenon (“legalese,” we might call it) on biblical writers. Even if it were the case that universally legal language is largely striped of metaphor it does not follow that biblical writers—who are not writing legal documents—would feel any need to do the same.

For similar affirmations on the literal meaning of words strongly governing any figurative meaning, see Atkinson, *Life and Immortality*, 37-38, 42, 83. Atkinson repeatedly commits the fallacy that a word’s meaning in a particular context should be determined by the most frequent meaning of the word’s use in all of Scripture. Atkinson says about the Hebrew מָוֶת, since “it bears the natural and ordinary meaning of death as cessation of life” in but a few easily explained figurative uses, “This fact provides a strong inference that its meaning is the same when it refers to the second death.” Ibid., 84. He does likewise with θάνατος and ἀποθάνειν. Ibid., 84-85. Petavel says the same, see Emmanuel Petavel, *The Problem of Immortality* (London: Elliot Stock, 1892), 206-215. While his view is more nuanced than Fudge’s, admitting a more complex relationship between the various ways Scripture speaks of death, it ultimately amounts to the same thing.

indication a heavily literal sense is the only way to proceed, and when it comes to certain descriptions of eternal punishment, Fudge thinks that we must not interpret figuratively.

This interpretive principle is evident in Fudge's discussion of the biblical origins of the language in question. He says

We have already seen throughout the Old Testament that God's wrath against sin results in the total destruction of the sinner. The Psalms and Proverbs repeatedly speak of a time when the wicked will be no more, their place will not be found, and even their name will be forgotten. The prophets contribute a whole vocabulary of divine wrath and destruction as they tell of floods that rise, storms that destroy, swords that slay and blood that flows, moths and worms that consume, fire that devours and smoke that ascends. Poetry and prophecy alike build on God's actual acts of past judgment within history. Outstanding examples are the Flood, which destroyed a world and abolished all but eight members of its race, and the storm of fire and sulfur which utterly obliterated Sodom and Gomorrah, leaving neither a single survivor within nor a trace of the cities forever.²¹

Fudge is arguing that the language used in Old Testament accounts of divine judgments should not be changed to have a metaphorical sense when it—the very same language—is being used to describe eternal punishment, especially since so often when eternal punishment is described in the New Testament there are allusions to specific Old Testament passages. Yet he must and does admit that this language as used in the Old Testament is not absolutely literal, for there is a future resurrection and those persons who were “destroyed” in

²¹ Fudge, *Fire That Consumes*, 239.

Sodom and Gomorrah, for example, were not at that time eternally destroyed—permanently annihilated—because they will be present at the final judgment.²²

Fudge seems to set things up like this: when it comes to the language used to describe eternal punishment, the words used have a semantic range. Within any given word's semantic range, there are some senses that are more metaphorical and some that are more literal. Since the meaning of the language of eternal punishment is ambiguous and contested, we must have strong justification to take up any meanings that move away from the "literal" sense (the majority usage sense that is the most "natural" sense of the word). When the words are used to describe eternal punishment, "nowhere does Scripture indicate that it uses these words in a figurative sense when it applies them to the end of the wicked."²³ The immortality of the soul and an uncritical adherence to tradition are the reasons that traditionalists have to understand the language metaphorically, but these are not good reasons to do so. Since we are in want of a good justification for this, we cannot move away from the literal sense of the words. Ergo, annihilationism.

Denying Annihilationism in the Biblical Language of Eternal Punishment

What reasons might there be to interpret the biblical language of eternal punishment in a way that goes against an annihilationist understanding? Fudge repeatedly reminds us that most passages on eternal punishment lack any explicit statement that clearly demands everlasting conscious punishment and it must be conceded that many (but not all) passages

²² Matt. 11:24.

²³ Fudge, *Fire That Consumes*, 289.

have a degree of ambiguity. That said, certainly the absence of a straightforward and unambiguous statement of a particular doctrine is not a fatal blow for that doctrine, lest we throw out any talk of God as triune. I submit that what follows are (in no particular order) five good reasons to interpret the biblical witness on eternal punishment in accordance with the traditionalist rather than the annihilationist view.²⁴

The Analogy of Scripture: Scripture Interprets Scripture

First, when dealing with any passage where the meaning has a degree of ambiguity or uncertainty, granting the unity of the canon as Christian Scripture, as most evangelicals do, exegetes should follow the principle of letting Scripture interpret Scripture. If there is difficulty in understanding how metaphorically or literally the language of eternal punishment is operating in particular verses, interpreters should at that point turn to passages that are more clear and let them inform the exegesis of those that are less clear; the difficulty may be settled inter-textually. While Fudge claims to be doing just this, I suggest that he appeals to passages with less clarity and that he ignores or dismisses those that have more clarity. I will now deal with the latter; the former will be treated as a separate reason for understanding the language of eternal punishment more figuratively.

In his *The Fire That Consumes*, Fudge attempts to be exhaustive but makes the strange oversight of ignoring one of the strongest arguments for the traditionalist position: the interconnectedness of texts like Matt. 25:31-46, Rev. 14:9-11, and Rev. 20:9-15. It is difficult to refute the conclusion that these texts (and others that speak of eternal punishment) all have

²⁴ Obviously, this is not intended to be an exhaustive presentation of all the reasons for the traditionalist rather than annihilationist view, and these five reasons are of varying import.

the same referent in view: the lake of fire, the second death, γέεννα, outer darkness, etc. all address the same entity. This shared referent is said to be the “eternal fire” prepared for Satan and demons;²⁵ in this place the smoke of the torment of the condemned goes up forever and ever; the condemned will have no rest, day or night; Satan, the beast, and the false prophet are tormented day and night forever and ever. In Revelation chapter 20 the finally impenitent are cast into this place and there is no reason to think that their experience there will be any different than that of the other beings who reside there (Satan, demons, et al.): tormented day and night forever and ever. In fact, reading Rev. 20:9-15 in light of Rev. 14:9-11, Matt. 25:31-46 and other passages on eternal punishment gives good reason to think that the reprobate will experience the same fate as Satan and his ilk, which almost undeniably appears to consist of everlasting, conscious punishment.

At this point, the objection might be raised that it is invalid to conclude that finally impenitent humans will have the same fate as Satan.²⁶ Although the beast and the false

²⁵ See Matt. 8:29 for the notion that demons will be tormented along with Satan.

²⁶ David Powys makes a similar objection but does so differently than Fudge; a brief summary and treatment are in order. In his handling of Rev. 14:9-11, he tries to minimize the passage, saying it speaks only hypothetically of those who apostatize, and does so in highly rhetorical and figurative terms. David Powys, *"Hell": A Hard Look at a Hard Question: The Fate of the Unrighteous in New Testament Thought* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998), 366-368. He says, "... there is no warrant for regarding them as a general description of the fate of the unrighteous." Ibid., 366. However, this is to completely ignore the interconnectedness of this passage with Rev. 20:9-15 (and other passages).

Powys recognizes that in the final judgment scene in Rev. 20:11-15 all the dead whose names are not in the book of life are thrown into the lake of fire. Ibid., 369. That the wicked share the same fate as the devil, beast, and false prophet is brushed off—he attempts to make a distinction *within* the lake of fire between the members of the

prophet, as well as death and *hades*, are thrown into the lake of fire, they cannot rightly be considered capable of experiencing torment. That they are not (indeed *cannot* be) consciously tormented everlastingly is reason to allow for Satan and company to have a different sentence than condemned humans, it is argued, even if they are cast into the same place. If the annihilation of these wicked institutions and abstractions can occur in the lake of fire then why not the annihilation of condemned humans? Fudge raises this very objection:

In the case of the beast and false prophet (both personifications of ungodly power or perversion), and in the case of death and Hades (both abstractions treated as persons), the lake of fire clearly means annihilation and cessation of existence. In the case of impenitent sinners, nothing in the text prevents this meaning. The context twice suggests it by explaining the lake

unholy trinity, who alone are *explicitly* said to experience ongoing and unending torture, and those referenced in Rev. 20:15, the unrighteous, to whom is attributed “the second death.” *ibid.*, 370-372. He insists that “... if the lake of fire will constitute literal torment for any, it will be so only for the beast, the false prophet, and Satan. For the others, being cast into the lake of fire will be to suffer ‘the second death’, a concept denoting cessation of existence.” *Ibid.*, 372. He then appeals to the Targums’ use of “second death” to support his annihilationist understanding of the phrase. *Ibid.*, 373. Powys’ distinction within the lake of fire is unsustainable for a number of reasons, one being that Revelation intends the reader to understand that the wicked in Rev. 20:15 share in the same basic fate as the unholy trinity (which is supported by Rev.14:9-11, where a subset of the unrighteous, a subset isolated for the passage’s purposes, have their fate described in strikingly similar language to that of the unholy trinity). For a critique of Powys’ distinction, see Gregory Beale’s “The Revelation on Hell” in Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, eds., *Hell under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents Eternal Punishment* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 133.

of fire as the “second death.” Everything we have seen in the rest of the Bible is in keeping with this meaning.²⁷

By way of response, I will follow Beale and point out that Fudge is importing a strong distinction between individuals and corporate institutions comprised of individuals that is not present in the book of Revelation.²⁸ The persecuting institutions are in fact destroyed by virtue of the individuals in whom they consist being thrown into the lake of fire, which is quite consistent when this passage is understood in light of 14:10-11 and 20:15.²⁹ Further, these

²⁷ Fudge, *Fire That Consumes*, 307. Elsewhere, in addressing the fate of the false beast and the false prophet, He says, “Whether we understand them to be specific persons or impersonal forces, the fate of the beast and false prophet does not define the final destiny of wicked human beings . . . sound biblical interpretation requires us to explain the mysterious sayings of Scripture in light of its many plain statements, and not the other way around.” Fudge and Peterson, *Two Views of Hell*, 78. While we certainly agree with the principle Fudge is invoking, his particular use of it here is problematic. He seems to be saying that because Revelation is using imagery in the apocalyptic genre, it is therefore mysterious, unintelligible, and uninterpretable. This is a suspect and unsubstantiated assumption.

²⁸ See Gregory K. Beale in Morgan and Peterson, eds., *Hell under Fire*, 127ff. Beale argues convincingly that the defeat of the persecuting institutions are to be understood in virtue of those people who compose those institutions being cast into the lake of fire. People cast into the lake of fire are described with the language of everlasting conscious punishment (cf. Rev. 14:9-11 with Rev. 20:9-15).

²⁹ When it comes to “death and *hades*” being thrown into the lake of fire there is good reason to also think that this is to be understood as a product of the finally impenitent being cast into the lake of fire. See Beale in *ibid.*, 129-131. Also, see David Edward Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 1103. Aune says that the casting of death and *hades* into the lake of fire in v. 14 stands for “the unrighteous dead in accord with v 15.”

institutions are grouped together with Satan, and all three are explicitly said to be *tormented day and night forever and ever*.

This raises a fatal problem for Fudge, who follows much of evangelical thinking in viewing Satan as an individual rather than some sort of figurative representative of evil. In discussing the lake of fire, Fudge says, “So far as the devil is concerned, the expression itself would seem to have the same meaning [annihilation], but it becomes ambiguous and somewhat questionable in light of the specific statement that he will be tormented for ever and ever Whatever the case with Satan, the final punishment of the wicked is a different subject.”³⁰ Surely it is not a different subject! Much of the force of Revelation 20:15 comes from the linking in the passage of the fate of the wicked with the fate of the Satan, the beast, and the false prophet.

Fudge uncomfortably struggles with how to handle Satan being “thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown.” These three occupants of the lake of fire are said to be “tormented day and night for ever and ever.” In trying to answer this, after pointing out that institutions cannot be tormented and therefore this is symbolic language, Fudge says

On the one hand, if the lake of fire means here what it did in Revelation 19:20, it is nothing but a symbol for annihilation. But if that is its meaning, how does John see the devil “tormented day and night for ever and ever?” There is no easy solution. Yet to this point no human beings

³⁰ Fudge, *Fire That Consumes*, 307. Fudge has just concluded that the beast, the false prophet, death and *hades* all will be annihilated in the lake of fire, and is struggling with the implication that Satan will also be annihilated but is described as being everlastingly tormented.

are involved in the lake of fire, nor does this passage say that any of Adam's race are tormented for ever and ever.³¹

From this and other comments he makes it would be fair to conclude that Fudge considers Satan to be a real individual capable of being tormented. Yet he cannot escape the obvious conclusion that Satan experiences eternal punishment in the way the traditionalist view understands it, and the universally shared fate of the condemned (both demonic and human) here in Revelation 20 is incompatible with the annihilationist picture of eternal punishment.

This, of course, is to say that the devil and those who follow after him—the wicked—share the same fate. Fudge seems to think that one ought not to make this connection because throughout the Bible, death is envisioned as annihilation, and when the lake of fire is mentioned in regards to human persons, it is referred to as “the second death.” Again following Beale, I raise some objections to taking “the second death” to be a description of a categorically different fate.³² The punishment of humans has already been described to be such that “the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever” and they have “no rest day or night” in Rev. 14:11. The exact same language is applied to Satan, the beast, and the false prophet to describe their existence in the lake of fire. Put simply, the lake of fire *is* the second death.³³ Also, the phrase “fire and brimstone” appears in both 14:10 and 20:10, the

³¹ Ibid., 304.

³² Beale in Morgan and Peterson, eds., *Hell under Fire*, 132-134.

³³ See Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1091-1093. Regarding the origins of John's unique phrases “lake of fire” and “second death,” Aune says, “The Egyptian significance of second death and the lake of fire, i.e., complete and total destruction, cannot be meant in Revelation, as Rev. 14:9-11 and 20:10 make clear. Rather . . . *eternal*

implication being the same fate is in view in the descriptions of punishment in both 14:9-11 and 20:9-15.

Fudge could try to avoid these difficulties by saying that Satan is not really an individual: talk of the devil as a personal being is merely a metaphorical personification. This move raises other problems that require an answer (what of the all passages that present Satan as an individual, demonic being; e.g. Matt. 4:1-11?) but ultimately such a maneuver does not solve the problem for Fudge, for as has been argued, even if “the devil” is taken metaphorically, there still are metaphorical institutions composed of human persons and the eternal fate of those human persons are described with the language of everlasting conscious torment.

Without getting any further into the details of the particular exegesis of each of these passages and the various ways that annihilationists have attempted to explain away the seeming descriptions of everlasting conscious torment, it is sufficient to say that the apparent clarity of these passages should inform how figuratively one understands the language of eternal punishment in places where it may be a bit ambiguous.³⁴ Fudge agrees with this in

torment is signified, so that what we have is an adaption of Egyptian underworld mythology to Judeo-Christian tradition.” Ibid., 1093.

³⁴ Guillebaud’s treatment of these passages is somewhat different from Fudge’s and is worthy of a detailed note. He considers Matt. 18:34-45, Mark 9:43-48, Rev. 14:10-11, and Rev. 20:10 to be the most substantial support for traditionalism, where in his judgment everything else the Scriptures say on eternal punishment fits more naturally with annihilationism. Since these problem passages for annihilationism are supposedly the odd ones out, he says we ought to dig deeper, past the “first impression” or surface reading of these passages. Guillebaud, *The Righteous Judge*, 20. On the Matthew and Mark passages, he thinks the undying worm and unquenchable fire exist eternally as memorials of judgment to those annihilated. Ibid., 22. On Rev. 14:10-11, he contends that “day

principle—that passages with more clarity help interpret those with less clarity—but I fault

and night” refers to their punishment being unrelenting but not necessarily everlasting. The smoke rises everlastingly, again as a memorial, even after the point of annihilation. *Ibid.*, 24. His treatment of Rev 20:10 is interesting and telling, and goes as follows (*ibid.*, 25-26). He says that Rev. 20:10 does not refer to human beings: the beast and false prophets might be “institutions or abstractions,” which he concedes would make the verses hard to understand. But, he says, even if these are individual human beings, they are “incarnations of Satan” and their fate is no indication of the fate of ordinary humans (an unsupported assertion that seems dubious at best). Then he dismisses the idea that humans share in the devil’s fate in the lake of fire, because despite the seemingly clear meaning of Matt. 25:41 (and, I would add although he does not, Rev. 20:15)—that condemnation to the lake of fire is essentially the same thing for both humans and the devil and his demons—it “does not at all necessarily mean that they remain alive in that fire as long as the devil would.” However, recognizing that all these verses have the same referent in view makes just such a conclusion difficult to escape, for the language of everlastingness is used for both human and non-human entities.

To avoid the traditionalist conclusion he appeals to Ezek. 28:11-19 in explaining Rev. 20:10 to argue that Satan, who is the antitype behind the condemned king of Tyre, “shall be no more forever” (v. 19). This, coupled with his interpretation of 1 Cor. 15:28 (where God being “all in all” necessarily requires annihilation for those consigned to hell because all evil must be eradicated), means that the devil will not exist everlastingly. Therefore, we must interpret Rev. 20:10 in light of these considerations (as well as the biblical emphasis on destruction, which he takes along annihilationist lines). He contends that although the phrase “day and night forever and ever” (or his preferred translation “unto the ages of the ages”) elsewhere means everlasting and unending eternity, here in 20:10 it is conditioned by the nature of what is described—something that is neither absolutely eternal nor connected to God, who is.

Guillebaud does acknowledge that reprobate humans share the same final destination as Satan and his angels, but dismisses one verse (Matt. 25:41) that states this and completely ignores another—Rev. 20:15. This omission is indeed very curious, and his case is in the end like that of Fudge: unpersuasive because of his scant and dismissive treatment of these passages and because of his refusal to consider them together.

him for failing to recognize which passages truly exhibit more clarity. He argues that the passages with more clarity are not the likes of Matt. 25:31-46, Rev. 14:9-11 and 20:9-15 but rather are Old Testament passages of judgment that become paradigmatic for how one should understand other passages that may be less clear. Here I contest that Fudge has not justified his scant, sometimes dismissive treatment of the Matthew and Revelation passages and that his failure to consider them in conjunction with one another leaves this point unsatisfactorily unanswered.

Having seen that Fudge ignores or dismisses several passages on the nature of eternal punishment that possess more clarity, we turn to the passages he does consider to be clearer and argue that they ought not be used to interpret the language of eternal punishment.

Hermeneutic Method, Progressive Revelation, and Metaphorical Language

Second, Fudge's hermeneutical method does not adequately appreciate the progressive nature of revelation in Scripture and does not properly handle metaphorical language. As previously demonstrated, his method gives interpretive primacy to certain Old Testament passages in interpreting the biblical language on eternal punishment. For example, Fudge says

The historical books of the Old Testament show us examples of actual judgments against the wicked in the past. More important, Jesus and the writers of the New Testament borrow the vocabulary of these events to describe God's final judgment against the lost If we allow the Bible to interpret itself, these Old Testament examples can teach us much about the punishment awaiting the wicked at the end of the world.³⁵

³⁵ Fudge and Peterson, *Two Views of Hell*, 26. Atkinson makes similar arguments on the precedence of certain Old Testament passages; see Peterson's response, Peterson, "Basil Atkinson," 206-208. See also Guillebaud, *The Righteous Judge*, 21-24.

And later he elaborates

As we become familiar with these Old Testament symbols of judgment, we will be better able to understand the meaning of the same language in New Testament texts. And we will escape the easy temptation to explain biblical expressions in ways that have no basis in Scripture. More important, we can avoid interpreting biblical images in ways that contradict their ordinary usage throughout the Bible.³⁶

It is true that the New Testament often draws on the themes, images, and language of earlier Scripture and one must not neglect these passages in interpretation. That said, the annihilationist hermeneutical method of viewing passages on eternal punishment almost exclusively through the lens of narratives of divine judgment in history is problematic. One problem is that Fudge does not rightly allow the New Testament sufficient freedom to utilize the language of specific Old Testament historical judgments to teach something previously unknown about the nature of eternal punishment. Another is that the majority of the Old Testament passages appealed to by Fudge do not speak to the issue at hand—they are not addressing final punishment but the punishment of an often premature and swift physical death—and those that do touch on final punishment do not teach annihilationism.

Space is lacking for an examination of every Old Testament passage Fudge considers to be in support of annihilationism or to be important in the annihilationist hermeneutic.³⁷ However, my point can be illustrated by considering an Old Testament passage that does address the final end of the wicked and that is drawn upon by New Testament passages: Isaiah 66:24.

³⁶ Fudge and Peterson, *Two Views of Hell*, 29.

³⁷ For an initial response to Fudge's use of Old Testament passages, see Peterson in *ibid.*, 90-92.

Isaiah chapters 65 and 66 contain an eschatological vision that contrasts the righteous and the wicked. In the new heavens and new earth, the righteous from all nations continuously come to worship in Jerusalem, “And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.”³⁸ The imagery of dead bodies, undying worm, and unquenchable fire all merit closer consideration.

Interpreters should first consider the whole of the picture presented before focusing on one image, and in so doing, it becomes evident that the language of undying worm and the unquenchable fire is at least as significant as the language of corpses and is probably more so. Isaiah is using familiar images to depict the eschatological fate of the wicked: a burning garbage dump and defeated enemies in battle. The going out of the worshipers in v. 24 could refer to the procession from the temple after worship, but also could refer to going out of Jerusalem to see the Valley of Hinnom.³⁹ Later known as the transliterated *gehenna*, it was a ravine south of Jerusalem that was, amongst other things, a smoldering garbage dump of continuous decay and a place of child sacrifice—a picture extremely repugnant, especially in the Jewish mind (Josh. 15:8; 18:16; Neh. 11:30; 2 Kgs. 23:10; 2 Chr. 28:3; 33:6; Jer. 7:32-33; 19:2; 32:35).

³⁸ Isa. 66:24, English Standard Version.

³⁹ John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah. Chapters 40-66*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 692. See also Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1st ed., The Anchor Bible (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2003), 316-317, Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah*, 1st ed., The Old Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 542, and John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 366.

Isaiah describes the worm as undying and the fire as unquenchable, both qualifications that are intended to take the reader beyond the normal connotations of maggots and flame.⁴⁰ We do not normally think of these two things coexisting, which is indicative of a rich use of metaphorical language in all of this passage's imagery.⁴¹ It is *their* worm and *their* fire, implying that these agents of punishment are tied closely to those being punished. The agents of punishment are *undying* and *unquenchable*, which gives good reason to see their unlimited perpetuality to track with an unlimited duration, and since they are both wed to those being punished, it follows that the existence of the rebellious is likewise unlimited in duration and perpetuality. The paralleling of the continuous worship of the righteous (v. 23) and the continuous punishment of the wicked supports this conclusion, as does the repetition of "all

⁴⁰ The English "undying worm" and "unquenchable fire" are adequate and accurate to the Hebrew and Greek in Isa. 66:24 and Mark 9:43, 48. The Hebrew word translated as "worm" (תולעה) probably refers to insect larvae—likely from flies, moths, and beetles—that feed on decaying matter, including corpses. See R. Laird Harris, Gleason Leonard Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1980). S.v. תולעה. The Greek word for "worm" (σκώληξ), used in Mark 9:48, follows the same meaning. See J. P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1989). S.v. σκώληξ. Similarly, the fire is unquenchable in that it is not quenched or extinguished. See *ibid.* S.v. ἄσβεστος. See also Francis Brown et al., *The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon: With an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1979). S.v. כבֿה.

⁴¹ See D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 524.

flesh” in both verses.⁴² Indeed, the sternness of the warning and the hope of the promise implicit in the passage depend on both being ongoing.

The language of unburied dead bodies links the shame and contempt of defeat in battle (a familiar historical reality, see Isa. 37:36) with the shame and contempt of eschatological defeat by the divine warrior (“dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me”). The dead bodies are those slain in Isa. 66:16. Leaving unburied the bodies of defeated enemies was a significant disgrace. Moreover, the burning of a dead body would be considered an act of desecration to the Hebrew (Josh. 7:25; Amos 2:1). The eschatological picture, then, is one of ultimate disgrace.

Isaiah was using the imagery of his day to speak of an eschatological reality that receives more revelation later. One cannot baldly say that Isaiah was describing the more developed hell of the New Testament, but it is natural for Jesus and the New Testament writers to adopt this imagery in further revealing details about the final fate of the wicked. The imagery should be seen as eschatological first, through that lens then can one rightly interpret imagery of phenomena that was current to Isaiah. With all this in view, I can conclude that Isaiah’s language of dead bodies is not intended to invoke ideas of annihilation but rather of utter defeat.

How, then, does Fudge interpret Isa. 66:24? He reads annihilationism into the language of dead bodies and then interprets the rest of the imagery accordingly. About Isa. 66:24 Fudge says, “They see *corpses*, not living people. They view *destruction*, not conscious misery Worms and fire also indicate complete destruction, for the maggot in this picture

⁴² See Oswalt, *Isaiah*, 692-693. See also J. A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 544.

does not die but continues to feed so long as there is anything to eat. The fire, which is not ‘quenched’ or extinguished, burns until nothing is left of what it is burning.”⁴³ Yet Fudge’s interpretation strains this imagery of worm and fire, which are continuously and perpetually *undying* and *unquenchable* in the same way that the worship of the righteous is continuous and perpetual. Apart from annihilationist presuppositions, what reason is there to think that the worm is undying “so long as there is anything to eat” or that the fire “burns until nothing is left of what it is burning”? The text, in fact, points in the opposite direction.

It is difficult to see Isa. 66:24 teaching annihilationism and that in itself undercuts Fudge’s hermeneutical method. For example, Fudge rightly turns to Isa. 66:24 to interpret New Testament passages such as Mark 9:42-48, but mistakenly imposes his annihilationist interpretation of Isaiah on Mark.⁴⁴ A further consideration—progressive revelation—is likewise quite damaging to his method.

⁴³ Fudge and Peterson, *Two Views of Hell*, 32. (Italics original.)

⁴⁴ For example, in talking about Jesus’ teaching in Mark 9:43-48 (where Jesus quotes Isa. 66:24) Fudge says, “This is a devouring worm, and what it eats—in Isaiah’s picture here quoted without amendment—is already dead.” Fudge, *Fire That Consumes*, 185. Similarly, he says, “The devouring worm is aided by unquenchable fire that cannot be put out and that therefore continues to destroy until nothing remains. And when that destruction is completed, it will last for all eternity.” Fudge and Peterson, *Two Views of Hell*, 44. Again, annihilationist conclusions are imposed upon but not supported by the text. A consultation of academic commentaries on Mark 9:42-48 reveals no annihilationist support. See, for example, C. S. Mann, *Mark: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1st ed., The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1986), 383, Adela Yarbro Collins and Harold W. Attridge, *Mark: A Commentary*, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 453-454, and Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, vol. 34B, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 71-72.

A proper understanding of progressive revelation renders Fudge's interpretive reliance on Old Testament judgment passages inappropriate. If later revelation develops a fuller, richer understanding of the afterlife, then Fudge's method seems to place interpretive importance on less developed depictions and makes those the hermeneutical key to understanding the more developed accounts. In short, Fudge has it backwards.

Progressive revelation involves the idea that God's redemptive work is a process and correspondingly, information about this plan of redemption has been revealed gradually as God works redemption over time. As the canon of Scripture unfolds, certain doctrines receive more clarity and more specificity as more details are revealed. The later revelation does not contradict or falsify the earlier; it merely brings more information and clarity. In this sense later revelation complements and supplements earlier revelation.

Given this understanding of progressive revelation, in doing theology it is imperative that care is taken not to confuse the movement of our knowledge from less-specific to more-specific revelation with the reality being described. This means that a particular reality behind a doctrine may very well have stayed the same; it was only further revealed with later revelation. The reality did not evolve or change; what happened was that human knowledge of it grew.

An important example relevant to present purposes can be found in the Bible's concept of the afterlife. The Hebrew word *שְׁאוֹל* can be used in the sense of "the state of death" or "the grave."⁴⁵ When the word is used with this connotation, the sense is largely neutral. For example, Ps. 6:5 says, "For in death there is no remembrance of you; in Sheol who will give

⁴⁵ Gen. 42:38; 37:35; Ps. 6:5; 89:48; 1 Sam. 2:6; Job 14:13,14; Hos. 13:14; Prov. 30:16.

you praise?” In the New Testament there is a much more developed sense of a positive and a negative side to the afterlife. One must be careful to avoid uncritically injecting developed New Testament concepts of the afterlife into Old Testament words like שְׁאוֹל.⁴⁶

Granting this notion of progressive revelation, one should understand the various and seemingly conflicting depictions of the afterlife in Scripture neither as contradictions nor as a changing reality but interpret the biblical passages on the afterlife with the view that as more was revealed about the matter, more clarity became evident in the usage of these terms and concepts.

Not surprisingly, Fudge only touches upon the concept of progressive revelation a handful of times and when he does, it is only in passing. For example, in the introduction to his chapter devoted to Paul’s perspective on eternal punishment Fudge mentions that Paul received numerous revelations over the span of his life about the gospel he should preach. He then says, “Words sometimes alter in meaning with the passing of time and events We do not wish to ‘homogenize’ words that should express a rich variety of meaning; we do desire to be sensitive to any developments of doctrine as Scripture progressively unfolds.”⁴⁷ This statement and the accompanying footnote (in which he quotes Pinnock in order to give a basic

⁴⁶ For example, it certainly would be odd for Jacob (a patriarch) to speak about himself being brought down to *hell* (Gen. 42:38, “But he said, ‘My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he is the only one left. If harm should happen to him on the journey that you are to make, you would bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to Sheol.’”). Here שְׁאוֹל must mean “the grave.”

⁴⁷ Fudge, *Fire That Consumes*, 236.

definition of progressive revelation) are essentially the fullest treatment of the concept of progressive revelation Fudge gives us in *The Fire That Consumes*.⁴⁸

An understanding of progressive revelation raises difficulties for Fudge's hermeneutical practice of using Old Testament passages of judgment to interpret the language of eternal punishment. Initially, it must be affirmed that many New Testament passages draw from the language and imagery of the Old Testament.⁴⁹ That said, a proper understanding of progressive revelation enables one's interpretation to appreciate any metaphorical aspects of New Testament language that invokes Old Testament judgments. The idea is that the language and concepts of physical death resulting from divine judgment in the Old Testament are applied in the New Testament to spiritual death as more was revealed about eternal punishment. When considering how to understand the Old Testament passages that speak of death, destruction, perishing, etc., one must keep in mind that the concepts of an afterlife and eternal punishment did not enjoy the clarity and detail that come with later revelation. Given this understanding, Fudge's insistence that certain Old Testament passages be an interpretive control for the language of eternal punishment seems backwards. Interpretation of the language of eternal punishment should be done in light of an overarching study of the corpus of Scripture, where the whole defines the parts; Fudge has one select part defining the whole.

⁴⁸ Interestingly, evangelical annihilationists such as Fudge will commonly allow for and even appeal to progressive revelation to justify a chronology in their scheme of universal resurrection, final judgment, a period of conscious punishment, then annihilation—a sequence that seems entirely absent in Scripture and is not even hinted at in the Old Testament.

⁴⁹ See Mark 9:48 and Isa. 66:24.

If Fudge's annihilationist hermeneutical method runs aground on progressive revelation, it fares no better when it comes to the language of eternal punishment and the use of metaphor. Consider Fudge's words

The final choices are eternal life or the second death. Conditionalists can express their view using the unadorned language of Scripture. Biblical writers teach that the wages of sin is death so frequently and so consistently that one can let the Bible fall open almost anywhere and find this doctrine within a few pages. When they find it, conditionalists can express their view in the clear language of Scripture, allowing the Bible to interpret itself. They do not have to assign strange meanings to common words such as *die*, *perish* and *destroy*. They ordinary person may take these words at face value and affirm them with confidence.⁵⁰

When one considers how Fudge handles the use of language that might be metaphorical, it seems that the "natural" or "common" sense of any given piece of language is not nearly as obvious or as simple as he would have us believe. To illustrate this I will return to the previously utilized example of destroying a football team. To literally destroy the team would be to fire everyone, disfranchise from the league, bulldoze the stadium, etc. A thorough and embarrassing defeat on the field of play would be a more metaphorical destruction of the team; let us say this defeat was so deflating and disheartening that the team spirals into infighting and is unable to be even competitive for the rest of the season. Now given these two options, which is the more natural way to take a statement like 'such-and-such team has been destroyed?' I strongly suspect most sports fans would conclude that the team had suffered a defeat so severe it *ruined* them and *destroyed* their ability to do what a football team is meant to do: play competitively in (and hopefully win) football games. However, we could

⁵⁰ Fudge and Peterson, *Two Views of Hell*, 196. (Italics original.)

also imagine this same statement being taken differently in a business meeting of league executives (there the statement might elicit a response like ‘did such-and-such team really fold?’). Certainly, as Fudge would agree, the context of any given piece of language is of the utmost importance.

So when John Stott says, “It would seem strange . . . if people who are said to suffer destruction are in fact not destroyed”⁵¹ he has offered nothing more than a question-begging conclusion that D. A. Carson rightly calls “merely tautologous.”⁵² Fudge repeatedly makes similar arguments when dealing with the biblical language on eternal punishment but fails to move beyond assuming his view in the language and then concluding the passages teach his view. Based on word studies that establish semantic range one can say that the language of destruction, when applied to the finally impenitent, *could* mean either annihilation or ruin.⁵³ In total usage, the frequency that the words have one meaning or another is largely irrelevant: the first and primary concern is the context of each passage, then extending to the inter-textual and theological. Moreover, the focus is on what the writer intended the language to mean and on how the original audience would have understood it, not how readers in any other time or context might understand it. Therefore, when Fudge appeals to the “connotations of the

⁵¹ David Lawrence Edwards and John R. W. Stott, *Evangelical Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 316.

⁵² Carson, *The Gagging of God*, 522. David Powys is vulnerable to the same criticism: throughout his book, he makes the error of assuming certain definitions of ‘life,’ ‘death,’ and ‘destruction’ and then interprets everything through those assumptions. See Powys, “Hell”.

⁵³ See Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon... S.v. ἀπόλλυμι*.

simplest person” in arguing for the annihilationist understanding of the language of eternal punishment he has offered a red herring.⁵⁴

Rather, annihilationists like Fudge would do well to argue for an annihilationist understanding of any given verse’s metaphorical language with specific support in the passage itself, the surrounding context, and inter-textual considerations. Fudge’s inter-textual reliance on certain Old Testament passages has already been found wanting. Fudge uses very little support from the passages themselves to justify his annihilationist reading of the metaphorical language. Rather he merely assumes his understanding to be the “default setting” (to borrow a metaphor from computer software)—but coming to a text with an agenda as to how its metaphorical language should be interpreted does not do justice to the contents of that passage in their context.

Our hermeneutical method should be theologically informed yet faithful to the language, content, and context of the passage before us. Rather than Fudge’s insistence on the “literal” meaning of the language of destruction, interpreters would do well to follow Kevin Vanhoozer’s suggestion to seek what he labels the “theological natural sense.” The sense is

⁵⁴ Interestingly, even if we grant Fudge’s appeal to our common ideas of, say, destruction, it is not at all obvious that we ought to follow his annihilationist conclusions. C.S. Lewis argues to this end regarding the idea behind the word *destruction* when he says, “In all our experience, however, the destruction of one thing means the emergence of something else. Burn a log, and you have gases, heat and ash. To have been a log means now being those three things. If soul can be destroyed, must there not be a state of having been a human soul? And is not that, perhaps, the state which is equally well described as torment, destruction and privation?” C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, The Christian Challenge Series (London: Centenary Press, 1940), 113. If we pursue the common idea of destruction, it seems that to destroy something is to bring about something else, not to annihilate it altogether.

natural in that it refers “to what authors are doing with just *these* words in using them in just *this* way in just *this* literary context.”⁵⁵ “The natural sense, in short, is the authorially *intended* sense: the sense the words bear when used in *this* context by *this* author.”⁵⁶ The sense is theological in that it refers “to what God, as divine author, is doing with just these human words in just this canonical context.”⁵⁷ When it comes to metaphor and the language of eternal punishment, the process of interpreting the metaphor must eventually have “recourse to the canonical context, for the meaning of the part is related to the whole of Scripture.”⁵⁸

This has now encroached on the relationship between theology and biblical exegesis and a few brief words are in order. One cannot fully understand a particular passage without increasingly broadening the scope of consideration: the surrounding passages, the whole book, the genre, the canon, and eventually out to systematic theology. Moreover, these broader considerations should have a mutually informing relationship of reciprocity with the specific passage.

Fudge, however, gives the impression that his conclusions are superior because his hermeneutical method is “above” any recourse to systematic theology or the tradition. For example, in addressing issues of the intermediate state, Fudge says, “[Peterson’s statement] goes to the heart of an overwhelming temptation that confronts anyone who tries to think systematically about biblical doctrines or is committed to a human creed. That is the

⁵⁵ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture & Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 277. Italics original.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 292.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 277.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 292-293.

temptation to bend Scriptures to fit the particular doctrinal grid and to reject whatever they cannot explain.”⁵⁹ He repeatedly reminds readers that his case rests entirely on Scripture, but even a casual examination of his arguments reveals this assertion to be false. A hermeneutic void of theology is unattainable and undesirable.⁶⁰

Anthropology and the Intermediate State

Third, if one is a mind/body dualist of any stripe then one will be very strongly inclined to say that biological death does not mean existential annihilation. In the dualist view a human person has some part of her being that is immaterial and cannot be accounted for in merely physical terms. After biological death, a person has continued existence, be it a conscious existence (the majority view amongst dualists) or a version of “soul sleep” that adopts a coma-like state of nonetheless continuously existent soul.⁶¹

All of this becomes pertinent when it is acknowledged that Fudge sprinkles hints that he might be a mind/body dualist, although he is far from perspicuous on the matter.⁶² The

⁵⁹ Fudge and Peterson, *Two Views of Hell*, 203.

⁶⁰ More will be said on this in the next chapter.

⁶¹ Note that most views labeled “soul sleep” usually involve a period of non-existence between biological death and a universal resurrection.

⁶² In his treatment of Matt. 10:28 Fudge seems to be working with the conceptual tools of some sort of anthropological dualism, but elsewhere in passing he says that man’s nature is a “psychosomatic unity.” See 58 fn 25 and 173-174 of Fudge, *Fire That Consumes*. His ambiguity on this matter likely mirrors his more explicitly stated agnosticism regarding a conscious intermediate state, about which he says, “Peterson is simply wrong when he says that I deny an intermediate state. I frequently respond to questions on the subject by saying that I am not dogmatic one way or the other.” Fudge and Peterson, *Two Views of Hell*, 203.

point to be made is that within the dualistic framework the “natural” meaning of the language of eternal punishment is not as literal as the annihilationist would like it to be: biological death does not mean that the entire person dies a death of non-existence, for part of her being—a crucial part for the dualist, her soul—in fact continues to exist when the Bible in some places says she has died or perished. If the Bible can speak of someone dying and yet not ceasing to exist, then the indication seems to be that when the Scriptures talk about life and death the matter of existence vs. non-existence is not really in focus (more on this shortly).

To retain a strongly literal sense of the language in question as it is invoked to describe bodily death, physical destruction, etc., the annihilationist might very well deny anthropological dualism and move to some monist position—Fudge at times appears to be making this maneuver. In this framework, when a person biologically dies she is as annihilated as one could be.⁶³ However, as might be expected, a move of this sort carries with it significant liabilities. The first is that, biblically speaking, there seems to be a conscious intermediate state and the annihilationist who adopts anthropological monism must give a plausible interpretation of the relevant passages that is consistent with the rest of Scripture.⁶⁴

⁶³ Fudge does not seem to appreciate how one’s view of the intermediate state might inform one’s interpretation of the rich biblical language of death. He says, “But what one believes about the intermediate state—whether the dead are conscious, ‘asleep’ or extinct—does not determine one way or the other how one understands the subject of final punishment. Because the intermediate state has absolutely nothing to do with the nature of final punishment in hell, I intentionally avoided that issue in my book *The Fire That Consumes*.” Fudge and Peterson, *Two Views of Hell*, 203.

⁶⁴ While the passages demanding an account are too numerous to list much less go into any detail, some of the most problematic for the monist are worth mentioning. Luke 9:30, 31 describes Jesus speaking with Moses and Elijah after their deaths but before their participation in eschatological resurrection. In 2 Cor. 5:6-10 Paul says

The second is that even if one denies an intermediate state, the biblical language of death cannot uniformly be taken to mean permanent annihilation without also denying a future and universal eschatological resurrection, which Scripture teaches relatively clearly.⁶⁵ In the end, with the only alternative being the adoption of views that are very close to those of the Jehovah's Witnesses, it must be recognized that the biblical language of death, destruction, etc. when applied to the cessation of biological life does not carry any significant sense of 'annihilation.'⁶⁶

Death and Metaphor

Fourth, the concept of 'death' in Scripture is much more rich and complex than Fudge allows it to be; in fact, what Fudge considers the primary sense of the term is, biblically speaking, a secondary one. As previously demonstrated, Fudge considers the Bible's primary

"to be away from the body is to be with the Lord," seemingly saying that a person can be "with the Lord" and not be currently existing in bodily form (note that there is no mention of a resurrection body). In Phil. 1:23, 24 Paul describes his confliction at the prospects of remaining "in the body" for the sake of the Philippians and departing (the body) to be with Christ. For a fuller treatment of the biblical witness to a conscious intermediate state, see John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000).

⁶⁵ The most obvious examples include Dan. 12:2; John 5:28, 29; 1 Thes. 4:13-18; 1 Cor. 15:51-52. Again, for a more detailed discussion see *ibid.*

⁶⁶ Even the body is not annihilated but "returns to the dust of the ground." Perhaps one could say bodily death is annihilation in that biological life becomes non-existent, but this heavily qualified nuance of annihilation does not seem substantial enough to be serviceable for Fudge's purposes.

sense of ‘death’ to be the most “natural,” “commonsense” notion: the non-existence of annihilation.

Just what is the primary sense of ‘death’ in Scripture and how are interpreters to understand the idea when used in the Bible? The question has no easy answer, for the uses of the related terms and ideas are rich and complex.⁶⁷ Part of the difficulty is the absence of a clear and consistent distinction between what might be called ‘physical’ and ‘spiritual’ death, for death in the Bible is death of the whole person. As Berkhof says, “The Bible does not know the distinction, so common among us, between a physical, a spiritual, and an eternal death; it has a synthetic view of death and regards it as separation from God.”⁶⁸ Physical death—the cessation of biological life—is theologically inadequate in and of itself to account for the biblical statements about death. For example, when Adam is told by God “in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die,” since Adam clearly did not immediately experience physical death it seems that more is in view (although physical death is not excluded). Physical death cannot be the whole story when it comes to the biblical concept of death, although it is often an inextricable overtone and is in some sense present in the usage of the idea.

It must then be recognized that metaphor is operative in the biblical treatments of death and dying. The concepts of physical death are employed in metaphorical description of a horribly dreadful and severe consequence and punishment for sin: spiritual death. The physical death with which all have an inescapable familiarity is used to describe aspects of the

⁶⁷ See Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985). *S.v.* θάνατος.

⁶⁸ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 258-259.

punishment for sin that go beyond physical death. “Physical death, then, is a fit symbol and expression of, and unity with, the more serious death that it inevitably brings.”⁶⁹ As far as the Bible is concerned, separation from God is the primary (but not exhaustive) aspect of ‘death.’⁷⁰ A good example of this is the biblical concept of a person being dead in sin. Man in sin is spiritually dead despite the (temporary) possession of physical life. In senses that are respectively more figurative and more literal, death is both a state and an event.

What then is the primary sense of the term, biblically? I suggest that ‘death’ should primarily be viewed as the consequence of sin that involves a relational separation from God, the giver and source of all life. ‘Death’ in this perspective incorporates not only the eventual loss of biological life but also, more importantly, the loss of spiritual vitality that comes from a proper orientation to and relationship with God. Death is the separation from and deprivation of God as the source and giver of all life. Notions of life and death in the bible have little concern for the question of existence vs. non-existence.⁷¹ Thus, it is invalid for Fudge to

⁶⁹ D. R. W. Wood and I. Howard Marshall, *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 265.

⁷⁰ While biblical examples abound, two will suffice. Gen. 2:17 promises that death will ensue “in the day” that the fruit is eaten, yet Adam and Eve did not biologically die on that day. They were, however, banished from the garden and from divine fellowship. Eph. 2:1-5 speaks of the Ephesians previously being in the state of death in their sins but asserts that God made them (and Paul) *alive* together with Christ.

⁷¹ Fudge at one point seems to concede this point: “The most notable characteristic of the dead in the Old Testament is that they are cut off from God. Death means lack of relationship with God.” Fudge, *Fire That Consumes*, 80.

conclude that the second death is the “ultimate penal extinction” that follows conscious punishment after the wicked are resurrected.⁷²

In further support of this view, frequently death is contrasted with life and since life in Scripture is to be understood primarily theologically rather than biologically, much more than the physical event of passing is meant when death is invoked. Life and death speak of spiritual states as well as physical ones; a strong dichotomy between the two is foreign to the text. Again, Fudge initially recognizes this point only to go on and disregard it. First he says, “Traditionalists are absolutely correct when they point out that ‘life’ means far more than bare ‘existence.’”⁷³ However, later in his book he begins to move away from an appreciation of the richness of these terms. He says, “The most natural opposite of *life* is *death* or *non-life*. It is not *life in misery*. The fact that ‘eternal life’ involves so much *more* than mere existence only heightens Paul’s contrast involving ‘corruption.’ If ordinary *life* stands over against *death*, can the opposite of ‘eternal’ life be any *less* drastic?”⁷⁴ Here, against his early statements in the book, Fudge assumes that Paul’s language of life and death has in view questions of existence and annihilation.⁷⁵

Life and death when used in the bible are primarily about qualitative aspects of one’s relationship with the giver and source of all life. Jüngel says, “. . . death is understood as

⁷² Ibid., 264.

⁷³ Ibid., 79-80.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 258. (Italics original.)

⁷⁵ It seems the annihilationist is making the assertion that “death as the cessation of existence” is preferable to “death as the cessation of bodily function.” Lacking any strong argumentation for this preference, it seems susceptible to accusations of begging the question.

God's *judgment* upon man. Yet it is viewed even more as an event in which God and man *are alienated* from one another. And it is this deadly alienation of God and man which constitutes the real misery of death."⁷⁶ Death is not about existence vs. non-existence; as long as a creature has a relationship to God (even one characterized by wrath), the creature has existence. Bailey summarizes nicely, "'Death,' then, tends to be used to describe the various conditions which detract from the full potential which Yahweh intended for his creatures; it is used as a value judgment on the quality of life . . .".⁷⁷ If death as the punishment for sin is seen as detraction from fully participating in the life given by God, then the ultimate punishment for sin is eternal banishment from God's presence, and this is a major motif in the New Testament passages on eternal punishment.

So what is the true character of death? Is it in destruction or in a future punishment of conscious torment? Perhaps both, where 'destruction' is not constricted to disallow rich metaphorical nuances. It is not the destruction of non-existence but the destruction of the positive relational connection to all that is good. This connection is destroyed because the fellowship with the life-giver, from whom all good things come, has been broken. Destruction when talking about death is not really about bare existence but the state of deprivation from the source of life.

For the Israelites, death was being cut off from all that was good: God's presence, his covenant community, his land, etc. So for Fudge to use Old Testament examples of people

⁷⁶ Eberhard Jüngel, *Death, the Riddle and the Mystery*, Topics in Theology (Edinburgh: St. Andrew Press, 1975), 76. (Italics original).

⁷⁷ Lloyd R. Bailey, *Biblical Perspectives on Death*, Overtures to Biblical Theology [5] (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1979), 40.

physically dying a penal death in the way he does is to miss the point; their ceasing to exist as biologically living beings is only of secondary significance. The point for the Israelite is that it brought about the premature and shameful cutting off from God's blessings and from God himself.

Doctrinal Implications

Fifth, the doctrine of annihilation has unacceptable consequences when its implications for other doctrines are considered. Specifically, I will argue that annihilationism seems to require us to adopt problematic accounts of the atonement and/or Christological views that are outside the bounds of orthodoxy. Such significant considerations are worthy of detailed treatment and warrant a chapter of their own.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have interacted with and analyzed the case for annihilationism as found in the most detailed work of Edward Fudge on the topic. I have also considered the arguments of other proponents such as Basil Atkinson, Harold Guillebaud, and David Powys. I have argued that a proper implementation of the analogy of Scripture supports traditionalism rather than annihilationism and that annihilationists have not properly interpreted the Old Testament influence on New Testament passages on eternal punishment. I have also shown that a proper understanding of progressive revelation and of Scripture's usage of metaphorical language will lead to traditionalism rather than annihilationism. My discussion on related doctrines such as anthropology and the intermediate state reveals support for traditionalism

and difficulties for annihilationism. Finally, I have argued that the theology of death contained in the Scriptures support traditionalism rather than annihilationism.

By arguing that traditionalism is much more exegetically plausible than annihilationism, I have removed the first support for annihilationism. The next chapter will address the second support, where I will expand upon this theology of death and I will also present arguments against annihilationism from systematic theology.

Chapter 3

The Annihilationist's Theological Problem

The goal of this chapter is to remove the second of three supports for annihilationism: its doctrinal compatibility with the rest of Christian theology. I will accomplish this by presenting a major theological inconsistency for annihilationism. First, I will argue that Christ's death was essentially like ours, providing exegetical and theological support for this conclusion. I will also expand upon the treatment of death that began in the last chapter. Second, I will lead readers down an excursus on metaphors, meaning, and truth. This will relate to the previous chapter but will also set up the treatment of the various atonement theories that follow. Third, I will consider the major theories for the atonement, showing how each entails the idea that Christ's death was like ours. Finally, I will argue that all this leads to unacceptable consequences for Christology, suggesting that since annihilationism carries these entailments it ought to be abandoned.

The first portion of this chapter will serve to establish a thesis that will be utilized as a premise in an argument that appears towards the end. Various arguments and support for the thesis will be set forth but it should be stated that the avenues leading to it are numerous and most any of them will suit for my purposes. I will endeavour to garner approval for the following thesis (the Death of Christ thesis, hereafter "DoC"): *Christ's death was of the same essential nature as that which comes to man (in his fallen state).*

The question “why did Christ die?” is central to theological discussion of the atonement and much of the debate ultimately returns to this issue. The various views on the atonement—penal substitution, *Christus Victor*, satisfaction, et al.—answer the question differently; it is, however, nearly unanimously agreed that the role played by Christ’s death is crucial.¹ That Christ died is no mere historical accident (although some of the details surrounding his death might well be), but rather is inextricably linked to his atoning work.

For the purposes of my argument, much more interesting than the *why* or even the *how* of the atonement is the *what*; particularly the *what* of his death. For if we agree that Christ’s death was the same in *the right ways*² to that which is the common lot of natural man, then whatever we consider death to be, it will be something Christ went through. We do not necessarily need to specify a detailed “theory” of the atonement to reach this conclusion and most theories will deliver what my argument requires. Later, I will argue that DoC generates serious problems for the annihilationist view.

¹ One notable exception to Christ’s death being crucial for atonement is Richard Swinburne, where he says that any valuable act, even that which is done by a mere man or an angel, could have been accepted by God as the grounds of atonement (in this he is following Dun Scotus’ doctrine of *acceptatio*). Christ’s human life and death are fitting but not the only live option, he says, but even then it is not clear in his account why the death of Christ is necessary or even helpful in atonement. (I might add that this seems more in line with a Grotian Governmentalism than with a satisfaction view, which is how Swinburne casts it.) See Richard Swinburne, *Responsibility and Atonement* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), esp. 156-160. For an argument against this view, see Steven L. Porter’s chapter “Swinburnian Atonement and the Doctrine of Penal Substitution” in Michael C. Rea, ed. *Oxford Readings in Philosophical Theology: Volume I: Trinity, Incarnation, Atonement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 314-327.

² The meaning of this phrase will be elaborated shortly.

The Death of Christ

Before addressing any specific theory of the atonement, I will present support for DoC along exegetical lines. I will also give two theological arguments that do not depend on any specific view of the atonement but are compatible with all of them.

First, it must be clearly stated that *Jesus died*. This should seem uncontroversial to even a casual reader of the New Testament (not to mention of the church fathers and creeds) but it is important to make the point as plainly as possible. A lengthy but far from exhaustive list of passages stating Christ's death is easily compiled: Matt. 27:50; Mark 15:45; Luke 23:46; John 19:30; Acts 2:23; 3:15; Rom. 4:24, 25; 5:6, 8; 6:3-10; 14:9, 15; 1 Cor. 1:13; 8:11; 15:3, 4; 2 Cor. 5:14, 15; Gal. 1:1; Phil. 2:8; 1 Thes. 2:14; 4:14; 5:10; 1 Pet. 3:18; Rev. 1:17, 18. Elaboration on just one instance will suffice: on Christ's death as presented in the gospel of Matthew, commentator Ulrich Luz says, "Matthew allows not the slightest suspicion that Jesus could have suffered [and died] only for the sake of appearances."³ It must be noted that Christ's death and resurrection are almost always mentioned together (e.g., 1 Cor. 15:3-5) and when only one is mentioned it is a synecdoche for the both, but this constitutes no reason to think of his death as being any different in nature than ours. His following resurrection does not make his death any less real or full. In fact there seems to be no reason, at least on the basis of the texts themselves, to think his historical human death to be a special case *in its nature* (of course, this is not true in other regards, such as its severity or its consequences, but it must be maintained that his death was truly a human death). Another point worth mentioning: many passages speak of the death of Christ in relation to the Christian, using the

³ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 571.

language of “Christ died for us.” (e.g., Rom. 5:8). This also does not constitute reason to think his death was of a different character than human death more broadly.

Second, I will turn to a discussion on a few relevant passages as to *what death is*, first generally, then particularly regarding the death of Christ. In the previous chapter I addressed the nature of death in Scripture. Building upon that, I will examine select passages and draw some conclusions.

The initial passage to consider is in Romans 5. In comparing the works of Adam and of Christ, Paul discusses death. V. 12 is key: death entered the world through sin and death is a consequence of sin.⁴ Schreiner writes that in v. 12 death “... is not perceived as a natural result of living in the world. Instead, it became a reality ‘through sin’ . . . Some scholars have restricted death here to physical death . . . This is a mistake, for the context clarifies that death is both spiritual and physical.”⁵ Jewett writes, “That death came as a result of Adam’s fall is integral to the biblical narrative (Gen. 3:3-4, 19, 22), and Paul refers to it

⁴ The comparison that begins with “just as” in v. 12 does not find its conclusion until v. 18. See Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 272, Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 316, and Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 373.

⁵ Schreiner, *Romans*, 272. Here is a fitting place for a brief qualification: the exegetical conclusions here need not exclude the possibility of physical death existing before the fall. For those interested in maintaining views involving theistic evolution and/or an old earth, physical death could easily be a reality preexistent to the fall that only takes on the significance it does as the consequence of sin when it is inextricably united with spiritual and eternal death. This uniting happens in Genesis 3,—interestingly—just after an *imago dei* human race makes its initial appearance. Perhaps ‘death’ could only be expanded beyond physical death once a creature created in the image of God becomes a reality.

here as a kind of 'epidemic' sweeping over the world as a result. It is a destiny that afflicted all of the descendants of Adam, without exception, placing all under the power of sin and death."⁶ Moo says, "Paul frequently uses 'death' and related words to designate a 'physico-spiritual entity' — 'total death,' the penalty incurred for sin."⁷ Moo, along with most commentators, contends that Paul does just this in v. 12; such a conclusion seems difficult to refute. Death in this passage is linked with condemnation and contrasted with eternal life such that Paul cannot merely have physical death in mind but must have a concept much more theologically rich. He is drawing from Gen. 2:17 and Gen. 3, where Adam's *death* was ultimately his separation from God (although his physical death, while having been made inevitable, was postponed).⁸ Death in all its fullness—physical death, spiritual death, and eternal death—became the lot of Adam and all his kin.

The next few verses are in Romans chapter 6. Vv. 3-5 speak of the believer's participation in the death and resurrection of Christ by way of union with him. Here the union with Christ is such that his death becomes ours, so that his resurrection and victory over death becomes ours (burial is mentioned because it confirms death has occurred).⁹ If believers are united with the death of Christ in its redemptive-historical significance, how could that bear the soteriological weight Paul gives it if it were a fundamentally different death (incidentally,

⁶ Jewett, *Romans*, 374.

⁷ Moo, *Romans*, 320.

⁸ See Schreiner, *Romans*, 272.

⁹ See *ibid.*, 308-310, Moo, *Romans*, 363-366.

the same is true of resurrection)?¹⁰ V. 16 states that sin results in death and, like in the previous chapter, 'death' is ultimately eternal death but also includes physical and spiritual as well. Moo writes, "'Death' may include reference to physical death and present spiritual death, but in this context it means mainly 'eternal' death: the final and eternal exclusion from God's presence that is the ultimate result of sin."¹¹ V. 23 famously states that the wages of sin is death. Schreiner suggests that "... the term [death] refers to eschatological death as the contrast with 'eternal life' demonstrates."¹² Christ experienced the same death we all do—not just physical death, but *full* death—so that we might also share in his resurrection victory over death.

The final passage is in Hebrews chapter 2, starting in verse 9 on to verse 17.¹³ The author of Hebrews here argues that for Christ to be humanity's great high priest and to make atonement for sin, Christ had to assume the same human nature he intended to redeem. Specifically, in order to do this "... he must share in the conditions inseparable from the human condition ..."¹⁴ This passage provides substantial support for DoC. In v. 9, Christ assumed flesh so that he might "taste death" (γεύσεται θανάτου) for everyone. The meaning of

¹⁰ See Moo, *Romans*, 370.

¹¹ Ibid., 399. See also Schreiner, *Romans*, 332., where he writes, "The death that is the result of sin, therefore, is separation from God, eternal death, and final condemnation."

¹² Schreiner, *Romans*, 340. Moo, *Romans*, 408. Getting at the idea of spiritual death that leads to eternal death, Jewett says "... the death that Paul has in mind is a present reality that will extend into the future." Jewett, *Romans*, 426.

¹³ Other relevant verses which I am unfortunately unable to address here include Phil. 2:7 and Rom. 8:3.

¹⁴ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 74.

this interesting phrase has purchase for present purposes. It cannot refer to the shortness of time between his death and resurrection—where he merely “tasted” death by being dead for just three days—, not least because others are implied to be able to (and actually do) “taste death” in the New Testament.¹⁵ Also, those who keep Jesus’ words will never “taste death” (the context indicates it is spiritual and eternal death, not physical death, which would be avoided).¹⁶ What, then, should we make of this phrase? The word for “taste” (γεύσεται) could also literally mean “eat,” but it has the extended meaning of “come to know, experience.”¹⁷ Nowhere, including here in Hebrews 2, is it suggested that Jesus “only tasted” or “merely tasted” death.¹⁸ The phrase is used to indicate a matter of experience, not to suggest a superficiality of that experience. P. E. Hughes summarizes well, “... the significance of the verb ‘to taste’ when used in this common idiomatic sense is to *experience* something, in this case death, to the full.”¹⁹ In v. 11, both Christ and the sanctified are ἐξ ἐνὸς πάντες. There are several different ways to interpret this phrase and Ellingworth provides a

¹⁵ For example, see Mark 9:1; Matt 16:28; Luke 9:27. See *ibid.*, 75-76.

¹⁶ John 8:52. This seems to suggest that death’s meaning cannot be grasped apart from its contrast to eternal life; physical death is only a (lesser) part of the whole story. See John 5:24.

¹⁷ Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 157. Lane sees “taste death” as a Semitism, used to hint at the violence and severity of the cross. William Lister Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, vol. 47A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, TX: Word, 1991), 49.

¹⁸ Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 157.

¹⁹ Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 91. Italics original.

helpful summary, as follows.²⁰ (1.) ἐνὸς is neuter, (a.) implying a neuter noun (“blood” (Acts 17:26), “seed,” or “race”); (b.) used absolutely (John 10:30); (2.) ἐνὸς is masculine, referring to (a.) God, (b.) Adam, (c.) Abraham, or (d.) some unspecified human origin. Ellingworth’s preference is for (2d); F. F. Bruce’s interpretation follows along the lines of (2a) and is the majority position—the “shared stock,” “one origin,” or “same family” is based on having the same Father.²¹ However, any of these options would deliver the same basic conclusion for my purposes: Jesus and those he consecrates both share a common humanity.²² A decision between them is unnecessary at this juncture. In v. 14, Christ himself partook of the same shared “flesh and blood” as those he sanctifies. Both verbs in v. 14a (“share” and “partake,” κοινωνέω and μετέχω) “describe a full participation in a shared reality,” because of their parallelism they are essentially to be understood as synonyms.²³ Christ fully participated in human nature, explicitly for the purpose of dying, so as to conquer death for all.²⁴ In order to accomplish redemption, he must have complete solidarity with his brothers and sisters; this solidarity required that he take on “the mode of existence common to all humanity.”²⁵ FF Bruce writes, “But if his solidarity with them is to be real, he also must partake of flesh and blood ‘in like manner’ with them—that is to say, by the gateway of birth. . . . And if they,

²⁰ Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 164-165.

²¹ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 81., Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 58.

²² See also Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 60, Hughes, *Hebrews*, 104-106.

²³ Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 60.

²⁴ See Hughes, *Hebrews*, 110-111.

²⁵ Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 60.

entering this earthly life by birth, leave it in due course by death, it was divinely fitting that he too should die. Indeed, this is stated here as the purpose of his incarnation—that he should die, and in the very act of dying draw the sting of death.”²⁶ This verse in particular and the passage as a whole implies the DoC thesis. His death is not allowed to be ‘lesser’ or ‘different’ than ours. His humanity and, by implication, his human death, by the logic of this verse, seems to require the basic idea that his death was of the same nature as that which comes to everyone in the human race.²⁷ V. 17 states that Christ had to be “made like his brothers in every respect.”²⁸ Christ could only be the great high priest that he is if he became *completely* like his brethren in every way (except in committing sin, 4:15); the likeness is not partial or superficial but is one that is realized by full participation and self-identification in solidarity. It is unfathomable that, “being made like his brethren in every respect,” his death would be so different as to make DoC false. For my argument, it is noteworthy that his death is invoked as the main feature of his taking on full humanity; it is not just some ancillary aspect or property. The Son took on human nature and did so completely. Yet not only did he take on that nature, he also took on the consequences of that nature—culminating in death. Grayston nicely summarizes the point, saying, “[Jesus] was not an immortal angelic being but a mortal human being capable of learning from what he suffered, made like his brothers in every respect. As the consecrator he belonged to the same category of being as the

²⁶ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 84-85.

²⁷ See Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 172.

²⁸ The phrase “in every respect” (κατὰ πάντα) might have a special view to Christ’s death, but “to make like” (ὁμοιόω) is to be taken in a strong sense so as not to restrict matters to just his death but to extend to everything, indicating his full and true human existence. See *ibid.*, 180, and Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 64.

consecrated. He is able to sympathize with our weaknesses; having been put to the test of death as we all are, he can help those who now fail the test.”²⁹

If DoC is false, then how could Jesus rightly be considered the great high priest as he is in Hebrews? The argument is clear: a high priest must self-identify and act on behalf of those he represents, and a death other than a human death would seemingly disqualify Jesus for this role.³⁰ However one understands the atonement, Hebrews chapter 2 seems to require that DoC be true for it to be effective.

These exegetical results, along with my previous discussion on the nature of death in Scripture, allow me to draw some conclusions. (1.) Death in its fullness is a consequence of sin. It is not inherent in humanity, and if sin had never entered the human race, neither would have the sting of death. (2.) The nature of death's relationship to sin is, amongst other things, penal: death is the penalty for sin imposed by God. (3.) The distinction between physical, spiritual, and eternal death is, east of Eden, largely a synthetic one. 'Death' is a theologically rich concept in Scripture. (4.) A primary characteristic of death is that it involves separation. In its spiritual sense it involves relational separation from God, made permanent and most extreme in eternal death. (5.) Talk of Christ as “the last Adam” or the “second Adam” implies that he is of the same sort as Adam, and thus his death is the same sort as Adam's. (6.) Believers are spared the full sting of death because of the death of Christ. (7.) Christ assumed

²⁹ Kenneth Grayston, *Dying, We Live* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1990), 274.

³⁰ See Hughes, *Hebrews*, 120.

a full human nature which was the same as the human nature that is common to all mankind in this age.³¹ *The unassumed is the unredeemed.*

Third, in concert with this exegetical support, two theological considerations largely independent of any particular atonement view can be offered in support of DoC. (1.) The Christian tradition has insisted as a point of orthodoxy that Christ in the incarnation took on a fully human nature—and for good reason, as this seems an exegetically sound conclusion. With the likes of Docetism and Apollinarism denied and his full humanity affirmed, we reason from his human nature being like ours to his death being like ours as well. By virtue of being like us, he was capable of dying like us. Further, his victory over death was not won by evading the full weight of death but by taking on the fullness of death only to emerge victorious over it. His was not a “light” death (we might say, in this age of mass consumption and marketing, his was not a “death-lite”) or a partial death. Whatever death is and all that it entails, Christ took that upon himself. He took the full sting of death to provide a way for us to escape death’s sting. His cannot be the “stingless” death of the saints, because his death provides the foundation and possibility for that.³²

³¹ That is, if there is a substantial difference between a human nature pre-fall and post-fall (which I find doubtful but others might not), Christ assumed the post-fall (pre-glorification, if one also sees human nature pre- and post-glorification as substantially different) human nature. Note I have been careful to avoid the language of “fallen human nature” as it is not natures that are in a state of fallenness *per se*, but actual human persons.

³² While we note that physical death is not done away with by Christ’s victory over death, for the saints it is a “stingless” death (1 Cor. 15:55, 56) in that it is in anticipation of resurrection and glorification. Also, many theologians and exegetes see biblical support for a conscious intermediate state: to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8).

(2.) It is difficult to evade the conclusion that the Scriptures regard death as a consequence of sin. If this is true, and death is one of the consequences of sin and evil, and probably a primary one if not *the* primary one, then even if one is resistant to penal substitution it seems the inescapable conclusion is that this consequence fell upon Jesus' head. Jesus experienced the death that sin brings, whether he did so as our substitute, as our example, or as the Victor who enables our victory. Different as the reasons may be, they all still lead to the DoC thesis.

Excursus: Metaphors, Meaning, and Truth

Before turning to discuss how each of the major metaphors for the atonement supports DoC, I must make an excursus on metaphor itself. Since the atonement is stated in various metaphors it must be established that metaphors can communicate truth and an explanation of how that might be is required before discussing how DoC receives support from each atonement metaphor. Since I will theologically reason from the atonement, I must first give an account of metaphor and truth.³³

The New Testament uses several metaphors to speak of the atonement—sacrifice, ransom, and victory, to name a few. These metaphors and images are often mixed freely. The common term “theory” is misguided, as it implies that a particular way of depicting the atonement is the correct one, to the exclusion of others. It is best to recognize that many

³³ I recognize that the discussions surrounding metaphors, truth, and doctrine are lively and ongoing and that some might be resistant to my account. I contend that many views on this issue would still raise the same fundamental problem for the annihilationist that I intend to raise but since demonstrating this is well beyond my current scope, I have provided here one plausible and well-represented account.

different models are required to appreciate the inexhaustible richness of the atonement.³⁴ While debate on this issue has flared recently, it is not yet obvious that any one model has ultimate primacy, is more fundamental, or has explanatory power over all the others (although some have offered strong arguments for the centrality—but not exclusivity—of the juridical).³⁵ This many metaphors view need not be defended here, however, because all that is required for my argument is assent to at least one of the models (or, if you like, theories) of the atonement treated below. Assent to more than one only strengthens my argument.

If the atonement is spoken of in metaphors, and the death of Christ is a key aspect of the atonement, we must go through the metaphors to reach the fullest understanding of the death of Christ possible. This then naturally leads to questions of truth and metaphor: how, if at all, are metaphors true? Is there a “metaphorical truth” that is fundamentally different from “normal”(!) truth? Do religious metaphors have cognitive content, or are they merely affective? To shed some of the chaff that surrounds the issue, first one must recognize that a metaphor’s usefulness, accessibility, or relevance to a particular culture—while of course not insignificant—does not in itself constitute truth and does not make the metaphor true. The metaphor “that man is a Cretan” uttered at a philosopher’s conference may be useful if one’s

³⁴ Stephen R. Holmes, “Can Punishment Bring Peace? Penal Substitution Revisited,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58, no. 1 (2005): 105. Holmes states that the atonement is “necessarily *sui generis*” and evades complete or even adequate description with just one model.

³⁵ For two examples, see Henri Blocher, “Biblical Metaphors and the Doctrine of the Atonement,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47, no. Dec (2004): 639-645, and Thomas R. Scheiner’s chapter in James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy, eds., *The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 67-98.

goal is to socially ostracise him and will likely be accessible and relevant to its hearers, but is only true if the man is, in fact, characteristically a liar (see Titus 1:12). When using metaphors to speak of God (or anything else, for that matter), a metaphor is true if and only if what is being asserted by the metaphor is, in fact, the case. I insist that metaphorical talk of God can be true; it can be both cognitive and descriptive. I will return to this in due time, but first some questions on the nature of metaphor must be addressed.

What is a metaphor? The question is surprisingly complex. I will treat the matter briefly and interested readers can follow up with the sources cited. First I will note that words have a literal meaning, what we might call the dictionary definition. This is determined by a linguistic community and evolves over time, so in that sense it is not fixed or necessary, but it is not completely indeterminate—even outside of a context. Given this understanding, I next point out that there are many ways in which we do not use words in their literal meaning; numerous are the figures of speech, a set which includes hyperbole, irony, simile, and of course metaphor. Restricting this discussion to only metaphor, several definitions can be offered. In using a metaphor “we refer to things with words we normally use to refer to other things.”³⁶ A metaphor is “... a certain way of *using* words, a mode of *speech* rather than a type of meaning or any other feature of *language*.”³⁷ Best is that of Soskice, “... metaphor is that figure of speech whereby we speak about one thing in terms which are seen to be suggestive

³⁶ J. Muis, “The Truth of Metaphorical God-Talk,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 63, no. 2 (2010): 147.

³⁷ William P. Alston, *Divine Nature and Human Language: Essays in Philosophical Theology* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 21. Italics original.

of another.”³⁸ A metaphor somehow states that X is a model for Y; that Y is similar to X in certain respects.

Is there such a thing as a metaphorical meaning? The answer must be in the negative if intended in the question is a fundamentally different notion of ‘meaning.’ Yet metaphors do express things differently, uniquely. They mean things above and beyond the literal expression used, which at the literal level is usually obviously false (“that man is a troll”) or trivially true (“No man is an island”).³⁹ To state it plainly, the meaning of a metaphor is what the speaker intends (and ideally the hearers understand) when she suggests X is a model for Y. Metaphors suggest that something is similar to something else, but the meaning of a metaphor is not left indeterminate. Muis says that “... a successful creative metaphorical statement discloses specific similarities, not just any similarity.”⁴⁰ Of course, the meaning will be heavily dependent on context, reference, etc., but the meaning of a metaphor will ultimately lie in the specific ways the speaker suggests that X is a model for Y.

Is there a special type of truth—metaphorical truth—that is distinct from regular truth? The answer must also be in the negative, for while a truth might be expressed in metaphor, it is not true in ways different from that of truth in literal expression. Speakers of language do many things with words—they command, they express emotion, they make assertions, etc. Metaphors often do many things, usually much more than making assertions—for example, good metaphors will often hint at a whole set of similarities, will often cause us to consider

³⁸ Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 15.

³⁹ The “no man is an island” example is Soskice’s. *Ibid.*, 29.

⁴⁰ Muis, “The Truth of Metaphorical God-Talk,” 148.

something from a different perspective or in a new way, and will usually stir the imagination. Without denying the importance of any of these other functions, my focus will be restricted to assertions, for therein lies the possibility of truth. When an assertion is made in any form, because it is an assertion, in some way the utterance is rightly related to at least one proposition. However, even in the most literal and technical sentences we do not have *direct* access to any propositions. The “mapping” of language to propositions is never perfect, but with some language we come closer than with others. If we take up critical realism and a correspondence notion of truth, as I insist we should, a proposition has a truth value.⁴¹ If a metaphor is to be cognitive and descriptive, it must assert propositions, and these propositions have truth values. Exactly which propositions are being asserted might well be difficult to specify outside of the metaphor itself and the nature of the realities involved with certain propositions (particularly some in theology) may well be somewhat mysterious to us. Nonetheless, a theological metaphor does more than evoke emotion or condition behaviour—in fact, if it is to rightly do these things at all, it must also make assertions that are, in fact, true.

How is a metaphor true? As already stated, metaphors do many things. They often “speak to us” (affect us) in ways that literal prose does not. They invoke the familiar to say something about the unfamiliar, or to say something new about the familiar. They often insinuate rich connections of similarity, usually subtly. *However, without denying all this, a metaphor can be true—or, better put, can assert true propositions—if the points of similarity*

⁴¹ For one of a myriad of defenses of truth as correspondence, see James Porter Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 130-153.

intended by the speaker (and ideally also understood by the audience) correspond to reality.

This does not commit us to the notion that all metaphors can be successfully translated into literal terms: certainly the more interesting ones cannot be translated without remainder.⁴²

Can all metaphors be translated into non-metaphorical expression, or do some (or all) metaphors have irreducibility? The translatability of metaphors is germane in that DoC is an attempt at such a translation and if the metaphors used for the atonement are fundamentally irreducible then the whole argument is a non-starter. The question demands an answer but it is unfortunately often muddled in the literature, so some initial clarification is required. Of course, by definition the vehicle of assertion cannot be translated. The question is whether or not the propositional content of a specific metaphorical statement can be, at least in some degree, stated in literal expression. The translation almost certainly cannot move from metaphor to literal expression *without remainder* and the propositional content cannot be translated exactly or exhaustively much of the time, certainly not with the majority of the more interesting metaphors. The question, then, is this: can the specific propositional content of a specific metaphorical statement be, at least in principle, capable of expression—however

⁴² Interestingly, John McIntyre argues that soteriological metaphors have multiple and rich points of similarity in ways that ordinary metaphors often lack. His example: the death of Jesus really is a ransom, but in the metaphor *the camel is the ship of the desert*, a camel is not a ship. Like Colin Gunton, he suggests the difference between these two types can be explained by the idea that “The soteriological reference becomes the real and primary reference of these terms, and the everyday usage, not so much metaphorical in some dramatic reversal of roles, as deviant from the norm. What had begun as metaphor ends by being a statement about the nature of things and events, as they are.” John McIntyre, *The Shape of Soteriology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), 77-78.

crudely and inexactly—in literal terms, at least in part? I contend this should be answered in affirmative and I will follow the arguments of William Alston to show why.

Alston's argument runs something like the following: when a speaker says something metaphorically, she attributes some property P to one or more things. Alston says,

So long as it is possible for members of the linguistic community to form a concept of P, it will be possible for P to become the meaning of a predicate term in the language. For so long as I can form the concept of P, it will be possible for me to associate an element of the language with P in such a way as to use that element to attribute P to something. How could that be impossible for me to do, so long as I have 'cognitive access' to P?⁴³

If the speaker has it, in principle the hearers could have it, too. "But if it is conceptually accessible to the language community, there is no bar in principle to a word's signifying the property *in the language*."⁴⁴ Thus whenever a certain property appears in the propositional content of a metaphorical statement, it can be spoken in literal terms because by speaking it the speaker "has it in mind." If the metaphor actually says anything then what it is saying could in principle be expressed literally, by terms whose content matches the conceptual content achieved by the metaphor.⁴⁵ The step in the argument from 'possibly forming a concept of P' to 'possibly some predicate term in the language for P' is unproblematic: "I will

⁴³ Alston, *Divine Nature...* 28.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 28. Italics original.

⁴⁵ Alston says, "No matter in how inexplicit or inarticulate a fashion he 'has it in mind,' he will be in possession of at least an equally inexplicit or inarticulate concept. Therefore a statement cannot possess a propositional content unless it is, in principle, possible that a language should contain words that have the meanings required for the literal expression of that content." Ibid., 28-29.

take it for granted that whatever factors are generally available for disseminating socially shared meanings in religious communities are also available for establishing new meanings of terms out of originally metaphorical uses.”⁴⁶ In principle at least, the propositional content of a metaphor can be expressed literally.⁴⁷

Now we are able to return to more directly address the issue of metaphorical talk of God. Even if the preceding account is generally correct, it remains to be demonstrated that it also holds for religious language.⁴⁸ Critical realism rightly insists that metaphorical

⁴⁶ Ibid., 29.

⁴⁷ At this point, however, Alston makes an interesting qualification, saying, “A careful examination of our argument on that point will reveal its conclusion to be quite compatible with the possibility that one who makes or grasps the statement may not be in a position to bring off even a lame and inadequate literal version. One may have the property ‘in mind’ in too implicit or intuitive a fashion to know whether any term in the language signifies it, or to associate it explicitly with a new term. Or perhaps the most we can come up with is a paraphrase into other metaphors. The ‘in principle’ possibility for which I have argued may not be a real possibility for anyone at this point, or, perhaps, at any point.” Ibid., 30. While this is an important possibility, it seems irrelevant to the DoC thesis in that the aspect of the human dying of Jesus Christ is straightforward enough in the metaphors surrounding the atonement. That Jesus died a human death common to mankind post-fall is clear enough; what that means for a doctrine of God or Christology could perhaps be more resistant to translation. This, coupled with the very clear and literal statements in Scripture stating that Jesus died, demonstrates that this qualification has little bearing on my formulation and use of the DoC thesis.

For additional argumentation against a strong sense of irreducibility, see Blocher, “Biblical Metaphors...”: 637-638.

⁴⁸ Alston defends a “partial univocity” between regular language and talk of God. Alston, *Divine Nature...* 82. His very attractive view goes roughly as follows: with certain terms, when used in certain ways, there can be a significant core shared between the meanings when applied to humans/the world and when applied to God, even

statements must refer in order to be “about God as an extra-lingual being.”⁴⁹ In other words, metaphorical talk of God can (and should!) genuinely refer to reality. It is not merely language-bound and cannot be reduced to statements of the speaker’s preferences. Further, metaphorical statements about God can (and should!) be descriptive. In a helpful article, Muis writes, “... metaphorical predicates can be descriptive if the metaphorical statement in which they occur produces a specific metaphorical meaning which is understood by the hearers or

if there are vast differences in how these terms are realized or a great deal of mystery on the divine side of the term. Perhaps these terms are necessarily very thin—they only give a partial account. On the human side there is much to draw upon—our experiences, observations, etc. On the divine side we have precious little beyond the shared territory of the terms themselves. Such is our condition—we cannot demand our theory to go any further, given who we are and who God is. However, for religious adequacy—that which is required for life and faith—their mere shared territory of terms as applied to God and to us is probably insufficient; certainly the Scriptures and the tradition have gone beyond this. In going beyond we enter into the realm of analogy, metaphor, and the like. However one might handle these matters, their presence does not erase the minimalist univocal core possibly present in talk about God (possibly present whether the talk of God is in literal terms or in metaphorical ones), and they do not require that all talk of God be completely metaphorical or analogical (even if much of it is).

Two examples can be provided to illustrate how the view would work. First, a metaphor could apply univocally to both God and to people: “God is the shepherd of his people” and “Scott is the shepherd of those neighbourhood orphans.” Between these two there is a univocal “core” meaning that is (or at least could be, if Scott is charitable with his time) true for both. Second, speech could be both literal and univocal: consider “God moved the stone blocking some tomb” and “a Roman soldier moved the stone blocking some tomb.” In both instances there is a small core meaning that is both literal and univocal: X brought about Y change in the world.

⁴⁹ Muis, “The Truth of Metaphorical God-Talk,” 149.

readers.”⁵⁰ If we understand “specific metaphorical meaning” to be saying something like “specific meaning in the vehicle of metaphor” then Muis is correct here.⁵¹ Metaphorical talk of God can both refer and be descriptive. It can also be true: a specific metaphorical statement can rightly express a proposition in which the state of affairs is, in fact, as it is asserted. “When we understand the specific metaphorical meaning of a metaphorical statement, we can assess its truth.”⁵² The criteria for the truth of a metaphorical statement is no different than that of a literal one.⁵³ Alston says that the propositional content of a metaphor can *at least in principle* be expressed in literal terms, and this is how we can evaluate a metaphor’s truth. Muis thinks that Alston is saying that “... only reducible metaphors can be true or false,”⁵⁴ or again “... Alston seems to presuppose that we can always have direct access to the reality which makes a metaphorical statement true apart from the metaphorical statement itself.”⁵⁵ However, a better reading of Alston is available: he is likely saying that metaphors that are reducible (in practicality, not merely in principle) to literal statements can best have their truth values known through evaluating the resultant translation. He might well be leaving open the

⁵⁰ Ibid., 152.

⁵¹ That is, this should not entail a metaphorical meaning as a different sort of meaning, but rather a different means of expression. This reading seems correct: he says, “There is no need to restrict the term description to literal predication, and to contrast literal description with metaphorical depiction or with metaphorical imagination ...” Ibid., 152.

⁵² Ibid., 157. See also Soskice, *Metaphor...* 86, 115, 120, 132.

⁵³ Muis, “The Truth of Metaphorical God-Talk,” 156. See also Soskice, *Metaphor...* 86, 90, 93.

⁵⁴ Muis, “The Truth of Metaphorical God-Talk,” 156.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 157.

possibility that some *de facto* irreducible metaphors—metaphors where a translation into literal expression is no more enlightening than the metaphor itself—might best have their truth value known through some means other than translation.

We now arrive at the testing of the truth of metaphorical talk of God. How might we test whether or not the reality described in a metaphorical statement is as it is asserted to be? That will, of course, depend on the nature of what is being addressed. If we lack more direct access to the reality that is described (whether metaphorically or literally), how do we proceed? Muis makes the helpful distinction between a “truth-condition” and a “truth-criterion.”⁵⁶ The first is ontological, the second is epistemological. He rightly says that God is the “ultimate truth-condition of God-talk.”⁵⁷ Fair enough, but how do we identify God? What is the referent? Here Soskice stumbles and retreats to exclusively apophatic possibilities “because she identifies God as the absolutely transcendent source and cause of all there is.”⁵⁸ We can avoid Soskice’s agnosticism if God “has made himself known in the historical reality of Jesus Christ.”⁵⁹ The way forward, then, is to ground our talk of God on revelation and hold fast to truth as correspondence: “The truth-condition of metaphorical God-talk is the God who has revealed himself in Christ, and its truth is a partial correspondence with the transcendent creator.”⁶⁰ The truth-criterion cannot be mere explanatory power (contra Soskice) and it

⁵⁶ Ibid., 158.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 158.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 159. See Soskice, *Metaphor...* 140.

⁵⁹ Muis, “The Truth of Metaphorical God-Talk,” 159.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 161.

cannot be the truth-condition itself (as we lack direct access to God, at least empirically). The truth-criterion is this: “If God-talk is a response to God’s self-revealing address in Jesus Christ, its truth can only be tested by this address. If this address itself is not directly accessible, the only criterion can be something in which it is documented in a reliable way, something that gives an indirect access and a reliable witness to God.”⁶¹ Of course, this is Scripture: Scripture is the truth-criterion of metaphorical talk of God. Of this Muis astutely notes

To be sure, this criterion is itself highly diverse and complex and therefore difficult to apply. In order to be used as criterion, the coherence and unity of the biblical witness about God, his acts, relations and properties need to be made explicit and defined. Part of this task is to determine the meaning and implications of indispensable biblical root-metaphors as ‘Father’ and ‘King’, which, in the context of the witness of scripture as a whole, give access to the God of Israel.⁶²

The upshot of all this is the provision of the means to attempt to assess the truth-value of what is being asserted by any model of the atonement. Since the atonement metaphors (like all meaningful metaphors) have an extra-lingual referent, are cognitive, and are descriptive, we can understand (if only in part) the propositional content being asserted by the metaphor. Or in Blocher’s words

Biblical writers did not handle the main “metaphors” for atonement as if they were, in their estimate, inadequate images—images they had to borrow from their cultural context while “struggling” to express an impenetrable mystery. They found in them sources of light, on God’s

⁶¹ Ibid., 161.

⁶² Ibid., 162.

action, for believing intelligence. They were confident the various representations had direct doctrinal cash value.⁶³

Since the death of Christ lies at the heart of the atonement, *as it relates to the human death of Christ* we are in a position to translate the propositional content of the metaphors into more literal terms in a way that is helpful and enlightening. When we do that, the various models for the atonement yield affirmation of DoC. To demonstrating this I now turn.

Atonement Models and the Death of Christ

Here I will treat some of the various models of the atonement, showing how each of them supports the DoC thesis. The first model is penal substitution. Initially it should be noted that penal substitution is generally held by many or even most annihilationists. Edward Fudge and Harold Guillebaud support it.⁶⁴ Basil Atkinson assumes it (attempting to make it an argument for annihilationism).⁶⁵ John Stott wrote a highly influential book in its defense.⁶⁶

⁶³ Blocher, "Biblical Metaphors...": 641.

⁶⁴ For just a few examples, see Edward Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of Final Punishment* (Houston, TX: Providential Press, 1982), 102, 214-215, 221, 226-229, 296. See also Harold E. Guillebaud, *The Righteous Judge: A Study of the Biblical Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment* (Taunton: Phoenix Press, 1964), 62-63.

⁶⁵ See Basil F. C. Atkinson, *Life and Immortality: An Examination of the Nature and Meaning of Life and Death as They Are Revealed in the Scriptures* (Taunton: Phoenix Press, 1969), 103-104.

⁶⁶ John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1986).

Clark Pinnock is one of the few exceptions to this, as he came to reject penal substitution.⁶⁷ Pinnock excepted, it seems annihilationists would grant the penal substitution model of the atonement as at least a valid way to speak truthfully about the cross. Since this is the case I will have the most to say about this model, treating the others with more brevity.

Penal substitution sees death (physical and spiritual, see above) as the just penalty for sin. In love, Jesus Christ became our substitute, living a life in our stead that fulfilled the law and dying a death that bore the just penalty for our sins. Without fully entering into the sometimes contentious debate on the issue, I will here attempt a few words of explanation on penal substitution before showing how it supports the DoC, offering a brief defense against some common complaints. Penal substitution usually operates under the presupposition that it is impossible for God to simply forgive sin in the sense that he no longer holds the guilty agent accountable or regards them as guilty *even though nothing has happened to properly deal with the guilt/offense*. In other words, God cannot shrug at a sinner's sin and say "let's pretend as if that never happened." Divine justice in the face of sin is inexorable and something must be done for things to be made right. The alternative—that God could forgive merely "by fiat," if you will—would require God to compromise on at least one of his essential attributes. God's holiness is oft invoked as one such attribute: God's moral goodness renders forgiveness by mere fiat a non-possibility. This metaphysical intuition, I suspect, is what is largely meant when the concept of law is utilized in the penal substitution model: a law cannot simply be set aside and the satisfaction of the demands of justice must be made (in this way, penal substitution is a subspecies of the satisfaction model of the atonement). Various reasons might

⁶⁷ See Clark H. Pinnock, ed. *The Grace of God and the Will of Man* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1995), 15-30.

be given in support of this. Perhaps it is impossible, once brought about and thus intended, for creation to fail to meet its intended purposes, which include honoring God perfectly. Perhaps, as I consider quite plausible, a world in which sin is rampant and is not punished or dealt with in any way whatsoever is not fundamentally good and it is metaphysically impossible for a God who necessarily exists and necessarily has certain essential attributes to actualize such a world. Other reasons might be given but the result is the same: sin cannot go unpunished. This, I might add, seems presupposed by the Old Testament sacrificial system: sin cannot be waived, ignored, or ultimately left unaddressed for God. Both in the NT and the history of Christian theology, the notion that sin must be punished has been a well established refinement of this point.

Penal substitution needs to give an answer as to how the substitution of the punishment of the innocent can be properly and acceptably made for the punishment due to the guilty. How, vicarious punishment? One response (to which I am sympathetic) is to claim witness to just such a thing happening in the Old Testament sacrificial system, noting it can and does happen, regardless of our understanding the metaphysical mechanics or possessing the ability to provide arguments to demonstrate this to be the case. However appealing this response might be, at least an attempt to argue for the plausibility of this point can be made. Admittedly, no court would let a murderer walk free if his brother offered to serve his sentence in his place; in legal systems it is generally agreed that guilt cannot be transferred from one person to another. However, this feature of our legal systems could be explained in part by the difference between human and divine justice: human justice is not ultimate, it is always provisional and done from a position of epistemic limitedness, its authority and validity is always derived from and dependent upon divine justice, and the human justice

system has to consider matters of protecting society from dangerous individuals and concerns for reintegration into the population that, quite frankly, final divine justice does not. Perhaps certain limitations on the transferring of guilt hold only for human and not divine justice. Further, even in human justice, some forms of vicarious punishment are in principle acceptable: in many legal systems we commonly allow another person to pay a penal fine for another and consider justice satisfied. Despite these difficulties, I note that penal substitution does not involve one completely separate individual from another: the believer has a union with Christ that allows Christ to operate in place of the redeemed, as one metaphysical entity, which allows for the possibility of vicarious punishment.⁶⁸

One final point before addressing penal substitution and DoC: penal substitution is not without Scriptural support. Without venturing into the full discussion, we can briefly note the words of John McIntyre, “If we interpret II Cor 5.21 ‘For [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin’ in the light of the text ‘The wages of sin is death’ (Rom 6.23), we come very close to the statement that Christ died the death which was punishment for sins, but these sins were not his own, but theirs, the brothers’ and sisters’, against whom their trespasses should properly have been counted.”⁶⁹

⁶⁸ See also Hodge, who argues that while the transfer of guilt or righteousness as psychological states or “forms of moral character” is impossible, the transfer of a legal liability for punishment can indeed be transferred, just as one person can pay the debt of another. “All that the Bible teaches on this subject is that Christ paid as substitute, our debt to the justice of God.” Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1952), vol II: 540-541.

⁶⁹ McIntyre, *The Shape of Soteriology*, 45.

What does the death of Christ mean in penal substitution? Christ's death is vicarious punishment: he experienced the penalty for sin that was due to us and this includes death. It supports DoC in that it insists Christ's death was essentially like ours would otherwise be because it *really was* ours, forensically. He experienced the penalty of full death: physical death, spiritual death, and the limitlessness of eternal death. His physical death is nearly impossible to deny. His spiritual death, which would otherwise be ours, is the relational separation he experienced as part of the penalty for sin, best manifest in his cry of dereliction on the cross. On the matter of eternal death, the traditional view of eternal punishment fully recognizes that Christ did not die everlastingly or experience death forever. His limited time of dying on the cross and entering into death for three Jewish days has been raised as a problem by the annihilationist against traditionalism: how can hell be everlasting conscious torment if Christ drank the full cup of God's wrath for sin yet paid the penalty of hell for just a weekend? Is not the penalty of hell eternal? Making this argument, Atkinson writes, "If He bore the punishment of our sins, that punishment cannot under any circumstances be eternal conscious suffering or misery, for He never suffered this and it is impossible that He could have. Thus the facts of the suffering and death of Christ Jesus prove conclusively that the punishment of sin is death in its natural sense of the deprivation of life."⁷⁰

The answer to this problem, I suggest, lies in the concept of equivalency. Given his innocence, and the hypostatic union that makes the person of Jesus Christ of limitless worth on account of being divine as well as human, the penal suffering incurred by Christ is equivalent to that of those redeemed from a spiritual death which would have been made permanent in

⁷⁰ Atkinson, *Life and Immortality*, 103.

the eschaton: it is limitless. His is limitless on account of his limitless worth; theirs, if realized, would be limitless on account of its everlasting duration. It is not everlasting punishment per se that divine justice requires but rather punishment that rightly corresponds to the limitless value of God.⁷¹ This, save for the exception of the God-man, can only be achieved by everlasting punishment, by eternal death. In the case of the God-man it is achieved by experiencing the essential penal nature of death in all its fullness (although not in an everlasting duration). Despite the difference, equivalency is achieved and the essential character of death is fully experienced in both situations.

Importantly, the annihilationist has the same problem. The view insists that eternal punishment is eternal in effect, not in duration—see the previous discussion on αἰώνιος in the previous chapter.⁷² Yet Jesus' death was not eternal in effect—it famously failed to be permanent—, a fact on which the whole of the Christian faith seems to hinge. The annihilationist demands that death as the consequence of sin be understood as “eternal punishment” in the sense of “permanent non-existence” (preceded by a finite period of conscious suffering). Both the traditionalist and the annihilationist thus must appeal to equivalency, as Basil Atkinson does, writing of the period of Christ's suffering that ended with his death, “There is no reason why we should not take this as the model and example of the final punishment of sin. We are not likely to go far wrong if we conclude that His suffering was the most extreme that will be inflicted on the most defiant and responsible sinner (? Judas

⁷¹ See my arguments for this point in the next chapter.

⁷² Guillebaud says that one of the major overtones in αἰώνιος is the concept of permanency—“eternal death” is characterized by being permanent. See Guillebaud, *The Righteous Judge*, 7.

Iscariot) and comprised in itself, and covered, all lower degrees of desert.”⁷³ Neither view, when combined with penal substitution, can say that Christ experienced exactly everything that the reprobate in hell will, and since this is true neither side can claim that fact *per se* as a fault of the other. Both make an appeal to equivalency: however, does equivalency work on annihilationism?

It seems that it might not, that annihilationism cannot rightly claim equivalency between eternal punishment and Christ's suffering and death. For annihilationists insist that eternal punishment is characterized by permanent non-existence—“death” as they would understand it—and it is very difficult to see how Christ's death could be sufficiently of the same essential nature to maintain consistency with penal substitution.

To explain this, let us examine Edward Fudge on the topic. As penal substitution requires, he recognizes that Christ's death was that which is due to sinners. He writes, “... the death [Christ] died was in some true and real sense the sinner's death—the death required by sin—the death we should have died and must finally have died had Jesus not taken it upon

⁷³ Atkinson, *Life and Immortality*, 103. Elsewhere he writes, “... the destruction of the wicked is accompanied by suffering and . . . there is an analogy between it and the sufferings and death of Christ.” Ibid., 86. It is not an absolute identity but an analogy—it very much appears Atkinson is providing an equivalency argument. See also p. 103-104, where he says, “By reason of His Deity and the sinlessness of His human nature the Lord could not be held by death. He was in the grave only so long as to prove to the world that He was actually dead and then, as we know and believe, rose to live for ever. The unrepentant and unbelieving sinner on the other hand has no escape from death but remains beneath its power eternally.” Atkinson appears to be saying that Jesus' death is not *permanent* extinction because of his deity and sinlessness, whereas the unbeliever's death will result in the annihilationist understanding of death: non-existence. Yet both instances, Atkinson would say, are truly a human death.

Himself in our stead.”⁷⁴ He has a section titled “Calvary Reveals God’s Final Judgment” followed by a section titled “Jesus Died the Sinner’s Own Death.”⁷⁵ He plainly says, “To use the familiar language, Jesus suffered *hell* for His people—the very hell they would have suffered had He not taken their place.”⁷⁶ Fudge thinks the difference between Christ’s suffering and death (three days) and hell (everlasting) in traditionalism is a major argument against the view but a boon for annihilationism.⁷⁷ He does notice that the curse of sin is death forever (for him, non-existence forever) and that this did not happen to Jesus.⁷⁸ Citing Edward White to provide a solution to this problem, an appeal is made to the dual natures of Christ—his death would have been permanent non-existence, were he not also divine; instead, just the human nature “died” (from the context, clearly to be taken as non-existence).⁷⁹ It is worth quoting his comments at length:

Some protest that Christ’s death was not a true pattern of the judgment awaiting sinners in hell, since Jesus was an infinite person and could absorb infinite punishment in a single moment. Finite sinners, this argument goes, will require conscious punishment in infinite duration for justice to have its way. The whole logic of ‘finite’ and ‘infinite’ punishment and victims is totally without biblical basis, springing instead from medieval speculation grounded in feudalistic canons of justice. . . . More than that, this philosophy itself leaves little room for the

⁷⁴ Fudge, *Fire That Consumes*, 215.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 219, 226.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 227. Italics original.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 228-230.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 230.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 231.

question whether the 'infinite' punishment of hell might not be defined in some terms other than conscious torment for endless time. If *death* is seen to be destruction without limitation (which the traditional view has not allowed), then is not penal death *itself* an *infinite* punishment, especially if it is an eternal death which is forever irreversible?⁸⁰

Fudge then approvingly cites Edward White who dismisses the traditional view about equivalency as "an 'afterthought of theology' which finds no place in the authoritative record."⁸¹

There are at least four problems with Fudge's handling of this issue. First, he seems to have missed the basic point about equivalency. The issue is not that "Jesus was an infinite person," the issue is that Jesus, as fully divine, was a person of limitless value and worth. It is not an appeal to his omnipotence in enduring punishment; it is an appeal to equivalency that requires limitlessness. Only such a person could satisfy the demands of justice for the multitude of the elect, which require a limitless punishment. Second, his dismissal of the equivalency issue is alarming, for he seems not to realize his own position also requires an account of equivalency. In annihilationism, death is supposedly limitless punishment in that it is eternal in its effects. Only a God-man could satisfy the demands of justice that stem from a victim of limitless worth being wronged. This is in no way merely bound to "medieval speculation grounded in feudalistic canons of justice," as a careful and responsible reading of Anselm would demonstrate. Third, while I am unable to flesh the point out here, it seems to me that the idea that a limitless punishment is required for sin because God is of limitless

⁸⁰ Ibid., 232. For similar comments, see Edward Fudge and Robert A. Peterson, *Two Views of Hell: A Biblical & Theological Dialogue* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 204.

⁸¹ Fudge, *Fire That Consumes*, 232-233.

worth is veiled behind every passage about judgment, wrath, and punishment, and therefore, contra Fudge, has substantial biblical warrant. Fourth, Fudge goes on to seemingly concede the point on equivalency: he posits that permanent annihilation is a limitless punishment. Yet remarkably he fails to see that Christ did not die “an eternal death which is forever irreversible.” He claims that forever irreversible penal non-existence is the essential nature of death, yet must deny that Christ experienced this. Even if equivalency can be achieved on annihilationism—the temporary non-existence of Christ, given his limitless worth, is equivalent to the permanent non-existence of the sinner—the problem still remains: the death of Christ is of a fundamentally different nature than the death of sinners. This, however, is not a problem for traditionalism, since part of the essential nature of death is relational separation from God’s presence of blessing, which Christ did experience in his death.

Thus the penal substitution model must say that Christ’s death was of the same essential nature as that which comes to sinners because death is the penal consequence of sin. In order for Christ, the God-man, to pay the penalty due for guilty human beings, he must suffer a limitless human death, and in this way his death is, forensically, the same as that which comes to unrepentant sinners.

The second model is the *Christus Victor* model. In it, in his death and resurrection Christ victoriously defeated and overcame the subjugating cosmic and spiritual forces that hold humanity in slavery; powers that include (or are described as) death. In the model, our victory over death is made possible by Christ’s victory over death. However, his victory was not an escape from or avoidance of death, it was fully taking on death, entering into it and overcoming. If we take seriously the Christological truth that Christ was fully human, the conclusion that his death was like that which is common to all humans is nearly unavoidable.

He took on the full consequences of sin—not, in this model, the penal consequences but the inevitable destination for a person in a world infected with sin—which is death. The *Christus Victor* model supports DoC by entailing that Christ's death was like ours because he engaged in battle with death and emerged victorious. If his death was different than ours, how could this provide victory for us over death?

Thirdly, the model of satisfaction warrants a few comments. In it, God rightly requires total obedience from his creatures. By sinning and failing to obey, sinners owe God a debt. Yet they are completely unable to “make good” (or “satisfy”) on their relationship with God because they still owe continued obedience in addition to reparations for the dishonor done to God in sinning. Merely resuming obedience does not make good, for the past wrong is unaddressed. Man should make good for the sins committed but only God is in a position to do so. Thus, a *God-man* is the only solution to this dilemma and only he could properly make satisfaction. This God-man voluntarily offers up his own death, which alone is of sufficiently limitless value to rightly make reparations. Since it was given up freely, is not a necessary consequence of sin (for Christ did not sin), was not already owed to God, and because it is God himself being offered, it has the requisite merit to secure satisfaction. Given the incarnation's entailment that Jesus Christ was fully human, only a fully human death could be possible. As we have seen, a fully human death is one like that which is common to all humanity: the satisfaction model supports DoC.

The fourth model I will consider is sometimes called the governmental theory. In this view, God can forgive merely by fiat. However, Christ needed to die because of an obligation God has to creation: namely, he must uphold the moral order he has instituted in the world. While forgiveness by mere fiat is in fact a metaphysical possibility for God, there is still a

moral necessity attached to his governance of the world which entails he do something to make it clear just how much sin displeases him, and also entails he do something to achieve a maximum deterrence against sin. Christ is thus sent to suffer innocently as a spectacle to us all. Although forgiveness has been achieved, God must do something drastic to demonstrate the full depth of human sinfulness; rather than end creation, he has chosen to do something to himself. In this view, the relationship between the act of Christ in atonement and sin is not so much a causal one—in that it causes forgiveness—but rather makes clear to us the severe horror of sin, with the end that moral governance is still upheld.

In this moral governance view, left unchecked, without rebuke, and unforgiven, sin necessarily tends to death. Thus the extensive connection between atonement and death throughout Scripture (in the sacrificial system; most fully in the atonement of the cross) is appropriate and necessary in moral terms. To make the death of Christ a sham death or “death-lite” would be for God to fail to adequately display how horrific a thing sin is, to fail to maximally deter sin. Thus the death of Christ is like that which is to come to all humanity in this model: the moral governance model supports DoC.

Fifth is the moral example model. Unless this model is wed to one of the others, it becomes difficult to see how the death of Christ accomplishes anything objective. Rather, God’s love as revealed in the life, teaching, and self-sacrifice of Jesus on the cross achieves a subjective effect, bringing about repentance, conversion, etc. Often omitted is an account of how these subjective responses are worked. Nonetheless, the love of God is finally demonstrated in the death of Christ because God identifies with us so deeply that he (as the incarnate son) endures the fullest consequences of sin. The recognition of this love of God is occasioned by grasping Christ’s death, and this recognition plays a key role in our

transformation. The force of the theory rests in the idea that the self-sacrifice of Christ was the preeminent self-sacrifice made by any human person. If he did not give everything in this act, including enduring death in all its fullness, then much of this model is undercut. If God's love as revealed in Christ stops short of taking on our death then it is not a limitless love and cannot be the basis and cause (however that might be envisaged) of our moral change. There is biblical warrant for the atonement being an example (see Heb. 12:1-4) but it seems best to follow John McIntyre and regard it as a second order model, requiring dependence on one or more of the other models for coherence.⁸² Yet once thus qualified, this model, when coupled with Christ's full humanity, entails that Jesus' death was of the same character as that which comes to all mankind.

The final model I will mention is sacrifice. While the biblical presentation of this model is rich and complex, for my current purposes one rather noncontentious, salient point will suffice: the biblical vision of sacrifice always involves death. A successful and efficacious sacrifice involves the death of a living creature. Indeed, "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins." (Heb. 9:22).⁸³ If Christ is our sacrifice, his atoning

⁸² See McIntyre, *The Shape of Soteriology*, 49.

⁸³ For a response to the objection that sometimes grain could be used as a sin offering in the OT sacrificial system (Lev. 5:11-13), see Emile Nicole in Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James, eds., *The Glory of the Atonement: Biblical, Historical & Practical Perspectives* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 45. This was "an exception among exceptions!" and was only allowed as a last resort for someone who could not even afford the concession of offering two doves or two young pigeons. Since the substitution was always unequal (a man's life is worth more than an animal's), the rare exception could be made for extreme poverty. I would also add that the death of an animal could only be efficacious in that it was in anticipatory dependence on the Cross, so the rare exception of allowing grain for the poor in no way undercuts the point.

work involved his death; and since his death was according to his nature (in this case, human nature), then his death must be that which comes to all mankind. So it is the same kind of death.

The conclusion to be drawn from this section is that, seemingly, DoC can only be denied if one also rejects all of the major models of the atonement. Since it is not clear how one could consistently reject *all* of them and still remain a Christian theist, I conclude that any acceptable view of the atonement will entail DoC, regardless of which model or combination of models one holds.

The Annihilationist's Theological Problem

I am now able to present my theological argument against annihilationism:⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Robert Peterson has, on multiple occasions, presented a shorter version of this argument, always in response to Edward Fudge. See Robert A. Peterson, "The Hermeneutics of Annihilationism: The Theological Method of Edward Fudge," *Presbyterion* 21, no. 1 (1995): 25-27, and Fudge and Peterson, *Two Views of Hell*, 174-178. Since Fudge holds penal substitution, Peterson's presentation of the argument seems to (understandably) presuppose it. My presentation of the argument in this chapter expands it so as to explicitly go through with any one of several atonement models, not just penal substitution.

Also, John W. Cooper very briefly forms this argument. See John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 131-132. Cooper appeals to the dual natures of Christ as inseparable and not commixed. If Jesus' human nature ceased to exist then the inseparability is lost. This cuts for the annihilationist whether she is an anthropological monist or dualist because even on dualism the whole of a human being must die the death of non-existence, including the immaterial component. Cooper seems to be implicitly assuming the truth of DoC and as such Jesus' human nature was subject to non-existence.

- (A) The annihilationist must say that death is ultimately and characteristically non-existence.
- (B) DoC is true.
- (C) Annihilationism must say that Christ ceased to exist in his death. (From (A) and (B))
- (D) Annihilationism must say that Christ ceased to exist in both his human and divine nature, in his divine nature but not his human, or in his human nature but not his divine.
- (E) Christ could not have ceased to exist in both his human and divine natures or in his divine nature but not his human.
- (F) Christ could not have ceased to exist in his human nature but not in his divine.
- (G) Therefore, annihilationism is false.

Premise (A) seems easy to defend: the annihilationist position is that death is ultimately and characteristically non-existence. I have already treated this in detail in the previous chapter; a few examples from the writings of annihilationists will suffice to make the point. Fudge says that the natural meaning of death is "... dissolution with no hope of a resurrection ..."⁸⁵ Further he writes, "The most natural opposite of *life* is *death* or *non-life*. It is not *life in misery*. . . . If ordinary *life* stands over against *death*, can the opposite of 'eternal'

⁸⁵ Fudge, *Fire That Consumes*, 230.

life be any *less* drastic?”⁸⁶ Guillebaud argues that since the first death is the end of physical life, we should likewise conclude that the second death is the end of existence.⁸⁷ Basil Atkinson, in addressing death as the cessation of life by non-existence, writes, “Thus when we read of the second death the natural inference is that, whatever differences in detail there may be, the principle is the same in both cases.”⁸⁸ For him, ‘death’ means non-existence; he writes that “... only the fact of resurrection prevents [physical] death from being final extinction.”⁸⁹ It seems that the force of the annihilationists’ exegesis would be undercut if this point were not insisted upon; that it carries significant theological weight in their position is clear enough. So not only do prominent annihilationists in fact accept (A), it seems the annihilationist must do so as it is essential to the position. It becomes difficult to see how, without (A), any position could be annihilationism, conditionalism, or anything remotely similar.

Premise (B) has been given detailed exegetical and theological support throughout this chapter. Could it be rejected? Could it be that Christ’s death was fundamentally different than that common to humanity? As argued before, the Christological insistence upon his full humanity precludes this possibility. Even if death was not due to him individually because of his sinlessness, it is very difficult to see how any doctrine of the atonement could succeed if his death was essentially unlike that of those he saves.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 258.

⁸⁷ Guillebaud, *The Righteous Judge*, 15.

⁸⁸ Atkinson, *Life and Immortality*, 83.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 96.

Perhaps the annihilationist could appeal to the general resurrection and/or intermediate state to reject (B) and avoid the force of this argument: Christ's death did not involve non-existence but continued existence in the intermediate state before his resurrection. Regarding the general resurrection, with only a few exceptions (such as the Jehovah's Witnesses) annihilationists hold that all who physically die will participate in the general resurrection.⁹⁰ In annihilationism a more uncertain status befalls the doctrine of post-mortem, pre-resurrection conscious existence in the intermediate state: annihilationists commonly claim agnosticism or avoid mentioning the issue altogether, but a few suggest the intermediate state is non-existence, at least for the reprobate, while most others affirm continued existence of the reprobate in the intermediate state, leaving annihilation for the final judgment.⁹¹ Their recognition of the importance of these two doctrines is quite reasonable, as both enjoy Scriptural support. However, these doctrines do not alleviate the problem I am raising: Christ could not have experienced death in the sense of merely experiencing the intermediate state because that would make his death less than full and because the intermediate state for the reprobate only exists in anticipation of the full realization of death in the final judgment

⁹⁰ For a few examples, see Fudge, *Fire That Consumes*, 98 fn 8, 173-174, 242, Peterson, "The Hermeneutics of Annihilationism," 13 fn 1, David Powys, *"Hell": A Hard Look at a Hard Question: The Fate of the Unrighteous in New Testament Thought* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998), 416, and Kendall Harmon in Nigel M. de S. Cameron, ed. *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1992), 197.

⁹¹ See Fudge and Peterson, *Two Views of Hell*, 202-203, Guillebaud, *The Righteous Judge*, 3, and Atkinson, *Life and Immortality*, 32, 51.

(which, for the annihilationist, means non-existence).⁹² The post-physical death, pre-general resurrection state of the reprobate (call it the negative intermediate state) is provisional and temporary and exists only because of other eschatological purposes and goals—without those, in the annihilationist view physical death would be the occasion of total and permanent extinction. The intermediate state is only a part of the biblical concept of death, as is physical death. Neither in itself would constitute death enough to be the fullness of death, to support the weight put on it by the demands of any doctrine of the atonement.

The annihilationist resists (B) at the cost of gutting most every model of the atonement and at the severe risk of making Christ's human nature unacceptably unlike ours (in that it was not liable to a truly human death, which for the annihilationist is non-existence). In the face of this alternative it seems that (B) stands.

⁹² Basil Atkinson appears to make this argument, although he confusedly also says that Christ went into the death of non-existence for three days. See Atkinson, *Life and Immortality*. He says that Christ's soul dies on the cross (p. 9) where his spirit went "into the safe hands of His father to await its restoration to Him in resurrection. As His spirit left Him, the Lord died and sank into unconsciousness." (p. 30). Yet on 1 Cor. 15 he says, "We may also notice that the whole of the apostle's teaching in this chapter is based upon the *resurrection* of Christ and not a word said about, much less based upon, the survival of Christ between death and resurrection." (p. 62-63) On Matt 10:28 he says, "To kill the body here means to take the present life on earth. But this does not kill the soul or person himself. It only puts him to sleep. He is finally destroyed in the second death, when his person or self is killed for ever." (p. 12) It is not clear if Atkinson sees "sleep" as non-existence or merely unconscious existence. If it is merely unconscious existence then Christ as the first "sleeper" (a model the redeemed will follow) did not experience the true nature of death. If it is non-existence then even if the difficulties of seeing the intermediate state as non-existence (more on that below) can be overcome (which is doubtful), Atkinson still has the problem of Christ's death being a "death-lite": he did not experience the fullness of death, which Atkinson views to be permanent non-existence.

Premise (C) is entailed by the conjunction of DoC and the annihilationists' understanding of death. Many annihilationists recognize this entailment: Edward Fudge—following Edward White—says as much,⁹³ as do Atkinson⁹⁴ and Froom.⁹⁵

To reject (C), an annihilationist might attempt this maneuver: Christ experienced physical death and something related to the intermediate state (in that he had some sort of continued existence while in the grave) but any experience of spiritual death was fully taken up on the cross in the process of dying; he did not at all experience death in all its fullness, which is the nonexistence of annihilation. However, as we have seen, there is exegetical reason to think this “death-lite” is wrongheaded, and all of the atonement models speak against it.

⁹³ The section is titled, “Jesus’ Death Involved Total Destruction.” Fudge, *Fire That Consumes*, 228-234.

Remarkably, in his defense of annihilationism, Glenn Peoples denies that any major annihilationist holds the view that Jesus’ humanity ceased to exist and accuses Peterson of leveling this argument against a straw man he unfairly constructed. See Glenn Peoples, “Fallacies in the Annihilationism Debate: A Critique of Robert Peterson and Other Traditionalist Scholarship,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50, no. 2 (2007): 330-331, esp fn 5. Such remarks by Peoples are surprising, as this position can easily be found in many annihilationist writings, if not stated directly then at least as the clear implication of other statements. See Peterson’s cogent response in Robert A. Peterson, “Fallacies in the Annihilationism Debate? A Response to Glenn Peoples,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50, no. 2 (2007): 350-351.

⁹⁴ See Atkinson, *Life and Immortality*, 9, 12, 30, 62, 63, 86, 103. See also Robert Peterson’s summary of Atkinson on this point in Robert A. Peterson, “Basil Atkinson: A Key Figure for Twentieth-Century Evangelical Annihilationism,” *Churchman* 111, no. 3 (1997): 203-204.

⁹⁵ Le Roy Edwin Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers; the Conflict of the Ages over the Nature and Destiny of Man* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1965), Vol 1: 377-383.

Premise (D) sets forth the three logically possible options that follow from orthodox Christology, where Christ is one person with two natures, divine and human. Presumably, the annihilationist would be unwilling to violate Chalcedon. For now I will proceed on this assumption, addressing it in detail shortly.

Edward Fudge attempts to avoid the force of the argument by claiming agnosticism on (D) and what follows from it. Despite Robert Peterson's repeated pleas for clarity in private correspondence before pressing the issue in print, Fudge refuses to state which option of these three he defends, preferring to leave it "in the realm of mystery."⁹⁶ I will later extrapolate how Fudge responds to this argument; for now it will suffice to note that among those who actually address the issue, he is the only annihilationist who does not directly state that it was only Christ's human nature that was annihilated. Everyone else recognizes the disjunctive as valid and also affirms (E), leaving the burden of rejection on (F).

Premise (E) is very difficult to resist. The annihilationist cannot say that Christ's divine nature ceased to exist, whether his human did or not. To do so would create insurmountable problems: if Christ's divine nature ceased to exist then God was biune for a few days. The unacceptability of this implication is obvious—the Trinity cannot be undone, not least because it is metaphysically impossible for any member of the Trinity to exist without the relationship he has to the other members. It also violates God's immutability (even in the weakest sense of the attribute), his necessary existence, and his eternity. Also, at the resurrection the second member of the Trinity would then become a created being,

⁹⁶ Fudge and Peterson, *Two Views of Hell*, 176.

which is unacceptable.⁹⁷ It is nearly unimaginable that any annihilationist would posit the non-existence of a member of the Trinity, even temporarily. Seemingly, Christ's divine nature could only cease to exist if orthodoxy on the Trinity is denied and tritheism is affirmed (and even on tritheism it seems implausible). Given the clear dead end to which this route leads, the annihilationist must say that in Christ's death only his human nature ceased to exist. (E) stands.

Premise (F) is also difficult to resist. As I explained from premise (E), the annihilationist must say that Christ's human but not divine nature ceased to exist. Yet in this case Chalcedon cannot stand. Chalcedon insists that once incarnate, Christ's two natures are united into one person without confusion and without separation. In annihilationism, Christ's human nature ceases to exist. That which does not exist cannot be united with anything and thus the view must posit a separation between the two natures. One could deny Chalcedon and part ways with the preponderance of the tradition (if denied, one needs to then provide plausible and acceptable alternative exegesis of the Scriptural passages this confession is attempting to summarize—a daunting task indeed). Perhaps the annihilationist might wish to do so in order to retain annihilationism. However, I suggest a view of eternal punishment that is decidedly a minority in the tradition and is—to say the least—surrounded by exegetical and theological difficulties should be abandoned and avoided long before Christological doctrines that flow straight to the heart of the Christian faith. Since we are forced to choose between retaining Chalcedon or hell as non-existence, the former strikes me as the clear choice.

⁹⁷ Peterson makes this argument, see *ibid.*, 177.

Another issue with premise (F) remains: Christ's human nature ceasing to exist for three days amounts to another incarnation, not a suspension-then-resumption of the incarnation. This is because diachronic human personal existence cannot be "gappy." Most laboring in the field of philosophy of religion think this to be the case.⁹⁸ Even if one believes this account of termination and resumption of personal existence can support identity, one must provide a convincing account of how this "gappiness" is not really the serious problem it appears to be and how personal identity can be maintained in such a scenario. An explanation is also needed as to how the incarnation can be one unified reality if it is undone for three days and then redone—how is this not two incarnations, if Christ's human nature is annihilated and then recreated and rejoined with the divine nature?⁹⁹ Edward Fudge dismisses these

⁹⁸ For a few examples, see Peter van Inwagen, "The Possibility of Resurrection," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 9 (1978): 114-121, George I. Mavrodes, "The Life Everlasting and the Bodily Criterion of Identity," *Noûs* 27-39 (1977): 27-39, and Eli Hirsch, *The Concept of Identity* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1982). See also the discussion in Kevin Corcoran's chapter "Physical Persons and Postmortem Survival without Temporal Gaps" in Kevin Corcoran, ed. *Soul, Body, and Survival: Essays on the Metaphysics of Human Persons* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 201-217. Trenton Merricks is an exception to this consensus, see his chapter "How to Live Forever without Saving Your Soul: Physicalism and Immortality" in *ibid.*, 183-200, and his chapter "The Resurrection of the Body" in Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 476-490.

⁹⁹ Of course, the traditionalist will grant that Christ's physical body died, in that animation ceased. This, however, does not at all amount to the non-existence of his human nature; in other words, there is much more to the incarnation than biological life of a physical body.

objections to his view as unimportant speculation,¹⁰⁰ but certainly they are anything but. Cooper fleshes out the force of this point, stating that the “extinction—re-creation” view runs into the problem of turning Easter into another Christmas. For a second time the Word became flesh—only a different sort of flesh, resurrection flesh. He writes, “For either the human nature of the Son is incidental even after his incarnation and was nonexistent for three Jewish days; or else we have two persons in Jesus Christ, a divine person who continued to exist and a human person who did not.”¹⁰¹

Two final issues with premise (F): First, the person of Jesus Christ depends upon the union of the divine logos and his human nature—if the human nature experienced an annihilationist death then it becomes difficult to see how a *person*, not merely a nature, died a death of non-existence on the cross. Second, if Christ’s human nature were annihilated and thus separated from his divine nature then his death would *merely* be a human death (or, more specifically, the death of an impersonal human nature). This seemingly creates major

¹⁰⁰ Fudge and Peterson, *Two Views of Hell*, 203-204. He says, “[This objection] goes to the heart of an overwhelming temptation that confronts anyone who tries to think systematically about biblical doctrines or is committed to a human creed. That is the temptation to bend Scriptures to fit their particular doctrinal grind and to reject whatever they cannot explain . . . In truth, the best any of us can do is to place our confidence in God—God who is faithful to his people and who has promised to raise the dead. Peterson’s logic would lead him to criticize the apostle Paul because Paul could not fully explain the nature of the resurrection body. Paul called such rationalism ‘foolish’ (1 Cor 15:35-36).” He seems to miss the point that he is not being accused of failing to fully explain a mystery; the accusation is one of internal inconsistency. Remarkably, Fudge seems to think that the demonstration that his theology contains logical contradictions is not adequate proof that his exegesis is incorrect.

¹⁰¹ Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting*, 131-132.

problems for the atonement, as it seems—at least in penal substitution, but perhaps in other models as well—that the death of a mere man cannot provide an efficacious atonement.

The argument I have here presented is valid and I submit that rejecting any of the premises is a worse option than rejecting annihilationism itself.¹⁰²

Fudge's response to this argument is less than satisfactory and, if one is forthright, can only be described as unhelpfully less than charitable. He dismissively calls the argument "rationalistic" before he insinuates that Robert Peterson's traditionalism is best explained by being overly committed to the Westminster Confession of Faith rather than holding that "Scripture is the only and final authority in matters of doctrine."¹⁰³ He calls Peterson's presentation of this argument "perhaps the most extreme of Peterson's red herrings," providing five reasons to reject it as merely a smoke screen.¹⁰⁴ I will examine each of these reasons in detail.

His first is that the possibility of Jesus not being resurrected was a real one, based on his prayer in Gethsemane, and as such the traditionalist supposedly has the same problem

¹⁰² Here I will mention one issue on the differences between annihilationism and conditional immortality: do any of the distinctives of conditionalism allow the position to fare better than what we might call annihilationism proper? In fact things seem worse for the conditionalist, because in the view everlasting life is a gift graciously given to the redeemed. Apart from this gracious gift, man would die and then cease to exist; not as a penalty for sin, but simply by virtue of being the sort of creature he is. If Christ's death did not involve non-existence, then conditionalism must explain how Christ's death can be "super-human" while at the same time being substitutionary, an example, a victory won over death, etc.

¹⁰³ Fudge and Peterson, *Two Views of Hell*, 201-202.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 205.

raised by this argument—Jesus' human nature would have remained dead, undoing Chalcedon.¹⁰⁵ Astonishingly, Fudge fails to realize that Peterson's view is that Christ's divine and human nature are never separated on traditionalism, not even in his death. This is because in his human nature he *died* but his human nature did not cease to exist. Traditionalism does not consider the true meaning of death to be nonexistence; annihilationism does. The problem only cuts if one assumes death is extinction and as such it is no argument against traditionalism. Fudge's second reason more or less repeats the first—he says that even the traditionalists "weakened definition of *death*" (he is using the phrase pejoratively) means that Jesus' human nature was dead in some sense.¹⁰⁶ The traditionalist in fact states that Jesus in his human nature experienced the fullness of death but since the fullness of death does not require the extinction of the human nature (only temporary separation from the body), there is no issue with separating the divine and human natures in the person of Christ. Like the first, this reason is quite confused. Fudge's third reason is that this argument breaches the limitations of human wisdom.¹⁰⁷ Since Fudge cannot reasonably be expected to explain matters that "inspired Scripture leaves unexplained," such as the mechanics of the incarnation, the details of Christ's "emptying himself," and how Christ "became sin" and "became a curse" in the atonement, it is likewise unreasonable that Fudge be expected to explain the mystery involved in the extinction of the Son of God that his view posits. This defense is wrongheaded in that it confuses mystery with contradiction. That any view involves some degree of

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 205.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 205. Italics original.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 206.

mystery on certain points is not necessarily a defeater for the view, that it involves a contradiction is. Fudge misidentifies the argument against him as the former when it is clearly the latter. That internal contradiction renders something false is a basic point of any exercise of reasoning, not some unacceptable import of rationalistic philosophy or theological hubris that Fudge casts it to be. The fourth reason flirts with being a personal attack on Peterson himself. Fudge points out that the Council of Chalcedon was fallible, that any interpretation of the council's statements is fallible, and that its "language, after all, is highly technical and is fifteen hundred years old."¹⁰⁸ He then accuses Peterson of going even further than Chalcedon in this argument. Fudge writes

[Peterson] determines, using his own wisdom, the logical implications of my supposed view, then decides on his own authority that those implications are inconsistent with his interpretation of the Chalcedon pronouncements. Concluding that the implications that he draws from my exposition of Scripture are inconsistent with the implications that he draws from the conclusions of the bishops at Chalcedon, he boldly tells the world that 'nothing less than orthodox Christology is at stake.' Such authoritarianism and allegiance to human councils would be at home in a court of the Inquisition, but what place do they have in a discussion between Protestants and particularly between evangelicals?¹⁰⁹

To say the least, these words give off an air of naivety on the part of Fudge—the theological task does not end with exegesis, it ends with Scripture interpreting Scripture and with theological coherence. It is hard to see how he does not end up dismissing any theological endeavor (including his own, and his is undeniably one) in just a few sentences—as if his

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 206.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 206.

views were the straightforward and pure product of biblical exegesis, nothing more, while his opponents views are contaminated by Greek philosophy, blind creedalism (his words), and prideful confidence in human reasoning ability. He has yet to offer any substantial response to the argument and unfortunately his fifth and final reason does not do so either. In it he essentially says that, even though Peterson does not really know the implications of Chalcedon, if the implications did in fact contradict “some declaration of Scripture,” we would then be forced to abandon Chalcedon.¹¹⁰ Fudge states that this choice is not really forced upon him in case, but if it were, Chalcedon must go. Yet the choice very much is forced upon him and apart from unjustified dismissal he has not responded to the objection at all. On pains of inconsistency, the annihilationist must walk away from Chalcedonian Christology.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have raised a serious theological problem for annihilationism that remains unresolved. I have shown, both exegetically and theologically, that Christ’s death was of the same essential nature as that which comes to man (in his fallen state). My excursus on meaning yielded one viable way to understand how metaphors communicate truth, which in turn provides a way to draw out the implications of Christ’s death for the debate on eternal punishment. My treatment of the major models of the atonement revealed that they all support the concept of Christ’s death being essentially like ours. Particularly so with penal substitution—which nearly all the major figures in annihilationism hold—, in which the concept of equivalency between Christ’s death and the suffering in eternal punishment

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 207.

dovetails nicely with traditionalism but proves highly problematic for annihilationism. Since annihilationism views death as, essentially, non-existence, the death of Christ—which was like ours—must have resulted in his annihilation. This seemingly unavoidable conclusion has devastating consequences for Christology. It very much appears that one must choose between annihilationism and Chalcedonian orthodoxy, and I suggest a view of eternal punishment that is decidedly a minority in the tradition and is—to say the least—surrounded by exegetical and theological difficulties should be abandoned and avoided long before Christological doctrines that flow straight to the heart of the Christian faith. Since we are forced to choose between retaining Chalcedon or hell as non-existence, the former strikes me as the clear choice.

By demonstrating that annihilationism is incompatible with crucial doctrines in Christian theology, I have removed the second support for annihilationism. The next chapter will address the third support, showing that annihilationism cannot lay exclusive claim to eternal punishment that is both just and compatible with God's love.

Chapter 4

Annihilationism, Traditionalism, and the Problem of Hell

The objective of this chapter is to remove the third and final support for annihilationism: the contention that the view best comports with divine justice and love.¹ I will argue that in traditionalism, punishment in hell is not unjust, too severe, or unloving, and thus these considerations provide no reason to regard traditionalism to be inferior to annihilationism. I will then suggest other criteria for success of a doctrine of hell, showing that annihilationism and one type of traditionalism fall short on these. My treatment begins with the problem of hell.

The problem of hell in its logical form accuses theism of constructing accounts of God and of hell that are contradictory. To defend herself, the theist need only provide one logically possible way that her account of God and her account of hell might be reconciled. Resolutions to the problem of hell that meet the minimum requirement of possibly being true are not particularly difficult to conjure up, and a good number are readily available in the literature. In responding to the problem of hell, the Christian theologian should seek to go beyond the minimal criterion of logical consistency and provide a response that is also plausible and is harmonious with Scripture, the tradition, and the rest of Christian theology. In this chapter I

¹ An earlier revision of this chapter appeared in *Philosophia Christi*. See Shawn Bawulski, "Annihilationism, Traditionalism, and the Problem of Hell," *Philosophia Christi* 12, no. 1 (2010): 61-79.

will examine annihilationism and two forms of traditionalism, assessing each view's success not only in defending against the disproportionality problem of hell but also success with these additional criteria. In the next chapter, I will suggest that a refined version of the traditional view best succeeds.

The Disproportionality Problem

At the heart of the problem of hell is what I shall call the disproportionality problem. In short, the disproportionality problem is that the intensity and duration of eternal punishment seems to be incompatible with God's omnibenevolence. The objection is that if God either permits or is the agent of such punishment, then there is a stain on his character; if he does not, then the traditional view of hell is false. I consider it best to regard the task of reconciling hell with other divine attributes, such as love, to be a separate but related task from reconciling hell with God's moral perfection, and beginning with the proportionality problem of hell is appropriate in that it will serve as a foundation for answering many of the other issues in the problem of hell (more on this below).

Before proceeding, it seems a comment on the word "infinity" is in order. The language of infinitude in this discussion can be vague and slippery. There is some fuzziness in arguments that invoke a relationship between sin being infinitely heinous and various divine attributes being infinite, and the resulting "infinity calculus" has the liability of possibly equivocating on the two uses of the word *infinity*. I, however, do not regard the concept of infinitude to be unserviceable, if the term is taken to mean something skeletal like *without limit* or *to the highest degree*.

The disproportionality problem of hell can be readily summarized in the following argument:

(A) Justice demands that punishment for sins be proportionate to their seriousness, and it is unjust for a punishment to be disproportionate to the seriousness of the sin(s).²

(B) No human sin or lifetime of sinning can be infinite in seriousness.

(C) Hell is infinite punishment.

(D) To punish human sins with hell is to punish human sins disproportionately to their seriousness. (From (B) and (C))

(E) Therefore, hell is an unjust punishment for human sins.

Premise (A) seems to strike at a basic ethical principle; it is unclear how one might reject it without entirely abandoning any notion of retributive punishment.³ Premise (B) banks on the idea that a limit case is illusory: we can imagine that even the worst of the worst, e.g., Hitler or Idi Amin, could have perpetrated even greater evils. (C) is based on the idea that, traditionally

² This assumes that justice in eternal punishment is in some sense retributive—see my comments on this matter in the introductory chapter. Frequently in this discussion, retributive justice is largely assumed, and perhaps rightly so; the concept does seem thoroughly biblical (2 Thes. 1:5-10). For an excellent defense of hell as retributive justice, see Oliver D. Crisp, "Divine Retribution: A Defence," *Sophia* 42, no. 2 (2003).

³ (A) does not exclude the possibility that, in certain circumstances, the punishment of one agent may be borne by another in order to meet completely the demands of justice. However, (A) does entail that even in the instance of one agent bearing the punishment of another, the punishment borne must be proportionate to the seriousness of the offense(s) committed.

understood, hell is everlasting punishment.⁴ (D) receives plausibility from the idea that if a finite punishment (a lifetime imprisonment with hard labor) can be disproportionate to a finite sin (petty theft), then an infinite punishment is likely disproportionate to any finite sin. (E), so the argument goes, means that hell cannot be squared with God's justice, and any theology that incorporates both divine moral perfection and hell is inconsistent.

There are many solutions to the disproportionality problem and varying degrees of acceptability. The most radical involve some form of theistic voluntarism according to which God's will determines the laws of justice and/or the laws of logic. These solutions work, but only at great cost; most theologians find them too costly and at odds with the Scriptures. Universalism might work in resolving the proportionality problem by making hell merely theoretical, never actual, but has largely been rejected by the tradition on the basis of several key biblical texts.⁵ Purgatorial views reject (C) to resolve this problem, but run into problems

⁴ Charles Seymour rightly recognizes that everlasting punishment need not be infinite; for example, a scenario in which the severity of pain in hell is halved every year, so that the punishment approaches but never reaches a finite amount. However, it seems that there is a smallest conceivable pain intensity. Also, in this scenario, at some point a reduction in the severity of pain will result in a situation that fails to be, on the whole, bad. Thus, it ceases to be a hell of everlasting *punishment*, even if the existence of the reprobate is everlasting. These considerations suggest one ought to consider everlasting punishment to be infinite punishment. See Charles Seymour, "Hell, Justice, and Freedom," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 43, no. 2 (1998): 84 n5.

⁵ Seemingly, the only universalism that might succeed in resolving the disproportionality problem would be one in which hell is impossible. Regardless of whether or not eternal punishment is actualized, if it would be just and deserved, even the mere *possibility* raises the disproportionality problem. The tension remains unless one categorically denies that God *would* (in the appropriate circumstances) condemn some to eternal punishment. I thank Bob Fischer for bringing this point to my attention.

much like those that afflict universalism. Beyond merely providing a possible solution to the logical problem of hell, one must attempt to find a solution that will resound with the biblical witness and will be most compatible with the rest of the theological tradition.

One way forward is simply to agree with the biblical statements asserting God's justice and then let the nature of eternal punishment be determined by exegetical considerations of the relevant passages.⁶ This move is not voluntaristic—it is not to claim that God is “above” the category of justice—but rather is motivated by an epistemic humility: if God has indeed revealed that the fate of the finally impenitent is everlasting conscious punishment, then it is in fact just, regardless of our human conceptions of justice, which are sufficiently damaged by sin so as to be considered suspect.⁷ While I am sympathetic towards this line (because I think the biblical passages on eternal punishment are not so obscure that exegetical considerations must be at best secondary) it is doubtless that the lack of consensus on the relevant passages will prevent such a solution from being acceptable, even if it ought to be. The theologian's task, then, is to formulate a picture of eternal punishment that is most consistent with the rest

⁶ Passages such as Deut. 32:4; 2 Chron. 12:6; Neh. 9:8; Ps. 33:5; Isa. 45:19, 23-24; 1 Pet. 3:18; 1 John 2:1 and many others all affirm that God is just and righteous.

⁷ Harold Brown gets at this very point when he says “The Bible makes it plain enough that human concepts of justice and equity, distorted as they are by the sinfulness of fallen human nature, are deceptive and unreliable, and in any case are not binding upon God, who tells us explicitly, ‘My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways’ (Isa 55:8).” Harold O. J. Brown, “Will the Lost Suffer Forever?,” *Criswell Theological Review* 4, no. 2 (1990): 272. This is not to say that justice is something that God arbitrarily or capriciously wills, but rather is a statement about our epistemic access to these standards of justice.

of her theology, especially divine justice, that best handles the exegetical data, and that is sufficiently plausible.

Given these criteria, and considering that the focus of this project is the debate between annihilationism and traditionalism, three views of eternal punishment emerge as candidates. I will examine each, considering if and how they are successful in answering the disproportionality problem of hell. The three views examined will be: 1.) annihilationism (in the form most commonly found in the literature; I will not consider any annihilationism that does not include a general resurrection of the reprobate to judgment), 2.) the continuing sin traditionalist view, in which everlasting conscious punishment is required because some (limited) sin continues to be committed by the reprobate, and 3.) the infinite seriousness traditionalist view, in which the infinite severity of sin's heinousness requires everlasting conscious punishment. In addition to assessing the success of each view regarding the disproportionality problem, in select issues I will briefly examine each for theological and exegetical adequacy.⁸

⁸ Other important and related issues that unfortunately lie beyond my present scope include original, inherited and actual sin and guilt, the fate of the unevangelized, pluralism, and many others. While none of these is my own view, post-mortem evangelism, inclusionism, and perhaps even 'Christian pluralism' might be compatible with the arguments of this chapter. In short, this chapter makes no claims about the scope of salvation or the means of receiving salvation, and the arguments here only require that salvation be based on the cross—the redeemed alone are the salvific beneficiaries of Christ's atonement.

Annihilationism

God must have a morally sufficient reason for the continued existence of those in hell; if he does not, hell is unjust. The disproportionality objection accuses the traditional doctrine of hell of failure on this point. Not surprisingly, annihilationists often cite their view's supposed ability to dodge the traditionalist's disproportionality problem as a great virtue. For example, in his defense of annihilationism, John Stott says, "Would there not, then, be a serious disproportion between sins consciously committed in time and torment consciously experienced throughout eternity? . . . no finite set of deeds that individual sinners have done could justify such an infinite sentence."⁹ Annihilationists argue that traditionalists cannot resolve the disproportionality problem because God does not have a morally sufficient reason for an *everlasting* hell, but annihilationism can solve the problem because God has a morally sufficient reason for a hell of limited duration that culminates in nonexistence.

Assessment of Annihilationism

Annihilationism can attempt to resolve the disproportionality problem by rejecting (C) or by rejecting (D).¹⁰ (C) simply stated that hell is infinite punishment. If (C) is rejected then

⁹ David Lawrence Edwards and John R. W. Stott, *Evangelical Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 318-319. I assume that in saying "torment consciously experienced throughout eternity" Stott intends the eternality described to be taken as everlasting rather than timeless, so that he is comparing this age and the age to come without any commitment to an atemporal eschatological existence for the reprobate. It is dubious that the idea of a human being going from a temporal to an atemporal existence is even coherent.

¹⁰ Here I note that the annihilationist could also reject (B), "No human sin or lifetime of sinning can be infinite in seriousness." They could then follow the infinite seriousness view detailed below (that infinite punishment is

annihilation is a finite punishment, and there need be no disproportionality between the punishment and the crime: both are finite.¹¹ (D) said, “To punish human sins with hell is to punish human sins disproportionately to their seriousness.” If (D) is rejected, the annihilationist will need to argue that although annihilation is an infinite punishment, the disproportionality problem arises not from punishment being infinite *per se* but rather from some feature of punishment in hell that annihilationism does not include, presumably everlasting conscious existence.¹² Interestingly, although seemingly a natural fit, some annihilationists are reluctant to see annihilation as finite punishment.¹³ I will argue that one ought not to consider annihilationism to be infinite punishment but should regard it to be finite

required because of the seriousness of sinning against a God who is of infinite value) in responding to the disproportionality problem. They would part company with the infinite seriousness view when it comes to what makes the punishment *infinite*; punishment that is infinite because it is everlasting is disproportionate, but punishment that is infinite because it involves annihilation is not. When this is the route taken, my objections still apply—specifically, that the punishment of annihilationism cannot be infinite—so I will not treat it separately from infinite punishment annihilationist views that retain (B) but reject (D).

¹¹ Affirming (B) and rejecting (C) is probably the most common route taken by annihilationists; for just one example among many, see Henry Smith Warleigh, *Twelve Discussions Proving the Extinction of Evil Persons and Things* (London: E. Stock, 1873), 232-237.

¹² See Claire Brown and Jerry Walls’ chapter in Joel Buening, ed. *The Problem of Hell: A Philosophical Anthology* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 55.

¹³ See, for example, Edward Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of Final Punishment* (Houston, TX: Providential Press, 1982), 232. Also, see Edward Fudge and Robert A. Peterson, *Two Views of Hell: A Biblical & Theological Dialogue* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 192-193.

punishment.¹⁴ I conclude that annihilationism as finite punishment might succeed in resolving the disproportionality problem but at a price too exegetically and theologically costly.

Annihilation as Infinite Punishment

If annihilation is an infinite punishment, then to resolve the disproportionality problem the annihilationist must argue that a certain type of infinite punishment (that which ends in annihilation) is a just sentence for sin of finite seriousness despite the punishment being, in fact, infinite. Presumably, this will be done by attempting to link the disproportion to something other than the infinite nature of the punishment, and the most likely candidate is everlasting conscious existence.

There are two major problems with annihilationism as an infinite punishment. First is a difficulty that attaches to annihilationism in either finite or infinite form, but I will raise it here because it is all the worse if annihilation is an infinite punishment: it is not obvious that extinction is genuinely a lesser and more proportionate punishment than that of the traditional view.¹⁵ Assuming there is some validity to the analogy, there is no consensus as to which is more severe: life imprisonment or capital punishment. If annihilation is a lesser punishment then the annihilationist needs to argue this point persuasively, and I have not encountered any

¹⁴ For a helpful discussion on annihilationism as either finite or infinite, see Andy Saville, "Arguing with Annihilationism: An Assessment of the Doctrinal Arguments for Annihilationism," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 24, no. 1 (2006): 65-90.

¹⁵ This is particularly apparent when the punishment of annihilationism is compared to that of reconciliationism, for with reconciliationism the reprobate would prefer continued existence over annihilation, even though theirs is a subjectively negative experience. In reconciliationism the reprobate have a right perception of the value of their continued existence, and agree with that valuation. See the next chapter on reconciliationism.

argument to that effect.¹⁶ This is a significant problem, for there is little explanation as to *how* annihilationism adequately distances itself from the traditional view regarding the disproportionality problem. Mere assertions will not do. If everlasting conscious punishment is too strong of a punishment for sin, why is *permanent extinction* any better, especially if both are infinite punishments?

Second, it does seem that retributive punishment *as it occurs in hell* needs to be experienced. It is hard to see how we might punish an offender who is in a coma, especially if that coma were irreversible. We might be able to extract compensation from her estate, but we would normally consider this means of punishment to be a contingency-plan sentence in lieu of a punishment that involved the offender's knowledge and recognition of her wrongdoing. This, coupled with several biblical texts that describe the reprobate as aware of and experiencing their punishment, point to the conclusion that a criteria of the punishment of hell is that it be experienced.¹⁷ This becomes problematic for annihilationism; in fact, there is great difficulty in seeing how annihilation *per se* is punishment at all. It must be noted that most annihilationists claim annihilation does not occur at physical death or even immediately

¹⁶ In Matt. 26:24 Jesus says, "It would be better for him if he had not been born," which may seem to suggest that non-existence is preferable to going to hell. However, Jesus is speaking of a person's birth, not of her original creation or her existence vs. non-existence. Blocher writes, "... the point of comparison in his statement, however, is the loss of the privileges of *this* life as incurred by a stillborn child (*cf.* Eccles. 6:3ff), and *not* pure non-existence." See Blocher in Nigel M. de S. Cameron, ed. *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1992), 311.

¹⁷ However one might regard the practice, the death sentence as retributive punishment is not a counterexample because the Christian doctrine of a final universal resurrection means that state implemented capital punishment is not personal annihilation, merely a penal ending *of this life*.

after the final judgment, but posit a finite period of conscious punishment leading up to final annihilation. The problem then becomes this: the only penal or retributive aspect related to *annihilation* is the dreadful anticipation of the upcoming annihilation. Yet if the antecedent period of punishment is finite and the anticipatory period of dread is finite, even if the annihilation is permanent and in that sense infinite in consequence, the *punishment* itself is finite. Thus, I conclude that annihilation should not be considered an infinite punishment.

Annihilation as Finite Punishment

If annihilation is a finite punishment, then in the standard annihilationist picture of final punishment described above, a limited period of punishment ends in extinction. The degree of punishment is finite—less than in an everlasting hell, and in this way the annihilationist hell can handle the disproportionality problem (where sin is not regarded as infinitely serious; if sin *is* infinitely serious, then the finite punishment of annihilationism has a *reverse* disproportionality problem). The punishment is finite in virtue of the limited duration and can be proportioned to the deserved degree of punishment. The disproportionality problem is solved, but the view still has a number of problems.

First, there is an objection sometimes leveled against annihilationism when it is regarded as a finite punishment: once the end of the punishment is reached, why are the reprobate not at that point reconciled with God and worthy of heaven? The objection is that the annihilationist hell collapses into purgatory and once the punishment has been completed, the person should be released from hell, not annihilated. In response, the annihilationist can insist that annihilation is the required culmination of one's hell sentence, even if it is not part of the punishment proper (and it cannot be, as I have shown). If the dread of the coming annihilation is a crucial component of the punishment and this fear and dread is brought about

by the sentence of a God who is not dishonest, it would seem that the experience of a person in hell must end in non-existence.¹⁸ But what reason is there to think that extinction must be the termination of hell? If hell needs to be finite punishment, as the annihilationist is forced to say, why not make the necessary adjustments to hell's duration and/or intensity so that it need not terminate in annihilation but rather becomes a sort of purgatory? There seems to be no compelling reason to retain extinction as an aspect of hell.

Second, in (finite) annihilationism the overall punishment itself *might* be less severe than the traditionalist's hell,¹⁹ but there are unfitting and unacceptable corollary losses that accompany this account of hell, even if it is recognized that these losses do not constitute any part of the punishment itself. For example, the annihilation of a human person degrades and assaults the dignity inherent in a creature endowed with the *imago dei*.²⁰ Non-existence, it

¹⁸ The conditionalist could claim that God is under no obligation to continue to sustain the existence of those who have completed their punishment. Here, continued existence is entirely gracious, and God does nothing unjust by ceasing their existence because the sentence has been served to its completion and the debt has been paid. However, it is reasonable to think that God would need some motive for allowing the annihilation of a human being made in his own image, *one that is no longer in need of forgiveness*. Since the punishment has been completed, the creature's sinfulness cannot rightly be that motive. At this point, where the survivor of hell no longer possessing any guilt for sin, would it not be much more fitting for God to do what is necessary to allow this person into his presence rather than extinguish her? Perhaps there are some theological reasons that God cannot do this but the conditionalist must spell these out convincingly.

¹⁹ However, I contend that the hell of annihilationism *is* harsher than that of reconciliationism—see the chapter on reconciliationism.

²⁰ In reconciliationism, God's respect for *imago dei* creatures (or, at least, of an entity that was formerly an *imago dei* creature) means that they are "redeemed" from continuing sin and from non-existence, from being a total loss

could be argued, is a much harsher treatment (albeit a non-penal treatment) of a human person than the treatment of a human person consigned to a more traditional hell. Another example: perhaps with the annihilation of the wicked God loses an opportunity to display his justice and glory in the eternal state of the cosmos. Losses like these are all the more unfitting and unacceptable if they are not mere corollaries of punishment but are part of annihilation *per se* as punishment (although I have shown that this cannot be the case).

Third, the annihilationist has to answer the traditionalist argument about the infinite seriousness of sin. I will present this argument below, so it need not detain us now, but here it is enough to say that despite the current popularity of rejecting the infinite seriousness of sin, it has a pedigree in the tradition²¹ and exegetical support that the annihilationist must confront.²² These considerations are likely an impetus to view annihilation as an infinite punishment, despite the serious problems with so doing (see above).

and an ongoing problem in the glorified cosmos. He respects them enough to bring it about that they meet the grand *telos* of every creature, even if that is realized through punishment. In annihilationism, the goal of “glorifying God forever” is unrealized in the reprobate; not so in reconciliationism.

²¹ For example, Anselm’s *Cur Deus Homo*.

²² For a representative presentation of the exegetical support for the seriousness of sin, see Peterson’s response to Stott on the disproportionality problem in Robert A. Peterson, “A Traditionalist Response to John Stott’s Arguments for Annihilationism,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37, no. 4 (1994): 561-565. Peterson gives some instances where God punishes seemingly “little” sins with the swift and severe judgment of a premature death (Lot’s wife disobediently turning back, Ananias and Sapphires lying to the apostles, Uzzah touching the ark, etc.). Further, Adam’s one “little” act of eating forbidden fruit plunged the whole human race into sin, bringing about physical and spiritual death and eternal condemnation. These punishments are just, Peterson argues, because “the Bible views sin as an attack on God’s character and therefore deserving of great

Space limitations prevent more than a passing mention of two additional problems that I wish to highlight, one biblical and one theological. As I argued in chapters one and two, the interpretive issues with the view have received a great deal of attention and although the debate has no end in sight, it does not seem that annihilationism has adequately answered the substantial exegetical and hermeneutical objections raised by its critics. As I argued in chapter three, accommodating annihilationism into Christian theology will require unacceptable modifications of other doctrines, particularly the incarnation.

Annihilationism and Degrees of Punishment

There are passages that suggest the punishment of hell will be experienced in varying degrees.²³ The disproportionality problem stems from a related intuition: the degree of punishment should correspond to the degree of wrongdoing. Since an initial stipulation was that hell is distributive retributive punishment, the annihilationist account must accommodate degrees of punishment in hell. Given the conclusion that the annihilationist hell must be finite punishment, I think this is not difficult to achieve, since annihilation occurs after some finite time of conscious punishment. The annihilationist could say the duration is uniform for all but

punishment.” (563) While overall Peterson’s argument is persuasive, he must explain why in everyday life most “little” sins do not receive such ostensible punishment. Most of Peterson’s examples could be explained away by suggesting each was a unique protection of key players and events in God’s redemptive historical activity, but even then, one would do well to see God’s swift punishment as a strategic repeal of his patient delaying of judgment rather than an otherwise undeserved “sniping” of those who threaten the plan of redemption. Generally, his point does stand—it seems any sin really is a tremendous offense to God.

²³ Several passages speak of degrees of guilt, which entail degrees of punishment. See Matt. 11:21-24; 16:27; Luke. 12:47-48; John. 9:41; Rom. 2:5-8.

the severity of the conscious punishment varies, the severity is uniform but the duration varies, or both vary.

Annihilationism, Eschatology, and Cosmic Dualism

Traditional accounts of hell have received criticism for creating an unbiblical cosmic dualism between good and evil in the final state. The criticism cannot be ignored, because the comprehensive scope of some “universalist” passages in Scripture cannot be easily downplayed.²⁴ Annihilationism *prima facie* might fare better here, as some have argued.²⁵ Matters, however, are not so straightforward: how can annihilationism’s temporary cosmic dualism really be called the *final* state? The book of Revelation gives the strong impression that the results of the Great White Throne Judgment are the final phase of the eschatological consummation and of the divine defeat of evil, yet annihilationism postulates subsequent events that threaten to undermine this finality, which in the annihilationist view does not find ultimate realization until hell is no longer populated.²⁶ Further, it is unclear that evil is genuinely defeated if it forces God to literally uncreate humans made in his image.²⁷

²⁴ See 1 Cor. 15:27-28; Phil. 2:10-11; Eph. 1:10; Col. 1:20. These will be treated in detail in the next chapter.

²⁵ Fudge, *Fire That Consumes*, 249 fn 36, 372 fn 18.

²⁶ Traditionalists can claim that the divine defeat of evil is completed at the Great White Throne Judgment, and if the annihilationist follows suit in this then the cosmic dualism objection ceases to bolster the case for annihilationism over and against traditionalism. The annihilationist could suggest that the *process* of annihilation commences at the final judgment and it is a slow process—a gradual annihilation—that is experienced. Such a move might enable the annihilationism to avoid the criticism here. However, there are problems—it is difficult to see how annihilation can be this sort of process. Something either exists or it does not (there are, strictly speaking, not *degrees* of existence) and once a human person has been altered in some process headed towards

Traditionalist Views

Traditionalist views vary in detail, but almost all contend that God has a good reason for the reality of an everlasting hell. If God does have a morally sufficient reason for the continued everlasting existence of those in hell, what might this reason be? The two traditionalist views I will examine both insist the reason to be that justice requires a traditionalist hell, but they differ as to *how* justice requires it.²⁸ The continuing sin view says that those in hell continue to accumulate desert of punishment through continued, though limited, sinning in hell; hell is everlasting because their desert of punishment perpetuates. The infinite seriousness view says that one sin—or merely being a sinner—is infinitely heinous on account of who has been wronged; hell is everlasting because the punishment must be infinite

non-existence, as soon as one or more essential attribute has been removed, at that moment the person is moved from existence to non-existence. But even granting that such a process is possible, a slow annihilation is still an eventual annihilation, and at some point in the “transition to non-existence” the possibility of *experience* breaks down. This is problematic, for it does not seem that a punishment that fails to be everlastingly experienced can be what the Scriptures describe as *eternal* punishment, nor does it seem that it can be an infinite punishment in the necessary senses.

²⁷ Simon Chan, in a somewhat difference context, makes a similar point, “... annihilationism could not be true without bringing into question the moral integrity of the Creator-creature relationship.” Simon Chan, “The Logic of Hell: A Response to Annihilationism,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 18 (1994): 27.

²⁸ Traditionalists might insist that secondary considerations might play a supportive role in the larger argument that the requirements of justice constitute the morally sufficient reason for hell. Some examples of these secondary factors might include the idea that hell displays God’s holiness and thereby glorifies him, or that annihilating a human person treats an agent endowed with the *imago dei*—a dignity derived from God’s own—with tremendous indignity.

in order to be fitting to the infinite seriousness of the wrongdoing. These views are not mutually exclusive, and a synthesis may be possible, but for simplicity's sake I will treat them separately.

The Continuing Sin View

The continuing sin view says that the reprobate continue to sin in hell and thus accrue guilt that warrants further punishment. This situation goes on perpetually and the punishment is everlasting in duration because the guilt continues to mount. The continuing sin view succeeds in answering the disproportionality problem by rejecting premise (D), which said "To punish human sins with hell is to punish human sins disproportionately to their seriousness." The view concedes that (D) would be true if only one sin or just a lifetime of sin were considered, but the everlasting perpetuation of the 'sin-guilt-inflicted punishment' state of affairs renders (D) false as it is stated and justifies the infinite nature of hell. The disproportionality problem is answered, and even John Stott, who has given an influential defense of the annihilationist position, recognizes that traditionalism of the continuing sin sort resolves the objection.²⁹

Objections and Responses

Despite a complete lack of biblical attestation, the view has a degree of natural plausibility, especially under the qualification that the sins are limited to acts of the will and sins of omission. D. A. Carson cashes on this when he says, "... are we to imagine that the

²⁹ Stott suggests that perhaps "'eternal conscious torment' is compatible with the biblical revelation of divine justice, [if] the impenitence of the lost also continues throughout eternity." Edwards and Stott, *Evangelical Essentials*, 319.

lost in hell love God with heart and soul and mind and strength, and their neighbors as themselves? If not, they are breaking the first and second commandments.”³⁰ This however, assumes that failure to do certain things in hell (like keep the commandments) should be regarded as punishable sin; perhaps it should not, considering the radical nature of the defeat of evil as well as the gravity of punishment brought about by the events in Revelation chapter 20. It is possible to view at least some of the commandments as binding on earth but not in hell.³¹ At minimum I observe that more work needs to be done on these questions by proponents of the continuing sin view.

The view has some further difficulties when it comes to human freedom. It is a commonly held ethical principle that guilt only obtains when the agent acts freely. Regarding hell, most agree that the reprobate are in hell because of free choices they have made. ‘Free’ may be understood compatibilistically or libertarianly, as long as the reprobate in a relevant sense have freely sinned and are thus morally culpable and deserving of the punishment of hell. If freedom is of the libertarian sort then the permanency of one’s consignment to hell must be at the most a weak version, where escape is possible, even if it is never realized. This is because with libertarian free will moral culpability requires a contra-causal “ability to do otherwise.”³² If guilt is accruing then the sinning must be done freely, and if it is done with libertarian freedom it must at least be theoretically possible to refrain from sinning, even to

³⁰ D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 534. See his full discussion on pages 533-534.

³¹ See my comments on this issue in the next chapter.

³² Or, at the very least, the sinning in hell must be connected in the right ways to an agent’s contra-causal ability as exercised at some point in her life.

refrain regularly enough to endure all deserved punishment and to return to a status of being innocent and be worthy of release.³³ The proponent of libertarian free will would have to construct a picture of hell where each reprobate could complete her punishment but in fact never does, and at the same time libertarian freedom is retained. While not impossible, a satisfactory account of libertarian freedom within this notion of hell might be elusive, given that this hell is *everlasting*. Of course, the task of reconciling the continuing sin view with human freedom is not as difficult if the freedom is compatibilist.

Hell in the continuing sin view is everlasting and infinite, but can achieve degrees of punishment quite handily. One would simply have to say that at any given moment the severity of afflictions correspond to the severity of the offense for which the reprobate is being punished at that time.

The Continuing Sin View, Eschatology, and Cosmic Dualism

Traditional views of hell that incorporate continued sin must grapple with the everlasting existence of sin in hell. While it might be that sin is contained, does not reign, and cannot affect the rest of the glorified cosmos, continuing sin is still an eternal blemish, an everlasting sign that God's victory is not entirely comprehensive.³⁴ Sin involves rebellion

³³ Himma mistakenly states that sinful acts, even if just acts of the will, must be committed at every moment by a person in hell. But certainly there can be gaps—moments where no sin is being committed—provided that the accrued desert of punishment never reaches zero. See Kenneth Einar Himma, "Eternally Incurable: The Continuing-Sin Response to the Proportionality Problem of Hell," *Religious Studies* 39, no. 01 (2003): 71.

³⁴ The biblical picture of the final eschatological state leaves no room for any sin or evil, even in hell. It could be argued that a hell of everlasting conscious punishment is just as much of an eternal blemish as continuing sin, but this seems to consider eternal punishment to be an evil, whereas I suggest the just punishment of sin is a good.

from the divine kingship, which is difficult to reconcile with some “universalist” texts that describe the final state of the cosmos as one where “all things will be subjected to him [God],” “God [will] be all in all,” and “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.”³⁵ The traditional response has contended that hell is sin’s proper punishment, and the just punishment of sin is a good and not an evil. In assessing this response, I note that it works for the *punishment* of sin, not the continued existence of sin. It is successful in addressing the eternal existence of pain and suffering as components of punishment, but is not a satisfactory response when it concerns the continued existence of sin in hell.³⁶

The Infinite Seriousness View

The infinite seriousness view says that the everlasting duration of hell is justified and even required on account of the infinite demerit any sinner receives in committing offense against a God of infinite dignity, glory, and honor. The view resolves the disproportionality problem by rejecting (B), “No human sin or lifetime of sinning can be infinite in seriousness.” If sin can be and indeed is infinite in seriousness, then the view successfully answers the disproportionality problem of hell.

Although pain and suffering still continue in the eternal state, they only exist in as much as they are involved in the execution of final justice, making them a good and not a blemish. Pressing the point any further, essentially asking why God would actualize a world where sin and hell obtain at all, takes us into the realm of the problem of evil—which is a problem shared by all of Christian theism.

³⁵ 1Cor. 15:28; Phil. 2:10-11. See the latter chapter on reconciliationism for detailed consideration of these and other related passages.

³⁶ See the discussion in Saville, “Arguing with Annihilationism,” 78-85.

Here, some further explanation on the use of “infinite” is in order. There are some difficulties explaining the relationship between the *infinities* being invoked: 1.) why does the *infinite* dignity, glory, and honor of God translate into *infinite* demerit? 2.) Why does *infinite* demerit translate into *infinite* (in the sense of everlasting) duration of punishment? The status principle adequately answers the first question (as I will explain in a moment). The second question is trickier, especially since the term *infinite* is being used in quite different senses when one speaks of *infinite* demerit and *infinite* duration. These do seem to be different types of infinitude. This is not fatal, however, if it remembered that ‘infinite’ is being used with the broad meaning of ‘without limit,’ for the infinite serious view requires that *in some appropriate sense* the punishment be without limit, as the value of the victim (God) is without limit.³⁷ Further, because it seems odd to speak of a human person receiving punishment of an infinite intensity (if intensity of punishment is measured in pain-units, one more unit could always be added), it is therefore the everlasting duration that is required to render a punishment infinite. Apart from an everlasting duration, how might the punishment of hell be rightly considered infinite?

Proponents of the infinite seriousness view must defend some version of the status principle—that the heinousness of a crime corresponds in some way to the status of the victim—which is more than a little contentious.³⁸ However, a forgeable way ahead emerges if

³⁷ Further considerations would need to be made to explain the differences, likely an appeal to the differences between creature and Creator, between a finite being and an infinite being. I am confident such a case could be made.

³⁸ For examples of this debate, see Marilyn McCord Adams, “Hell and the God of Justice,” *Religious Studies* 11, no. 04 (1975): 441ff. Also, see Crisp, “Divine Retribution,” 39-44, and Paul Kabay, “Is the Status Principle

it is insisted that minimally the status principle include this idea: *the degree of guilt is proportional to the person offended against, all other things being equal*. With the qualification *all other things being equal* many of the objections to the status principle can be answered.³⁹ Of course, this means that the status of the person wronged need not be the only

Beyond Salvation? Toward Redeeming an Unpopular Theory of Hell," *Sophia* 44, no. 1 (2005): 91-103. See also Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo* I.12-21. Kvanvig defines the status principle as holding that "guilt is proportional to the status of the offended party," that "guilt incurred by wrongdoing is proportional not only to the severity of actual or intended harm but also to the kind of being against whom the act is committed." See Jonathan L. Kvanvig, *The Problem of Hell* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), 29ff. The status of a victim who is of the highest ontological kind (God) is infinite, for God is divine: he is morally perfect, he is entirely righteous, he is infinitely good, etc. Because God is divine, he is of infinite dignity, honor, and value. Crisp states the principle thusly: "the dignity of God is infinite, so the seriousness of an offence committed against God is infinite, or infinitely surpasses that of other kinds." (44) With the status principle, regarding the victim: status correlates to value and value tracks with ontological kind. Because God is of the highest ontological kind, sin against God is infinitely serious. "Status" here should not be reduced to "moral value"—that status of being a member of the ontological kind "divine" is much broader, but would certainly include moral considerations.

Sometimes the infinite seriousness of sin is attributed not directly to some way in which God is infinite, but to the *infinite obligation* of obedience creatures have to God. Yet the status principle still seems operative, albeit one step removed. For what makes the obligation *infinite*, if not something in God?

³⁹ See, for example, Adams, "Hell and the God of Justice," 443, and Kabay's response in Kabay, "Is the Status Principle...": 96-99.

factor in determining the degree of guilt and the appropriate punishment, but it should receive due consideration.⁴⁰

Perhaps an example will be illustrative. Imagine the just punishment given to someone who, with premeditation and planning and solely for her own pleasure, kidnaps, tortures, and eventually kills a resident of the house adjacent to her own. *All other things being equal*, the punishment should be more severe if the victim is a human being than if the victim is a golden retriever. Legally and morally both offenses are worthy of punishment—seemingly most everyone would agree that animal cruelty like this is morally wrong and would also agree that murder is wrong—but torturing and killing a human for pleasure is a more serious offense than doing the same to a dog, because a human is of a higher status than a dog.

Now let us extend this status principle to its limit case: when the offended person is God, the seriousness of the offense is infinite, because, as Crisp puts well, “The value of a deity outweighs the value of a human to an infinite degree, such that crimes against a member of that ontological kind carry significantly greater (in fact, infinite) consequences.”⁴¹ In considerations of wrongdoing, the value of God is infinite because of his dignity, honor, and

⁴⁰ Other factors may include the intentions of the offender, premeditation vs. “heat of the moment” impulsivity, the damage caused, the mental state (and health!) of the offender, and many more. Working out a more developed account of factors like these is far beyond my scope here and is not necessary to make my point.

⁴¹ Crisp, “Divine Retribution,” 40. Crisp appeals to a basic distinction between ‘divine’ and ‘non-divine’ amongst ontological kinds in order to avoid some of the problems with alternative formulations, many that result in an unhelpful “bloated ontology.”

glory.⁴² ⁴³ God's goodness towards his creatures has to be qualified with appropriate considerations of economic relationships, factors that include the sinfulness of the creatures. God is not obligated to treat favorably those who have so seriously wronged him; in fact, he is obligated to treat them with due wrath and punishment.⁴⁴ As Stephen R. Holmes rightly states, "God's goodness demands that God has an infinite regard for his own honor, and so has an infinite hatred for creatures who offend against his honor."⁴⁵

As Kabay points out, the status principle only supports the infinite seriousness view if other factors do not override or trump considerations of status.⁴⁶ For example, for the sake of the argument, allow the possibility that someone could sin against God with sufficient ignorance of a sort where infinite punishment would not be in order, even given the status principle. In such cases, it seems to me, God would be unjust in consigning that person to

⁴² This assumes that, in some relevant way, all sin is against God, an idea that is controversial but defensible. While a defense would take us astray, interested readers can see Kvanvig, *The Problem of Hell*, 36ff.

⁴³ God does not punish sinners *because* of his infinite value, strictly speaking; he punishes the rebellious because he is just, or, perhaps better, because he is committed to upholding the right order of creation. God *executes* (final) punishment because that is his and his alone to do; the rebellious *deserve* punishment because of the infinite value of the one wronged.

⁴⁴ This utilization of the doctrine of God is in line with Christopher Morgan's call for the full integration of systematic theology into evangelical conversations on eternal punishment, as is my chapter length defense of reconciliationism. See Christopher W. Morgan, *Jonathan Edwards & Hell* (Fearn: Mentor, 2004), 98, 139.

⁴⁵ Stephen R. Holmes, "Everlasting Punishment and the Goodness of God: Some Contributions to the Current Debate from Jonathan Edwards," *Philosophia Christi* 8, no. 2 (2006): 339.

⁴⁶ Kabay, "Is the Status Principle...": 99-100.

everlasting hell. The “fully informed” objections of Thomas Talbott (and others) are in principle arguing this very point.⁴⁷ A full treatment of this objection would take us to an issue beyond our current scope, but I can offer a basic answer. Since the one wronged is of infinite value, the punishment must be infinite; no other factors can mitigate the infinite nature of the guilty party’s desert without compromising the infinite worth, dignity, and holiness of God. The response, then, is this: while considerations of ignorance and the like are not moot, they are not enough to override the status principle’s minimum threshold of an infinite punishment.⁴⁸

However, that all sin, as it is against God, is infinitely heinous and deserving of everlasting punishment does not entail that all sin is equally severe in every aspect; it is merely to say that any sin warrants a punishment that is in some capacity *without limit*. Consider two cases, where all the relevant details are the same except that in the first, some offender X tortures an innocent person, and in the second, some offender Y tortures and murders an innocent person. Since both sins are infinitely heinous, as they both ultimately offend God, does that not require the infinite serious view to say that both are of equal severity? No, such a counterintuitive (and probably unbiblical) conclusion does not follow. The offense in the second scenario is obviously worse, and will warrant a more severe punishment. Offenses vary in severity in many ways: by the damage done, by being premeditated, by being done in

⁴⁷ This is a common theme in Talbott’s writings. For an example, see Thomas Talbott, “The Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment,” *Faith and Philosophy* 7, no. 1 (1990): 36-38. His “fully informed” objections come from a quite different perspective, since Talbot’s views do not accept retributive punishment.

⁴⁸ I could also argue based on Rom. 1:18-20 and other passages that no one sins with sufficient ignorance to render them innocent.

some degree of ignorance, and many more, *and the infinite serious view does not require that all these other factors be “flattened out” by the status principle.* That all sin is infinitely serious does not mean that comparison between sins is impossible. It simply means that since God is in some sense the ultimate victim of any sin, that the punishment for that sin have some feature that makes it comport with the value of the victim, that it have some feature that makes it infinite (in the sense of *without limit*). In turning to discuss degrees of punishment with the view, I will explain how this might work.

The Infinite Seriousness View and Degrees of Punishment

There are passages that suggest the punishment of hell will be experienced in varying degrees, which can be realized in an everlasting hell. The infinite seriousness view does not entail that all sinners are punished equally, even if all sinners' punishments endure everlastingly.⁴⁹ I suggest this calculus: the degree of punishment is a function of the duration of the punishment and the experiential intensity of the punishment.⁵⁰ In this model, various considerations might affect the experiential severity of the inflicted punishment, but the duration will be uniformly everlasting.⁵¹

⁴⁹ See Crisp, "Divine Retribution," 38.

⁵⁰ Both Himma and Crisp seem to be getting at something similar. See *ibid.*, 38, and Himma, "Eternally Incurable," 64. Also, see Aquinas's Response in the Supplement to the *Summa Theologica*, Question 99, Article 1.

⁵¹ Regarding the intensity of punishment, Himma considers the difference made by whether or not the reprobate are aware of their separation from God. Himma, "Eternally Incurable," 66ff. I question what it would take for God to bring about a state of affairs where the reprobate are unaware of him in any sense. Is a possible world with such a hell a wise or desirable choice for God? Further, as previously mentioned, it is difficult to envisage a

It is important to realize that while the duration of hell is infinite, it is merely a potential infinity. This is to say that hell's duration is never complete, but rather is one of successive moments, so that time progresses on everlastingly. An illustration: we might imagine two tunnels both being continually dug by a rotating crew of miners at the rate of two miles each week. One of the tunnels is three feet in diameter; the other is eight feet. The digging never stops and the tunnels are never completed; yet one tunnel is certainly 'greater' than the other. By way of analogy, we see that God can implement meaningful degrees of punishment in an everlasting hell.⁵²

The Infinite Seriousness View, Eschatology, and Cosmic Dualism

The infinite seriousness view is not automatically immune from the eternal cosmic dualism objection to traditionalist views of hell. However, rejecting the idea that sin continues in hell alleviates much of the tension. Avoiding the eternal cosmic dualism objection can be accomplished by reconciliationism, which will receive a full presentation and defense in the next chapter.⁵³

hell of penal retribution that does not involve an awareness of being punished. Finally, how might this notion be squared with the biblical texts in which the punishment of hell is portrayed with an awareness of punishment on the part of the finally impenitent?

⁵² Jonathan Edwards uses a similar analogy with cylinders. See Edwards' *Miscellanies* #713.

⁵³ Thomas Rawson Birks defended a version of the view in the 19th century, and more recently Henri Blocher has done so in his "Everlasting Punishment and the Problem of Evil" in Cameron, ed. *Universalism And...* (Unfortunately, Blocher's most detailed development of reconciliationism is limited to one chapter length contribution; one wishes for a fuller treatment from him.) For the views of Birks and a few other 19th and early 20th century theologians who held views with varying similarities to reconciliationism, see the survey provided in

Hell, Annihilationism, and Divine Love

Annihilationists, for all their appeals to God's love in rejecting an everlasting hell, run the risk of being cut on their own sword. If an everlasting hell is incompatible with God's love, what reason is there to think that a hell of suffering culminating in extermination is any more loving? Further, how can any punitive suffering—before annihilation or even in this life—be compatible? Vague appeals to some nebulous divine love run the risk of proving too much, and it seems a bit arbitrary to say that *some* duration of punishment terminating in extinction is satisfactorily compatible whilst everlasting punishment is not. Arguments to support this distinction require much more than sentimentalized appeals to the love of God. The objection is this: *how* is it that the traditional view of hell is incompatible with divine love but the annihilationist view is not? Why does it stop there and not cut so deeply so as to say that any pain, suffering, etc. in this life—even right now—is incompatible?

Hell only conflicts with God's love if it is unjust, and I have shown one satisfactory way in which an everlasting hell can be just, at least as far as the disproportionality problem is concerned.⁵⁴ God can punish sinners and still be loving because God's first love—the fullness

Stephen N. Williams, "The Question of Hell and Salvation: Is There a Fourth View?," *Tyndale Bulletin* 57, no. 2 (2006).

⁵⁴ Granted, emotionally the doctrine of eternal punishment can be taxing. However, I would argue that the psychological weight of the issue ultimately comes from the problem of evil, which is a problem not unique to the view defended here. Hell exists because of sin. Further, I am not convinced we wretched sinners are in a proper place to accurately assess the seriousness of sin—it seems that there is good reason to suspect that our warped and stunted emotions might be unreliable in this area, unable to perceive any fraction of the true heinousness and ugliness of sin. If there is an emotional cost to be paid, it is on account of the horror of sin and

of his love—is intra-Trinitarian. God, apart from considerations of sin, is dispositionally loving towards all available objects of love. But when considerations of sin are un-bracketed, this dispositional love towards creatures is informed by the wrath God has for those whose sins are, by virtue of the one offended, infinitely heinous. The result is that God’s consistent and uniform regard for the finally impenitent is thoroughly marked by wrath. Sin, unless properly dealt with, makes a love relationship impossible, and since God is in the relevant sense not free to love them, he cannot be held morally accountable for failing to do so. When it comes to sinners, God has only one obligated response: wrath. He can choose to be merciful and gracious, but nothing in the creature or the cosmos makes this compulsory.⁵⁵ Grace, by definition, is not an (external) obligation.⁵⁶

its consequences, not of the doctrine of eternal punishment itself. The answer is always Anselm’s, “you have not yet come to grips with how serious sin is.” (*Cur Deus Homo* I.21).

⁵⁵ There is nothing in the sinner that demands God show mercy; there is much in the sinner that demands God to judge. I suggest that when one rightly grasps the seriousness of sin, one should find it *remarkable* that God would graciously forgive creatures in such a wretched state and thank God for the infinitely high price paid on the cross to bring about that forgiveness.

⁵⁶ God’s wrath towards sinners—as sinners—is “obligated” by his own goodness, accurate self-regard, and intra-Trinitarian love; in fact, God’s wrath is a second-order attribute, one that is ultimately dependent on first-order attributes. In that sense, wrath is the relationship of God’s goodness and intra-Trinitarian love in regards to moral agents who have sinned. Should God have chosen to abstain from creating, existing in the fullness of his triune being, there would be no wrath. Likewise with mercy, for there is nothing to be merciful *toward*. Both wrath and mercy can be rightly ascribed to God (again, as second-order attributes) only if they are appropriate and relevant to the sort of creation God brings into existence. Given the actuality of sin in creation, God cannot be loving and good if he fails to rightly handle sin, if he fails to have wrath towards it. Divine justice is inexorable. Is the same true of forgiveness and mercy? Do God’s goodness and love *require* God to show forgiveness and

Neither God's grace nor his mercy is required by justice, and the absence of grace and mercy is not unjust, a common mistake critics make in objecting to the traditional view of hell.⁵⁷ Mercy is not unjust, although mercy is non-justice (non-justice regarding the recipient of that mercy). This is not to say the demands of justice go unmet; God's goodness and holiness are not shrugged off in the forgiveness and salvation of the saints, and I am convinced that God cannot forgive merely by fiat, as it were. If the Cross is in any way to be seen as substitutionary, as I think it is, then God himself has met the demands of justice in order to show the redeemed grace and mercy.

mercy, in a way similar to wrath? Perhaps this is the wrong way to approach the issue. Better, I suggest this: it seems plausible that a world of universal damnation is not a world that is on the whole a good one. Also, it seems that God's loving disposition towards humans translates into some seeking and saving activity when the creatures sin (Luke 15). If either of these arguments or others like them succeeds, then a world of universal damnation is not a "live option" for God to actualize. Yet if God is *required* to save (at least some) humans by "necessity" of his love or of avoiding something as unfitting as a fundamentally bad world, how is salvation *gracious*? Must God's refraining from doing a particular thing in a particular context be metaphysically possible in order for that action to be gracious? It seems this is not the case. Following Anselm, I deny that God saves unwilling, *merely* out of necessity. Rather, God *freely* "subjects himself to the necessity of conferring a benefit, and he does not remain subject to the necessity against his will . . . In fact, this should not be called necessity, but grace (*gratia*), since he undertook it or remains subject to it freely (*gratis*), with nothing compelling him." (Anselm, CDH II.5, quote taken from Anselm, *Basic Writings*, trans. Thomas Williams (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 2007), 292.) In actualizing a possible world with humans who fall, God freely "obligated" himself (as it were) to see his basic original purposes for humanity fulfilled in some appropriate way, and he has done so through the salvation of the elect (and perhaps, in a very limited way, in the reprobate, too; see the chapter on reconciliationism).

⁵⁷ For an example that is typical of this sort of mistake, see Adams, "Hell and the God of Justice," 434.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have addressed the disproportionality problem of hell, which was laid out in detail. I have concluded that annihilationism can resolve the issue but fails with the additional criteria of harmony with Scripture, harmony with the tradition, and coherence with the rest of theology, including the doctrine of God, hamartiology, and eschatology. I considered the continuing sin view, showing that it solves the problem but fails with some of the additional criteria, particularly in creating an eschatological cosmic dualism. In defending the infinite seriousness view, I argued for the legitimacy of the status principle and that all sin is infinitely serious because of the nature of God. In the next chapter I will argue that reconciliationism, as a type of infinite seriousness view, best succeeds with the additional criteria. Finally, I argued that the annihilationists' frequent appeal to divine love does not actually benefit their view and that a theologically robust understanding of God's love is compatible with traditionalism.

By showing that both traditionalism and annihilationism can be compatible with God's love, justice, and goodness, I have removed the third support for annihilationism. The second support was swept out in showing that the view is incompatible with important doctrines in Christian theology, and the first was removed by showing that traditionalism is more exegetically plausible than annihilationism. With these three gone the case for annihilation has been undercut, the view cannot stand, and the negative aspect of my thesis is complete.

In the next chapter I move on to the positive aspect of this project. Dismantling the case for annihilationism is not enough if a better alternative is not available. I will now turn to present just such a superior option: reconciliationism.

Chapter 5

A Hell of a View: Reconciliation through Eternal Punishment

Thus far I have offered significant theological reasons to question annihilationism—reasons in addition to the exegetical difficulties the view faces. However, we might be willing to accept these difficulties if no better option were available. I have argued that annihilationism is fundamentally flawed; now I will argue that a much better view is available. Whereas up until now the focus has been the negative aspect of my thesis, this chapter will be largely constructive. In this chapter I will set forth some criteria of success for any view of hell. I will then argue that while other views fail to meet one or more of these criteria, there is one view that succeeds.

Criteria for Success

For any view of hell, while not exhaustive, I suggest that all the following desiderata must be met in order to consider the view successful and a viable option.

Exegetical Desiderata

The first desideratum to be met is exegetical; quite naturally, it is compatibility with the Scriptural teaching on hell, eternal punishment, and judgment in the life to come. Any view of hell must be able to provide consistent and exegetically plausible interpretations of these passages. I have already considered some of these texts in the first and second chapters,

and limitations prevent a fuller treatment of all the relevant passages here. Interested readers can reference the relevant literature.¹ However, building from what I regard to be responsible exegesis (in conjunction with appropriate consideration of the tradition), I can here suggest a core teaching from these texts, some essentials that any doctrine of hell should not abandon.

As difficult of a doctrine as it may be, it seems to me that eternal punishment cannot be purged from the Scriptures without doing some degree of violence to the text. Warnings of the reality of hell come frequently from the lips of Jesus himself. Once this basic doctrine is in place, however, the particulars are not so straightforward: what is essential to any view of eternal punishment, a “core” teaching? Unfortunately, a brief and incomplete sketch must suffice. First and foremost, hell involves distributive retributive punishment—each individual receives the punishment due to her in proportion to her deeds; God actively requites to the reprobate the deserved punishment for their sin (Matt. 16:27). God is “dealing out retribution” to the finally impenitent, and they will “pay the penalty of eternal destruction” (2 Thes. 1:5-10). Second, hell is the destruction of the sinner—not, I contend, the extinction or annihilation, but *destruction*; their existence is one of loss and ruin in comparison to the blessedness of the saints (Gal. 6:8). The reprobate are forever broken shells of what they might have been. Third, hell is banishment, separation from God’s presence and exclusion

¹ See the list in Evangelical Alliance- Commission on Unity and Truth among Evangelicals- ACUTE, *The Nature of Hell: A Report* (London: ACUTE, 2000), 36-52. For a more detailed treatment of the relevant texts, see Robert A. Peterson, *Hell on Trial: The Case for Eternal Punishment* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1995), 21-96. For an (nearly) exhaustive list of all the relevant texts and discussion from an annihilationist perspective, see Edward Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of Final Punishment* (Houston, TX: Providential Press, 1982).

from his kingdom (Matt. 7:21-23). In judgment God banishes the wicked from the heavenly city, and they are excluded from experiencing his presence of blessing. Fourth, there is an eternal and more-or-less binary distinction between the righteous and the wicked that is actually realized. In other words, hell is populated.² This contrast starts in this current age (a theme running through the whole canon; for example, see Ps. 1) and is finally and fully realized in the eschaton (Matt. 25:31-46; Rev. 20:10-15; 21:1-8).

The second desideratum to be met is also exegetical and is this: compatibility with passages that speak of the cosmic and universal eschatological reconciliation and consummation of all things (these passages might be shorthand as ‘the universalist hope’). These texts, often considered a mainstay of universalism, seem to teach an unqualified reconciliation and restored cosmic order, one that any view of hell must not preclude. I will consider three of these passages in detail (1 Cor. 15:28; Col. 1:20; Phil. 2:9-11), first giving a summary of the implications for this desideratum, followed by exegetical support.³

² I recognize that up to this point a universalist position could affirm that hell *would be* retributive punishment, destruction, and banishment; it would then deny that anyone actually meets this possibility. Below I will address this matter and other difficulties with universalism.

³ Two related passages are worth mentioning. First is the passing mention of “restoring all things” (ἀποκαταστάσεως πάντων) in Acts 3:21, taken up by Origen, who was followed by more than a few, to build a theology of *Apokatastasis*. Proper exegesis, however, shows that this phrase refers to a realization of *prior prophetic promises*, perhaps with a hint towards universal cosmic restoration to the original created order but certainly not entailing universal salvation. See I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 94, Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles, a Commentary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971), 208, Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 29, and

1 Cor. 15:28: God Will Be All in All

God being “all in all” means that God’s rule will be unmediated, direct, and unchallenged. It is a statement describing the restored order, the reconciliation of all things. No longer will there be the rift between God and everything in the cosmos that sin brought about, but when death—as representative of the effects of sin—is destroyed, the whole cosmos will be right and right with him again. This does not necessarily preclude eternal punishment because the verse speaking of defeat, destruction, and subjection in the immediate context seems to allow hell to be part of the grander whole.

Structurally, vv. 24-28 constitute a chiasm, with v. 26 at the center. V. 28 is paired with vv. 24a and 24b, where God being all in all is conceptually linked with the coming of

Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Anchor Bible (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1998), 288-289. Second is Eph. 1:10, where, at the fullness of time, τὰ πάντα will be “summed up” or “united” in Christ. Consensus on ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι is that it means “to sum up” or “to bring something to a main point,” rather than “to bring under one head.” Peter Thomas O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 111. See also M. Barth’s discussion in Markus Barth, *Ephesians*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 89-92. For God to “sum up” all things is for God to unify all things in Christ. The “in him” in this verse is not instrumental; rather Christ is the sphere: “Christ is the one *in whom* God chooses to sum up the cosmos, the one in whom he restores harmony to the universe.” (italics original) O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 111-112. “Things in heaven and things on earth” is more than just a reference to the totality of the cosmos; that these represent two spheres of reality undergirds a theme running through the epistle, and Christ “sums up” and unifies both. Ibid., 112. The unification in this verse seemingly also includes the reprobate.

“the end,” where the son hands over the kingdom to the father.⁴ In v. 26, “the death” is personified as the last enemy whose defeat represents the most important victory: the undoing of the effects of sin, the cosmic overturning of the curse of Adam. V. 26 is a pivot in the chiasm, where before it all opposition in the cosmos is defeated and destroyed and after it all things are put into subjection and subordination, restoring the harmonious created order.⁵ In so emphasizing the destruction of death Paul is continuing his argument for the resurrection: that Christ’s resurrection will ultimately lead to God being “all in all.”⁶

In this passage, saying that God will be “all in all” or “all things in all” is not to assert a metaphysical position or to affirm any sort of pantheism⁷ but rather is to speak of God’s relationship to creation, his unmitigated sovereign rule over the entire cosmos, without challenge and without opposition.⁸ As Garland says, “It applies to the pacification and

⁴ John Paul Heil, *The Rhetorical Role of Scripture in 1 Corinthians*, SBL Monograph Series (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 212-213.

⁵ Ibid., 215.

⁶ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 759. See also David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 714.

⁷ See Craig S. Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 127-128, Fee, *First Corinthians*, 760, Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1975), 275, and Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 714.

⁸ See Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 275. Also, David Fredrickson has an interesting article in which he argues that God being all in all is not to be seen in terms of sovereignty but rather in terms of personal relations, including things like love and need fulfillment, where there is a personal identity through participation. See David

redemption of the created order and is similar to saying that God is over all. It affirms God's undivided and total power over the enemies."⁹ In this eternal state "... God's will will be supreme in every quarter and in every way."¹⁰ Fitzmyer says that "all in all" means that "All will be ordered by God to himself directly, with no further need of mediation, not even of the 'kingdom' or the 'reign' of Christ (vv. 24, 25)."¹¹ Regarding τὰ πάντα in v. 28, Thiselton says, "... Paul sees God as the source and goal of a world in need of reconciliation and salvation through (δι' αὐτοῦ, Rom 11:36) God in Christ."¹²

The scope of this final sovereignty is cosmically unlimited. "All" in vv. 20-28 is "a symbol of comprehensiveness and completeness."¹³ More specifically, in v. 28 "'All things' [τὰ πάντα] would include the created order, the world, the heavenly powers, and human

Fredrickson, "God, Christ, and All Things in 1 Corinthians 15:28," *Word & World* XVIII, no. 3 (1998): 260. Even if Fredrickson is right in this, the implications for a doctrine of eternal punishment would be much the same: sin shall be no more.

⁹ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 714.

¹⁰ Fee, *First Corinthians*, 760.

¹¹ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 575.

¹² Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 1239.

¹³ Scott M. Lewis, *So That God May Be All in All: The Apocalyptic Message of 1 Corinthians 15, 12-34*, *Tesi Gregoriana. Serie Teologia* 42 (Roma: Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1998), 149.

beings.”¹⁴ The “all” in ἐν παντι (v. 28) is the whole of the human realm, all that is experienced by humans.¹⁵ Fee states it well:

In Paul's view the consummation of redemption includes the whole sphere of creation as well (cf. Rom. 8:19-22; Col. 1:15-20). Nothing lies outside God's redemptive purposes in Christ, in whom all things finally will be “united” (Eph. 1:9-10). Therefore, at the death of death the final rupture in the universe will be healed and God alone will rule over all beings, banishing those who have rejected his offer of life and lovingly governing all those who by grace have entered into God's “rest.”¹⁶

God being “all in all” is very much universalistic but does not necessarily entail universal salvation. It is about the restored order, the reconciliation of all things, of which the reprobate will be participants, but by some means other than salvation.

Col. 1:20: To Reconcile to Himself All Things

Christ is the means of reconciliation but is also, as the one preeminent in all things, the subject of reconciliation (v. 20) as all things will be reconciled to him. The scope of this reconciliation is unlimited and presumably extends even to the reprobate: “all things” includes

¹⁴ Ibid., 69.

¹⁵ Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 1239. See also Martinus C. de Boer, *The Defeat of Death: Apocalyptic Eschatology in 1 Corinthians 15 and Romans 5*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament, Supplement Series 22 (Sheffield, England: JSNT Press, 1988), 126.

¹⁶ Fee, *First Corinthians*, 760.

everything in the cosmos, sentient or otherwise.¹⁷ The cosmos and everything in it has been afflicted with a rupture, and the necessary reconciliation is found in Christ. The Christ-event has universal significance and the dimensions are cosmic—by the Cross, the cosmos are restored to an Edenic harmony, brought into a “renewed oneness and wholeness.”¹⁸ For the redeemed, this reconciliation and peace is available now, in the present (v. 22), but such present reality is not a given—it is only true of the Colossians if they continue in their belief (v. 23). Reconciliation is achieved through Christ alone, but reconciliation and salvation are not coterminous and there is nothing in this passage that precludes other means of reconciliation.¹⁹

¹⁷ See the argument for this in Robert A. Peterson, "'To Reconcile to Himself All Things': Colossians 1:20," *Presbyterion* 36, no. 1 (2010): 37-46. See also Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 134-137.

¹⁸ James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 104.

¹⁹ Usually in the New Testament, “reconcile” points to what happens between God and sinners through salvation. Extending normative to comprehensive, a few exegetes wish to always limit reconciliation to just those human beings who rightly respond to the gospel invitation. I. Howard Marshall is counted among this group, making a distinction between reconciliation becoming an actual reality for some (as in v. 23), and the seemingly universal reconciliation in v. 20, which he sees to simply be “God’s provision of reconciliation for the world.” I. Howard Marshall in Robert A. Guelich, ed. *Unity and Diversity in New Testament Theology: Essays in Honor of George E. Ladd* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 16-127. As Moo has pointed out (Moo, *Colossians & Philemon*, 134-135), this will not do, because the context and the repeated use of “all things” for the entire universe indicates that the scope cannot be restricted in this way. Marshall seems to be limited to the concept of reconciliation through salvation by acceptance of the gospel (which, granted, is the focus of much of the NT’s treatment of reconciliation, but it need not be taken as exhaustively definitive), while the verse demands that

Crucial for the current purposes with this verse is an understanding of the word “reconcile.” Strictly, the words translated “reconcile” mean to change something from one state to a quite different state.²⁰ In Paul’s usage, the word “reconcile” (ἀποκαταλλάσσω in Col. 1:20, 22; Eph. 2:16; elsewhere in Paul καταλλάσσω) describes an act or a relationship between God and mankind or creation.²¹ God is always the agent of reconciliation and here Christ is said to be the agent.²² “All things” will be reconciled to God, but from that it does not follow that everything and everyone will be reconciled in the same way, as Henri Blocher has noted.²³ For believers, reconciliation is brought about by salvation. For the part of the cosmos

reconciliation be universal. The need, then, is to explain different possible means and types of reconciliation that can account for inanimate creation, rulers and powers, and, by implication, the reprobate.

²⁰ Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, and Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, Baker's Greek New Testament Library 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000). S.v. ἀποκαταλλάσσω

²¹ Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke, *Colossians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1994), 213-214. According to M. Barth, the addition of the prefix ἀπο is probably just stylistic. Similarly, see F. F. Bruce, "Colossian Problems, Pt 4: Christ as Conqueror and Reconciler," *Bibliotheca sacra* 141, no. 564 (1984): 292. See also the discussion in Moo, *Colossians & Philemon*, 134-135.

²² This passage assumes that the cosmic order has suffered a rupture. Reconciliation is necessary, and it comes through the Christ event. See Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon: A Commentary on the Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1971), 59.

²³ Blocher says, “‘Reconciliation’ does not imply *salvation*, here, as independent exegetes have recognized; it means the restoration of order, of all within God's order, ‘pacification,’ as all are brought back into the divinely-ruled harmony.” Nigel M. de S. Cameron, ed. *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1992), 303.

that is non-sentient, reconciliation is dependent on the completed redemption of humans (Rom. 8:19-23). For the “principalities and powers,” the reconciliation spoken of in Col. 1:20 is best understood as finding realization through their conquest detailed later in the letter (Col. 2:13-15); reconciliation for them “means more of what is understood as pacification, the imposing of peace, something brought about by conquest.”²⁴

Phil. 2:9-11: Every Knee Will Bow and Every Tongue Confess

Jesus’ dominion as Lord is such that when his lordship is perceived—in the present, by some, but in the end, by everyone—the universal response will be acts of homage, openly and publically declaring and acknowledging that which can no longer be denied. All sentient beings in the cosmos will bow the knee and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.²⁵

This passage draws from Isa. 45:20ff, where God declares that one day everyone will worship him.²⁶ In Philippians this passage is applied to Christ. The name bestowed to Christ

²⁴ Bruce, “Colossian Problems, Pt 4,” 293. See also Peter T. O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1982), 56. O’Brien argues that the pacification in this passage is essentially a type or means of reconciliation.

²⁵ This, agrees Calvin, includes the demons. Calvin in commenting on Phil. 2:10-11 says the devils “are not, and never will be, subject of their own accord and by cheerful submission; but Paul is not speaking here of voluntary obedience.” John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*, vol. 11, Calvin's Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965), 252.

²⁶ The universality and limitlessness is expressed in terms that even encompass all of creation. See Richard Bauckham’s essay in Ralph P. Martin and Brian J. Dodd, eds., *Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 131, 133. Bauckham also mentions Rev. 5:13 as depicting the worship of Christ to include the whole of creation.

is “Lord” (really, the tetragrammaton!), revealing his true nature.²⁷ Vv. 10-11 are a ἵνα clause, stating that both the purpose and result of God “highly exalting” and “bestowing the name on” Jesus is universal bowing and confessing. This passage has a strong sense of confidence: vv. 10-11 are not conditional or expressing a mere intent but a future certainty.²⁸ Ralph P. Martin rightly describes the bowing of the knee in this passage as “a mark of extreme abasement and submission (as in Eph. iii.14) and denotes that the universal homage marks the subjection of those who so kneel to the lordship of Christ.”²⁹ *Every* knee shall bow, and *every* tongue confess, the scope of which is unlimited: “in heaven and on earth and under the earth.”³⁰ Lexically “confess” can mean either “admit and acknowledge publically” or

²⁷ Peter Thomas O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 237-238. See also Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 91, and Bauckham in Martin and Dodd, eds., *Where Christology Began*, 131.

²⁸ Commentators seem to be in agreement that the ἵνα clause should be understood as both purpose and result; for example, see O'Brien, *Philippians*, 239, John Henry Paul Reumann, *Philippians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 373, and Ralph P. Martin, *Carmen Christi: Philippians 2:5-11 in Recent Interpretation and in the Setting of Early Christian Worship*, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 249. An exception to this is Hawthorne, who, in an appeal to human free will, considers it to be merely stating purpose or intent—see Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 94. For a convincing argument directly against Hawthorne, see Moisés Silva, *Philippians*, 2nd ed., Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 111-112.

²⁹ Martin, *Carmen Christi*, 265.

³⁰ The stating of the three tiered structure serves to explain the “every” as modifying knee and tongue and should be taken to include the reprobate, however one might understand “in heaven and on earth and under the earth.” It

“proclaim with thanksgiving and confession of faith,” but the former is preferred as it best fits the context of vv. 9-11 and Isa. 45:20ff.³¹

The timing of this universal homage is not clear—is it current, on account of the ascension, or future, perhaps at the parousia?—but probably follows Paul’s (and the NT’s) eschatological already/not yet tension.³² Ruemann captures the idea: “Believers are part of a broader company giving homage to Jesus ‘in the heavens, on earth, and in the underworld.’ Not ‘genuflecting every time the name “Jesus” is mentioned,’ but submission when the title ‘Lord’ for Jesus is perceived. Perceived in his true identity? That happens for some in the present; it will obtain for all in God’s future time.”³³

Any view of hell, in order to satisfy this second desideratum, must be able to strongly affirm the universal scope of restoration, reconciliation, and consummation that is present in these passages.

seems preferable to consider the phrase to mean all rational beings, be they human, angelic or demonic, dead or alive, but even if one interprets the phrase to be stating a less specific cosmic scope, the reprobate would be included. For further discussions see O'Brien, *Philippians*, 244-245, Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 93, and Martin, *Carmen Christi*, 257-265.

³¹ Most recent scholars follow this conclusion, for example see O'Brien, *Philippians*, 247-248, Martin, *Carmen Christi*, 263, and Bockmuehl, who even says of the word "... it can occasionally be used of acknowledging something against one's will ..." Markus N. A. Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, Black's New Testament Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 147.

³² Martin, *Carmen Christi*, 268.

³³ Reumann, *Philippians*, 374.

Theological Desiderata

The first two desiderata are exegetical in nature; the remaining four are theological, which I will state briefly and then elaborate upon in what follows. The third desideratum to be met is this: affirming that the punishment for sin must be infinite. The argument for this can be found in the previous chapter, where I present a theological argument in discussing the status principle. The fourth is that an eternal cosmological dualism must not be entailed (see the discussion in the previous chapter on how some forms of traditionalism fail this test). The fifth is this: any view of hell must be able to give a satisfactory account of God's love. The sixth and final desideratum to be met is compatibility and harmony with other eschatological themes and with one's broader theology.

From the exegetical and theological considerations that give rise to these desiderata, one view arises naturally and is, I will argue, successful at meeting these criteria where other views fail on one or more points. Further, while often overlooked or ignored, this view is not a theological novelty, but evidences some support within the tradition.

Introducing Reconciliationism

Put succinctly, reconciliationism is the view that all sinning ceases in the eternal state, and in some sense the reprobate participate in the cosmic reconciliation of all things to God: they are reconciled, not salvifically but in and through punishment. They do not experience the divine presence of blessing, but instead experience punishment, loss, shame, humiliation, pain, suffering, subjection, and lucidity of their wrongdoing and of God's holiness and justice. They are defeated rebels, no longer able to continue in rebellion. They acquiescently accept their judgment and in so doing glorify God, under and through punishment praising him for

his justice, an ability brought by the lucidity of God's right and their wrong. This view embraces a universal and cosmic reconciliation of all things to God: the finally impenitent are part of a restored divine order not by receiving salvation but by their subjection and punishment.

Reconciliationism provides modifications to the traditional view of hell that alleviate some of the anxieties that serve as points of departure into other views. If successful, it could serve as a view more winsome to the annihilationist and the universalist, even if this middle ground still lies within traditionalist territory.

While reconciliationism is best categorized as a refined traditionalism, the view parts ways with certain types of traditionalisms on some key points. On the matter of which points, and why, I hope to provide a detailed answer, as the view here argued should be regarded as a purification of the traditional view, the expunging of problematic non-essentials that can and should be jettisoned. Preliminarily, such deadweight includes the eternity of sin, hell as the realm of Satanic and demonic dominion, a hell that is outside the scope of the "restoration of all things," the reprobate sinking deeper into their own dark pleasure, and an eternal cosmic dualism where God is not "all in all." In this chapter I will argue that the modifications reconciliationism makes to the traditional view enjoy biblical support. In excising the problematic and unbiblical additions that have crept into some traditionalisms, and especially in taking seriously some of the "universalist" passages, it seems that reconciliationism might turn out to be the most biblically faithful view of eternal punishment on offer.

The view argued in this chapter seeks to navigate perilous theological waters, steering an essentially traditionalist course but one that takes seriously the "universalist" passages in Scripture. While fundamentally a modified traditionalism, to distinguish the view I will adopt

the term “reconciliationism.” Also, the groundwork has recently been laid by Henri Blocher, one of few contemporary defenders of this view (although he does not explicitly use the label), and in this chapter I will develop and extend his ideas, making adjustments as necessary.³⁴ I will also at places draw from several theologians in the nineteenth and early twentieth century who held views with varying similarities to reconciliationism: T. R. Birks, James Orr, J. R. Illingworth, Samuel Garratt, and Langton Clarke. Stephen Williams has written a helpful article providing a survey of their views on hell which I will not reproduce here, but he rightly concludes that these thinkers, despite familial similarities, probably cannot be synthesized into one unified view.³⁵ Certainly each would have significant points of departure from the position defended here.

Reconciliationism and the Exegetical Desiderata

Reconciliationism satisfies the first desideratum—consistency with the Scriptural teaching on eternal punishment—and maintains that hell is retributive punishment, destruction, and banishment. The view can harmoniously accommodate all the passages on hell, eternal punishment, future judgment, and the like; what follows is a brief sketch that will be expanded upon throughout the rest of the chapter. It affirms that eternal punishment involves the conscious experience of penal suffering, an existence that is subjectively negative (Matt. 8:12, Mark 9:43). Further on this point—the devil and his demons are tormented (Matt.

³⁴ For another example of a contemporary advocate of the view, see Andy Saville, “Hell without Sin - a Renewed View of a Disputed Doctrine,” *Churchman* 119, no. 3 (2005): 243-261, and Andy Saville, “Reconciliationism - a Forgotten Evangelical Doctrine of Hell,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 79, no. 1 (2007): 35-51.

³⁵ Stephen N. Williams, “The Question of Hell and Salvation: Is There a Fourth View?,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 57, no. 2 (2006).

8:29; Rev. 20:10) and humans who share the fate of hell with the devil experience the same conscious torment (Luke. 16:23, 28; Rev. 14:10-11; 20:15). It affirms final punishment as ‘eternal’ in the sense of ‘everlasting’ in duration, not merely in effect. The reprobate have continued existence where they experience everlasting punishment, as the redeemed experience continued existence in everlasting life (Matt. 25:41, 46; Mark 9:48). Reconciliationism posits a punishment inflicted by God’s judgment, where God is in some sense active (2 Thes. 1:6-9). Other versions of traditionalism, often those cashing heavily on human free will, sometimes withdraw to a hell of mere separation where God is basically passive; final punishment, while not excluding the outworkings of sin, is unduly truncated if limited to such. Hell is permanent: unlike in many types of annihilationism or in purgatorial views, in reconciliationism, the final state really is the final state (the entirety of Rev. 20-22 strongly suggests the fixed permanency of the state of affairs in both the lake of fire and the new heaven(s) and new earth). Reconciliationism takes seriously the biblical teaching on hell, recognizing that the relevant passages are not empty threats or mere kerygmatic or existential statements about what is ultimately an unreality.³⁶ Finally, it affirms the universal resurrection and final judgment (Dan. 12:2, John 5:28-29).

Charges that reconciliationism, at least as I present it, undermines the seriousness of hell are unfounded. Since my reconciliationism does not mitigate any of the severity of eternal punishment it cannot rightly be accused of watering down the warnings that are an

³⁶ My presentation of the view makes no commitment to the number or scope of the saved compared to the reprobate, nor does it entail one particular view on the requirements for salvation. While not my own view, I see no reason why reconciliationism could not be made to work with some inclusivisms or pluralisms, provided they are sufficiently “Christian.”

essential part of the scriptural teachings on hell; in fact, it might do fuller justice to those warnings. Without compromising the solemnity of hell, my view does change the nature and content of what is being warned against. Distorted versions of the traditional view posit an eternity of seemingly arbitrary and cruel torture inflicted by an unbecomingly vindictive God, by Satan and demons, by other sinners, or by one's own continued sin and blasphemous hatred for God. In great contradistinction, my view sees the horrors of hell arising from the experience of a lucid awareness of God's goodness, of the sinner's own guilt, of a paralyzing shame and regret, of being the offender against the True Good and thus the object of divine wrath, and of the retributive punishment that involves being irrevocably cut off from the presence of divine blessing and from even the possibility of a love relationship with God. Samuel Garratt makes a similar point about deterrential power and distortions of the traditional view when he says "... I believe that if it was understood that in eternal punishment God will not leave men alone, or allow them to corrupt one another, but by His stern yet loving discipline restrain sin and lead to submission, wicked men would fear it more ..."³⁷ In reconciliationism, the awfulness of hell derives not from random and unrelated suffering but from the punitive suffering of a sinner experiencing the end of divine forbearance, the perfect defeat of sin, and the ultimate divine victory over all opposition. Hell is hell because the good and righteous God has the last word on evil.

Reconciliationism satisfies the second desideratum: compatibility with the universal reconciliation and consummation of all things in the eschaton. All things in the cosmos—whether in heaven, on the earth, or under the earth—will be subject to the uncontested

³⁷ Samuel Garratt, *Veins of Silver, Etc.*, 2nd ed. (London: Charles J. Thynne, 1904), 169. Although describing eternal punishment as "loving discipline" may not be entirely helpful or accurate, his basic point stands.

sovereign reign of God. A perfect cosmic order will be restored, and *all things* will be reconciled to God through Christ. All this, however, in no way precludes eternal punishment as the universalist asserts, but only rules out a hell of a certain sort. Reconciliationism fits very well with the eschatological reality portrayed in these passages.

I have above given exegetical consideration to these passages; here I will explain how reconciliationism accords with them (where again this is a brief sketch that will be expanded in the rest of this chapter). In Eph. 1:10, at the fullness of time, “all things” will be summed up or united in Christ. Fitting well with this verse, eternal punishment in reconciliationism has Christ as a focal point and can speak of a unification by means of the pacification and defeat of the reprobate. In 1 Cor. 15:28, in the end when Christ hands over the kingdom to the Father, God will be “all in all.” In this restored order where God truly is “all in all,” reconciliationism sees the reprobate participating in this reality by way of their punishment and defeat. It will not do, as in some traditionalist views, to see hell as involving continued existence but yet somehow outside the scope of this reality. If God’s rule genuinely will be unmediated, direct, and unchallenged, the reprobate cannot continue in rebellion and sin.³⁸ In

³⁸ Interestingly, some annihilationists have argued against the traditional view on the basis of this verse. Atkinson writes, “While sinners live and continue to sin, how can God be all in all?” Basil F. C. Atkinson, *Life and Immortality: An Examination of the Nature and Meaning of Life and Death as They Are Revealed in the Scriptures* (Taunton: Phoenix Press, 1969), 112. See also Le Roy Edwin Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers; the Conflict of the Ages over the Nature and Destiny of Man* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1965), vol 1 23-5, 269, 301-302, 413-414, 518-519, and David Lawrence Edwards and John R. W. Stott, *Evangelical Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 319. Harold Guillebaud makes a similar argument that draws from Eph. 1:9-10 and Phil. 2:9-10 in addition to 1 Cor. 15:24-28. In his view, the submission “under the earth” in Phil. 2:10 is part of the reprobate’s defeat and penal

Col. 1:20, *all things* will be reconciled to Christ, and while the focus of this passage is the reconciliation believers currently have in salvation, it does not preclude the possibility of other means of reconciliation.³⁹ Like the principalities and powers, the reprobate participate in the final reconciliation by way of conquest and pacification. Further, this verse also states that Christ is the agent of all reconciliation; certainly in salvation but also in judgment, for Christ is the agent of God's judgment (Matt. 25:31-33; John 5:22, 27; Rev. 19:11, 15). Reconciliation is the bringing of all things under the divine rule and order, whether by salvation or by defeat. The reprobate, though not explicitly mentioned here, seem to share in the same fate of defeat as opposing powers, the devil, and his angels (Matt. 25:41).⁴⁰ The universe and everything in

suffering before annihilation, but the "summing up" of all things and God being "all in all" precludes the possibility of their everlasting existence *in any state whatsoever*, because their mere existence would constitute an evil. Harold E. Guillebaud, *The Righteous Judge: A Study of the Biblical Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment* (Taunton: Phoenix Press, 1964), 5-6. For an argument similar to Guillebaud's, see Henry Smith Warleigh, *Twelve Discussions Proving the Extinction of Evil Persons and Things* (London: E. Stock, 1873), 219-220. In my judgment the annihilationist has a valid point but an invalid conclusion. God being all in all, where his reign is unqualified in a perfected cosmos, excludes the possibility of continued sin and evil, but this does not require the non-existence of the reprobate.

³⁹ On this Moo writes, "The implications of this reconciliation for unbelievers is not entirely clear from Scripture. [Ruling out universalism and annihilationism] ... Perhaps, however, we might tentatively think that reconciliation will mean that unbelievers will themselves, though suffering the torments of Hell, nevertheless cease to sin and express remorse for their sin." He then cites Blocher and Stephen Williams. Moo, *Colossians & Philemon*, 136 fn 218.

⁴⁰ For an excellent discussion of Col. 1:20 as it relates to this issue, see Peter Thomas O'Brien, "Col. 1:20 and the Reconciliation of All Things," *Reformed Theological Review* 33, no. 2 (1974): 51-53. See also O'Brien,

it are reconciled in that they will be subjected to the Lord, bringing about a state of pacification and peace; but this is realized by quite diverse routes.⁴¹ As F. F. Bruce puts well, “The peace effected by the death of Christ may be freely accepted, or it may be imposed.”⁴² In Phil. 2:9-11, upon perceiving Jesus’ true identity, every knee will bow to him and every tongue will confess his lordship. All sentient beings in the cosmos will bow the knee and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.⁴³ The redeemed do so in loving adoration, the reprobate in subjection, shame, and defeat—not with contrived and insincere external lip service but as an expression of their internal recognition of the undeniable worth, goodness, and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is an open acknowledgement of their guilt and shame upon perceiving Jesus’ true identity. *Every* knee shall bow, and *every* tongue confess, the scope of

Colossians, Philemon, 54-57. O’Brien reaches similar conclusions: the reprobate are included within the cosmic reconciliation through defeat.

⁴¹ See Peterson, “‘To Reconcile...’,” 43. On Paul’s presenting reconciliation to include “all things, whether on earth or in heaven,” Peterson says, “In so doing the apostle teaches that Christ accomplished a cosmic reconciliation, though that concept needs to be defined.” Later he writes, “... the Son of God died and rose again on the third day to accomplish the reconciliation of human beings, angels, and the creation itself, *mutatis mutandis*.” (italics original) *ibid.*, 44. From this framework, reconciliationism can be seen as explaining the *mutatis mutandis* when it comes to the reprobate.

⁴² F. F. Bruce, “Colossian Problems, Pt 2: The ‘Christ Hymn’ of Colossians 1:15-20,” *Bibliotheca sacra* 141, no. 562 (1984): 109.

⁴³ See Bauckham’s essay in Martin and Dodd, eds., *Where Christology Began*, 134-137. Bauckham argues that the acts of homage and worship in this passage are indicative of recognition of Christ’s unique divine identity. Since the scope of those who will worship is unrestricted (all creation), reconciliationism gives an account of the reprobate that accords with this eschatological reality.

which is unlimited: “in heaven and on earth and under the earth,” which includes both the redeemed and the reprobate in acknowledging Jesus’ rule. The reprobate bow and confess as one defeated and conquered.⁴⁴ As O’Brien points out, this is in significant accord with Isa. 45:20ff (which is drawn from in Phil. 2:9-11), where the future reality of universal worship is an irrevocable truth (v. 23) and at the same time “all who have raged against him will come to him and be put to shame (v. 24).⁴⁵

Reconciliationism and the Theological Desiderata

In the rest of this chapter, I detail how reconciliationism satisfies each of the theological desiderata, but here a brief summary can be offered. Meeting the third desideratum, punishment in reconciliationism is infinite in virtue of it being everlasting. The fourth, avoiding an eternal cosmological dualism, is a feature of reconciliationism distinguishing it from most other traditionalisms—in the end, sin and evil will entirely be done away with—completely eradicated—despite the existence of hell. The fifth—giving a satisfactory account of God’s love—is accomplished by first carefully considering just what it might mean for God to love sinners and then insisting that in reconciliationism in a certain sense love is shown to the reprobate without compromising punishment or divine wrath towards sinners. The sixth and final desideratum, harmony with other eschatological and broader theological themes—is accomplished with reconciliationism by providing an account in which the divine victory and consummation of all the redeemed and restored cosmos is compatible with eternal punishment, and how eternal punishment might have a theological and

⁴⁴ For hints towards this idea, see O’Brien, *Philippians*, 250. See also Bockmuehl, *Philippians*, 146-147.

⁴⁵ O’Brien, *Philippians*, 243.

even christological focus. All of this requires much discussion and defense, and will soon be fleshed out in the more extensive extrapolation of the view.

The Rarity of Reconciliationism?

Before presenting the view in detail, one issue bears mentioning and a few words are in order. The apparent rarity of this view could be a stumbling block for some, or at least a cause for concern. The novelty of the view is actually debatable, as elements of it show up in various places throughout the tradition. As a fourth view distinct from traditionalism, annihilationism, and universalism it is perhaps rare, but not so as a refinement of traditionalism. That said, one does wish to find more explicit representation of reconciliationism. Some of the aforementioned nineteenth century reconciliationists felt the weight of this problem. In a context in which many Victorians regarded the traditional view—even the worst of it—necessary for the “commoners” as a deterrent for sin and antisocial behavior, even if the educated upper echelon of society considered the doctrine barbaric, some reconciliationists feared that the masses might use reconciliationism licentiously and thought that in God’s providence he has hidden it from all but those divines who are diligent to look for it.⁴⁶ Yet such responses to these difficulties are possibly an overreaction: it seems the

⁴⁶ For example, Birks says his view is not plainly laid out in Scripture because doing so would soften the clear contrast of reward and punishment therein. See T. R. Birks, *The Victory of Divine Goodness*, Second ed. (London: Rivingtons, 1870), 45-46. Garratt says, “The blessed truth as to the loving and holy purpose of everlasting punishment is a pearl to be carefully handled, a secret not to be too rashly divulged, but told to God’s children, or to those who are thinking of God wrongly and need to be taught that He is indeed love.” Samuel Garratt, *World without End* (London: W. Hunt & Co., 1886), 228.

problem of hiddenness and rarity has teeth if reconciliationism is a distinct fourth view of hell, much less so if it is a purified form of traditionalism.

Perhaps the minority status of the view can, in part, be explained by the inferential nature of the position. Reconciliationism seeks to synthesize broad, seemingly disparate theological strands flowing from eschatological pictures given to us in Scripture—for example, how the finally impenitent will be thrown into the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth, while at the same time God will be all in all and every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord (Matt. 8:12; 1 Cor. 15:28; Phil. 2:9-11). The way forward must be forged by responsible inference, putting together doctrines taught more clearly in Scripture, because in this age our view of the eternal state is somewhat fuzzy; we are given glimpses of that future reality but it still has elements of mystery. When it comes to issues of eschatology, we only “see in a mirror dimly” (1 Cor. 13:12), but we do see a bit, and we can, with reverence and caution, put together some of the pieces given to us to get a better picture. James Orr states this inferentiality well:

Beyond lie *the eternal ages*, the secrets of which, known only to God, it is equally presumptuous and vain for man to attempt to penetrate. The veil, in Scripture, falls on what seems to be a duality, yet not to the exclusion of hints, even more, of a future final unification—a gathering up of all things in Christ as Head—when God is once more ‘all in all.’ Such language would seem to imply at least, a cessation of active opposition to the will of God—an acknowledgement universally of His authority and rule,—a reconciliation, in some form, on the part even of those outside the blessedness of the Kingdom with the order of the universe.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ James Orr, *Sin as a Problem of to-Day* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1910), 317-318. Italics original.

Reconciliationism Expounded

In this section I will give a detailed explanation and defense of reconciliationism. As stated above, the essential tenets of the traditional view seem unavoidable; but within this much is left open, including the form and means of the punishment, the psychological (and physical) state of the reprobate—particularly towards God, sin and the eternal state—, and much more. In forging out the view I will address the eternal existence of sin, the final state of the reprobate in hell, the purpose, nature, and means of eternal punishment with reconciliationism, divine patience, and the atonement and reconciliationism.

Sin Shall Be No More

Reconciliationism's biggest distinctive, probably its *sine qua non*, is that in the eternal state all sinning ceases: God's victory will be such so that sin shall be no more. Many other aspects of the view stem or derive from this fundamental insight. The ceasing of all sin means both the ceasing of sinful actions (including mental acts) and the ceasing of all sinful attitudes and dispositions. When evil is ultimately and finally vanquished, sinful acts and sinful hearts will nowhere be found.

In this regard reconciliationism diverges from a common stream in traditionalism which envisages sin continuing in hell.⁴⁸ Aquinas thinks sin (in this example, blasphemy) will continue, saying the reprobate in hell “retain their wicked will which is turned away from God's justice ...” and later “... this detestation of the Divine justice is, in them, the interior

⁴⁸ See the helpful survey of the trends in the tradition in J. H. Leckie, *The World to Come and Final Destiny*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1922), 188-207. The continuing sin view seems to be common.

blasphemy of the heart ...”⁴⁹ Although, in a hint of reconciliationist thinking, he seems to assume that there is a moral freezing at death: for Aquinas, the sinning in hell lacks culpability, “... in the damned, evil is not demeritorious, but is part of the punishment of damnation.” Hodge says that suffering in hell comes in part from “consequent unrestrained dominion of sin and sinful passions” and “... as the lost continue to sin forever they may justly be punished forever.”⁵⁰ Shedd likewise follows, writing, “... sin is actually being added to sin, in the future life, and the amount of guilt is accumulating.”⁵¹

While the majority view, some significant figures in the tradition do not advocate continuing sin, and reconciliationism is in good company in insisting that sin shall be no more. It is interesting that all of the major church creeds are silent on the issue of everlasting sin while affirming the return of Christ, the final judgment, and eternal punishment. Augustine, while not entirely clear on the matter, does say that the reprobate will have “no power to sin.”⁵² Calvin also hints at this, writing, “... but then the majesty of God, and also the justice which they have violated by their sins, are eternal. Justly, therefore, the memory of their iniquity does not perish.”⁵³ In speaking solely of the memory of the reprobate’s iniquity he could plausibly be understood as implying that just their memory of such remains, not further iniquity as well.

⁴⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*. 2^A2^{AE}, Q13 A4. See also Supplement Q98 A6.

⁵⁰ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3 Part IV Ch. IV Sect. 6.

⁵¹ William G. T. Shedd, *The Doctrine of Endless Punishment* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1986), 146.

⁵² Augustine, *Enchiridion*, Ch. xxix, sect. 111.

⁵³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III, 25, 5.

For being a mainstream of traditionalism, the continuing sin view has at best scant and speculative biblical support. No passages teach ongoing sin in hell and Blocher rightly decries the lack of even an attempt to give the view exegetical legs on which to stand.⁵⁴ Perhaps the only obvious potential verse in support of the view, Mark 3:29 (“he is guilty of an eternal sin”) is more naturally understood as describing guilt that remains than perpetual sinning, especially considering the context of the verse and its synoptic parallels.⁵⁵

D. A. Carson argues for continuing sin (calling the view “probable” but “hard to prove”) from Rev. 16:21 and 22:10-11, saying of the latter

Of course, the primary emphasis here is on the time from “now” *until* judgment: there is a kind of realized judgment, within time, that sometimes takes place. Nevertheless the parallelism is telling. If the holy and those who do right continue to be holy and to do right, *in anticipation of the perfect holiness and rightness to be lived and practiced throughout all eternity*, should we not also conclude that the vile continue their vileness *in anticipation of the vileness they will live and practice throughout all eternity?* (italics original)⁵⁶

Contra Carson, the parallelism is interesting because of the allusion to Dan. 12:9-10 in Rev. 22:10-11, not because it has any significant bearing on the continuation of sin in the final state. In Dan. 12:9 the words of prophecy are “closed up and sealed until the time of the end”; in Rev. 20:10 John is instructed *not* to “seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because

⁵⁴ See Blocher in Cameron, ed. *Universalism And...* 301.

⁵⁵ See Morna Dorothy Hooker, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Mark* (London: Continuum, 1991), 117. See also Blocher in Cameron, ed. *Universalism And...* 301-302.

⁵⁶ D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 533.

the time is near.” Dan. 12:10, “Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand.” Rev. 22:11, “Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy.” On the implications of appreciating the allusion to Daniel in this verse, Beale (in a work he co-edited with Carson) says the prediction in Dan. 12:9-10 is that some in the latter days will fail to recognize the “dawning fulfillment of prophecy” and continue in wickedness, while the righteous will understand and obey.⁵⁷ “The change from prediction in Daniel to imperatives in Rev. 22:11 expresses an awareness that Daniel’s prophecy is commencing fulfillment in John’s own time and that genuine believers should discern this revelation and respond positively.”⁵⁸ Carson has it backwards: the wicked currently continue in wickedness not in anticipation of their wickedness to be done in eternity but because, unlike the righteous, *they fail to anticipate* the beginning of the fulfillment of prophecy and the imminently coming judgment (v. 22:13). The answer to the question of continuing sin in hell is not found in this verse.

On Rev. 16:21, Carson says, “Moreover, does not Revelation 16:21 provide a portrait of those who are being punished and who curse God?”⁵⁹ In Rev. 16:21, large hailstones from heaven fell on people, “... and they cursed God for the plague of the hail ...” This theme is repeated thrice in this chapter, the other instances being v. 9 and v. 11, which also speak of

⁵⁷ G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 1157.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 1157.

⁵⁹ Carson, *The Gagging of God*, 533.

rebels cursing God, but unlike v. 21, they mention a refusal to repent from the wicked as they experience judgment from the plagues. The major problem with Carson's use of this verse is that, whether on an amillennialist or a premillennialist interpretation, there is good reason to think Rev. 16:21 is not particularly concerned with a chronology of events and thus does not shed light on the eternal state of the wicked. While the verse does come sequentially after the seventh bowl (which, in the amillennialist scheme, is a recapitulation of the final judgment), the placement of the hailstorm plague after the seventh bowl in vv. 17-20 is easily explained by stylistic factors rather than chronological ones. Seeing the eschaton as a new Exodus (on account of the linking of the final judgments with the Exodus plagues),⁶⁰ Beale argues that the hailstorm is linked with the cosmic events of the Sinai theophany that was invoked in v. 18, possibly because Ezek. 38:19-22 forms a motif of an earthquake followed by a hailstorm marking the final stroke of defeat of the end-time enemy.⁶¹ In explaining why they appear at the very end of Rev. 16, Beale says, "... the plague of hail together with the Sinai phenomena are placed last in Rev. 16:17-21 because the theophany is a more climatic event in Exodus and is placed there after the plagues."⁶² Their placement at the end of the chapter is plausibly explained by these stylistic considerations and means one should not draw conclusions regarding continuing sin from these verses: there is no reason to require Rev. 16:21 to be depicting the state of affairs after the final judgment. Things are even more problematic for

⁶⁰ See Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 600.

⁶¹ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 845.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 845.

Carson's appeal on a premillennialist reading. On this view, described in Rev. 16:14-16 and 19:17-21 is a battle led by the beast where the Lord destroys the rebellious army; the final battle of Rev. 20:7-10 is led by Satan and "includes the rest of the world." As Osborne says, "the details are sufficiently different to warrant the view of a second battle rather than a recapitulation of the first."⁶³ So the judgments in Rev. 16 are not final eternal punishment because it is dwellers of this earth who are described (v. 16:18 seems to indicate such), not those who are resurrected for judgment (Rev. 20:11-15). As to the lack of a mention of unrepentance in v. 21, this is likely because the seventh bowl is the final event before the eschaton (in which resurrection and final judgment will take place).⁶⁴

Richard Bauckham has a brief discussion that has bearing on this issue.⁶⁵ Bauckham says, in Revelation chapter 16, "the point is the response of those who finally harden themselves against all witness to the truth of God. The result of this hardening is their final assault against God's kingdom, in which they are destroyed so that God's kingdom may come."⁶⁶ But I note that nothing is said of their response once they experience final judgment. Earlier, in speaking about the response of unrepentant sinners to the plagues of Revelation 16, Bauckham does say, "In the subsequent account of the fall of Babylon, the parousia and the battle of Armageddon (chapters 18-19) there is never any suggestion that those who suffer

⁶³ Osborne, *Revelation*, 713.

⁶⁴ See *ibid.*, 601.

⁶⁵ Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 307-309.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 309.

final judgment finally acknowledge God's rule in enforced worship.”⁶⁷ Though an argument from silence, even if successful it need not warrant the conclusion of eternally continuing sin. That the finally impenitent maintain this attitude of cursing God through their last act of rebellion and while being brought into subjection does not entail this to be the case once they are finally defeated, i.e., the eternal state that follows the final universal judgment. Further, the acknowledgement of God's rule and limited worship by those who fall under final judgment is so inferior to and so categorically different from that of the saints, it ought not to surprise us that Revelation is not bothered to mention it. The point of Revelation 16 is that despite judgments and despite God's repeated gracious offers, the reprobate stubbornly persist in open opposition and refuse to repent. But there seems to be no compelling reason to think this continues on once the opportunity to repent has passed altogether and when nothing is left but the eternal judgment and the ultimate defeat of sin and evil.

A main argument for the continuation of sin leverages the notion of inextricable sinfulness in the reprobate: “Psychological considerations on habit and hardening eclipse all other arguments.”⁶⁸ We see how ingrained and enmeshed sin can become in a hardened sinner and assume that after the opportunity for repentance has passed the sinner must always be that way, but this is to underestimate the power exercised in the final judgment. More on this below.

Yet psychological considerations are not the only motive: theologically, the continuing sin view has some advantages. It has the advantage of answering the charge of divine

⁶⁷ Ibid., 307.

⁶⁸ Cameron, ed. *Universalism And...* 301.

injustice frequently leveled against the traditional view of hell as everlasting conscious punishment. The reprobate continue to sin in hell and thus accrue guilt that warrants further punishment; since this situation goes on unendingly, the punishment is everlasting in duration because the guilt continues to mount. The everlasting perpetuation of the ‘sin-guilt-inflicted punishment’ state of affairs requires unending punishment, and God does no injustice. Even John Stott, who has given an influential defense of the annihilationist position, recognizes the strength of traditionalism of the continuing sin sort.⁶⁹

Even setting aside the lack of biblical support, the continuing sin view still has major problems. Views of eternal punishment that incorporate continued sin must grapple with its everlasting existence: continuing sin is an eternal blemish and any view of hell that incorporates it fails the fourth desideratum, for continuing sin entails an eternal dualism. Sin involves rebellion from the divine kingship, which is difficult to reconcile with a final state of the cosmos where “all things will be subjected to him [God],” “God [will] be all in all,” and “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.”⁷⁰ The biblical picture of the final eschatological state seems to preclude any sin or evil, and the restored divine harmony and order—the return to the shalom of Eden, and indeed, even the surpassing of it—leaves no room for sin, even in hell. Further, in Scripture the focus of judgment is squarely on this earthly life. For example, it is said to be in retribution “for the things done while in the body”

⁶⁹ Stott suggests that perhaps “‘eternal conscious torment’ is compatible with the biblical revelation of divine justice, [if] the impenitence of the lost also continues throughout eternity.” Edwards and Stott, *Evangelical Essentials*, 319.

⁷⁰ 1Cor. 15:28; Phil. 2:10-11.

(2 Cor. 5:10),⁷¹ according to what the dead had done (in the imagery of Revelation) “as written in the books” (Rev. 20:12, 13). This, coupled with the divine victory over sin and evil, argues strongly against continued sin in hell. One final consideration worth mentioning—the problem of evil seems all the more exacerbated if sin and evil *per se* are never eradicated and an eternal cosmological dualism is realized. Reconciliationism helps alleviate the problem of evil by unqualifiedly affirming that sin and evil will someday be no more.

The traditional response has contended that hell is sin’s proper punishment, and the just punishment of sin is a good and not an evil. In assessing this response, I note that it works and seems correct for the punishment for sin, but not the continued existence of sin. It is successful in addressing the eternal existence of pain and suffering as components of punishment, but is not a satisfactory response when it comes to sin itself.⁷²

Blocher captures well the shortcomings of the continuing sin view:

⁷¹ I recognize that scholarly opinion is divided on the scope of those being judged in this verse. 1). If the general judgment is in view, then it obviously applies to the reprobate—they are judged for the deeds done in “the body.” Given that this judgment is a specific event, it is reasonable to think it based on deeds done in *this earthly* body, not just *a* body (as of course the universal resurrection is bodily and eternal punishment involves bodily existence). It would also be strange for this judgment to be for all *bodily* existence but exclude the intermediate state, or for future sins (those committed in hell). Best to understand “things done while in the body” to mean “during one’s bodily life on this earth.” 2). If this judgment is exclusively for believers, then the idea that the reprobate are judged on the basis of their earthly deeds is only supported indirectly, as it would seem odd for believers to be judged on earthly lives but the judgment of the reprobate to have a different, broader scope.

⁷² See the discussion in Andy Saville, “Arguing with Annihilationism: An Assessment of the Doctrinal Arguments for Annihilationism,” *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 24, no. 1 (2006): 78-85.

The theory of sin forever flourishing ignores the message of Christ's perfect victory over sin and all evil. *Every* knee shall bow and *every* tongue confess ... (Phil. 2:10f), those of the lost included. It cannot mean mere outward, hypocritical and forced agreement; what sense could there be in any outward show in the light of that Day, when all the secrets shall be exposed (Rom. 2:16), before the God who is Spirit? Sinners are forced, then, to confess the truth, but they are forced by truth itself, by its overwhelming evidence and spiritual authority; they can no longer refuse to see, they cannot *think* otherwise . . . Nothing could be farther removed from divine defeat and sin going on after divine judgment.⁷³

Reconciliationism and the State of the Reprobate

In this section I will discuss in detail how reconciliationism envisages the mode of existence and state of a reprobate person once consigned to hell. In the end, the collective gaze of the cosmos will be on the Creator, giving him glory. Like the redeemed, the all-consuming thought of the reprobate will be the infinite goodness of the Lord; unlike the redeemed, they will be aware of this goodness through punishment, not through his presence of blessing. At the end of the age, when forbearance finds its completion, the final judgment will radically change the reprobate; their subjugation producing in them a lucidity of their sin's heinousness and God's goodness. There will no more rebellion, and sinners cannot help but agree with God—not begrudgingly, but with painful awareness and agreement that the heinousness of their sin calls for nothing short of eternal punishment. They will respond with shame, humiliation, and regret, but also acquiescence to their judgment as just. Their state of shame and remorse will be fixed, and without any future possibilities save for the same, a state of spiritual death—the second death—will take hold. Yet, in this state and in their agreement

⁷³ Cameron, ed. *Universalism And...* 303.

with God, they participate in the cosmic glorification of God. On the day of total and perfect victory there will be none found who disagree with God's judgment, not even among the wicked.

In the rest of this section on the state of the reprobate I will reflect on the changes they will undergo; first I turn to consider how these changes are brought about. The apparent problem lies in explaining how the reprobate can be changed so radically without experiencing salvation. How do hardened lifelong sinners suddenly have remorse for their wrongdoings when wickedness and habitual sin seem to be all they know? Generally, sin begets further sin—how could the necessary psychological, habitual, and moral changes be wrought in a person so that they do not sin—at all!—apart from regeneration, faith, repentance, and forgiveness?

The answer to these difficulties lies in the nature of the final judgment (described in Matt. 25:31-46; Rev. 20:11-15, etc.). At the end of the age, Christ will be revealed in his full glory and the truth of his identity will be plainly manifest, in contradistinction to this age. All of humanity will be resurrected, including the reprobate, who will be resurrected in anticipation of judgment (Dan. 12:2; John 5:28, 29; Rev. 20:5, 13, etc.). Every deed of every person will be available as evidence, and that evil which was thought to be secret will be openly counted as wrongdoing (Rom. 2:16; Rev. 20:12). God will directly confront each person for their sins, holding them responsible. The moral status and culpability of every deed will be public and obvious, as God's perfect memory (metaphorically presented as record books) and perfect moral assessment will be incontrovertible and irrefutable. God does not force mere external recognition of wrongdoing, but the truth as presented by the judge who is goodness and has unleashed his spiritual authority in full will be so overwhelming it will be

irresistible. This authority, this divine veracity, coupled with the permanency and finality of judgment, will operate together to bring these changes. The reprobate will not be changed by coercion, as against their will, but the actions of God in fully revealing his goodness will be such that even the most stubborn and sinful will, when the conditions for the ability to sin are removed, shall respond with remorse and shame.

Questions about the means of realizing these psychological changes need not concern us greatly—for the means of resurrecting the physical body is a mysterious change and yet is not considered problematic for an omnipotent God. If the resurrection of all deceased humanity to eternal bodies (either glorified or non-glorified) is allowed, why would not something similar with issues of psychological change? There is no contradiction or logical problem with God working these changes (unless a certain type of free will is insisted upon, see below).

First, the reprobate will be lucid. Lucidity is a main aspect of reconciliationism—that existence in hell is one in which the condemned are vividly aware of their condemnation as completely just, aware of the exact severity and heinousness of their wrongdoing, and aware of the infinite goodness, worth, and value of the ultimate victim of their crimes (which would all seem to be part and parcel of the perfect execution of final justice).⁷⁴ This state of lucidity is to be seen as an entailment of the divine victory, especially as described in Phil. 2:9-11 and

⁷⁴ Interestingly, John Wenham gestures at this very idea—although he is arguing for conditionalism and thus sees it as part of the conscious suffering leading up to extinction—when he says, “Perhaps a major part of the punishment will be a realisation of the true awfulness of their sin, in its crucifixion of the Son of God and in its effects on others.” John Wenham, *The Enigma of Evil: Can We Believe in the Goodness of God?*, Third ed. (Guildford: Eagle, 1994), 91.

Col. 1:20 (see above). Blocher writes, “The main Biblical expressions [unquenchable fire and undying worm], then, may refer to the reaction of the moral creature, no longer able to sin, when he or she becomes at last lucid. Then, impenitent sinners appreciate the value of their lives and see them as they are, under God's reprobation.”⁷⁵ Likewise Birks writes, “... the general nature of such mercy may, and probably will, consist in a contemplation, passively and under Divine compulsion, of the infinite goodness of the Lord,—a contemplation rendered possible to lost souls only by the strict execution of the solemn threatening of God.”⁷⁶

This lucidity has bearing on a question repeatedly raised in the tradition: are the damned aware of the bliss of heaven, and vice versa? It seems to me that such awareness would be likely if the reprobate are lucid in the way reconciliation envisages, but this is not a liability of the view.⁷⁷ The reprobate are aware of their state as such, and probably the redeemed are aware of them as well—if so, it is not a detraction from the bliss of heaven or from the goodness and perfection of the divine victory that is the eternal state, because the regard of the redeemed towards the reprobate will be that of God's.

Second, they will be acquiescent. The reprobate will not be eternally cursing God or rebelling from his rule; instead they will in the last day see their guilty condition for what it is, and, under God's judgment, acquiesce to their punishment as just. If it is sin for a human to disagree with God (and it seemingly is), and if in the end all sinning ceases, then the reprobate abandon their disagreement with God and with his assessment of their guilt. They would in

⁷⁵ Blocher in Cameron, ed. *Universalism And...* 307.

⁷⁶ T. R. Birks, *The Victory of Divine Goodness: Reply to Strictures in Two Recent Works* (London: Rivingtons, 1869), 34. See also Birks, *Victory*, 45, 190.

⁷⁷ T. R. Birks did not seem to think so. See Birks, *Victory*, 179.

fact not wish for their own annihilation, seeing that theirs is an existence subjectively negative but on the whole objectively good, among other things, serving to glorify God in the justice of their punishment. Illustrating this, Birks says, “How often has the wounded soldier or sailor almost forgotten his wounds in his deep joy for his commander’s or his country’s victory!”⁷⁸ Blocher captures this acquiescence well, writing, “They will render to God the homage he requires: a sincere Amen assenting to judgement. The ungodly shall condemn their own ungodliness, in agreement with God; they will wish for nothing else than for punishment as they will see that punishment alone can right them with God; the consuming desire of their conscience shall be to satisfy the divine justice.”⁷⁹

Samuel Garratt uses the analogy of a story of convicts sentenced to banishment who, on a ship during transport, were converted through the efforts of the ship doctor. These convicts accepted their sentence as deserved and in that acceptance found fulfillment. He writes, “Rebellion against it, the attempt to escape, continued misconduct, any resistance to the sentence led to still worse banishment; but submission to it and good conduct brought with it first relaxation, then elevation. The sentence could not be reversed. But many a convict would have owned that in his case, beneath inexorable judgment, mercy lay concealed.”⁸⁰

Third, the reprobate will have shame and remorse. Despite this acceptance and acquiescence to their punishment, the reprobate are full of shame and remorse for the things done in their earthly lives. While the sin has ceased, the guilt and shame remain. Garratt

⁷⁸ Ibid., 43.

⁷⁹ Henri Blocher, “The Scope of Redemption and Modern Theology,” *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 9, Aut (1991): 103.

⁸⁰ Garratt, *Veins of Silver, Etc.*, 167-168.

writes, “The frequent mention of shame in connection with everlasting punishment has in it a double bearing. It not only shows us how grievous a thing is sin, but it shows us also how wholesome a thing is punishment as God uses it.”⁸¹ The regret is for their wrongdoing; the acceptance is of its judgment. However, the remorse in eternal punishment is different from remorse as experienced in this age, particularly in that it will not have any aspect of repentance. Blocher says, “final remorse will be remorse-in-agreement with God. In life, as long as it is called 'today', only *repentance* agrees with God; remorse remains a twisted and truncated apprehension of the truth of one's deeds. . . . repentance has a *future*, it enters the open future; remorse relates only to the *past*. The remorse of the gnashed teeth and gnawing worm relates only to the past.”⁸²

Fourth, hell is a state of fixity and death. Another key concept for reconciliationism is that the reprobate are in a state of fixity. This is what is meant by the second death—that after divine patience reaches perfection, all that will be left for the unrepentant is *the loss of life*. Blocher states this idea well:

Life is ability to act and to project, life is sharing in exchanges; total death is isolation, paralysis (no *facultas* left, to recall the Augustinian word), non-renewal, that is *fixity*, absolute fixity. *Rigor mortis*, *rigor secundae mortis*, could we say, using the same kind of metaphor which Isaiah coined and Jesus himself borrowed. What remains is the *corpse* of a sinful life together with the lucid consciousness of that truth - abhorrence - and no ground whatsoever for any change of that final situation.⁸³

⁸¹ Ibid., 173-174.

⁸² Blocher in Cameron, ed. *Universalism And...* 307. Italics original.

⁸³ Ibid., 308. Italics original.

Seeing the severity of sin and realizing its judgment will be *spiritually paralyzing*. Blocher seems to posit a completely atemporal notion of eternity in hell, saying it “could approximately suit eternal *death*, the endless duration of which is equivalent to a *nunc aeternum*.”⁸⁴ This is helpful in as much as it is a description of the experiential or psychological life of the reprobate; taken to be a full description of their existence it is problematic and should be avoided (since the notion of a temporal being becoming atemporal may well be incoherent). Rather the picture is one in which the “conscious gaze” of a sinner is so overwhelmed by its object of perception—God fully revealed in his goodness—that there is no awareness of time, no change in thought away from remorse and shame towards the self and proclamation of Lordship towards God. Such a state, relationally cut off from the source of life and vitality, is truly the final spiritual death. We could perhaps say that the reprobate are in a state of petrification.

Finally, the reprobate will glorify God. As stated previously, the pain and suffering of eternal punishment are the just sentence for sin and as such are a good and not an evil. A further good will be realized in hell: the reprobate will, in a limited way, glorify God—firstly, by merely receiving final justice, secondly, by owning and accepting their punishment and the justice and goodness of God. In this way, as Blocher points out, they knowingly yet paradoxically reach the *telos* of all creatures.⁸⁵ Theirs is an existence of loss, but not of utter vanity. Birks states this well:

⁸⁴ Ibid., 309. Italics original.

⁸⁵ Blocher, “The Scope...”: 103.

To glorify God, through shame and punishment, compared with the bliss of the redeemed and holy, must be an infinite and irreparable loss. But to glorify Him in any way, however solemn and mournful, when contrasted with the reign of [unceasing sin and its consequences], and the curse of eternal vanity, darkness, and corruption, may be, even to the souls of the lost, a real, and perhaps even in some respects, an infinite gain.⁸⁶

Before leaving the topic of the state of the reprobate, it will be worthwhile to briefly consider the views of N. T. Wright. Wright's presentations of his view of eternal punishment are sparse, with no extensive discussion in any of his writings. From the few places he does address the topic it is possible to regard his view as a hybrid of conditionalism and traditionalism (with a tendency to emphasize conditionalist aspects), although perhaps better to say it is resistant to easy categorization within the standard taxonomy. In places he posits it as a fourth view, but he nowhere draws from reconciliationist writers and no direct impact on his thought is apparent from any of their work. That said, there are several interesting points of similarity between his view and the reconciliationism I defend. First I will briefly summarize his view, and then discuss similarities and differences between it and reconciliationism.

Wright finds the standard views of hell (conscious eternal punishment, universalism, and conditionalism/annihilationism) unsatisfying, cautiously opting for what he sometimes couches as a fourth view, at other times as a modified conditionalism.⁸⁷ His argument for his

⁸⁶ T. R. Birks, *The Difficulties of Belief in Connexion with the Creation and the Fall*, Second edition, enlarged. ed. (London: Macmillan & Co. , 1876), 235-236.

⁸⁷ In his 2003 "For All the Saints?" he says "... I think a somewhat different form of conditionalism may be the best we can do." N. T. Wright, *For All the Saints?: Remembering the Christian Departed* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 2003), 44. In his 2007 "Surprised by Hope" he casts his view as fourth view that combines strengths

view proceeds through several points: first, being in the image of God is essential to being a human person, and worshiping God is fundamental in bearing his image.⁸⁸ Second, failure to worship God and turning to worship not-God is to less than fully reflect the image of God and somehow fall short of being fully human.⁸⁹ Third, even to the very end, some will eventually persist in worshiping not-God.⁹⁰ Fourth, in hell the reprobate will no longer bear the image at all and will no longer be human.⁹¹ However, their fate is not utter non-existence because some scriptural passages speak “unambiguously of a *continuing* state” for the reprobate.⁹² Finally, in his view—someone consigned to hell becomes ex-human, “... a creature that once bore the image of God but does so no longer, and can never do so again.”⁹³

of traditionalism and conditionalism. N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2008), 182.

⁸⁸ Wright, *For All the Saints?* , 44.

⁸⁹ He says “they can only be maintained in his image, as genuine humans, by worshipping him ...” *ibid.*, 44. Also see Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 179-180.

⁹⁰ Wright, *For All the Saints?* , 44. He elsewhere says, “it is perfectly possible, and it really does seem to happen in practice, that this idolatry and dehumanization become so endemic in the life and chosen behavior of an individual, and indeed of groups, that unless there is a specific turning away from such a way of life, those who persist are conniving at their own ultimate dehumanization.” Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 180.

⁹¹ “... after death they become at last, by their own effective choice, *beings that once were human but now are not*, creatures that have ceased to bear the divine image at all.” (italics original) Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 182. Similarly, see Wright, *For All the Saints?* , 44.

⁹² Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 182. Italics original. He says, “Those creatures that still exist in an ex-human state, no longer reflecting their maker in any meaningful sense ...” *Ibid.*, 182.

⁹³ Wright, *For All the Saints?* , 44.

Similarities between reconciliationism and Wright's view are readily apparent. His emphasis on the unlimited scope of the divine victory and on God's 'putting the world right' in a final eschatological triumph is commendable and salutary (as is the larger point he makes—that the *telos* and eschatological goal of creation is not for us to reach some otherworldly 'heaven,' as is so prevalent in even Christian consciousness today, but rather is when things in this world are "on earth as they are in heaven," ultimately in the new heaven(s) and new earth in the new creation). Wright and reconciliationism agree that both universal salvation and hell as complete non-existence are exegetically untenable. Also, while Wright does not explicitly say so, his view seems agreeable to the notion that in the final state sin shall be no more.

Reconciliationism takes seriously the scriptural passages that speak of hell as destruction and ruin and as a state of death, and these reflections lead in a similar direction as Wright's view when it comes to the state of the reprobate, although the routes arriving at this point are a bit different. Wright focuses on the *imago dei* and works his way to implications for eternal punishment while reconciliationism focuses on the scriptural language of eternal punishment as destruction. This observation is not to critique Wright and both routes seem perfectly compatible.⁹⁴ Indeed, the reprobate are defeated and destroyed—mere shells of what they might have been—and as such there is an appropriate sense in which they are 'ex-

⁹⁴ Although for objections to Wright's view that in this life the unredeemed have a kind of image-bearingness that needs renewal, see John F. Kilner, "Humanity in God's Image: Is the Image Really Damaged?," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 53, no. 3 (2010). The outcome of the debate on the status of the *imago* for the unredeemed in this life does not determine the issue of the status of the *imago* for the reprobate in eternal punishment, so I will not address the former any further.

human.’ There appears to be no reason to require the reprobate to have ‘image-bearingness’ once they enter into eternal punishment (or, perhaps as former image-bearers they have just a residue of the *imago*, enough to facilitate the limited homage envisaged in Phil. 2 but not enough to constitute the *imago simpliciter*). It seems reasonable to allow for the loss of the *imago dei* to coincide with (if not be caused by) the creature’s eschatological destruction in judgment, a penal destruction that occurs upon the removal of God’s common grace linked with divine patience. In this life, by God’s patient common grace, unredeemed human beings still bear the image but are in danger of losing it eternally. When that happens, what is left is an *ex-human*, the eternal ruin, destruction, death, and perishing of a sinner.

It is difficult to give an account of the ontology of the reprobate in hell with any specificity, and both reconciliationism and Wright’s view reside in this grey area. However, I suggest these minimum criteria: the entity experiencing eternal punishment must be connected in the right ways to a specific human person (from this life), so that punishment is for what was done in earthly life. Even if someone (or *something*?) in hell is an ‘ex-human’ who has essentially lost the *imago dei*, that entity—whatever it is—still needs to be capable of experiencing punishment. Further, it needs to have some sort of minimal connection of identity with the guilty human from this life, because retributive justice seems to require this. Beyond these points it is difficult to say much on what existence in hell looks like—but perhaps this ought not surprise us, as the second death is described in Scripture as so horrible that the strongest metaphors from our current existence only give us but glimpses.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Also noteworthy is the view of O. A. Curtis. See Olin Alfred Curtis, *The Christian Faith Personally Given in a System of Doctrine* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1905), 462-469. His account of the state of the reprobate has affinities with reconciliationism, and of his view B. B. Warfield said, “There is no annihilation is Prof.

The Punishment of Reconciliationism: How, What, Why?

Thus far I have affirmed that eternal punishment is a significant part of the reconciliationist view, more about the nature of that punishment remains to be said. First, *how*

Curtis's view; not even relief for the lost from suffering, but it may perhaps be looked at as marking the point where the theories of annihilationism reach up to and melt at last into the doctrine of eternal punishment." B. B. Warfield "Annihilationism" in "New Shaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge," (New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls, 1908), 186.

Curtis insists hell to involve conscious and everlasting punishment (p. 462-63). In the final state all men and women will serve God in some sense, because doing so is inherent in all creatures: "The saint *may* be; the servant *must* be." (p. 464, italics original). God's ideal was for a final state where every person voluntarily serves God, but because of sin (which came through free will), this will go unrealized. Sin will be defeated, but its effects cannot be undone. In the final state, then, the reprobate will serve involuntarily, doing the task of "automatic creatures" like bird and beast (p. 465). What does Curtis mean by involuntary? Not that "lost men are crushed into mere 'thinghood.' They are, I believe, below the possibility of any moral action, or moral concern. Their conception of right and wrong is an intellection empty of all feeling. And they are, I think, also below the possibility of any real self-decision. They are creatures of fear." (p. 467). This loss of (presumably libertarian) free will is replaced by fear. "Their personal rebellion is all gone, and they obey God swiftly; but they obey him not because they eagerly recognize a moral obligation in his command, they obey merely because they are afraid. . . . Incapable of the vision of God, incapable of the love of God, incapable of any moral regard for God—and yet doing God's behest under the slavery of torturing fear—that is the eternal punishment; that is the worm which 'dieth not'; that is the fire which is 'not quenched.' ... The punishment of hell is the suffering of a man become entirely and eternally inorganic." (p. 467). Because the reprobate are outside of Christ, "In the most wholesomely rigid thinking, they are no longer men." (p. 469).

Curtis' view has much to commend it, and if his notion of fear were focused more on shame and remorse, and if his sense of 'involuntary' were understood not as external coercion but rather cast in terms of irresistibility caused by defeat and judgment, it would be very near the reconciliationism defended here.

is the punishment carried out? It is not as if God directly accesses the consciousness of the reprobate to inflict psychological suffering or accesses the body to inflict physical. The punishment is executed through means, primarily the means of a sinner's exposure to the light that is God's infinite goodness. All will be revealed by this light, even that which was done in secret (Rom. 2:16), and as such there will be the suffering of deep shame and regret on the part of the judged. God is not passive in this—we must not retreat to a hell of mere separationism. The *how* of eternal punishment is a combination of God removing the common grace associated with the forbearance of this age, the time of final accountability coming, God defeating, judging, and completely removing sin and evil, and the sinner being lucidly aware of all this.

Second, *what* is the punishment in reconciliationism? It seems difficult to specify exactly what this might be beyond being primarily psychological suffering (although physical is not excluded).⁹⁶ Certainly the imagery of Scripture used to describe hell is highly metaphorical and must be taken as such: hell is a “fiery furnace,” “eternal fire,” “outer darkness,” a place where “their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched,” to name a few.⁹⁷ Failure to appreciate the metaphoric language has caused some to posit things like a supernatural fire that burns without emitting light. Of course, better to allow the metaphors to speak *as metaphors*. To take the language of hell in Scripture as metaphor is not to denigrate the teaching on eternal punishment; it is to appreciate how one explains a somber reality so beyond our current experience that imagery of the worst earthly suffering and loss known to

⁹⁶ I could find no commentaries that treated the meaning of “undying worm,” “unquenchable fire,” or “weeping and gnashing of teeth” in any detail.

⁹⁷ Isa. 66:24; Matt. 8:12; 13:42, 50; 18:8; 22:13; 25:30; 25:41; Mark 9:48; Jude 1:7

us is fitting. The metaphors are not detailed and are allowed to stand on their own, leaving room for a variety of interpretive understandings. Perhaps this vagueness serves a purpose: the metaphors conjure up some of the worst earthly experiences we could imagine and are employed, using modifiers like “unquenchable” and “eternal,” to facilitate imagining the unthinkable, the worst of all fates. Commenting on this, and how the images of eternal punishment taken literally contradict each other, Turretin says, “Future punishments are represented by these which in other respects agree neither with the condition of our souls, nor with each other; but all of them set forth the most sad and painful condition of the wicked. For the same reason a metaphorical, not a proper fire is to be understood.”⁹⁸

In reflecting on just what the punishment of hell in reconciliationism might be, Blocher suggests we might interpret the metaphors in terms of remorse, a self-condemning conscience, despair, and shame.⁹⁹ “The unquenchable fire and the undying worm are the main symbols of the everlasting torments . . . both figures may easily be interpreted as the self-condemning conscience; actually, there is a spontaneous use of them, in everyday talk, for remorse: we all understand what a ‘burning’ or ‘gnawing’ remorse means.”¹⁰⁰ Similarly Aquinas says, “... and this is the remorse of conscience, which is called a worm because it originates from the corruption of sin, and torments the soul, as a corporeal worm born of corruption torments by

⁹⁸ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 3 vols. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1997), Vol I:605.

⁹⁹ Blocher in Cameron, ed. *Universalism And...* 305-307.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 306.

gnawing.”¹⁰¹ Blocher then references Isa. 66:24 and Dan. 12:2 which mention abhorrence and shame, saying

... this resembles a more literal language to denote a right attitude, attuned to God’s own judgment, towards the past sinful lives; all creatures will share in God’s abhorrence; the lost will be ashamed, theirs will be the ultimate ‘confusion of face’, as they shall be unable to escape the truth of their past actions. The main Biblical expressions, then, may refer to the reaction or the moral creature, no longer able to sin, when he or she becomes at last *lucid*.¹⁰²

It is best to be cautious, noting the possibility that some of the biblical imagery may loosely point to some of the distinctive aspects of reconciliationism. The key images of an undying worm and unquenchable fire, along with the language of banishment, seem in the biblical descriptions to function as the agents of suffering in eternal punishment. In as much as remorse, regret, shame, and the like are instruments or agents of suffering in hell, we can see them as within the scope of the metaphors. However, we must not press the point too far, for apart from the implications of reconciliationism there seems to be little in the metaphors themselves that clearly takes up reconciliationism and eliminates other possible interpretations of the language. Given the baldness of much of the imagery, we must sketch their trajectory theologically rather than finagle these passages into directly supporting any theological conclusions.

Third, *why* is eternal punishment this way rather than some other? Presumably there are a variety of ways that God could execute punishment that would be compatible with his justice, why the reconciliationist picture? In the answer lies the very core of reconciliationism,

¹⁰¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Supplement Q97 A2.

¹⁰² Cameron, ed. *Universalism And...* 306-307. Italics original.

for the view is motivated by shaping the doctrine of hell in light of other aspects of theology. Reconciliationism recognizes that there is much more to the eschaton than punishment; we might even say that punishment is at best ancillary to other objectives in the grand *telos* of God. In this regard, by insisting that one's view of eternal punishment be placed in the broader eschatological picture, reconciliationism satisfies the sixth desideratum.

There is a degree of punishment due that corresponds to the degree of wrongdoing; for the finally impenitent there is a degree of punishment due that is non-negotiable (and this is one major point where annihilationism fails: the requirements of justice go unmet). As our third desideratum specifies, there is an appropriate degree of punishment that the reprobate deserve, and since sin against God is infinitely heinous, anything short of an infinite punishment would be an atrocity, a stain on God's moral goodness. As James Orr says,

... [there is] no arbitrary relation of God to the sin of the world. It is grounded in His very nature, and cannot be laid aside by any act of will, any more than the moral law itself can be reversed or annulled. Sin is that against which the Holy One and Upholder of the moral order of the universe, *must* eternally declare Himself in judgment. To do otherwise would be to deny that He is God.¹⁰³

However, it does seem right to say that there are many possible ways in which God could execute judgment to meet the degree of punishment due: why think it would be the hell of reconciliationism? To answer this we must see that God has many other purposes and objectives in the eschaton (and even now in creation) beyond final punishment and these other considerations exert influence on hell. To name a few: God will be completely victorious over evil, there will be a cosmic renewal and reconciliation, he will restore his unmediated rule in

¹⁰³ Orr, *Sin as a Problem of to-Day*, 271. Italics original.

the universe, he will more fully display his nature to the cosmos everlastingly and *everything* will glorify him everlastingly, every knee shall bow and every will tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, even after the fall humanity retains the dignity of bearing the *imago dei*, and his desire to avoid any human existence amounting to a total loss. These factors and others are operative in shaping the nature of eternal punishment but they do so without mitigating the degree of punishment that God's goodness, righteousness, and justice require. Reconciliationism best accounts for these factors while at the same time being faithful to the Scriptural teaching on hell.

Divine Patience: As Long As It Is Still Called "Today" ...

Reconciliationism relies on the biblical concept of divine patience, in particular the notion that God's postponement of judgment is gracious and will not—indeed, cannot—extend indefinitely. This window of patience, for one, allows opportunity for repentance. However, the eventuality of this window being closed by God's complete eschatological victory is crucial for reconciliationism, especially as I will later be making the distinction between remorse and repentance. It is also essential in understanding the fixity and death that is involved in eternal punishment. This idea of divine patience, as expounded below, ensures that eternal punishment is in fact the ultimate and final expression of divine justice—a justice that will be complete, exhaustive, and completely victorious.

Divine patience is the idea that typically God does not immediately render the due punishment for sin but is patient with sinners and with the world in postponing justice. Divine patience generally should not be controversial; that it does not endure forever might well be, and reconciliationism insists on the latter point. However, this is not to say that reconciliationism adopts the most extreme understanding of divine patience possible, but

rather that the view best accords with the biblical data both on divine patience and on the complete eschatological victory over sin and evil. Biblically, God is said to be graciously *patient, long-suffering*. He is “slow to anger . . . yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished . . .” (Exod. 34:6-7; Num. 14:18; Nah. 1:3). As Heinrich Heppe illustrates, “*Patientia Dei* is His most benign will, by which He so controls His anger, that He either bears sinning creatures long and puts off punishment, awaiting their repentance, or He does not pour forth all His anger in one moment upon them, lest they should be reduced to naught.”¹⁰⁴ While I can only be brief on these points, I will discuss three issues as they relate to divine patience: the ability to sin, the opportunity to repent, and the purpose of patience.

The ability to sin and continue sinning possessed by humanity is only realized through the permission of divine patience. Reconciliationism champions the notion that when Christ returns in judgment and final justice is done, God's relationship to the world and to humans—including the reprobate—will be such that sinning will not occur. The freedom to sin assumes the suspension of judgment. But once the time of “perfect patience” (1 Tim. 1:16) ends and the final Day of the Lord comes, the judgment of the world will transform it radically. Within the scope of this transformation is the removal of the ability to sin from the reprobate.

The opportunity for repentance assumes that the gracious window of divine patience is still open. However, perfect patience does not endure indefinitely and there seems to be biblical teaching that repentance will not be possible forever. For example, the illustrative story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16, while full of exegetical complexities, asserts that there is a “fixed chasm” between the two eternal destinies, strongly implying these

¹⁰⁴ Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics, Set Out and Illustrated from the Sources*, trans. G. T. Thomson (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1950), 96. *Italics original.*

destinies themselves, once realized, are permanent and fixed (Luke 16:26). A fixed consignment to hell means the opportunity for repentance has passed.

The purpose of divine patience is hard to pin down precisely (who can know the mind of God?) but some hints might well be available. One purpose seems to be that ultimate judgment of the world is delayed so that many will have the opportunity to repent (Rom. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9, 15). Related is the idea that the gospel will first be preached in all the world (Matt. 24:14). Another might be to “make the riches of his glory known” to the church (Rom 9:22-24). More could be listed, but the basic point stands: God seems to have several objectives in mind in his patience with sinners, but the pain of evil will not sting for eternity and the response to the cry, “how long, O Lord?” is certainly not “forever.”

Reconciliationism and the Atonement

In reconciliationism the atonement has implications for the reprobate: not regarding salvation but regarding their state. They are lucidly fixed on the heinousness of their sin and the righteousness and goodness of God. They cannot help but confront the crucified and risen Christ; his atoning work, while not applied to them in that they experience salvation from the punishment due for their sin, serves as the “focal point,” displaying God’s character as loving, holy, righteous, and good. The atonement serves to support their reconciliation—again not through salvation but as the basis for all God’s merciful and good acts towards sinners, which includes allowing the reprobate to be resurrected, to cease sinning, to no longer persist in self-tormenting wickedness, to perceive the divine glory fully revealed to them in judgment, and to offer a limited type of praise in accepting and affirming the divine judgment they are

experiencing.¹⁰⁵ In that sense the cross does bring them “peace” (Col. 1:20)—there is no longer any rebellion, no further acts of sin, no longer blasphemy or hatred towards God.

Reconciliationism also makes some headway with the problem of discontinuity between the punishment experienced by Christ on the cross and the reprobate in eternal punishment. Assuming the controversial—that penal substitution should not entirely be abandoned—, the tradition has recognized that some level of continuity should obtain between the two but struggled with the obvious dissimilarities (duration being an especially poignant example). Without entirely solving the matter, reconciliationism can clearly posit points of analogue that might not be available elsewhere in traditionalism, such as the conscious experience of guilt, shame, and relational separation.

Also, under the picture of vicarious punishment in penal substitution, the punishment as borne by Christ actually does reconcile offenders to God. Reconciliation with God is costly; the price must be paid, it cannot be brushed off and forgotten. If punishment is a means of reconciliation, this is true both of Christ’s atonement regarding the redeemed and of the reprobate in their own punishment. Inevitably, when it comes to moral agents, punishment is the means of reconciliation to God.

¹⁰⁵ T. R. Birks gets at something similar, although he makes a firm categorical distinction between the hell of traditionalism (as including unbridled continuing sin) as the “first death” and the hell of his reconciliationism as the “second death,” a distinction that is misguided and seems difficult to support biblically; nevertheless, his basic point is worthwhile. See Birks, *Victory*, 168-169.

Reconciliationism, Universalism, and the Love of God

In this section I will contrast reconciliationism and universalism, showing how the two are distinct, but also considering how reconciliationism better satisfies several motivations and intuitions common within universalism. I have already discussed reconciliationism's exegetical superiority regarding both the passages on eternal punishment and the passages teaching a universal reconciliation. Here I will give further thought to some theological matters, particularly the love of God. In this section I will show how reconciliationism can meet the fifth desideratum by giving a satisfactory account of God's love.

Universal Reconciliation without Universal Salvation

Many of those who espoused some form of reconciliationism were accused of being universalists. Nineteenth century reconciliationists T. R. Birks suffered a great deal for his views, particularly under the accusation of being a guised or confused universalist. One can almost hear his fatigue with the issue when he comments on a rambling attack published against him, saying, "Within fifty pages he [James Grant] used me as his sling-stone to slay that Goliath of heresy, Baron Bunsen, has extracted me from his forehead, exposed me as a deadly heretic, unfit for the fellowship of Christians, and flung me away."¹⁰⁶ An assault on Birks led by Robert Baxter, James Grant, and Robert Candlish brought about his resignation from the Evangelical Alliance, but did not succeed in having his membership revoked, as was their intention.¹⁰⁷ While it is true that some versions of reconciliationism are close to

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 214.

¹⁰⁷ See the more detailed account in Geoffrey Rowell, *Hell and the Victorians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 127-128.

universalism and others run the liability of collapsing into it (the views of Langton Clarke being the best example of this¹⁰⁸), my form of the view is quite different and is not to be counted as a step towards universalism. Universal reconciliation should not be confused with universal salvation.

Both the redeemed and the reprobate are reconciled to God but by radically different avenues and in very different senses. The redeemed experience reconciliation with God in this life, it is a reconciliation that includes salvation from penalty due for sin: a reconciliation without loss. The reconciliation of the reprobate is not deliverance *from* punishment but rather is achieved *through* punishment. Reconciliationism is not a guised or unwitting Universalism, although it does involve a universalism of sorts: there is the universal deliverance from the state of sin, that is, from the state of committing sin, but it is not a deliverance from the punishment for sin. All will experience a universal “salvation”—sin will be no more—but only by virtue of the divine victory of evil is sin defeated, and it is important to realize that punishment is no small part of this divine victory. Yet, and I say this very carefully lest I be misunderstood, there is a minimal “salvation” for the reprobate: salvation from sinking further into the depths of sin, from non-existence, from persisting in blasphemy, from being forever rebels, from the distorted misery of continuing to deny God and to deny oneself.¹⁰⁹ The

¹⁰⁸ See Williams’ comments in Williams, “The Question...”: 273.

¹⁰⁹ Samuel Garratt gets at a similar point when he says, “... if the state of everlasting punishment is one which admits of no comparison with everlasting blessedness, if they are not separated by gradation but by nature, it is quite possible that in everlasting punishment itself there may not only be differences, as between many stripes and few, but an unlimited improvement and infinite alleviation, without the slightest approach, or tendency to

reprobate are part of the restored cosmic order, where the world is saved from the ruin of perpetual sin, freed from sin's tyranny and power, and is actually purged of all sin: all of this finds completion in the eschatological judgment, which includes eternal punishment. In the eschaton everything is reconciled to God, but we must insist that the finally impenitent are reconciled through punishment. The unlimited universality is one of eschatological cosmic reconciliation, not that of Universalism.

Yet we should not think of these two avenues of reconciliation as creating two classes of humanity. Both of these routes are found in Christ, and in both he does the reconciling—either in salvation (in the fullest sense) or in judgment. All judgment has been handed over to Christ and Christ returns in judgment. Christ does reconcile the entire cosmos; he does so in different ways.

Hell and the Love of God

Here I will reflect on how God's love might be reconcilable with my view of eternal punishment, while at the same time affirming the universalist's intuition that God's love is upon everyone.

The Problem

The first and perhaps most obvious difficulty when we talk about the love of God is that in the Scriptures God's wrath is said to be on sinners, usually in vivid and intense language. An example: in Rev. 14, those who worship the beast "will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger," sinners are thrown into the "great

approach, to a reversal of the sentence, or to admission into the heaven of the blest." Garratt, *Veins of Silver, Etc.*, 126.

winepress of the wrath of God” and it is pressed, and “blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses’ bridles for a distance of 200 miles.” Even with qualifications for apocalyptic genre, the language portrays a stunning depiction of divine wrath. This wrath is full of perfect passion, with a strong affective element to it—although with God, much unlike it often is with us, wrath is not capricious or malicious, it cannot be misdirected, and it is always justified. Biblically, divine wrath is not directed merely at sin, but also at sinners (Ps. 5:5, “you [God] hate all who do wrong,” is an example representative of a long list of texts to that effect. John 3:36 is another, “... whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”). The mantra “God hates the sin but loves the sinner” is actually, on the face of it, false. Yes, God has nothing but anger, hatred, and wrath for sin, whereas his regard towards sinners is more complex: his view of sin and of sinners is not exactly the same. Nonetheless, we must conclude that sin’s culpability adheres to the moral agent. Numerous are the biblical passages that speak of God’s wrath being upon sinners, not merely upon sin. The phrase “hate the sin, love the sinner” might have purchase as an ethical guide for the church, but it is difficult to consider it appropriately applied to God without running afoul of Scripture. The first problem, with these considerations in mind, is this: how is it true that God is a loving God, and in what sense, if any, does God love everyone?

There is a second problem with the love of God and eternal punishment: the basic universalist complaint seems to be that if God does not save all, he either fails to be perfectly loving or fails to be omnipotent. This notion of “omnipotent love” is a hallmark of universalism. For present purposes I am only interested in the sorts of universalism claiming to stem from theological reflection on the gospel and from exegetical considerations: what

Trevor Hart distinguishes under the label “Christian” universalism.¹¹⁰ Hart captures the basic impulse behind these views when he writes:

Most instances of this Christian universalism would appeal to some such list of factors as the following in support of their case: the central Christian conviction that love is the very nature of God, and that the most fundamental relation of this God to all his creatures must therefore be one of love if he is to be true to himself; the concomitant conviction that this same God must ultimately have the final good of all his creatures in view, that ‘he desireth not the death of (any) sinner, but rather that he may turn from his wickedness and live’; the gospel stress on the utter unconditionality of the salvation wrought by Christ, and the rejection of any notion that some might be more deserving than others of redemption; the clear affirmations in Scripture concerning the universality of the scope of Christ’s saving passion and resurrection and the completeness of the salvation effected by the same (*i.e.* in some sense God *has* saved all in Christ); and lastly an insistence that God, as Lord of all, must prevail, that the universal saving will springing inevitably from his nature must be fulfilled in his creatures.¹¹¹

Throughout this chapter I will argue that my view satisfies these concerns, showing that they need not entail universalism, and that mine is the more exegetically and theologically tenable view. I am defending the position that eternal punishment (at least as I envisage it) has no incompatibility with the biblical picture of God as a loving God. Contention on this point is a frequently cited motivation for universalist positions. I intend to argue that not only is there no contradiction between God’s love and God’s wrath, but further, there is no contradiction between God’s love and God eternally expressing that wrath in judgment upon the reprobate.

¹¹⁰ See Trevor Hart’s chapter “Universalism: Two Distinct Types” in Cameron, ed. *Universalism And...* 15ff.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 15-16. Italics original.

The Love of God

Far too often in this discussion an appeal is made to a vague or sentimentalized notion of God's love. We do a disservice in failing to think of divine love in full consideration of his other attributes, and we need scriptural bearing in speaking of God's love. I will follow, with some slight modifications, the taxonomy laid out by D. A. Carson in handling the different aspects of God's love.¹¹² A few preliminary remarks: 1.) the list of these different aspects of divine love becomes progressively more narrow in scope; 2.) though spoken of as different "loves," such language is to be understood as different aspects or manifestations of the one and the same love—God is one, and God is love; 3.) each of these could readily be backed with extensive exegetical support, but on space limitations I will list just one or two examples for each.

First is God's intra-Trinitarian love, which is infinite by virtue of the lover and the beloved both possessing the divine attributes. The Father loves the Son (John 3:35; 5:20) and the Son loves the Father (John 14:31). God's self-love is unlimited, could be no greater, and is fully complete in itself. This final point is crucial, for it secures the other manifestations of divine love as gracious and free: God is not obligated by anything in the creature to express his love in these ways, and he does so not to fill any lack or need in his being but completely as an act of grace. Further, God's gracious acts are motivated by that which is internal to himself, and we should be weary of presuming to know what God's love requires him to do. This, I think, is a key point missed by many universalists.

¹¹² D. A. Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000), 16-20.

Second, God has a providential love for all of creation. In Genesis 1 God is pleased with what he has made, repeatedly calling it “good.” In Matt. 6:26 Jesus appeals to God’s loving providence as shown towards the sparrows to give comfort that God is trustworthy to provide for his people. God’s relationship with the created world as a whole and in its parts is one of loving benevolence.

Third, God has a special love for humankind that, post-fall, morphs into a yearning love. There is a particular regard for humanity, which is endowed with the *imago dei* and, beyond the rest of declaredly “good” creation, these creatures are pronounced in Genesis 1 to be “very good.” While some higher level mammals seem to have some rationality and perhaps even a degree of self awareness, and while angelic beings certainly have rationality, self awareness, ability for relationship with God, and an ability to worship God, no other creature bears the image of God. In whatever the *imago dei* consists, it is something that makes humankind distinct amongst the rest of creation, and seems linked to God’s special love for human beings. After the fall, this love for humankind is extended into a longing love: essentially, God offers salvation to all humanity and in so doing intends to heal the whole of the cosmos from the devastation of sin (Rom. 8). The universalist’s intuition is not without biblical warrant: God is dispositionally inclined towards salvation regarding this fallen world (John 3:16; 1 John 2:2).

Fourth, God has an election love for those who are his own. In Scripture this is sometimes expressed corporately, towards a people or group, and sometimes expressed individually, towards particular persons. It is not my intention to enter into the Calvinist/Arminian debate at this point—but I will say this: the language of a special love towards the elect is common in Scripture, make of it what you will. God has particular

affection for his own in a way that is not true of everyone (Deut. 7:7-8). “Jacob I loved, Esau I hated.” This love is not motivated by anything within the beloved—it is not merited or deserved, but comes freely and graciously from God. This election love is particularly important in that it is directed towards the church.

Fifth and finally, there is a love in the context of an established relationship. This love is conditioned, provisional upon obedience. Perhaps this love comes in degrees, but it is a particular affection of God for those who obey (Jude v. 21).

For my purposes, the most significant distinction is that between the third and fourth aspects of God’s love. The doctrine of hell insists that there is a difference between God’s dispositional, yearning love for humankind and God’s special love for the elect. What is this difference? The *dogmatic universalist* conflates the two and collapses one into the other—but doing so means that hell cannot be populated, which seems to run into some significant exegetical difficulties, to say the least. The *hopeful universalist* pits passages speaking of God’s great love and of the restored eschaton against passages on eternal punishment, hoping that the latter turn out to be warnings that are never actually realized. Exegetical difficulties also abound with this move, and reconciliationism suggests a way in which both sets of passage need not be seen to be in conflict. Regarding God’s yearning love and his election love, I suggest that the difference, and what makes the difference, can begin to emerge from some reflection on sin and the problem of evil.

Divine Love and the Problem of Evil

Rightly appreciating the doctrine of the Trinity leads to the conclusion that a loving God is completely loving in his self-love. Yet it also seems fitting for God to be efficient with salvation, to save more than just a few, and, for those who are finally impenitent, we would

expect God to have good reason for the reality of their reprobation. Here, the universalist instinct is strong and powerful: if God can save one person, can he save two? If he can save two, why not four? And so on, so that eventually we ask, why not all? If God can seemingly save everyone and he does not, how can he still be good, and how can he still be loving?

On this point reconciliationism may appear to struggle, but the struggle is shared by most every Christian theism, for it is none other than the problem of evil. Unless one is willing to make the untenable claim that there is no evil, this problem must be faced. But back to the universalist instinct: it seems true that, all things being equal, it is possible for God to save everyone. But not all things are equal, and this inevitably takes us into the realm of theodicy.

Because of our topic's relation to the nature of sin, a brief venture into the problem of evil is here warranted. The standard move in defending against the problem of evil, at least in its logical form, is to provide one logically possible way in which the existence of evil can be reconciled with a God who is all-good, all-loving, and omnipotent. In and of itself, this is not a bad move—it is completely effective in answering the charge of inconsistency, because refutation of this charge is accomplished on the providing of just one logically possible explanation. It need not even be plausible, it need only be possible.

For example, a very common defense is an appeal to human free will, mostly ably defended on the contemporary scene by Alvin Plantinga.¹¹³ Plantinga argues that there is no possible way for God to create humans with a particular type of free will (libertarian) and to guarantee that all will refrain from sin or that all will freely choose salvation. He argues that

¹¹³ See his highly influential work, Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977).

since God does not do the logically impossible, and since genuine love respects the freedom of others, God cannot be held morally responsible for bringing about a world in which some people exercise their freedom in such a way that results in evil and even reprobation. As long as our definition of omnipotence does not require God to do the logically impossible, and as long as at least one world with libertarianly free creatures is as good as or better than a world without evil (better by virtue of some good(s) that comes from the existence of libertarianly free creatures), God has done nothing wrong and he is still all-loving (since love cannot be required to do the impossible). Hell exists because people use their libertarian freedom—which, by definition is outside of his control—to do evil. One simple feature of the world—free will—explains evil and vindicates God and his love. Plantinga even finds a way to link all evil back to free will, suggesting that all natural evil—every earthquake, every forest fire, every hurricane—is caused by humans or by demonic beings misusing their freedom. The free will defense succeeds in its stated goal—to provide one logically possible way in which evil and God can be reconciled. Yet we must ask—is it true? Rarely in theology are things so simple, why would we expect them to be with matters as complex as human freedom and evil? In my estimation, the free will defense fails the plausibility test and it posits a picture of divine sovereignty and human free will that is disharmonious with the Scriptures. However, the general strategy is on the right track.

What is this general strategy? First, we do well to affirm that God does not do contradictions and he does not actualize a contradictory state of affairs. God cannot bring about a world with round squares or married bachelors. Second, we cannot fault God for a world with evil in it if there is sufficiently good reason for that evil being there, if it is impossible for evil to be absent from a world with certain good things in it. Third, there is

some specific good, call it X, that obtains in this world. This specific good is such that it cannot exist without there also being evil. We might quibble about the relationship between X and evil, but in essence: if X, then evil too. Fourth, a world with X in it is, on the whole, a world that is as good as or better than a world without evil. Thus, God has done nothing wrong in bringing about a world with evil in it.

The strategy works, but I contend that limiting the specific good to just one item is reductionistic and problematic, even if so doing has significant apologetic payoff. It seems to me that there are several specific goods in this world, and their arrangement in a particular way is also good. Let us call this set $A, B, C \dots$ and the arrangement of these things q , indicated by $q(A, B, C \dots)$. Evil exists because this set of goods has some relationship of entailment to evil. In other words, there is no possible way that $q(A, B, C \dots)$ could be actualized without also the actualization of evil. Evil is, so to speak, the *necessary baggage* of $q(A, B, C \dots)$.

The likely complaint with my view will arise in defining the set. Just what are A, B, C , *et al*, and why is their arrangement q considered good? Here, chastising the apologist in at times being a bit too zealous, I suggest we can only gesture at some probable candidates, never completing the set and never determining its members with certainty. This limits the apologetic usefulness of the view, but gives it substantially more theological agility. The set might include things like free will of the compatibilist type, humans having physical bodies, the uniform consistency of causation, and God displaying his glory in the cosmos in the manner he sees fit, just to name a few. More could be suggested, many more could be debated, but the basic point would be the same: there are good things in our world that, taken together and weighed on the whole, counterbalance or outweigh the existence of evil.

However, since I have suggested that we run into the limitations of mystery in defining the set of goods, how do we know that this set really does entail the existence of evil, that it really is good and that it in fact really does outweigh the existence of evil in our world? Can the strategy work with the specific goods left so undefined, in only sketch form? I propose that it can. We know that the evil in our world is not ultimately pointless or superfluous because we know the character of God.¹¹⁴ God is good, he is loving, he would not bring about a world with the evil that is in ours if its presence were not the unavoidable companion of greater things. We do not know by seeing the connections between certain good things and all evil and then, knowing the exact values of everything involved, engaging in some cosmic moral calculus. We do not, I submit, have access to such details, as God's answer to Job might suggest (Job chapters 38-42). We know not because we can "do the math," but rather because we know God to be good and loving through other avenues of knowledge: we know this relationally, by testimony, and through revelation.

To summarize the deliverances of this consideration of theodicy: a good God would have a morally sufficient reason for the evil in our world, and we trust that he does, because we know him to be good and trustworthy. Would a loving God actualize a world in which creatures he loves experience reprobation? Similarly, we answer yes, because he has good reasons to do so, reasons incompatible with and greater than the salvation of all. The response to the problem of evil gives us a sketch of the reason behind the reality of eternal punishment: in the end, there are some counted among the reprobate because there is evil, and there is evil,

¹¹⁴ The category of evil being denied is commonly called "gratuitous" evil in the literature; I have taken up other terms so as to avoid confusion with the usage of the word elsewhere in this chapter, where the meaning is quite different.

ultimately, because God has a morally sufficient reason for bringing about a world in which it exists.

Love and Wrath

How does God love everyone, and how does God love even the reprobate? God loves everyone in the second and third senses from our taxonomy above: God loves the reprobate in that they are part of the cosmos, which he created and loves; God loves the reprobate in that they are part of humanity, endowed with the *imago dei*, and even in the tarnished and fallen state they are still members of a humanity that is the object of God's love.

How are we to understand the love of God and the wrath of God? To start, there is no contradiction in God or his actions, and our consideration of the different aspects of divine love shows how this is possible: God's love towards the reprobate is in regard to their membership in the created cosmos and in regard to their being counted among that which is humanity, his wrath—as motivated by his intra-Trinitarian love—is in regards to their sin. Love is an essential part of God's being; wrath is accidental. Interestingly, there is a sense in which wrath is actually a product of God's love: it is from his intra-Trinitarian love and regard for himself as holy, good, and of infinite worth. Wrath is the necessary response to sin, on account of God's other attributes. Sin is such that God's response towards what he would otherwise love is wrath—and even in this, in wrath and in executing just punishment, that love is not extinguished entirely; the reality of sin and its consequences transform the expression of God's love into the hell of reconciliationism, where, in love, God prevents sinners from further sin and includes them in the reconciliation of all things (while, I stress again, not mitigating the due punishment for sin). Perhaps part of the problem with the relationship between wrath and love stems from a consideration of the love of God in abstraction from his

other attributes such as holiness, sovereignty, righteousness, etc. God is not schizophrenic, and there is no tension or contradiction in himself or his actions. Reflections from theodicy show us that God's election love need not be on everyone in order for God to be in his very nature loving.

How does God show love to the reprobate? In my view, God shows the reprobate love in various items of grace and mercy realized in their final fate: continued existence where God metaphysically sustains their being, the grace shown in taking away their ability to further sin and damage themselves, the grace to put them in a place where they, in judgment, are in lucid awe of the truth and of God's goodness, etc. It is mercy for God to make the truth unavoidable, to make his character and power undeniable. In showing them the sort of grace and mercy described above, God is not mitigating their punishment; they receive, to the full extent, exactly the degree of punishment that justice requires.

The Shortcomings of Universalism

These reflections bring me to the first of universalism's shortcomings that I wish to consider. Universalism, working from assumptions about God's love, concludes that the salvation of everyone is the only or is the highest purpose of God regarding the world. Yet this seems false. God's love is not dependent on anything he does in the world but rather is full and complete in his intra-Trinitarian love. Given the atrocity and heinousness of sin as an assault on God's holy character, the unrepentant sinner ultimately offends God's self-love. This reality will greatly affect how God's gracious love will become manifest in his dealings with sinners and with the world, and the presence of other values and purposes that God has for creation means that we cannot rightly infer universal salvation from God's love. Second, the universalist's insistence that God must save all in order to be loving seems to have little

preventing it from extending further and cutting too deep. If it is unloving for God to allow people to suffer in hell, why is it not also unacceptably unloving for God to allow so many people to suffer so greatly in this life? It would seem that on the universalist's principles *any* suffering would make God unloving. Third, although I lack space for detailed defense of this point, it does seem universalism fails to do exegetical justice to numerous biblical texts. There are far too many verses that seem to indicate that hell will be a reality for some. On universalism in the 20th century, Richard Bauckham writes, "... exegesis has turned decisively against the universalist case. Few would now doubt that many NT texts clearly teach a final division of mankind into saved and lost, and the most that universalists now commonly claim is that alongside these texts there are others which hold out a universal hope (e.g. Eph. 1:10; Col. 1:20)."¹¹⁵ As I have been arguing, the texts which "hold out a universal hope" are not to be put in opposition to the texts which teach that hell is real but rather should be regarded as harmonious with them, for both sets are very much reconcilable within reconciliationism. The texts on hell cannot be reduced to mere kerygmatic or existentialist intentions—in fact, for many the kerygmatic intent would be severely weakened or lost if hell turns out to be an empty threat. Fourth, while recognizing others might use the terms differently, I will make a conceptual distinction between altruism and charity: the universalist mistakenly views the love of God as altruistic rather than charitable. The term "altruism" was coined by atheist, positivist, and forerunner to secular humanism, Auguste Comte. In this sense, pure altruism is the disinterested giving of a distinct individual to others without consideration of reward or self-benefit. Both altruism and charity are opposed to selfishness, but the difference is

¹¹⁵ Richard Bauckham, "Universalism: A Historical Survey," *Themelios* 4, no. 2 (1979): 52.

significant. In contemporary parlance “charity” has come to mean a one-way giving to the poor and needy, usually through a non-profit organization. More robustly I define “charity” as loving concern and action for those in whom we are in some relationship. God’s intra-Trinitarian love is charitable, but not strictly altruistic, and therefore all other manifestations and aspects of God’s love are also charitable, not altruistic (although certainly *gracious*). Since divine love is charitable in this manner, we cannot reason from the nature of God’s love to the extensiveness of salvation. This is so because God’s relationship with humanity after the fall is marked by sin and because God’s love is not the disinterested guarantee of salvation to all without regard to his own dignity and honor that has been violated and without regard to the consequences for other goods that might be precluded from realization in this world if he were to do so.

Questions and Objections

Some questions and objections regarding reconciliationism will be briefly considered.

The State of Reprobation

Several issues fall under the category of the condition or attitude of the reprobate. *First*, are the reprobate really, fully reconciled? If the reprobate are reconciled through their punishment, why is it not the case that their reconciliation is incomplete and lacking until their punishment is completed (which it never is)? Even though the punishment is never completed in terms of duration, the demands of justice do not go unmet, and this fulfilling of justice is the vehicle of their reconciliation. There is no longer a state of injustice in the cosmos once the wicked are defeated, judged, and the punishment of hell has commenced. It does not follow that justice has not been served merely because the penalty does not reach

termination, nor does it mean that reconciliation is not complete if punishment is everlasting. As long as the punishment is never curtailed, the demands of justice are met once the sentence begins and it is at this point the reprobate participate in the cosmic reconciliation.

Second, are they at peace? Reconciliationism is nuanced in speaking of the reprobate as “at peace.” They are at peace in accepting their punishment and their fate, and they are at peace in their fixity in a sense similar to words commonly uttered about the deceased at a funeral. They are not at peace in that they experience unfathomable shame, regret, and punishment. Yes, they are at peace in the sense that they are aware of their participation in the restored shalom of the eschaton, in the vanquishing of chaos from the cosmos, in a restored divine harmony and order that knows no boundaries or qualifications. Yes, they are at peace in that they accept and acquiesce to their punishment. No, they are not at peace in the sense that they experience some trite serenity or tranquility: the conscious suffering of the punishment remains on the forefront of their minds as their thoughts are solely fixed on their shame and God’s moral perfection. Their experience is marked by penal suffering, shame, and regret for the deeds done in the body. They are objectively at peace in the way intended by the inscription “RIP” on a tombstone, but regarding being subjectively at peace, the situation is complex and ambiguous. Certainly it is the case that the reprobate recognize the rightness of their punishment and of their place in the eschaton. In fact, the reprobate would not prefer extinction, on account of their lucidity and acquiescence—they recognize that the severity of their sin is such that their annihilation would amount to a miscarriage of justice and an impugnment of God’s character. Finally, if the reprobate are at peace, what are we to make of the biblical language of “weeping and gnashing of teeth”? This phrase is a “... proverbial

expression for pain and distress.”¹¹⁶ Reconciliationism sees this pain and distress as real, arising primarily from shame and regret.

Third, in what sense is there free will in hell? Reconciliationism does not depend on any one notion of human freedom, and most every view of free will can be accommodated. The reconciliationist picture of hell as a place of universal acquiescence, where even the defeated opposition freely bows the knee and confesses Christ’s lordship, might well be incompatible with free will of the libertarian (a.k.a. indeterminist or contra-causal) sort.¹¹⁷ However this need not be a fatal blow to reconciliationism for the libertarian, who could say that the ability to exercise libertarian free will, at least when it comes to moral decisions, is

¹¹⁶ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1992), 196. He goes on to say (all italics original), “*Wailing* signifies not only grief but grief loudly expressed, while the definite article ‘indicates the unique and extreme character of the action’ (BAGD); it is not any old wailing that is meant, but the wailing that is associated with final rejection. It will be accompanied by *the grinding of teeth*, another proverbial expression for distress and mostly used in the New Testament, as here, for grief (or possibly anger or vexation) at the final rejection.”

Luz notes that weeping and gnashing of teeth “... is the expression of horrible pain.” Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-20: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 11. Luz thinks that both phrases are expressions of pain, that there is nothing much more to them than that, and on this verse alone we should not read into them the anger of the reprobate upon seeing the redeemed or a despairing remorse. Interestingly, he notes, “Seldom has the expression been interpreted metaphorically, for the ‘weeping and gnashing and teeth’ was useful as a proof text for the bodily resurrection (as, e.g., Jerome uses it).”

¹¹⁷ The arguments of Thomas Talbott in support of necessary universalism *and* libertarian free will could be adjusted to accommodate reconciliationism, so that the reprobate in the reconciliationist hell operate with libertarian freedom. See Robin A. Parry and Christopher H. Partridge, eds., *Universal Salvation?: The Current Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003).

something the reprobate do not possess in eternal punishment. They are dead, fixed in their state, and in this way are then unable to commit any sin, for they lack the *freedom* to do so.¹¹⁸ Then the only problem would be if the libertarian insists that libertarian free will is necessary in all instances for personhood or for humanity or for the *imago dei* to obtain, but there seems to be no compelling reason for such requirements. On this view, both the ability to sin and a sinner possessing libertarian free will is dependent on this age of divine forbearance.

Reconciliationism works quite nicely with compatibilist free will; the actions of the reprobate in hell—shame, remorse, acceptance of punishment, etc.—can all easily be pictured as free in the compatibilist sense of freedom. In these acts there is no external coercion—these choices and actions are made by the agent, using the agent’s own equipment functioning properly (perhaps as properly as it ever has!), and the agent is following her strongest desire. There might even be some similarities between irresistible grace in salvation and irresistible acquiescence to punishment. In this view, the ability to sin is dependent on divine forbearance, but human freedom is not.

Fourth, an issue on lucidity and the beatific vision. The vision of hell in reconciliationism is one where the honor, worth, and justice of God are *undeniable*. God reveals himself in judgment and the reprobate respond with shame and remorse upon perceiving God’s goodness. A question arises from this—how does the reprobate’s knowledge of God not become a “beatific vision” of some sort, being pleasurable and rendering their experience on the whole good and therefore bereft of punishment? First, God is not revealed to them entirely directly or immediately: he is revealed to them in judgment

¹¹⁸ Interestingly, the libertarian still has the problem of the redeemed possessing libertarian free will and also no longer being able to commit sin.

and wrath. Second, while there is limited praise offered by the reprobate, and through them glory is given to God, their experience is not marked by pleasure, only remorse, regret, shame, and pain. Finally, this objection does not appreciate the depth of what is entailed in the second death. No one can see God's face and live (cf. Ex. 33:20), yet there will be a time when the redeemed see him *face to face* (1 Cor. 13:12). Sinners, who, if you will, in the end see God's face in judgment, die the ultimate death. Reconciliationism suggests a state of ruin and loss such that the faculties required for anything like the beatific vision are decimated.

Fifth, do the reprobate love God? D. A. Carson raises an objection against reconciliationism, arguing that if sinning ceases then the reprobate will love God. This objection can be readily answered. He says, "... are we to imagine that the lost in hell love God with heart and soul and mind and strength, and their neighbors as themselves? If not, they are breaking the first and second commandments."¹¹⁹ This raises the question, in reconciliationism, do the reprobate eventually love God? There are two answers to this question, and both are successful at fending off this criticism. 1.) One could view failure to keep the active (as opposed to the prohibitive) commandments to be a morally blameworthy offense only so long as a person is in a position where such obedience is possible. So no, the reprobate do not love God; for humans the fixity that is the second death precludes the possibility of loving God. In hell, the window of opportunity to enter into a love relationship with God has closed; therefore, while the absence of creaturely love toward God does not conform to the ideal state of what humanity should be, it is not a sin for the reprobate to lack a love relationship with God. Both now and in the eternal state the reprobate fail to love God;

¹¹⁹ Carson, *The Gagging of God*, 534. See his full discussion on pages 533-534.

but in the eternal state they also fail to hate God. In this age, when God's common grace still gives a measure of life and vitality to even the most heinous sinners, failure to participate in a love relationship with God amounts to hatred towards him: the choice is binary and there is no third option. However, in the age to come, when God's patience and the common grace of this age are superseded by the perfect execution of justice, and when the reprobate experience the *second death*, I suggest it is no longer the case that failure to love God amounts to additional sin. Analogously, we do not regard a dead man's (current) failure to love his wife as hatred for her—how can a (dead!) man be faulted for not doing what he categorically is unable to do, what does not even apply to him? Or perhaps from a different angle, do we consider it sin when an infant or someone suffering from severe mental defect fails to love, obey, and honor her parents? Moral responsibility regarding the first commandment (or any commandment, for that matter) is not binding on every person in a way that is unqualified or without prerequisites. Most everyone agrees that some of the commandments are not permanently binding (i.e., Sabbath keeping); it is possible that extenuating circumstances (such as hell) put the likes of those invoked in Carson's example in that same category. 2.) One could argue that what it means to keep the first commandment is heavily qualified by a person's situation. So yes, the reprobate love God in a sense—love for God from the reprobate looks like their response as envisaged by reconciliationism. The entire matter depends on what one means by the term “love.” With divine patience drawn to an end and the opportunity for repentance expired, the only avenue for fellowship with God has been forever closed to sinners. The reprobate do not hate God, because God's victory penetrates and subdues every aspect of the person in such a way that sin is no longer possible. Yet it is also likely the case that the condemned are incapable of positive affections towards God; their shame eclipses all else in

their consciousness. Yet it can also be said that they obey what God commands and requires of them in the eternal age: to accept their punishment and in so doing, give God glory. As much as the Johannine insistence that to love God is to obey might be a broad enough principle so as to apply to the reprobate in the age to come, it seems that in a sense the occupants of hell do love God—as much as someone in that situation is capable of doing. The regard of the reprobate in hell towards God is enough to satisfy the first commandment, but it lacks the sort of voluntariness and the reciprocity that loving God in this life enjoys.

What, Then, is Sin?

Reconciliationism does not propose nor entail an idiosyncratic or unusual understanding of sin. Most any standard theological treatment of the subject will be harmonious with the view. However, reconciliationism suggests the complete cessation and extermination of sin, and so a brief voyage into hamartiology is in order: what is sin and what are the implications of saying *sin shall be no more*?

Defining sin is no easy task. Of it R. R. Reno writes, “... theological interpreters have developed no consensus about the nature and root of sin, and there are no ecumenical doctrines that define the essence of sin.”¹²⁰ Scripture on the nature of sin is “diverse and allusive;” therefore a fundamentally negative definition is required: sin is not an ontological category; it is not “a function of embodiment or finitude;” it is disordered desire, not desire itself; it is perverse love; it cannot be reduced to a single motive (i.e., pride); it is a temporal

¹²⁰ See R. R. Reno’s entry “Sin, Doctrine of” in Kevin J. Vanhoozer et al., eds., *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 749.

category; it is “direction of life away from God;” it is a personal reality.¹²¹ It is a rich and complex concept, the definition of which is liable of reductionism if proper care is not taken.

Further complicating the matter is the doctrine’s dependence on other doctrines—sin cannot be conceptually grasped without reference to the doctrine of God, anthropology, and soteriology, amongst others. One cannot give an account of sin independent of an account of God (while, of course, the converse is not true). Ultimately, sin is profoundly theo-centric, sin is always “before God,” and all sin is a distortion of a creature’s relationship with God.

Many explanations of the nature of sin rely on word studies: I will not repeat these here, but I will distill down their deliverances. Biblically, sin is described as unrighteousness, lawlessness, ignorance, error, depravity, inattention, missing the mark, irreligion, transgression, iniquity, rebellion, treachery, evil desire, perversion, abomination, restlessness, evil, guilt, and trouble.¹²² It is moral evil, the creaturely violation of God’s moral law. Sin is the creature in an action, attitude, or state contrary to the will of God. It is also fundamentally personal. Paul R. Sponheim defines sin as “... a person’s volition, action, or condition which is against the will of God. In speaking so of sin, the emphasis is on personal activity or on a condition issuing from and sustained by such personal activity.”¹²³ Erickson’s definition: “sin

¹²¹ Ibid., 749.

¹²² See Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1998), 582-595, and Reno in Vanhoozer et al., eds., *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation...* 749.

¹²³ Paul. R. Sponheim in Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, eds., *Christian Dogmatics*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 363. In all definitions of sin as contrary to the will of God, I might add that when saying that sin is against the will of God, it is meant *the will of God for the well-being of creation*, not the will of God as understood in the sense of the divine decree of all that comes to pass.

is any lack of conformity, active or passive, to the moral law of God. This may be a matter of act, of thought, or of inner disposition or state.”¹²⁴ In Jenson’s definition, sin “is what God does not want done.”¹²⁵

Reconciliationism does not allow for any sin at all in hell: *sin shall be no more*. I have already treated the issue of the reprobate’s lack of love for God in the previous section; much of what I say here will mirror that discussion. With the creaturely freedom to sin removed (see above on divine patience), the reprobate do not commit any further moral evil or moral offense in hell. Their reconciliation through punishment as well as their defeated state precludes the active aspect of sin. In such a state of fixity, of spiritual paralysis, no acts of sin are possible. The active response is one of acquiescence, acceptance, regret, shame, and recognition of Jesus as Lord—certainly such a response is not sinful! Attitudinally, in thought and in inner disposition, the reprobate do not sin—they do not continue in rebellion, blasphemy, hatred, or anything of the sort. The reprobate are obedient to the only option available to them: they choose nothing other than to freely, genuinely, and wholeheartedly respond as they do. They do not fail to conform to God’s moral law as it relates to them, for, I suggest, conformity to the will of God by those under eternal punishment looks like the hell of reconciliationism. Of course, experiencing eternal punishment is not what God would have for any person, all things being equal, and God would, dispositionally, not want to see any human existence amount to loss and end in perdition (see the discussion on the love of God, above). However, given their state as guilty, the destructive nature of sin, and what has

¹²⁴ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 596.

¹²⁵ Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 2 vols., vol. 2 (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997), 133.

transpired leading up to the commencement of eternal punishment, the picture put forth by reconciliationism is what God wants for them—God wants them to be reconciled (even if through punishment); God wants them to be part of a renewed cosmos purged of all sin and evil; God wants them to give him glory and not amount to a total loss. In such a state, they are no longer “against God.” They are defeated, held captive by their shame in response to the irresistible power of Truth and Goodness revealed to them in judgment and punishment.

Evil, Privation, and Personhood in Hell

The elimination of sin is not enough—all evil will be eradicated.¹²⁶ Similarly with sin, ‘evil’ is at times a vague concept and definitions are often avoided or are illusive.¹²⁷ However, barring an excursus into the definition and metaphysics of evil, I can first note that, like sin, evil is fundamentally against the will of God. Second, I recognize in the Christian tradition evil has commonly been regarded in terms of privation: evil is a privation of the good that would be natural and fitting for a particular being, act, or state of affairs to have. Setting aside the matter of whether or not evil as privation is sufficient as an exhaustive description, I will

¹²⁶ If sin is completely removed, then so is all moral evil. Resisting a lengthy discussion on natural evil, it must suffice to say that God’s direct and sovereign relationship with a renewed and reconciled cosmos seems capable of being a state of affairs in which no natural evil occurs. In the glorified cosmos in the eternal state, the structure and nature of that which exists will be such that no metaphysical evil will occur—certainly such is something God can bring about. Finally, the suffering and pain of hell are goods and are not evil, for they are the just and due punishment for sin, and, as I argue, are the instruments of not only punishment but also of reconciliation.

¹²⁷ For an example in which the concept of evil is intentionally vaguely defined and in which an appeal to intuitions is made, see Henri Blocher, *Evil and the Cross: Christian Thought and the Problem of Evil* (Leicester: Apollos, 1994), 10-11.

here address a different issue: if evil is in any sense privation of the good, then to lack a good that is natural, essential, or fundamental for a being, act, or state of affairs is an evil. However, this creates a problem for reconciliationism: with the view, the reprobate lack a positive, loving, inter-personal relationship with God. If such a relationship is natural, essential, or fundamental to being a human person, then it seems that evil is not entirely removed in the eternal state (contra reconciliationism). At least two responses to this problem are available; I prefer the latter, but either will solve the problem.

One solution to this problem is to deny that, in the eternal state, the “beatific vision” relationship with God is natural for a human person. If the beatific vision is not essential to humanness but is only realized by some special divine act then to lack it is not an evil.¹²⁸ The problem is sidestepped if one contends that it is natural for a human person to have some relationship with God, but the nature of that relationship is determined by a variety of factors—relevant for this issue, factors like guilt and punishment. To be human is to have some relationship with God, but a human person can have a negative relationship and still be a person, for the relationship between a personal God and a human person under eternal

¹²⁸ Aquinas seems to be getting at this when he says, “Therefore, since the Divine essence is pure act, it will be possible for it to be the form whereby the intellect understands: and this will be the beatific vision.” The beatific vision is made possible only by the divine essence “itself united to our intellect as its form, so as to be both that which is understood, and that whereby it is understood.” Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*. Supplement Q92 Art 1 Responsio. In the Reply to Objection 14 he also says that God will be seen “as He is,” not because of the efficacy of seeing with the created intellect, but because of the effect of being seen possessed by the Divine essence. For Aquinas, God in this sense “becomes our seeing and knowing,” which enables our seeing and knowing to become united to the divine essence, and thus it is immediate. In such an understanding, the beatific vision is not an essential for being human but is a gift added beyond.

punishment is highly personal. Perhaps a love relationship with God on this side of the eternal state is natural for a human person, and to lack it is an evil, but if that is not the case in the eternal state, then the existence of the reprobate does not entail the continued existence of evil.

Another solution comes from reflection on the biblical language of ‘ruin,’ ‘destruction,’ ‘death,’ and ‘perishing’ that frequently appears in passages discussing hell. Annihilationism has a point: traditionalism has, at times, underappreciated the force of this language. Yet that does not mean we ought to conclude that ‘extinction’ is the meaning behind these words. Speaking of the Greek behind the biblical language of “destruction” in Scripture (ὄλεθος and ἀπόλλυμι/ἀπώλεια), Doug Moo says, “... leaving aside for the moment judgment texts, none of the key terms usually [means ‘extinction’] in the Old and New Testaments. Rather, they usually refer to the situation of a person or object that has lost the essence of its nature or function.”¹²⁹ It is possible, then, to view hell as the *destruction* of a person, the *perishing* of a human, the *second death*; to view eternal punishment as the “undoing” of a person’s personhood. When the Day of the Lord comes, divine patience is exhausted and all are held accountable, the sinner will be *ruined*: “... the very identity of the sinner is defined by sin, and that identity must be destroyed.”¹³⁰ Hell is the finalization of “unbecoming” human—what is left is a being still capable of experiencing punishment, but not one that is *truly human*. Since a positive loving relationship with God is not essential or natural to such a being, it is not an evil for one such as this to lack it.

¹²⁹ Moo in Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, eds., *Hell under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents Eternal Punishment* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 105.

¹³⁰ Vanhoozer et al., eds., *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation...* 750.

Reconciliationism, Banishment, and Separation from God

Reconciliationism concurs with the core of the traditional view, including the elements of separation and banishment that are, biblically, part of eternal punishment. Yet reconciliationism has a hell that is highly theo-centric, where even the reprobate are not outside the scope of reconciliation. In what sense, then, is hell a place of separation from God? If they are reconciled to God, how are they separated from him? If hell's occupants have a limited awareness of God, one that is related to their judgment, does reconciliationism then create an "un-banished" hell?

The objection behind these questions shows that the concept of separation from God requires a bit of nuance. Reconciliationism fully affirms that hell is a place of separation from God and banishment from his presence. Scripture teaches that the reprobate are cast into hell (Mark 9:42-48), that on the final day of judgment Jesus will say "away from me!" (Matt. 7:21-23; 25:41; Luke 13:22-30), and that those who do not know God "will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord" (2 Thes. 1:5-10). They are characterized as missing out on citizenship in the kingdom of God, cast outside the presence of the Lord into a place of unimaginable anguish.

Reconciliationism does nothing to undercut this teaching—the apparent problem is due to an overly simplistic theological concept of separation. Even those who are in hell are not completely separated from God in every sense: God is omnipresent (he is ontologically present everywhere at every time), and metaphysically speaking, God continues to maintain the existence of those in hell (as he does with all created beings). Further, there is a sense in which God is present to them *in judgment* (Rev. 14:10), where the reprobate see the truth of

what they are and who God is. So it cannot be said that those in hell are separated from God in every and any sense.

Hell is separation from God in that it is relational, the permanent banishment from his presence of blessing and fellowship. It is the antithesis of Rev. 21:3-4, where God will dwell with his people, and “God himself will be with them and be their God.” Hell as separation and banishment brings to focus what the reprobate do not experience, what they miss out on, namely, the ideal purpose of human existence: unbroken fellowship with God. Hell is to lose out on the opportunity for redemption and for salvation from loss, ruin, destruction, and judgment.

It is interesting that in many of the relevant passages the presence of the Lord has strong christological and incarnational overtones (Matt. 7:21-23; 25:41, etc.) Could banishment from God’s presence have some reference to the incarnate Christ, who in judgment casts people away from his presence and cuts them off? With this notion of God’s presence being tied to the incarnate Lord, the reprobate are outside the kingdom but yet neither outside of God’s final, direct, sovereign reign nor outside the scope of universal, cosmic reconciliation. The redeemed partake in harmonious and vibrant eternal life in fellowship with the Lord; the reprobate are handed over to the destruction and fixity that is the second death.

God’s Regard for the Finally Impenitent

Two brief points fall under the heading of God’s attitude for those in eternal punishment. *First*, how might one speak of God showing mercy towards the reprobate, if at all? Birks argues that in reconciliationism all of God’s attributes are shown to the reprobate,

and this may prove a helpful insistence.¹³¹ God does show the reprobate mercy and grace—not in an alleviation of the severity of punishment due for their sins, and not in salvation, but in the sort of eternal punishment of reconciliationism. They benefit from various items of grace and mercy: continued existence where God metaphysically sustains their being, the grace shown in taking away their ability to further sin and damage themselves, the grace to put them in a place where they, in judgment, are in lucid awe of the truth and of God’s goodness, etc. It is mercy for God to make the truth unavoidable, to make his character and power undeniable. However, contra Birks, it does not seem that God shows them mercy in the sense they are the salvific beneficiaries of the atonement; they are not saved from the punishment due for sin. In showing them the sort of grace and mercy described above, God is not mitigating their punishment; they receive, to the full extent, exactly the degree of punishment that justice requires.

Second, are the reprobate shown love? In addition to what I have said about divine love in relation to universalism, one point may be added. On divine love for the reprobate, it seems right to say that in the type of grace and mercy that I have just described, God shows

¹³¹ He says, “Now if the doom of lost souls involves an unwilling acknowledgment of God’s justice in their own sentence, must it not also imply a compulsory but real perception of all the other attributes of the Almighty? Must not the contemplation of infinite wisdom and love, however solemn the punishment and the compulsion by which alone it is made possible for those who have despised their day of grace, be still, in its own nature, be unutterably blessed? The personal loss and ruin may be complete and irreparable, the anguish intense, the shame and sorrow dreadful, the humiliation infinite and irreversible. Yet out of its depth there may arise such a passive but real view of the joys of a ransomed universe, and of the unveiled perfections of the Godhead, as to fulfil, even here, in a strange, mysterious way, the predicted office of the Redeemer of souls, and to swallow up death in victory.” Birks, *Victory*, 48.

love to the reprobate. Again, this is not accomplished through salvation from punishment and judgment, but rather it is accomplished through the punishment itself (see what I said above about possible ways in which God could execute eternal punishment).¹³² There is no contradiction in God or with his actions. As Birks says

If righteousness and grace coexist for ever in the infinite perfection of the Most High, their exercise may coexist for ever, even in his dealings with those whose rejection of offered grace involves the solemn necessity that this righteousness should assume the form of irreversible and ever-during punishment. Every stroke of the Avenger will be a testimony to God's anger against hatred and selfishness, and his delight in pure, genuine, and perfect love.¹³³

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that reconciliationism best delivers on all of the six presented desiderata. Unlike universalism, the view affirms all of the biblical teaching on hell without reservation or qualification, fulfilling the first desideratum. Separating itself from other traditionalisms, it harmonizes nicely with the passages that speak of eschatological reconciliation and consummation, fulfilling the second desideratum. The third is that eternal

¹³² Birks says something quite similar, writing “On the other hand, if it be meant that the infliction of just punishment is not the whole of God’s purpose towards the unsaved; but that, while His holiness is for ever manifested in the fulfilment of His warnings, and in their own irreparable loss and shame, there will, even in the depth of that ruin, be such a display of the unchangeable love of the Holy Creator to all the creatures of His hand, such depths of compassion to the self-ruined, as, without reversing their doom, may send a thrill of wondrous consolation through the abyss of what would else be unmingled woe and despair,—I do believe, for many reasons, that such a display of God’s all-perfect love is truly kept in store for the ages to come.” *Ibid.*, 64.

¹³³ Birks, *The Difficulties...* 233-234.

punishment be infinite punishment, and where annihilationism fails, reconciliationism succeeds here and can affirm the infinite dignity, honor, and worth of God and the severity of sin. The fourth desideratum separates reconciliationism from most forms of traditionalism, for the view can affirm the unqualified divine victory over sin and evil and deny an eternal cosmological dualism while most traditionalists cannot. The fifth desideratum is achieved by rightly appreciating the nature of God's love and human sin, and, with the reconciliationist picture, realizing that wrath and love are not in conflict. The view seems to succeed on the final desideratum, for it is very harmonious with the fuller eschatological picture, and although more work likely needs to be done in relating it to other aspects of theology, the view has been shown to be compatible with at least one view of the atonement and with God's love.

I have expounded the view in detail. I have an account of the state of the reprobate in reconciliationism, discussing how the envisaged changes are brought about, and arguing that the reprobate are lucid, acquiescent, shameful and remorseful, in a state of fixity, in a state of death, and will glorify God. I discussed how the view takes seriously the language of death and destruction in Scripture, something other traditionalisms often do not. I showed how eternal punishment relates to other eschatological themes, and discussed divine patience and the atonement. I also discussed universalism and the love of God, providing an account of divine love that does not conflict with eternal punishment as seen in reconciliationism. I also answered a series of questions and objections.

By offering a constructive case for reconciliationism, I have provided a superior alternative to annihilationism. I argued that traditionalism, when properly modified, is the most exegetically and theologically satisfying view of eternal punishment on offer.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

This work's title *The Fire That Reconciles* serves a dual purpose. First, by allusion to the influential annihilationist book *The Fire That Consumes*, it indicates that this work is to be viewed as a major response to the case presented therein by Edward Fudge. Not only is a response to Fudge offered, but, by virtue of his book's embodiment of most all the annihilationist arguments that went before him, it addresses the view in total. Second, it in four short words encapsulates reconciliationism—that the (metaphorical) fire of hell serves to put the reprobate within the scope of the universal reconciliation of the eschaton.

In this project I have argued that annihilationism has apparent insurmountable theological problems but reconciliationism can succeed as a doctrine of hell. I have summarized and engaged the contemporary debate between annihilationists and traditionalists, giving particular attention to Edward Fudge. His *The Fire That Consumes* received detailed treatment and analysis in chapter two, where I also presented four arguments against annihilationism that focus on hermeneutical and exegetical issues but also include some theological matters. In the third chapter I advanced a major theological argument against the view, that it has unacceptable entailments for Christology. In the fourth chapter I examined the disproportionality objection to the doctrine of hell, noting that annihilationism and two forms of traditionalism are able to resolve the problem but only a modified traditionalism called reconciliationism does so while also meeting crucial additional criteria. In the fifth

chapter I presented a detailed case for reconciliationism, arguing that it is the most scripturally faithful and theologically satisfying view of eternal punishment.

I conclude that annihilationism fares poorly in exegetical considerations but even worse in theological ones; such failures constitute sufficient reason for rejecting the view, but reconciliationism is an exegetically and theologically successful view of hell.

Some observations on the contributions of this work are in order. Many of the more novel and unique contributions relate to my defense of reconciliationism. 1). Apart from Henri Blocher's chapter in *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell* and a few journal articles and a thesis by Andy Saville, I could find no explicit contemporary defense of reconciliationism.¹ This work adds a lengthy defense of the view to the literature. 2). Realizing that such is lacking, I offer substantial traditionalist consideration of select universalist passages (1 Cor. 15:28; Eph. 1:10; Phil. 2:9-11; Col. 1:20) in defense of reconciliationism. Blocher has addressed some of these passages but not in great detail. Several commentators have hinted at the view in these passages—I have compiled and interacted with these. 3). Traditionalist defenses have handled the issue of an eschatological cosmic dualism in passing, and most go no further than arguing that the traditionalist picture is what Revelation portrays and thus this is not genuinely a problem. Mine is the first in contemporary literature to address this issue in depth. 4). I am the first to offer an exegetical

¹ Nigel M. de S. Cameron, ed. *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1992), 283-312, Andy Saville, "Hell without Sin - a Renewed View of a Disputed Doctrine," *Churchman* 119, no. 3 (2005), Andy Saville, "Reconciliationism - a Forgotten Evangelical Doctrine of Hell," *Evangelical Quarterly* 79, no. 1 (2007), and also his PhD thesis, Andy Saville, "Arguing with Annihilationism: A Doctrinal Assessment with Special Reference to Recent Evangelical Debate" (University of Coventry, 2000).

refutation of arguments for continuing sin. 5). This work gives form and content to a way that traditionalism can take seriously the scriptural language of death and destruction—something for which the annihilationist has rightly demanded an account.

Beyond the contributions relating to reconciliationism, in this work I have expanded Robert Peterson's theological argument against annihilationism, which was based on penal substitution, so that it goes through on most any understanding of the atonement and of any genuinely orthodox Christology. I have also provided serious and detailed consideration of the metaphorical nature of the language in question in the debate on eternal punishment, and I bridge that debate with contemporary discussions on metaphor, language, and truth. Finally, I have at least begun to answer Christopher Morgan's call for a full engagement of systematic theology for a doctrine of hell.²

The limitations imposed by a work like this leave many future research avenues open; here I will list a few. First, an entire chapter could easily have been included on the relationship between hell and the *imago dei*. I have implied that several, if not most all, views of the *imago dei* could be compatible with reconciliationism, but much more exploration is needed. One's views on the imago will likely determine if one regards the image as lost or persistent in the reprobate and it seems to me various live views will yield different answers to this question. While this underdetermination is not fatal to my presentation of reconciliationism—after all, the Scriptures seem to very much underdetermine a definition of the imago, content to say little more than asserting its existence, and there is far from consensus on the issue in theology today—, our anthropology will instruct the shape

² Christopher W. Morgan, *Jonathan Edwards & Hell* (Fearn: Mentor, 2004), 89, 139.

reconciliationism might take in certain aspects. Second, more work is needed on the ontology of the reprobate. Interactions with philosophy on matters such as diachronic personal existence, desires, creaturely freedom, and the nature of personhood should prove fruitful. Likewise, an engagement with psychological considerations should aid in accounting for the realization of fixity, acquiescence, death, petrification, etc. in hell. I have suggested a set of minimum criteria for an entity that is a destroyed human person to be rightly connected to the person in this life to sustain identity in a way that satisfies the demands of justice—more development on this issue is required. Third, as much of the contemporary literature in philosophy of religion on hell is taken up with the topic, the possibility of synthesizing libertarian free will with reconciliationism would be of great interest to many. Fourth, since the argument is frequently rejected as of late, more work on the correspondence between the value of God being without limit and the punishment for sin being without limit should be fruitful. Punishment in hell is a potential infinity, yet it seems that the value of God might be considered an actualized infinity (but, note, one that does not involve the absurdity of an actualized infinite set, because God’s attributes and being resist quantification—there are no “holiness units”). In short, the infinite seriousness view could receive a more robust defense than what could be afforded here. I suspect that, on this issue, interaction with the God/world relation and with the Creator/creature distinction should prove beneficial. Fifth, my presentation of reconciliationism would be strengthened by a defense of the conviction that all sin is against God. Sixth and finally, the achievements of this project prepare the way for a full reconciliationist response to universalism, particularly as found in influential books by Jan Bonda and Robin Parry.³

³ J. Bonda, *The One Purpose of God: An Answer to the Doctrine of Eternal Punishment* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B.

Before concluding with some reflections for pastoral theology, a few words on the psychological difficulty of this doctrine are in order. John Stott writes, “Well, emotionally, I find the concept [of the traditional view of hell] intolerable and do not understand how people can live with it without either cauterizing their feelings or cracking under the strain.”⁴ Perhaps a third option would be to find emotional relief by giving superficial assent to the doctrine but ultimately, perhaps even subconsciously, rejecting it. At any rate, I must confess that in a sense I share Stott’s assessment and have on occasion stood at the precipice of emotionally cracking as I stared into the abyss of hell. Yet the same is true when I look evil squarely in the eyes—who can read reports of a coach at a major American university sexually abusing young boys while those in power turn a blind eye without emotionally breaking down? Who can tolerate the genocide, child abuse, starvation, disease, and every other horrendous evil that permeates our world without cauterizing their feelings or cracking under the strain?

Hell should be terrifying and upsetting to us. We should not expect to understand it or make sense of it, just as we should not expect to fully comprehend the depths of sin and evil that hell exists for in the first place. I do not understand everlasting conscious punishment just as I do not understand the existence of pedophilia in our world—why should I expect to? Further, I cannot emotionally bear the weight of the horrendous evils in our world, just as I cannot emotionally bear the weight of the existence of hell—yet I can deny neither.

Eerdmans, 1998) and Robin Parry under the pseudonym Gregory MacDonald, *The Evangelical Universalist* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006).

⁴ David Lawrence Edwards and John R. W. Stott, *Evangelical Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 314.

It is only by the Cross that we might avoid existential paralysis while still retaining Christian theism, the doctrine of hell, and some semblance of emotional health and vitality. The Cross reveals God's judgment of sin and promises its ultimate demise. The Cross demonstrates that sin is costly beyond comprehension. In response to Stott, one can only view hell in light of the Cross, and vice-versa, and only then is one enabled to carry that weight without cauterization or cracking.

As was said in an earlier chapter, hell exists because of sin, and we should be skeptical that we wretched sinners can adequately assess the seriousness of sin on our own. Intuitions and emotional instincts are often in need of sanctification, even among believers. It is dubious that our warped and stunted emotions and intuitions are entirely reliable in this area. We are not able to perceive any fraction of the true heinousness and ugliness of sin. The emotional and psychological weight is due to the horror of sin and its consequences, not to the doctrine of eternal punishment itself, for hell is not an evil but rather the response to evil and sin. To the objection that hell is unacceptable, the answer is always Anselm's, "you have not yet come to grips with how serious sin is."⁵

Implications for Pastoral Theology

Here I will briefly address the issue of missions and hell. Sometimes traditionalists argue that annihilationism (or universalism, for that matter) is dangerous because it will undercut the impetus and effectiveness of missions and evangelism. This argument is weak, in part because it cashes on an impoverished view of salvation. Salvation is much more than

⁵ *Cur Deus Homo* I.21

“fire insurance”; it is the making right of the creature with the Creator and the reestablishment of true human existence, fully realized with glorification in the eschaton. While the doctrine of hell certainly has kerygmatic value (when utilized properly), and a desire to see sinners repent and avoid the wrath of God has a place in missionary efforts, traditionalism does not stand or fall as a motivation for missions and evangelism. The hell of annihilationism, at least as presented by Edward Fudge, is still a dreadful prospect and I see no reason to think it would necessarily compromise the motivation for or effectiveness of these tasks of the church. Further, the purpose of these is ultimately the worship and glorification of God and the motivation is ultimately faithfulness to the Lord’s charge to do so.

On to other implications for pastoral theology, of which reconciliationism has several. It posits an eschaton in which sin will be no more, where God will be all in all, where all things will be reconciled to God, and where every knee will bow and every tongue confess. The view, if successful, ties together several biblical streams of thought without depreciating one over the other, as competing views of eternal punishment seem liable to do. It may well be the most biblically and theologically satisfying view on offer.

We do well to remember that hell in the eschatological picture, while important, is less significant than the redemption of the saints and the restored cosmos. Reconciliationism reflects this: hell is real, but existence in hell is a shadow of true, intended existence—which is thriving in eternal life in fellowship between creature and Creator!

Reconciliationism helps to alleviate the most poignant aspect of the problem of evil—the problem of hell. Not all tension is removed, but I suspect the view goes a good distance in making progress by affirming sin and evil as temporary and fleeting, current realities that will

not exist in the eschaton. The victory that was won on the cross knows no bounds and in the end penetrates so deeply that sin and evil will be *completely eradicated*.

If a theology's worth is measured by its pastoral and preaching implications, reconciliationism fares well. It removes the troubling depictions of hell as a place where sin is eternally unbridled and wicked people and demons torment each other and themselves and replaces it with a place where God is supreme, a place for even the defeated to reside in the eschaton. It gives comfort for those who are suffering today, that evil will ultimately be completely eradicated and defeated. Finally, it pictures a final relationship between God and the totality of creation where the rift of sin is no longer. Even in eternal punishment, reconciliationism can say "in the end, God."

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