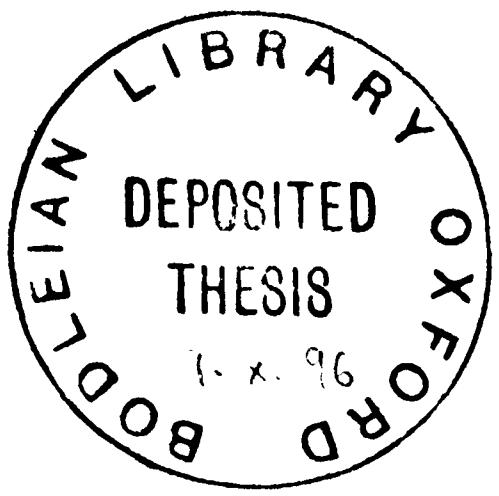
HELL: AN ANALYSIS OF SOME MAJOR TWENTIETH CENTURY ATTEMPTS TO DEFEND THE DOCTRINE OF HELL

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis submitted to the University of Oxford
Faculty of Theology by Mr. Tony J. Gray

Hilary Term, 1996



ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines some major attempts made during the twentieth century to defend the doctrine of hell in the light of charges made against it. It aims to provide a survey of major statements of the doctrine, evaluate the coherence of the various arguments involved, and then determine what is the most adequate and coherent defence of the doctrine.

The second and third chapters provide a backdrop to the rest of the thesis, detailing the traditional model of hell as presented in the works of St.Augustine and Jonathan Edwards, and then examining the modern reaction against hell as eternal retributive punishment.

Chapter four addresses the question of whether Karl Barth was a universalist, and concludes that because he cannot logically avoid the charge of universalism, his theology is not able to provide an adequate defence of the doctrine of hell.

The Roman Catholic theologians Hans Küng, Karl Rahner, and Hans Urs von Balthasar are examined in the fifth chapter. They provide a wealth of information on topics dealing with hell, and although hopeful that there will be a universal outcome in the eschaton, they defend the possibility of hell.

The sixth chapter looks at the impact and influence of C.S.Lewis' work on hell, whilst the seventh addresses a recent debate concerning whether or not those in hell will cease to exist. Although the position known as conditional immortality may be viable, as a defence of hell in itself it is insufficient.

The eighth and ninth chapters examine arguments used in the philosophy of religion. William Lane Craig and Thomas Talbott have debated the possibility of hell using the concept of Middle Knowledge. While Middle Knowledge is found wanting, this debate is particularly helpful in highlighting the issues involved in defending hell, and these are then considered in more detail in the ninth chapter which examines free will defences of hell.

Finally, the conclusion argues that the most adequate and coherent defence of hell available to the modern mind rests itself on the principle of free will. When this defence addresses particular issues highlighted throughout the rest of the thesis, then a coherent defence of the doctrine of hell can be provided.

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Hell: An Analysis of Some Major Twentieth Century Attempts To Defend The Doctrine Of Hell

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This thesis examines some major attempts made during the twentieth century to defend the doctrine of hell in the light of charges made against it. Although belief in the doctrine has been diminishing during this century, there appears to be renewed interest in a doctrine which is morally repulsive to many, yet centrally important to the Christian faith which others profess.

The introduction highlights the threefold aims of the thesis. These are to provide a survey of some major statements of the doctrine of hell given this century, to evaluate the coherence and strength of the various arguments involved, and then to determine what would be the most adequate and coherent defence of the doctrine of hell. Although many have attacked the doctrine of universalism, the underpinning of this thesis is that such an attack must be able to provide an adequate statement of the alternative proposal.

The second and third chapters provide a backdrop to the rest of the thesis. The second details the traditional elements of hell as presented in the works of St.Augustine and Jonathan Edwards. This tradition can then be split into the following four main components: that hell is definitely a *possibility*, that the *nature* of those in hell is existence, that there is a *finality* to hell, and that the *justification* for hell is God's eternal retributive punishment. These four elements can then be used as an investigative model for the rest of the thesis as different presentations of the doctrine of hell are examined.

Chapter three examines hell as eternal retributive punishment, the major component of this traditional model which has received most criticism in modern theology. Although some still attempt to defend hell as eternal retribution, there is a general failure to find an explanation as to why a finite period of evil deserves an infinite punishment. This issue is particularly highlighted by the detailed works of Walter Moberly, Jonathan Kvanvig, and Marilyn McCord Adams. It is mainly due to this problem of disproportion and an explanatory failure that theologians have looked elsewhere when considering hell.

Chapter four turns to the theology of Karl Barth. This necessarily involves addressing the question of whether his approach was universalistic in nature, for if his theology is to be used in a defence of hell, this position must be ruled out. After carrying out a study of some major themes in Barth's work, the various interpretations of Barth that have been made concerning this issue are explored. In particular, the recent

attempt by John Colwell to clear up the ambiguity within Barth is investigated. He defends Barth against the charge of universalism which comes from a number of quarters. However, it is concluded that because Barth cannot logically avoid the charge of universalism, his theology cannot provide an adequate defence of the doctrine of hell.

The Roman Catholic theologians, Karl Rahner, Hans Küng, and Hans Urs von Balthasar are examined in the fifth chapter. Rahner provides a wealth of information on topics dealing with hell, yet he is hard to understand when it comes to issues of time and eternity. Such problems make his thoughts and writings on hell hard to synthesize. Küng has a similar problem, and in addition it appears that he comes so close to universalism at times that it is hard to determine where his thoughts ultimately rest. In the course of an attempt to clarify his position, von Balthasar provides perhaps the most helpful discussion of the doctrine of hell written this century. For all three theologians, although they are hopeful that there will be a universal outcome at the eschaton, they defend the possibility of hell on the basis of human free will.

The sixth chapter looks at C.S.Lewis' work on hell. The impact and influence of his work is enormous, and his defence of hell based on the principle of human free will is most persuasive. This chapter surveys material from both his apologetic writings, and from his other creative literature. Nevertheless, because of Lewis' style of writing, several issues relating to the choice of hell and the possibility of a second chance remain puzzling,

and a more detailed exploration of the free will approach is therefore required if this is to provide an adequate defence of the doctrine of hell.

Before this study takes place, in chapter seven the thesis turns to a recent debate concerning the *nature* of those in hell, and whether in fact the damned will cease to exist. This debate has occurred largely within the evangelical community, although as the chapter makes clear, some other theologians have appealed to it as a possibility. Although the position known as conditional immortality may be backed up by a variety of arguments, as a defence of hell on its own conditional immortality (or annihilationism) remains insufficient. This is due to the fact that it can mask the problems which are common to the more traditional doctrine, as highlighted in chapter three. However, if combined with some free will defence of hell which tackles the issue of *justification*, conditional immortality may be a coherent option.

The eighth and ninth chapters examine arguments used in the philosophy of religion. William Lane Craig has defended the possibility of hell using the concept of Middle Knowledge, whilst Thomas Talbott has criticised his arguments on a number of fronts. Although Middle Knowledge as a theory fails, this debate is particularly helpful in highlighting the issues involved in defending hell. These are central issues such as the importance of free will, the nature of the choice to be in hell, God's knowledge, and the possibility of those in heaven being happy when others are in hell.

These are considered in more detail in the ninth chapter which specifically examines free will defences of hell. A wide variety of theologians have examined these issues. In particular, the recent renaissance amongst philosophers of religion who have turned to matters of doctrine has made hell a topic for discussion once again. This penultimate chapter highlights some of the key issues which face any attempt to defend the doctrine of hell in the face of charges made against it.

Finally, the conclusion argues that the most adequate and coherent defence of hell available to the modern mind rests itself on the principle of human free will. When this defence addresses particular issues highlighted throughout the rest of the thesis, then a coherent defence of the doctrine of hell can be provided. Some may carry out their lives in such a way that the path they follow will ultimately lead them away from God. They make themselves into people who would choose to be in hell, and because of the value that God attaches to free choices, God will respect the choices of these people to be in hell. This is God's punishment, that he allows individuals to reap the consequences of their decision to live without him. Hell is a *possibility*, the *nature* of which may be either existence or annihilation, there will be a *finality* to human life, and the *justification* for hell rests on the principle of human free will.

CONTENTS

PREFACE ..... p. i

Chapter

I. INTRODUCTION 1
Culturally Unavailable 1
Twentieth Century 5
Defence 6
Universalism 7
Coherence and Strengths 8
Hell and Christian Belief 8
Content 9

II HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE DOCTRINE OF HELL 14
Augustine 17
Possibility 17
Nature 19
Finality 21
Justification 23
Jonathan Edwards 27
Conclusion 33

III HELL AS RETRIBUTIVE PUNISHMENT IN MODERN THEOLOGY 35
Eternal Retributive Punishment 37
Retribution Defended 41
Vindication 42
The Natural Order 43
Glory and Majesty, Praise and Worship 45
Human Sin and Divine Holiness 47
Reactions 51
Moberly, Kvanvig and Adams 57
Walter Moberly 57
Jonathan Kvanvig 62
Marilyn McCord Adams 71
Conclusion 77

IV AMBIGUITY IN KARL BARTH: HELL AND APOKATASTASIS IN THE THEOLOGY OF KARL BARTH 80
Barth's Writings 83
Election and Predestination 85
Christ Takes the Rejection of All Upon Himself 87
Hell and Judgement 89
The Impossibility of Sin 91
God's Freedom 93
Barth's Interpreters 98
Emil Brunner 99
Colin Brown 100
Berkouwer 101
Bettis 103
Other Interpreters 109
Barth's Influence 113
John Colwell 116
God's Eternity 117
Proclamation of the Gospel 123
Conclusion 128

V HOPEFUL UNIVERSALISTS OR DEFENDERS OF HELL?
HANS KÜNG, KARL RAHNER, AND HANS URS VON BALTHASAR..... 131
Karl Rahner 131
Hermeneutics 133
Eternity and Death 136
Decision, Free Will and Judgement 139
God's Salvific Will versus The Possibility of Hell: Agnosticism. 143
Conclusion 150
Hans Küng 151
Jesus' Descent Into Hell 153
Problematic Belief in Hell 153
Jesus and Hell 155
Is Hell Eternal? 156
Conclusion 164
Hans Urs von Balthasar 165
Holy Saturday 166
Hope 169
Limitless Love 171
Judgement 173
Human Freedom 175
Mystery 177
Conclusion 179
Rahner, Küng and Von Balthasar - A Comparison 183
Conclusion 188

VI C.S.LEWIS - A POPULAR DEFENCE OF THE DOCTRINE OF HELL... 191
Introduction 191
The Problem of Pain 196
The Trouble With `X' 204
The Great Divorce 206
Critical Evaluation 212
The Choice 214
A Second Chance? 216
The Nature of Hell 220
Eternity 220
Hermeneutics 222
Influence of Lewis 224
Conclusion 228

VII HELL AND CONDITIONAL IMMORTALITY IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY..... 231
Introduction 231
Recent Debate 234
Summary of the Arguments 238
Initial Observations 239
Hidden Motives 239
Approaching the Issue 242
Scripture as the Final Authority 244
Lack of Critical Assessment 244
Scripture the Major Battle-Ground 247
Conditionalism and Doctrine 249
Conditional Immortality 249
God's Justice 255
Victory 259
Other Considerations 262
Analysis 264

Non-Evangelicals 268
Conclusion 272

VIII A MIDDLE KNOWLEDGE PERSPECTIVE ON THE DOCTRINE OF HELL: CRAIG VERSUS TALBOTT 276
The Debate 277
Craig I 277
Molinism and Middle Knowledge 277
Talbott I 297
Providence without Foreknowledge 298
Providence with Middle Knowledge 298
Providence with Simple Foreknowledge but Without Middle Knowledge 300
Talbott II 301
Conservative Theism 302
Hard-Hearted Theism 303
Moderately Conservative Theism 303
Craig II 304
Talbott III 306
Craig III 308
Analysis 313
Definition of Hell 313
God's Creation 314
Compossibility 315
Transworld Damnation 316
Optimum Balance 317
The Redeemed 319
Motive 321
The Nature of Evil 323
Can God Infringe Freedom? 327
Conclusion 328
Presuppositions 329
Importance of Freedom 329
Nature of Evil and Choice 329
Redemption and the Redeemed 330
Creation 330
Conclusion 331

IX THE FREE WILL DEFENCE OF HELL 332
God's Knowledge and Power 334
The Possibility of Choice 339
Mental Deficiency 344
Ignorance and Deception 344
Irrationality 352
The Justification of Freedom 355
Finality 366
Happiness in Heaven? 370
Punishment 370
Conclusion 380

X CONCLUSION 383

BIBLIOGRAPHY 391

PREFACE

Writing a thesis would be nearly impossible without the help of so many people. I wish here to record by debt and gratitude to a number of key individuals. Keith Ward saw me through the long period of research and writing, and I am grateful to his insightful and provocative supervision throughout. Ian Markham pushed me towards this subject and inspired me in the important task of theology. Inspiration also came from Steven Singleton, Gary Millar, Walter Rose, Chris Sinkinson, Mark Elliott and the other members of the Whitefield Institute. Helpful discussion was provided by the Oxford Theology Faculty Graduate Seminar, and I express my thanks to the British Academy for providing the funds to see this project through. Particular mention must be made of John Wenham who encouraged me throughout the thesis, and Alan Fairhurst who provided insightful correspondence.

Researching such a dark subject can be an oppressive experience, and so to all these and many other people I am extremely thankful. Above all, however, I wish to thank my wife Gemma for being there at all times. To the most important person in my life I dedicate this humble offering, and thank God for his manifold grace in providing all that I hold dear.

INTRODUCTION

CULTURALLY UNAVAILABLE

In a paper concerning the American civil debate about values in education, Martin Marty has argued that those who demand religious education must also include as part of the package the teaching of the doctrine of eternal punishment. However, he laments that hell has so disappeared from religious life that "It is a doctrine that is hence not culturally available"[1] due to the numerous problems associated with the doctrine in the modern mind. He maintains that hell should be included in moral instruction which is theistic in nature, as any mention of God also includes talk of rewards and punishment - hence hell is relevant. Believing that America's religious history testifies to the fact that moral discourse did not occur without mention of hell, Marty observes how attempts were later made to talk of moral education without reference to God, and hence without reference to heaven or hell. The result is that "Hell disappeared - no one noticed."[2]

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[1] Martin Marty, "Hell Disappeared. No One Noticed. A Civic Argument", Harvard Theological Review 78 (1985), p.381.

[2] p.393; there are a number of others who believe that hell has 'disappeared' from our culture: Piero Camporesi writes that "The maps of hell have by now become illegible." *The Fear of Hell: Images of Damnation and Salvation in Early Modern Europe*, trans. L. Byatt (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), p.vi; for other more popular statements of this view see John Blanchard, *Whatever Happened to Hell?* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 1993), pp.13-18.

The evidence he provides for this case is fairly impressive. Both the lack of references to hell in modern theological bibliographies and journals, and perhaps more importantly a list of religious opinion polls, point to the fact that hell plays a much smaller part in American secular and religious life than it once did. For example, a 1952 poll revealed that 42% of people questioned did not believe in hell, and that 46% thought there was no possibility of them ending up in hell. Although such statistics may not seem to indicate a doctrine that is "culturally unavailable", the compiler of the census comments that,

> It is easy to miss the profound implications of these findings because the term *Hell* has come to be regarded as nothing more than a byword in vulgar speech. Considered in the perspective of Christian realism, however, Hell is the alternative to justification and salvation ... To deny the existence of Hell is implicitly to deny the need for redemption ... Viewed in the light of these considerations, the fact that over one out of every four Roman Catholics and almost half the Protestants no longer believe in the existence of Hell may be judged highly significant.[3]

A further poll of Catholics in the 1980's revealed that only one percent saw hell as a possibility for them, and 74% saw it as the absence of God, rather than any traditional image of fire and sensory pain. 22% pictured Hitler in hell, with only 15%

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[3] John L.Thomas, S.J., *Religion and the American People* (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1963), pp.60-62, quoted in Marty, p.394.

viewing Stalin as ending up there with him![4]

Although these and other examples provided by Marty are impressive, another set of data exists that may suggest a different picture. In 1991, U.S. News and World Report published the results of a religious survey under the title "Hell's Sober Comeback". 65% of people asked in the United States still believed in the doctrine of hell. Other figures for belief in hell paint a similar picture: Ireland 50%, Northern Ireland 78%, Canada 38%, Italy 36%, Spain 27%, Great Britain 25%. Other European countries did not fare so well, but the belief still survives: France 16%, Belgium 15%, Netherlands 14%, West Germany 13%, Denmark 8%, and Sweden 7%.[5] Evidence from surveys of evangelical seminary students in America points not surprisingly to a prevalent belief in eternal hell. One such poll concluded that 95% of evangelical seminarians believed in an eternal hell. Yet even amongst this population, sociologists have noticed some hesitation. James Hunter reports that when these evangelical seminarians were "asked whether they believed in a place of eternal torment for nonbelievers, most affirmed this, yet not without some equivocation." In summing up his survey results that deal with the new generation of evangelicals, Hunter concludes that,

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[4] U.S. Catholic May 1983, quoted in Marty, p.396.

[5] These statistics are cited in Hans Küng, *Credo: The Apostle's Creed Explained for Today* (London: SCM, 1993), p.174; another helpful survey of the 'comeback' of hell is given by Eric Zorn in Notre Dame Magazine, Summer 1994, pp.36-41.

> The sentiment among the coming generation, then, is mixed. It is clear that they know what they "should" believe but with that they struggle. Intellectually grasping the soteriological demands of orthodox Christianity is one matter: emotionally accepting them is quite another.[6]

The evidence given by Marty, especially that which shows the absence of hell from major bibliographies on religion, may indicate that hell has become culturally unavailable in the ivory towers. The polls which he reports back up his claim that there is a wider loss of belief in hell, yet the statistics demonstrate some persistent belief in the doctrine. This is born out by the second set of more recent statistics, that perhaps hell is making something of a sober comeback amongst general populations.

It may be that the real situation this evidence points to is two-fold. Firstly, that there are large segments of the religious population which still maintain a strong belief in hell. This would account for the opinion poll statistics. On the other hand, if such an entity as academic theology could be defined, then it is amongst these professionals that hell has largely become a belief consigned to history.

It is with such a background in mind that this thesis is written. Compared with other major Christian doctrines,

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[6] James D.Hunter, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), p.390.

theological exploration of the doctrine of hell has been sparse during the twentieth century. However, in the last five years, there has been somewhat of an explosion of publications on the subject.[7] It seems that a culturally unavailable doctrine, which for many causes embarrassment and shame, is now making something of a comeback.[8]

This thesis aims to :

(i) provide a survey of some major twentieth century attempts to defend the doctrine of hell;

(ii) to evaluate the coherence and strengths of these various attempts;

(iii) to determine what may serve as an adequate defence of the doctrine of hell for the latter part of the twentieth century.

The rationale for following this path can be explained as follows:

Twentieth Century

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[7] In fact, in the introduction to the special edition of New Blackfriars 69 (1988), entitled "Hell: What it Means to be Saved", p.467, the editor writes that "the notion of hell ... has taken on an unexpected new lease of life in several very different places."

[8] See the slightly misleading report by Peggy Landers in the American paper The Post and Courier (November 28, 1993).

The thesis examines major theological expositions of the doctrine of hell which have been given during the twentieth century, especially those appearing towards the second half of this period. This period has been chosen for a number of reasons. Firstly, debates in previous centuries have been ably examined and such work need not be rehearsed here.[9] Secondly, it is noticeable how little has been written on the subject in this half of the present century. Some extensive discussion took place at the beginning of the century (tagging onto the tail end of the Victorian debates)[10] but little of any substance has been provided until recently. In addition to this second point, it is clear that in the past few years hell has not only made a comeback in contemporary opinion polls, but also amongst academic literature. This provides another reason for examining the doctrine of hell at this time.

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[9] D.P.Walker provides a detailed account of the seventeenth century debates in *The Decline of Hell* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964); Philip Almond discusses belief in heaven and hell during the period from 1650 to 1750 in *Heaven and Hell in Enlightenment England* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994); Geoffrey Rowell provides a study of the nineteenth century controversies in *Hell and the Victorians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974).

[10] See for example *Is There A Hell?: A Symposium by Leaders of Religious Thought* (London: Cassell & Co. Ltd, 1913), and a collection entitled *Seventeen Pamphlets on Everlasting Punishment* (Various authors and publishers - 1854-1917); the most helpful discussions given in the first half of the century are those given by John Baillie, *And the Life Everlasting* (London: OUP, 1934) and Baron Friedrich von Hügel, *Essays and Addresses on the Philosophy of Religion: 1st Series* (London: Dent and Sons, 1921).

Defence

Within Christianity there is a strong tradition that the elements of faith are in some sense to be defended. One only has to look at the fathers of the church to see this in action. Justin's *Apology*, Origen's *Against Celsus*, and supremely Augustine's *The City of God* all attempted in their own way to defend the faith. In the twentieth century the task remains similar, although the contexts and issues have changed drastically. When dealing with the doctrine of hell, the apologetic task appears to take on a subject matter that is of extreme difficulty and sensitivity.

Universalism

When the doctrine of hell is raised, the obvious alternative of universalism (which holds that all human beings will eventually be saved) is never far behind.[11] Numerous theologians have

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[11] It must be mentioned here that the term *apokatastasis* is often used by modern theologians (see especially Barth and those who discuss him) to imply the same doctrine. Strictly speaking, this is not the case, for the term derives from Origen's discussion of eschatology and how the final consummation of God's creation will mirror its beginning. Modern universalism does not necessarily imply this scheme, and so care must be taken when using the term. For a discussion of Origen's doctrine, see J.N.D.Kelly *Early Christian Doctrines* (London: A.& C.Black, 1977), pp.473-4, and Frederick W.Norris, "Universal Salvation in Origen and Maximus" in Nigel M.de S.Cameron, Ed., *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1992), pp.35-72; also note that in the literature the term is

advocated a form of universalism during this century (for example, Nels Ferré,[12] John Hick,[13] and J.A.T.Robinson[14]) and have attracted various levels of debate and criticism.[15] However, this thesis aims to concentrate on the doctrine of hell itself, in the belief that any attack against universalism must also furnish a coherent alternative in the form of a 'positive' statement of a doctrine of hell.

Coherence and Strengths

The arguments examined are evaluated according both to their internal coherence, and their coherence with other Christian doctrines where relevant. The debates in the philosophy of religion make it clear that incoherence is very often hard to prove to everyone's satisfaction. Nevertheless, the thesis aims to demonstrate that at important stages the doctrine of hell must face up to a number of logical difficulties. It is often the case that theologians appeal to mystery, and this may well

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also rendered as apocatastasis, whereas in this thesis apokatastasis shall be used.

[12] Ferré takes this position in both *Evil and the Christian Faith* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947), and *The Christian Understanding of God* (London: SCM, 1952).

[13] See *Evil and the God of Love* (London: Macmillan, 1985 - 2nd Edition), and *Death and Eternal Life* (London: Macmillan, 1985 - 2nd Edition).

[14] *In The End, God* (London: James Clarke, 1950).

[15] The majority of the works considered in this thesis will at one time or another mention, expound or critique a major proponent of universalism.

be appropriate at various instances. However, a defence of any doctrine must make a sufficient attempt to clarify the claims it is making and the problems it faces.

Hell and Christian Belief

Although the primary aim of this thesis is both to survey and evaluate the various arguments given for belief in hell, this study will also inevitably give some indication as to which are the best strategies when mounting such a defence. Belief in hell has always been a major constituent of the Christian faith. It is primarily during the enlightenment period that the doctrine has been seriously questioned,[16] and despite what may be called a 'comeback' of the doctrine in recent years, many are left in bewilderment and embarrassment when they consider the doctrine. On the other hand, many are convinced that the Christian faith must involve some form of the doctrine of hell, for if there is no 'bad news' and alternative, then in what sense is Christianity 'good news' or a 'salvation' from anything? Although various answers have been given to this argument (perhaps that Christ came to save people from despair, meaningless, selfishness and so on), a strong strand within the tradition finds itself compelled to affirm the possibility of some people being eternally 'lost'. If this tradition wishes to continue into the future, then it may be that an examination of present ideas will point toward an adequate defence of the

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[16] See Walker, Almond and Rowell, op.cit.

tradition.

Content

This thesis concentrates on a selection of twentieth century theologians and theologies. With respect to the theologians, there are obvious omissions, and these must be accounted for. On the one hand, there are those theologians that have been omitted because they have been treated extensively elsewhere (for example, the treatment of Schillebeeckx given in the excellent thesis by Kendall Harmon[17]). On the other hand, there are theologians who may have been treated, yet who would have lent little more to the study due to their brief treatments of the doctrine of hell itself (for example, despite their overwhelming concerns with eschatology, Jürgen Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg fall into this category, and therefore are not treated in this thesis[18]). In addition, there are theologians who

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[17] Kendall Harmon, *Finally Excluded From God? Some Twentieth Century Theological Explorations of the Problem of Hell and Universalism With Reference to the Historical Development of These Doctrines* (Oxford D.Phil Thesis, 1993).

[18] Jürgen Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* (London: SCM, 1967) and *The Way of Jesus Christ* (London: SCM, 1990) show hints of universalism yet an extensive treatment is lacking. Wolfhart Pannenberg's *Systematic Theology Vol I & II*, trans. G.W.Bromiley (Edinburgh: T.& T.Clarke, 1991 & 1994) provides a brief discussion of judgement and punishment, and has been charged with universalism. Nevertheless, in *Reason for Hope: The Systematic Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg* (Oxford: OUP, 1990), p.201, Stanley Grenz comments that "although he emphasizes the universality of the possibility of salvation in this manner and even moves the concept of eternal condemnation to that of a border situation, Pannenberg is unwilling to embrace universalism."; see also the discussion given by E.F.Tupper in *The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg* (London: SCM, 1974), pp.244-

have addressed the issue of hell yet who are not examined in detail due to the reason given above under 'universalism'. That is, they advocate some form of universalism, and so are not the subject matter of this thesis (and in addition, have been treated at length elsewhere[19]).

What, then, will be the content of this study? The first chapter examines the traditional model of hell as found in Augustine and Jonathan Edwards, and using a typology developed by the philosopher of religion Jonathan Kvanvig it draws out four key elements from the traditional doctrine. These four elements will then be used as a model with which to compare and analyse modern attempts to defend the doctrine. An examination of modern defences of this traditional retributive position is then provided. These two chapters provide an essential backdrop to the rest of the thesis, illustrating the history of and reaction against the doctrine of hell.

What may be called the 'dialectical' approach to hell is then examined. Karl Barth is a special case, for behind him looms the charge of universalism. It is in this sense that universalism is examined in this thesis, for if the charge is correct, and Barth

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[19] Harmon, op.cit., provides an excellent treatment of John Robinson and the influence of N.Berdyaev's theology on Robinson; for analysis of Tillich's universalism, see David E.Roberts, "Tillich's Doctrine of Man", in C.W.Kegley & R.W.Bretall, Eds., *The Theology of Paul Tillich* (New York: Macmillan, 1952), p.129, and Alexander J.McKelway, *The Systematic Theology of Paul Tillich* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1964), pp.243-247.

was a universalist, then he may not be included amongst modern 'defenders of hell.' However, if he was consistent in leaving hell open as a possibility, then the way in which he articulates this view is vitally important to the thesis.

Karl Rahner, Hans Küng and Hans Urs von Balthasar can in some sense be listed under the 'dialectical approach.' They are theologians who wish to leave hell open as a possible destiny for some of humanity, yet who are extremely optimistic about the universalist doctrine. All three theologians warrant inclusion due to the amount of space they give to the doctrine (space rare in modern theological writing), and due to their strenuous attempts to bridge the gap between orthodoxy and universalism.

C.S.Lewis cannot be avoided in any discussion of hell, mainly because, as it will be argued, he has had such a huge impact on modern understanding of the doctrine. Although he has been treated extensively elsewhere,[20] examination of Lewis is required here due to the influence he has had, and the use made of his ideas in free will responses.

The most voluminous writings on the doctrine of hell have always come from the more conservative wing of the church, and hence the evangelical debate concerning hell and the possibility of 'annihilation' cannot be ignored. Again, some examination of

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[20] See especially the lengthy chapter on Lewis in the thesis by Harmon, op.cit.

this material has occurred,[21] but the treatment given here concentrates primarily on British evangelical theologians. In addition, it examines those who have appealed to annihilation outside of the evangelical camp, and the contribution that this can make to debates concerning hell.

Finally, another field where there has recently been a large amount of writing on the doctrine of hell is within the philosophy of religion. This debate stresses the importance of human free will in any defence of hell, and can be broken down into two main sections. The first employs the notion of middle knowledge, and thereby wishes to employ a free will defence of hell within a Calvinist setting. The second is a more wide-ranging discussion of the possibility of defending hell, and the problems it raises for Christian doctrine.

From this it can be seen that the survey and scrutiny of the material will be broad and wide-ranging. It is hoped that this will provide an analysis which will contribute to the debate about hell, and determine whether it is possible to provide a sufficiently coherent statement of the doctrine of hell? In providing a survey of twentieth century attempts to defend the doctrine of hell, the thesis aims to show that although many of these positions struggle with unresolved difficulties, a defence

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[21] Once again, see Harmon's thesis, which considers the evangelical Clark Pinnock, the Canadian Protestant theologian John Mackintosh Shaw, and the Roman Catholic scholar, Edward Schillebeeckx.

of hell based on the over-riding importance of human freedom may point to a way forward.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE DOCTRINE OF HELL

To examine the doctrine of hell in the twentieth century is not to deny that hell has a formidable history within the Christian tradition. Hell has in fact had a substantial part to play in many theologies, and numerable accounts and descriptions have been given of the existence and nature of hell. Any survey of the history of hell would indeed be huge,[22] and so this is one of the reasons for not including it in this study. More specifically, this thesis is concerned with twentieth century accounts of hell, and because of this a detailed history of the doctrine is not necessary.

However, throughout the thesis reference will be made to a position labelled as the 'traditional view', and this will be taken as a reference point for comparison and evaluation. In order to establish what a 'traditional view' may be, we therefore need to have some acquaintance with history. Yet if the doctrine of hell does have such a wide-ranging history, can we in fact talk of a 'traditional view'? Many of the historical treatments which have been carried out concerning the doctrine do not paint a unified picture. There are many differences even within specific theological groups, let alone between different denominations.

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[22] Witness the work by Alan Bernstein, *The Formation of Hell* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1993), which in over 340 pages covers only the formative period up until the end of the patristic age.

In spite of this diversity, there does appear to be a set of beliefs that have been regarded as orthodox. To change terms from 'traditional' to 'orthodox' is not an attempt to hide the slipperiness of one term with another, but rather helps to focus on that which has been regarded as the norm by the majority of the church throughout most of its history.

In order to gain an historical perspective on the doctrine of hell, this chapter will examine the work of two major theologians from very different contexts: Augustine and Edwards. Augustine will be the chief point of departure, for it is his thought on the doctrine of hell which has become most influential. The work of Edwards shares many, if not all of the features which Augustine portrays. Therefore, Edwards shall be treated less substantially, and detail only given when his ideas supplement the account offered by Augustine.[23]

In examining how different theologians have thought about the doctrine of hell, it would be easy to lift their words out of context and ignore the theological system in which those beliefs

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[23] For an account of patristic eschatology in general, see Brian Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church* (Cambridge: CUP, 1991); another figure which would repay fruitful study is Calvin, dependent on Augustine and influential for Edwards - for the source material, see amongst others *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III.xxi-xxv, and *A Harmony of the Gospels. Matthew, Mark and Luke* vol III. trans. A.W.Morrison (Edinburgh: The St. Andrews Press, 1972), pp.118 & 131, and for secondary material see Heinrich Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1955), p.191.

played a part. However, to recount the theologies of Augustine and Edwards goes beyond the scope of this thesis. Therefore, in an as accurate way as possible, this section aims to convey those beliefs that are central to the doctrine of hell, whilst not wishing to give the impression that these beliefs were held in isolation from other issues.

In order to achieve this, four aspects of the doctrine of hell will be examined. This system owes something to the definition of the strong view of hell given by Jonathan Kvanvig, where he finds the following four components to the traditional doctrine of hell: "(H1) the Anti-Universalism Thesis; Some persons are consigned to hell; (H2) The Existence Thesis; Hell is a place where people exist, if they are consigned there; (H3) The No-Escape Thesis; There is no possibility of leaving hell, and nothing one can do, change, or become in order to get out of hell, once one is consigned there; and (H4) The Retribution Thesis; The justification for hell is retributive in nature, hell being constituted to mete out punishment to those whose earthly lives and behaviour warrant it."[24] So as not to prejudge the theologies of Augustine and Edwards, this four-fold scheme shall be slightly adapted as an investigative model. This will enable an examination into the *possibility* (could anyone end up in hell?), *nature* (will those consigned to hell continue in existence?), *finality* (is there any possible chance of escape from hell?), and *justification* (why would anyone end up in

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[24] J.Kvanvig, *The Problem of Hell* (Oxford: OUP, 1993), p.25.

hell?) as presented by the two theologians. The merits of this approach, rather than restricting the examination to the more precise definitions that Kvanvig employs, will become apparent later.

A special note must be made here concerning the issue of *justification*. It will become clear that the two main justifications given for the doctrine of hell are that hell is God's <u>just retribution</u> against sinners, or that sinners choose to go to hell of their own <u>human free will</u>. Although these are usually two very different strategies, they are often employed together. Therefore, God may exact just retribution on someone who has freely chosen to be a sinner, and although humans have significant free will, the primary reason they spend an eternity in hell is due to God sending them there. On the other hand, a person may freely choose to go to hell, and the fact that they get what they want is God's just retribution. In either case, the point at issue is which justification is given as the *primary* reason for a person ending up in hell. Thus a retributivist line may not ignore free will, nor will a free will line necessarily ignore retribution, yet one justification is given as more important than the other. This distinction will appear to be more significant as the different defences of hell are analysed.

AUGUSTINE

Possibility

Arguably the most influential theologian in the church, Augustine's bedrock for faith was Scripture, and so justification for hell was neither religious speculation, nor the evil-mindedness of humans, but rather statements "uttered by divine lips"[25] and therefore worthy of belief. Augustine would not have been content with the attempt by some modern theologians to take Jesus' words on hell as merely a threat. Rather, he declared that Scripture itself "is quite explicit and copious on the point."[26] When God threatened the wicked Nineveh with destruction he did in fact keep to his word, for the sins of the Ninevites were destroyed by their act of repentance. Universalism was never a possibility for Augustine, as the Scripture he followed made it abundantly clear that there would be a hell.

Augustine was not specifically engaged in 'defending hell' against unbelief as such, but rather against specific heresies which questioned certain beliefs about the destiny of the wicked. One of the heresies which he confronted was the belief that the punishments of hell would not last forever. Not only did this challenge the idea of the eternal duration of hell, but

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[25] Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. W.M.Green (Loeb Classical Library, 1972), XX1.9, p.61 (referred to as Loeb for the rest of this chapter).

[26] Augustine, *City of God*, trans. H.Bettenson (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), XX1.24, p.1005 (referred to as Bett for the rest of this chapter).

it also stood against the very possibility of anyone being in hell. It appears that there were some who believed that those in hell had a chance of rescue, and Augustine set out to challenge them. In the process he refers to Origen, who "was actually even more merciful"[27] because he held that the devil himself would be delivered from hell. Augustine condemned his contemporaries for not going this far. If they were so merciful, why did they not include the lost angels and the devil as Origen did? Any such hope, whether inclusive of the devil or not, was against the true word of God.[28]

Nature

Much of Augustine's discussion of hell is concerned with the question of how physical human bodies can be eternally consumed by fire without being destroyed. In *The City of God*, Book 21.1-9 sets out to demonstrate how this is possible. His arguments proceed in a variety of ways, including examples from nature together with an appeal to the miraculous power of God. Ultimately, Augustine trusts in divine omnipotence, for the person that declares that hell is impossible for God "does not know him from whom all marvels in nature are derived."[29]

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[27] XXI.17 (Loeb), p.91.

[28] Here as elsewhere Augustine refers to a number of Scriptural references - see XXI.17, and XXI.23 (Matthew 25.41, Revelation 20.10).

[29] XXI.9 (Loeb), p.63.

Augustine was well aware that there were a number of images used to portray the torments of hell, rather than that of everlasting fire alone. In Book XX.22 he uses the image of exclusion: "those who are being tormented will be outside", and they "will not know what is happening inside".[30] The image of exclusion is elsewhere reinforced by Augustine's emphasis on the wide gulf that will exist between the righteous and the wicked.[31] However, Augustine believed that those on the 'inside' would have knowledge of what was happening to those thrown out. For if prophets, who were mortals, can know about these things, "how can the immortal saints fail to know what has already happened?".[32] This knowledge which the saints have of the suffering of the wicked in hell is not mere sadistic pleasure. In Augustine's scheme, the saved recognise God's glory and justice, and rejoice in it. Bernstein's declaration that "the pleasure of the saved will be enhanced by knowing the condition of the damned"[33], although possibly correct in the long run, misses the subtlety of Augustine's position. The saved do not get pleasure from seeing the wicked suffer, but rather from seeing God's just judgement exacted.

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[30] XX.22 (Bett), p.943.

[31] XX.28 (Bett), p.955, quoting Malachi 3.17 - 4.3.

[32] XX.22 (Bett), p.944.

[33] Bernstein, p.332.

In common with many throughout the history of the church, Augustine proceeds to make a concession that is still suggested by some theologians today. That is, that the heat and violence of the fire in hell will be varied according to the punishment each individual deserves, so that "Eternal fire itself will be proportionate to the deserts of the wicked."[34]

Insight into Augustine's conception of the nature and processes of hell comes elsewhere when he discusses the efficacy of the prayers of saints for the dead. Although he is not keen on the idea (otherwise, could we not also pray for the devil?), he refuses to believe that God calls an end to his mercy, even in hell. Those in hell actually experience God's mercy, for their punishments will never be as severe as they could be, or as much as they deserve.

> This does not mean that they will escape these punishments, or ever reach their end, but that they will suffer punishments which are more gentle and easy than they deserve.[35]

In this Augustine admits some hope, yet this is not hope for ultimate salvation, but rather hope that even in hell God's mercy may be experienced in some form.

Finality

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[34] XXI.16 (Bett), p.994.

[35] XXI.24 (Loeb), p.123.

In anticipation of what came to be a modern argument, Augustine considers the meaning of the word 'eternal' in the biblical passages referring to hell. In particular, he concerns himself with Matthew 25.41 and Revelation 20.10. Could 'eternal' mean something less than 'for ever and ever'?

> What is called 'eternal' in the first passage is called 'for ever and ever' in the second, and by these words the divine Scripture is accustomed to signify only something without end in time.[36]

Furthermore, any belief which allows for the salvation of men and women from hell weakens belief in what the scripture says concerning the eternal fate of the devil and his angels. Augustine also uses parallelism in another way. Having just compared eternal hell for humans with eternal hell for the devils, he now contrasts eternal hell with eternal bliss:

> Hence, since the eternal life of the saints will be without end, eternal punishment also will surely have no end, for those whose lot it is.[37]

In the context of refuting various heresies, Augustine enters discussions concerning two particular beliefs, thus shedding light on what he believed about the duration of hell. The first discussion suggests the notion of purgatory. Some believed that the intercession of saints could help those in hell. However,

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[36] XXI.23 (Loeb), p.111.

[37] XXI.23 (Loeb), p.113.

prayers for the dead occur only for those who have been reborn in Christ, who may yet be punished but are not consigned to the eternal fire.[38] Bernstein wonders whether in these discussions concerning the level of punishments in hell and also prayers for the dead, Augustine may in fact have felt the force of some of those who doubted.[39] However, whether Augustine sympathised with their questions, he never once wavered on the final sentence of hell. Some have sensed in these discussions the beginnings of a notion of purgatory, and so it can be argued that such a doctrine evolved from Augustine's comments. However, as Le Goff in his masterful survey of purgatory concludes, "what interests Augustine is not what would one day become Purgatory but rather Hell."[40]

The second discussion deals with those, like Virgil, who believe that punishment after death is for the purpose of cleansing. In his account of the process, Augustine again shows hints of what may have later become a doctrine of purgatory:

> For, as we have already said, there are certain men whose sins, not forgiven in this world, will be forgiven in the next, so that they will not be punished in the eternal punishment of that world.[41]

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[38] XX1.24 (Bett), pp.1004-5.

[39] Bernstein, *The Formation of Hell*, p.325.

[40] Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1984), p.69.

[41] XX1.8 (Loeb), p.81.

Yet the duration of the punishment for those who will not be forgiven in the next world is never in doubt.

Justification

One of the main issues which Augustine addresses is the justice of such a state as hell. That is, is an eternity of punishment a just sentence for crimes that have been committed in a finite period of time? In fact, Augustine marvels at such a complaint. In our earthly systems of justice, no punishment is equal in duration to the time it took the criminal to perform the crime (perhaps the only exception to this is immediate retaliation).

> As if any just law would ever make it an aim that punishment should equal in length the time it took to become liable to punishment![42]

Rather, crimes should be measured not by the length of time it took to commit them, but rather by the extent to which injustice has been incurred. If death is the punishment for a crime, the measure for it being appropriate is not the duration of that punishment, but the fact that the criminal is expelled from the society of the living. With the image of the immortal city, Augustine carries this logic over to the punishment of the second death, that is expulsion from the City of God.

> And this is precisely the reason why this 'second death' will be harder to bear, because it cannot come

[42] XXI.11 (Loeb), p.69.

to an end in death.[43]

In this context, Augustine replies to the protester who argues that the Scriptures do in fact teach an equality of time between the crime and the punishment. Luke 6.38 declares that the measure you give will be the measure you receive. However, Augustine maintains that the 'measure' refers not to a period of time, but to evil being repaid by evil. Eternal punishment may in fact seem hard to us, yet we lack perception of the gravity of the first transgression against God, by which "the whole mass of mankind was condemned."[44] (the *massa damnata*). As Wetzel comments,

> No distinctions of merit emerge out of this mass, for under the onus of original sin I am as worthy of damnation as anybody else. ... If there is justice in God's mercy to an elect few, then it is justice sublimed in mystery, the operation of 'some hidden equity, indiscernible by human measures'.[45]

In Book XIV.15 Augustine defends the justice of retribution, for

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[43] XIX.28 (Bett), p.894.

[44] XXI.12 (Loeb), p.75; as for the whole question of hell and predestination, many have attempted to unravel Augustine's doctrines of predestination and free will - see in particular the work of John Rist, who finds in the *Enchiridion* that some are said to be "predestined to punishment" (26.100), whereas in the *De Dono Perseverantiae* (35) Augustine argues that "there is no positive impulsion to damnation originating from God" - J.M.Rist, "Augustine on Free Will and Predestination", Journal of Theological Studies 20 (1969), pp.427-8.

[45] J.Wetzel, *Augustine and the Limits of Virtue* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), p.156 - the quote is from *Ad Simplicianum*, 1.2.16; Wetzel traces this view of election and justice partly to Augustine's doctrine of limited atonement, but even here, "his most jealously guarded commitment rests with restoring the work of redemption wholly to God's initiative." - ibid., p.157.

"anyone who considers this sort of condemnation to be excessive or unjust certainly does not know how to measure the immensity of the wickedness in sinning when it was so immensely easy to avoid the sin."[46] Nevertheless, what has the human race done to deserve such a condemnation, and why is the punishment so strong? The answer lies in Augustine's doctrines of creation and the fall.

> For the more intimate the first man's enjoyment of God, the greater his impiety in abandoning God. By so doing he merited eternal evil, in that he destroyed in himself a good that might have been eternal.[47]

Here we begin to reach the heart of Augustine's doctrine of hell. The basis for his scheme is an aesthetic one. In the beginning human beings had complete and perfect fellowship with God, making the world a beautiful place. Yet due to sin, the beauty and good that might have lasted for ever was destroyed, and eternal death is the result. This aesthetic theme is carried over into Augustine's explanation as to why some had to be damned.

> For if all had remained condemned to the punishment entailed by just condemnation, then God's merciful grace would not have been seen at work in anyone; on the other hand, if all had been transferred from darkness into light, the truth of God's vengeance would not have been made evident.[48]

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[46] XIV.15 (Bett), p.575.

[47] XXI.13 (Bett), p.989.

[48] XXI.13 (Bett), p.989.

In actual fact, more people will be condemned than will be released, so that the world may witness the deserved punishment for all mankind.[49] Can this be just? According to Augustine, even if the whole human race had been condemned, no one would have the right to criticise God's justice:

> Now, who but a fool would think God unfair either when he imposes penal judgement on the deserving or when he shows mercy to the undeserving? ... The whole human race was condemned in its apostate head by a divine judgement so just that even if not a single member of the race were ever saved from it, no one could rail against God's justice.[50]

It is plain to see that God punishes men and women on earth for their deeds in this life, and so this scheme carries on into the next. God's ways are just and perfect, and in support of this Augustine quotes Paul from Romans 9.4 and 11.39.[51] In fact, the apparent injustice of this world requires judgement to be carried out in the next, and so then "it will become plain that God's judgements are perfectly just."[52]

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[49] Ibid.

[50] Augustine, *Enchiridion*, XXV; quoted in Kvanvig, *The Problem of Hell*, p.108.

[51] XX.1 (Bett), p.896.

[52] XX.1 (Bett), p.898; for an examination of Augustine's concept of justice, and the accusations made against him by Julian of Eclanum, see J.Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), pp.274ff.- Rist quotes the following from Augustine's sermons: "I call God just for want of a better word; he is beyond Justice." - *Sermons* (341.7.9).

What is the purpose of punishment? Augustine provides three possible reasons: "punishment may be a means to purification; punishment may be imposed as a retribution for sins; or punishment may serve to exercise and display the virtues of the good."[53] Augustine favours the last two reasons, and in particular this display of virtue fits neatly into Augustine's aesthetic scheme. John Baillie describes Augustine's

> bland assurance that the universe is no less admirable and beautiful a place for having a chamber of horrors eternally present within it, so long only as each horror of pain perfectly matches and balances each horror of sin.[54]

JONATHAN EDWARDS

Jonathan Edwards is possibly one of the most renowned 'hell-fire' preachers in the history of the Christian church. Robert Jenson suggests that "Edwards has become for educated Americans the horrid old fanatic who frightened 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.'"[55] Such is the pervasiveness of caricatures of

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[53] XXI.13 (Bett), p.990.

[54] Baillie, *And The Life Everlasting*, p.244; see the discussion of Augustine's aesthetic scheme in John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, pp.82ff., where he quotes Harnack's evaluation of this theme: "Even hell, the damnation of sinners, is, as an act in the ordination of evils (ordinatio malorum), an indispensable part of the work of art." - Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 3rd ed., trans. James Millar (London: Williams & Norgate, 1898, and New York: Russell & Russell, 1958), vol. v, p.114.

[55] R.Jenson, *America's Theologian: A Recommendation of Jonathan Edwards* (Oxford: OUP, 1988), p.3; when considering the

Jonathan Edwards in this way, that Phyllis McGinley felt compelled to write the following of Edwards' God:

> "Abraham's God, the Wrathful One.
> Intolerant of error ...
> Not God the Father or the Son,
> But God the Holy Terror."[56]

C.S.Storms comments that "it is ... a personal injustice, as well as historically inaccurate, that the reputation of Edwards should hang 'suspended by the single thread of one sermon over the pit of popular condemnation.'"[57] Any such caricatures ignore the fact that Edwards is beginning to be known as one of America's greatest theologians and philosophers. Within a complicated and widely thought-out system, Jonathan Edwards was convinced that hell had a part to play.

His most famous sermon on the subject, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God", is described by Kinnach not as a proper 'hellfire' sermon, where all the horrors of hell are described, but rather as (in Edwards' own terms) a 'hands' sermon, where

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role that human projections play in the doctrine of hell, John Hick comments that "It has been suggested that the theology implied by the title of Jonathan Edwards' famous sermon, 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God', reflects God in the hands of angry sinners!" - Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, p.93 n.1.

[56] Phyllis McGinley, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Viking Press, 1961), p.19, quoted in C.Samuel Storms, *Tragedy In Eden: Original Sin in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: University Press of America, 1985), p.1.

[57] C. Samuel Storms, p.1; the quotation comes from Carl W.Bogue, *Jonathan Edwards and the Covenant of Grace* (Cherry Hill, New Jersey: Mack Publishing Co., 1975), p.3.

the emphasis is on the providence of God.[58] Edwards himself believed that people needed both their hearts and their minds touched, and so such a sermon vividly combines words together with pictures so that the emotions are also provoked.

Much of Edwards' structure is similar to that seen in Augustine. Scripture is the starting point for any theology,[59] biblical imagery must be handled with caution,[60] hell consists of both deprivation and positive torments,[61] and the sentence of hell is final and without end.[62] In addition to all of this, Edwards could not conceive of religion without a doctrine of a future judgement. Thus he insisted that "if there be no future state of rewards and punishments in the other world, then the whole of

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[58] *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, vol.10: Sources and Discourses 1720-23*, Ed. Wilson H.Kinnach (Yale: Yale University Press, 1992) pp.168-9 (referred to for the rest of this chapter as vol.10).

[59] Vol.10, p.363.

[60] "... the Scriptural representations of the misery of the damned are not hyperbolical. They are not to be looked upon as false and incredible, nor to be taken in any sense below their proper signification. But these things that are used as similitudes, instead of exceeding the reality, are only faint images and shadows of the torments of hell. And therefore we find everything that gives an idea of an extreme misery is used to set forth hell's torments, because no one is sufficient to express it." - from a sermon Edwards gave on Luke 16.24, quoted in an essay by Wilson H.Kinnach, commenting on Edwards' literary theory and practice - vol. 10, p.226.

[61] See vol. 10, pp.320-321; for other descriptions of hell see also "Fragment: From an Application On Seeking God", vol. 10, p.386; "The Nakedness of Job", vol. 10, pp.407-8.

[62] "When once judgement is past, it's past forever; there is no reversing of it. There will be no persuading the Judge to alter his judgement." - vol. 10, p.365; see also p.366: "They will never have a pardon."

religion is immediately thrown up and destroyed."[63] Part of Edwards' rationale for a doctrine of hell was tied up with the moral fabric of the universe. Any religion without rewards and punishments is no religion at all. God will not let evil "go unpunished".[64] Those who would not believe in a future state, or in the possibility of ending up in hell, wallow in their own folly.[65] If men and women are without revelation to show them the dangers of hell, at the very least they have a conscience which tells them that rewards and punishments must be meted out.

Why would human beings end up in such a place as hell? Although Edwards held to a strong view of retribution, hell would in fact be the preferred destination of the wicked, who, being so devoted to their lord and master sin, would "rather burn in hell forever than disobey him and rebel against him."[66] Thus wicked men have turned their wills toward hell. Robert Jenson describes Edwards' view of hell as "simply the perfection of mutual hatred."[67] However, the sentencing to hell is carried out by God. Each sin stores up a wealth of wrath, "whetting the sword of vengeance."[68] As with Augustine, Edwards defends this by

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[63] vol. 10, p.292, from "The Importance of a Future State".

[64] vol. 10, p.369.

[65] vol. 10, p.369.

[66] vol. 10, p.342.

[67] Jenson, *America's Theologian*, p.17.

[68] vol. 10, p.349.

appealing to the justice of the judge,[69] the foolishness of human wisdom,[70] and the infringement of God's honour.

> God is infinitely merciful and gracious, it is true; so also he is infinitely just, and as he honours his mercy upon repenting and returning sinners - those that forsake all their sins - so he will honour his justice upon all those that go on in wickedness. God will vindicate his own honour, and when men dishonour him by living all their lives' time in sin, so he will be honoured upon them in their everlasting misery.[71]

Edwards expands on how this principle of punishment works. He believes that "a crime is more or less heinous, according as we are under greater or lesser *obligations* to the contrary." Therefore, "sin against God, being a violation of infinite obligations, must be a crime infinitely heinous, and so deserving infinite punishment."[72] Additionally, Edwards uses the aesthetic scheme as developed in Augustine. As Jenson notes, for Edwards "even the necessity of final moral Judgement is in the

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[69] "The Judge is omniscient and it is impossible that he should make a wrong judgement." - vol. 10, p.365.

[70] vol. 10, p.366.

[71] vol. 10, "God's Excellencies", p.433; see also vol.10, p.373; and *On Knowing Christ* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1990), p.116.

[72] *On Knowing Christ*, pp.117-8; see also *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol II* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974), pp.82 & 88, and *The Works of Jonathan Edwards vol. 5: Apocalyptic Writings*, Ed. Stephen J.Stein (New Haven: Yale, 1977), p.16-17 -in a sermon on Revelation 19.2-3, Edwards writes that eternal punishment is deserved since God is "a Being whose loveliness, honourableness and authority are infinite" - this quote in the Stein essay is from p.12 of a 1731/32 sermon, held in MSS at the Yale Collection.

last instance aesthetic."[73]

God does not only condemn the wicked. Edwards goes further when he asserts that God will not only "not answer when they call, but will laugh at their calamity and mock when their fear cometh."[74] The only salvation from such a horrendous state is "true repentance" and the "way of holiness"![75]

All this demonstrates a picture very similar to that drawn by Augustine. The *possibility* of hell is certain - Judas is already there, and others will follow. The suffering and torture inflicted on the damned, although presented figuratively in Scripture, will in fact be real. Thus the *nature* of hell is one of continued existence and pain. There is no doubt in Edwards' mind as to the *finality* of hell's torments, for the pains will last all eternity. Finally, Edwards shares with Augustine similar *justifications* for hell. Retributive justice and maintaining the honour of God are central. Tied in with these, Edwards makes a specific claim that reward and punishment are a necessary result of the moral nature of the universe, a claim which is not explicit in the writings of Augustine. Nevertheless, such a position is implicit in his view - God is the creator of the moral world, and for God not to punish wrong-

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[73] Jenson, *America's Theologian*, p.18.

[74] vol. 10, p.366.

[75] see "Way of Holiness", vol. 10, p.478; "Christian Safety", p.457; "True Repentance Required", pp.515-6.

doing would be to dishonour his name and make light of his justice.

CONCLUSION

Although these two theologians differ both in the amount of attention they give the doctrine of hell, and why they address it, there is nevertheless a common core of ideas. It is these ideas which have been the back-bone of the 'traditional' view of hell. Four core elements have been isolated, concerning the possibility, nature, finality and justification of hell. That is, universalism is not a possibility, actual existence (including the sense of loss and the sense of pain) as opposed to extinction is the nature of hell, this existence will last forever, and that hell is designed as a retributive punishment for sins, to uphold God's justice, to demonstrate the moral nature of the universe, to maintain God's honour, and to glorify his name.

The adaptation of Kvanvig's model has proved important in a number of ways. For example, Kvanvig's second thesis (that hell is a place where people exist) presumes a more recent question about whether those in hell may be annihilated, that is cease to exist. Neither Augustine nor Edwards were concerned with this question, but rather gave thought to what the punishments in hell consisted of. The *assumption* behind this thesis is existence, yet the question is never put in the terms used by

the modern debate.

With regard to Kvanvig's third thesis, the 'No Escape Thesis', the issue with which Augustine and Edwards have more concern is the eternity of hell. Again, the assumption is that because hell is eternal, there is therefore no escape. The resulting belief is the same, yet the emphasis is different. Nevertheless, Edwards does at one point deny the hope of a second chance in an explicit sense.[76]

More importantly, adaptation of Kvanvig's model allows other justifications for hell to be seen. Kvanvig concerns himself mainly with the idea of retribution. However, the preceding analysis has shown that other ideas acted as important forces behind the principle of retribution - namely God's honour, God's glory, and the manifestation of virtue. When turning to modern debates about hell, not only is the issue of retribution largely lacking, so also are these other elements. Therefore, adapting Kvanvig's model has proved useful, not only in delineating the main components of the traditional doctrine of hell, but also in isolating differences that result from differing historical contexts.

This analysis has not been intended to demonstrate that the traditional view has been held by all of the Christian church, for this is surely not the case. Origen and others have had

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[76] see vol. 10, p.365.

their influence and role to play. Yet the doctrine of hell with which theologians commonly interact has been the traditional notion of everlasting retributive punishment, to which some if not many are destined. It is such a doctrine of hell that modern theologians have either ignored, or attempted to reinterpret.

HELL AS RETRIBUTIVE PUNISHMENT IN MODERN THEOLOGY

> Even apart from the image of a truly merciless God that contradicts everything we can assume from what Jesus says of the Father of the lost, can we be surprised at a time when retributive punishments without an opportunity of probation are being increasingly abandoned in educational and penal justice, that the idea not only of a lifelong, but even eternal punishment of body and soul, seems to many people absolutely monstrous?[77]

In this statement, Hans Küng presents us with one of the major problems facing any doctrine of hell in the twentieth century. As found in Augustine and others, one of the main components of the traditional doctrine of hell is the notion of eternal retribution. That is, hell is a punishment which the wicked justly deserve for their wrong-doing, and that punishment consists of an eternity of suffering. The punishment is not meted out so as to reform the sinner and set them on the correct path, nor is its primary nature to deter either that sinner or others that follow from committing or recommitting the offense. Thus eternal retributive punishment is in contrast to some modern theories of educational and penal justice to which Küng

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[77] Hans Küng, *Eternal Life? Life After Death As A Medical, Philosophical and Theological Problem* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1984), pp.136-7.

refers (the deterrent and reformative theories of punishment).[78]

Retributive punishment is found at best wanting, and at worst distasteful, by many modern theologians. As Delumeau points out, this distaste has not been confined to the twentieth century:

> Throughout the centuries, this ecclesiastical discourse on Hell met with certain objections, especially one that clearly resurfaced on numerous occasions: Why does God punish with eternal punishment an offense that was only temporal? From Saint Gregory the Great to the early twentieth century, the answer was the same.[79]

In order to understand the retributive model and its place in modern theology, this chapter will attempt the following: (i) to provide a short account of what eternal retributive punishment may mean; (ii) to describe the essential components of a retributivist model as outlined in contemporary theology - this material is found mainly amongst evangelical authors; (iii) to observe some of the modern reactions against these arguments; (iv) to examine three particular treatments of eternal retribution, those provided by Walter Moberly, Jonathan Kvanvig and Marilyn McCord Adams; (v) to ascertain whether the retributive model may still have anything to contribute to a

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[78] For a brief analysis of the development of punitive theories, see "The Right of the State to Punish" in Egon Bittner and Anthony Platt, *The Meaning of Punishment* (1966), reprinted in R.Gerber & P.D.McAnany, Eds., *Contemporary Punishment: Views, Explanations and Justifications* (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1972), pp.24-30.

[79] Jean Delumeau, *Sin and Fear: The Emergence of a Western Guilt Culture*, trans. Eric Nicholson (New York: St.Martin's Press, 1983), p.375.

modern doctrine of hell.

(i) ETERNAL RETRIBUTIVE PUNISHMENT

Any glance at contemporary literature dealing with criminal justice, the justification of penal systems, and discussion of punishment shortly discovers wide and diverse disciplines. Debate continues concerning the main models used for punishment, and subsequently what this punishment should consist of. This includes the meaning of punishment, whether punishment should be defended from a practical, legal, or moral standpoint, the varied justifications for types and amounts of punishment, and the effectiveness of these punishments. These only represent some of the possible topics for discussion. However, with respect to this chapter, it will be helpful to briefly analyse how professionals in criminology understand the subject under discussion. Although this chapter is not specifically concerned with criminology and contemporary penal systems, the discussion it examines is heavily influenced by and dependent on a world whose usual vocabulary is saturated with talk of retribution and punishment.

With regards to punishment, the work of Antony Flew is widely accepted and used as a starting point for discussion. In "The Justification of Punishment",[80] Flew observes how the word

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[80] Reprinted in Gerber and McAnany, Eds., *Contemporary Punishment*, as "Definition of Punishment", pp.31-35.

'punishment' is used in a variety of settings, with a huge number of meanings. As a result of its meaning being both vague and 'open-textured', Flew sought to provide a working definition, and so elucidated five elements common to a *standard* use of the term. These are, (i) punishment is an evil or unpleasantness carried out against the victim; (ii) punishment must be carried out for an offence; (iii) it must be punishment of the offender; (iv) it must be the work of personal agencies; (v) it has to be imposed by virtue of some special authority (otherwise it would amount to revenge).

Applying these elements to the doctrine of hell, they are seen to operate as follows. (i) Hell is an unpleasantness which consists of eternal suffering. Interestingly, whether it is actually an 'evil' is one of the points at issue in any defence of hell (Jerome Hall argues that Aquinas stressed an important difference between the evil of a crime and the evil of a punishment, where one is wilful disregard or reason, and the other, based on reason, serves useful purposes[81]). (ii) Hell is inflicted for the offense of, in general, sin and rebellion against God, and, in particular, specific sins against God and fellow human beings. (iii) Hell is punishment directed specifically against the offender, that is the sinner. (iv) Hell is the work of a personal agency, that is, God. (v) Hell is imposed by God who, in a very ultimate sense, possesses special

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[81] See Jerome Hall, "Just v. Unjust Law", in Gerber & McAnanly, p.54.

authority by virtue of his nature. The traditional doctrine of hell therefore fits Flew's helpful definition of punishment. When we speak of the punishment of hell, we seem to be using the term 'punishment' in the same way as it is applied by modern discussion of penal theory.

As for specifically retributive punishment, although there may be varieties of definition, general consensus may be found in the statement that "the primary justification of punishment is always to be found in the fact that an offense has been committed which deserves punishment, not in any future advantage to be gained by its infliction."[82] Retribution, unlike reformation, "depends in some quite fundamental sense upon the presence of a morally wrong act."[83] Thus retribution is more commonly justified by appeals to morality, although in the world of criminology it has been defended on the basis of purely pragmatic and legal terms.[84] It must be noted, however, that retributivists defend their position in a number of ways, and therefore their arguments require a wider classification. As we shall see, Walter Moberly introduces the notion of hope, and so alters a 'pure' retribution theory.[85]

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[82] A.C.Ewing, *The Morality of Punishment* (London: Kegan Paul, 1929), p.13, quoted in Gerber & McAnany, p.39.

[83] R.A.Wasserstrom, "H.L.A.Hart and the Doctrines of *Mens Rea* and Criminal Responsibility", reprinted in Gerber and McAnany as "Punishment and Responsibility", p.19.

[84] See J.D.Mabbott, "Punishment", Mind 28 (1939).

[85] For an extremely helpful analysis of this, see Nigel Walker, *The Aims of the Penal System* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh

Retributive punishment consists primarily of two elements. Firstly, that the criminal should be punished because the criminal is the one who performed the crime. That is, it is essentially *because* they performed the crime that they should be punished, any other reasons for the punishment being secondary. Secondly, the punishment given to the criminal should fit the crime they performed - there should be some amount of proportion between the crime and the punishment.

Retribution has not been the most favoured justification for punishment in recent times, and although combined with arguments of deterrence and reform, it seldom appears as the sole motive behind penal theories.[86] Anthony Kenny is one amongst many who attempts to argue the incoherence of a retributivist theory, and describes the major difficulty the theory has in providing a measure of which punishment is appropriate to which crime.[87] Nevertheless, the details of these arguments are not essential

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University Press, 1966), where he defines at least three types of retributivism: compromising, limiting, and distributive; the major question he asks of all three is the difficult issue of deciding what constitutes an appropriate punishment for each crime committed.

[86] For an interesting attempt to provide such a purely retributive case, see the extract from Pope Pius XII, "Crime and Punishment", in Gerber & McAnany, pp.59-72, where he argues that retribution re-establishes an equilibrium, providing once again a harmony within the social order, and ultimately, within the world.

[87] A.Kenny, *Freewill and Responsibility* (London: Routledge, Keegan & Paul, 1978), pp.69-74; this provides a good summary of the arguments against retributivism; see also the collection of essays in S.E.Grupp, Ed., *Theories of Punishment* (Indiana University Press: 1971), and the attempt by K.G.Armstrong to defend retributivism - "The Retributivist Hits Back", pp.19-40.

to this examination. Rather, it is the particular problems that are associated with the doctrine of *eternal* retribution that are important. In this instance, not only is a certain amount of punishment given so that the debt can be payed, but an *infinite* amount of punishment is metered out, where there is no hope of future restoration.

Having outlined the meaning of eternal retributive punishment against the background of penal theory, we now turn to examine modern attempts to defend this interpretation of hell.

(ii) RETRIBUTION DEFENDED

Traditionally, evangelicals have not been hesitant in presenting hell as eternal retribution, inflicted on wicked and unrepentant creatures by a wrathful God. Although such a caricature must also be balanced by making reference to the love and grace which the same theologians have preached, and although evangelicals in this century have almost certainly lost some of that confidence, a number of contemporary and prominent evangelicals continue within this tradition. The following passage from James Packer is illustrative of this approach:

> The sin that God mysteriously chooses to permit and humans madly choose to commit so offends God, and so robs them of value in his sight, that retribution for the impenitent becomes the natural reaction whereby he expresses his holy nature. This self-vindicating judicial righteousness is glorious, and calls for

praise.[88]

As a well respected member of the evangelical movement, Packer can readily be taken to represent a large portion of that constituency. This claim can be born out by isolating a number of threads integral to Packer's model, and recording their use amongst other evangelical theologians. For clarification, we shall look at four main elements that occur within Packer's statement which also occur elsewhere: the 'vindication' of retributive punishment; eternal retribution as part of the natural order; the glory and majesty of God and the praise due to Him as a result of retribution; the nature of human sin and the importance of divine holiness.

Vindication

This element appears in a number of different forms, but all of them attempt to justify the ways of God to the ways of humans. Thus for Packer it is a case of *self*-vindication, whereby the very processes involved in retribution will become obvious. In others, the vindication of hell may be carried out by God, or rather by God's very nature. In his small monograph, *The Last Things*, Paul Helm asserts that hell is just, because God is

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[88] J.I.Packer, "Evangelicals and the Way of Salvation", in Kantzer & Henry, Eds., *Evangelical Affirmations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), p.121.

just. God, unlike us, is not responsible to anyone.[89] Thus, those who find the punishments of hell unjust, must put their confidence in the One who does right. Blanchard provides another example of what might come under the title of 'vindication'. However, not only does he believe that God's ways are self-vindicating, but also that they can never be understood by mere humans:

> When we understand God's holy hatred of sin, perhaps the more relevant question is not 'How can a God of love send anyone to hell?' but 'How can a God of holiness allow anyone into heaven?' How then do we reconcile the amazing love of God with his awesome holiness? Is God schizophrenic? ... Not at all; and questions like these show that God can never be grasped by feeble human logic.[90]

Helm and Blanchard never argue that God's justice is totally unlike human justice, yet they explain the perplexity of eternal retribution by appealing to the distance between our understanding of justice, and the true and authentic justice that God carries out. Therefore, if we are puzzled, then that is to be expected, and we should not be overly concerned.

These elements of the eternal retribution model are not essential to the model itself, although they can be found fairly frequently as a justification for what many believe to be an immoral doctrine. Whether hell is self-vindicating, vindicated by God, or beyond our comprehension, very few theologians stop

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[89] Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1989, p.124.

[90] John Blanchard, *Whatever Happened to Hell?*, p.170.

at this level.

The Natural Order

This element does not attempt to address why humans may not understand retribution, but rather seeks to explain why hell as punishment does in fact make perfect sense. Packer calls retribution for the impenitent the "natural reaction whereby he [God] expresses his holy nature". Whether this is natural to God, or natural to the order of things in the world, is not specifically clear. However, for Packer these two would ultimately be one and the same. Others make more explicit the idea of natural order, such that the punishment carried out in hell is not something strange and unique to that place or state, but rather something that coheres with the very fabric of the universe. As Davies argues, "Rather than being offensive and an unnecessary addendum to life, [hell] is the continuation of a principle God already upholds within the world, and without which social life would deteriorate into anarchy."[91]

Thus God has created a moral universe. Responsibility entails

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[91] Eryl Davies, *An Angry God?* (Bridgend: Evangelical Press of Wales, 1991), p.112; Peter Geach, who does not specifically defend a retributivist model, argues that hell is a part of the natural order: "the perishing of those who break [God's] law is the natural penalty of their folly" - Peter Geach, *Providence and Evil* (Cambridge: CUP, 1977), p.128; for a defence of hell based on a moral argument, such that heaven and hell are a continuation of the natural moral laws which God has installed in the universe, see Baron Friedrich von Hügel, *Essays and Addresses On The Philosophy of Religion: First Series*, pp.206-9.

reward and punishment, and eternal punishment is the logical outworking of that structure of morality and responsibility. To get rid of the punishment would be to endanger the whole system as it stands. Whether or not this argument is persuasive, it does not address the central issue of eternal retribution. That is, why does the logical outworking of this natural order happen to be eternal suffering? More specifically, hell is not just an accidental consequence of being evil, it is something actively inflicted on the sinner by God, a God who carries out his retribution in this way. It is to provide this justification that the following two elements of the model are employed.

Glory and Majesty, Praise and Worship

Packer declares that God's retribution "is glorious, and calls for praise". In opposition to those who believe retribution to be immoral and offensive, Packer believes that the just condemnation of the wicked to hell will in fact glorify God, demonstrating his majesty for all the world to see. Such a display of God's righteousness will cause the world to sing forth God's praise.

Other writers follow a similar line. "Hell demonstrates the justice of God in a public, unmistakeable way", according to

Helm.[92] For those who question the justice of God, all will be revealed on the day of judgement when they will see vividly why retributive punishment glorifies God. The only reason we find this difficult is because we place human beings, rather than God, at the centre of our world-view. "What is supreme in the purpose of God in the election and reprobation of men is His own glory, and hell also will glorify the justice, power and wrath of God throughout eternity... God will be glorified in the display of His wrath as well as of His mercy."[93] Opponents of retribution are too pre-occupied with the fate and condition of those condemned. Rather, Blanchard argues that we should look at the issue from God's perspective:

> In his eternal punishment of the wicked God is not aiming at their good but at his glory. The time for correction and discipline will be over. What matters then is that God's justice is satisfied, his majesty vindicated.[94]

It is apparent that there are two components to this argument. The first believes that God is glorified because he upholds the natural order of the world he has created, and so punishes sin. It is because he carries out what should happen that he is praise-worthy. However, a second component may rest behind this argument, and that is an aesthetic one. Although no longer

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[92] Helm, p.115.

[93] Eryl Davies, *An Angry God?*, p.120 & p.143; see also Peter Geach, *Providence and Evil*, p.128, who claims that the punishment of the damned "can only resound to the praise of His Eternal Justice".

[94] Blanchard, p.147.

common, the argument from God's glory and majesty may be founded on the belief that God has created the most beautiful and wonderful world which he could. Such a world may consist of a certain amount of variety, and people being condemned to hell may be part of that beauty. As has been demonstrated, Augustine used this argument with respect to both the problem of evil, and the doctrine of hell. Pope Pius XII believed that retribution re-established the equilibrium and harmony of God's universe. When discussing the role of judges in the legal system, he comforts those worried about their possible injustice by the fact that the ultimate judge will put everything right. This is not only the hope that those who do wrong may be paid back, but as the following comment demonstrates, he is looking forward to a renewed harmony in the universe:

> Consequently, in every case where human judges have erred, the Supreme Judge will re-establish equilibrium ... in the final and universal judgement before all men. ... there is something magnificent in the realization that there will be a final equation of guilt and punishment which will be absolutely perfect.[95]

Human Sin and Divine Holiness

One of the main arguments used in traditional doctrines of hell concerns both the holiness of God, and the infinite nature of

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[95] Pope Pius XII, "Crime and Punishment", in Gerber & McAnany, p.63.

human sin against God. It addresses the question of why finite sins in this life should merit an eternity of punishment. The crux of the argument lies not in the actual sins committed, or in how many of them are committed (Walvoord suggests that "if the slightest sin is infinite in its significance, then it also demands infinite punishment as a divine judgement"[96]), but against whom the sin is committed. The importance of God's holiness can not be underestimated in these arguments. Sin is therefore considered to be an affront to the majesty and holiness of God,[97] and, as Dixon explains, "one must take into account not only the nature of the sin, but also the *person* against which the sin is committed."[98] In fact, God's holiness not only justifies hell, but rather hell must be required by God's holiness.[99]

> Hell is without limit because the offence justly punished is committed against one of infinite, immeasurable holiness and goodness.[100]

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[96] John Walvoord in W.Crockett Ed., *Four Views on Hell* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), p.27; see also L.Dixon, *The Other Side of the Good News* (Wheaton: Bridge Point, 1992), p.84, and the discussion below of Jonathan Kvanvig's analysis of the type(s) of sin thought necessary to warrant punishment.

[97] Davies, *An Angry God?*, p.76.

[98] Dixon, p.82; for other evangelical statements of this position, see J.Kleinig, "Punishment in Philosophical and Biblical Perspective", Interchange 3 (1971), pp.24-45, and D.B.Knox, "Punishment as Retribution: A Criticism of the Humanist Attitude to Justice", Interchange 1 (1967), pp.5-8.

[99] Helm, p.114.

[100] Helm, p.116; With respect to the argument between traditionalists and conditionalists, Gomes provides the following account of the infinite nature of sin: "Evangelicals and the Annihilation of Hell, Part Two" Christian Research

At times this argument has also been linked with the doctrine of the atonement. For those theologians who hold to theories of penal substitution, the step from the cross to a retributive understanding of hell is a short one. Blum asks, if eternal punishment is not deserved by sin, then why the death of the Son of God?[101] Thus it is assumed that Christ's death was an offering of infinite worth, which God required because of the sin made against him.[102] The punishment which sin against a king deserves is greater than other forms of wrong-doing. Therefore, sin against an infinite king demands an infinite payment. Humans cannot endure an infinite amount of suffering, but they can endure a certain amount of suffering for an infinite length of time. Hence eternal suffering in hell is the punishment.[103]

Journal (Summer 1991), p.9: "How much more serious, then, is even the slightest offense against an absolutely holy God, who is worthy of our complete and perpetual allegiance? Indeed, sin against an absolute holy God is absolutely serious. For this reason, the unredeemed suffer absolute, unending alienation from God; this alienation is the essence of hell. It is the annihilationist's theory that is morally flawed. Their God is not truly holy, for he does not demand that sin receive its due."

[101] E.A.Blum, "Shall You Not Surely Die?", Themelios 4 (1979), p.61.

[102] For an explicit statement of this case, see Pope Pius XII, op.cit., p.69; see also Blanchard, p.277, who argues that Jesus suffered hell on the cross both physically and spiritually.

[103] Colin Sweet makes the interesting point that "if the penalty for sin is to suffer unending, conscious agony in the lake of fire how did Christ's death satisfy that penalty?" - *Hell and Judgement in the Book of Revelation* (Norwich: Open Bible Trust, 1992), p.15.

An important note to remember about these positions is not that certain men and women have committed such heinous crimes that they alone deserve eternal punishment. Rather, as Carson observes, God "takes guilty men and women, all of whom deserve his wrath, and in his great mercy and love he saves vast numbers of them."[104] The infinite guilt accrued by sin is not something unique to the wicked, but is common to all humanity. One of the most noted spokes-persons of evangelicalism, John Stott, summarises this thought in the following way: "'Hell-deserving sinner' sounds an absurdly antiquated phrase, but I believe it is the sober truth. Without Christ I am 'perishing', and deserve to perish."[105]

The obvious background for much of this is the Anselmian discussion of incarnation and atonement (as found in *Cur Deus Homo*). That is, it is God's honour which must be considered when analysing the guilt and subsequent punishment deserved. God is infinitely honourable, and so to dishonour God causes the sinner to be infinitely guilty. The cultural context of Anselm's position, in a feudal system where a crime against a king was considered worse than a crime against a serf, provides the background for this line of argument. Yet the argument itself still requires analysis.

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[104] D.Carson, *How Long O Lord?* (Leicester:IVP, 1991), p.103.

[105] David Edwards and John Stott, *Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1988), p.323.

For example, is it possible to understand how a minor error can deserve an eternity of punishment? Dixon believes that there are many instances in life which can have long-reaching consequences. A lapse at the wheel of a car can lead to paralysis, or a brief abandonment of morality can lead to pregnancy. In the same way, "a finite (although lifelong) rejection of Christ will lead to eternal separation from Him."[106] With the help of images from everyday life Dixon makes sense of an eternity of punishment. The problem is that neither the lapse at the car steering wheel, nor the lapse of morals, leads to an eternal consequence. The question remains as to why another error committed in a finite space of time (the rejection of Christ), should warrant an eternal sentence.

This traditional representation of retributive punishment can be isolated throughout the history of Western Christianity, from the likes of Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin and Edwards, as well as Anselm. Aquinas dealt with the objection of disproportion between the crime and the punishment in a similar way, stating that "punishment is meted according to the dignity of the person sinned against, so that a person who strikes one in authority receives a greater punishment than one who strikes anyone else."[107] In the nineteenth century W.G.T.Shedd continued the

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[106] Dixon, p.159.

[107] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Volume 5, Q.99 A.1 (London: Shedd & Ward, 1981), p.2996.

tradition that "endless punishment is rational, because sin is an infinite evil; infinite not because committed by an infinite being, but against one."[108] Reaction against such views has not been confined to the twentieth century, and works such as those by Walker, Almond and Rowell illustrate this.[109] However, we will now turn to the twentieth century reaction to retributive punishment, and how some theologians have chosen to remove it from their modern statements of the Christian faith.

(iii) REACTIONS

Criticisms of eternal retribution come from a wide range of theologians, especially within the literature on universalism.[110] The points made by John Hick represent opinion amongst many. Although a long passage, it is worth quoting in full, as it brings the main arguments together into one monumental attack

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[108] W.G.T.Shedd, *The Doctrine of Endless Punishment* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1986; first printed 1885), p.152.

[109] see above, p.6, n.9

[110] See Kendall Harmon, *Finally Excluded From God?*, which includes detailed examination of the universalism presented by J.A.T.Robinson (see *In the End, God* and "Universalism - Is It Heretical?" Scottish Journal of Theology 2 [1949], pp.139-155) and how J.A.T.R. was influenced by Nicolas Berdyaev; Robinson's universalism is not specifically directed against retribution, and the recoil against eternal retribution is one argument amongst several that lead him to universalism (Harmon, pp.132-217, esp. p.177); see also John Baillie, *And the Life Everlasting*, pp.237ff., Nels Ferré, *The Christian Understanding of God*.

against the doctrine of hell.

> The objections to the doctrine of eternal torment which once seemed so weak and now seem so strong are well known: for a conscious creature to undergo physical and mental torture through unending time (if this is indeed conceivable) is horrible and disturbing beyond words; and the thought of such torment being deliberately inflicted by divine decree is totally incompatible with the idea of God as infinite love; the absolute contrast of heaven and hell, entered immediately after death, does not correspond to the innumerable gradations of human good and evil; justice could never demand for finite human sins the infinite penalty of eternal pain; such unending torment could never serve any positive or reformative purpose precisely because it never ends; and it renders any coherent Christian theodicy impossible by giving the evils of sin and suffering an eternal lodgement within God's creation.[111]

Of the six main objections included in this paragraph, three relate directly to the notion of hell as retributive punishment. These are the apparent incompatibility between a God who inflicts hell and a God who loves, the idea that justice would never demand an eternity of punishment for sins committed in a finite space of time, and the fact that unending torment could be neither reformative, nor act as a deterrent.

Many agree with much of this analysis. The first criticism consists mainly of moral outrage against the idea that God is the active partner in the condemnation of hell. This is reflected in the major emphasis this century on free will defences of the doctrine of hell, whereby human beings provide

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[111] Hick, *Death and Eternal Life*, pp.200-201.

the initiative to condemn themselves. Although John Macquarrie pays more consideration to some of the alternative ideas about hell than John Hick does, he claims to "utterly reject the idea of a hell where God everlastingly punishes the wicked."[112] Ian Ramsey approaches the doctrine from within his analysis of theological models and the part they play in talk of immortality. He concludes that "the language of retribution ... has no foundation in any disclosure situation. ... As currency for immortality, therefore, the language of retribution is nowadays more likely to mislead than to be helpful, for it embodies nothing beyond what is spatio-temporally verifiable."[113] Thus, because we cannot make sense empirically or morally of what eternal punishment would mean, retribution as a concept is more likely to be dangerous rather than helpful.

It is often suggested that the retributive punishment version of hell has contributed to decline in religious belief over the past centuries. Although almost impossible to chart, it does seem possible that outrage against a vindictive God has contributed to this decline. H. H. Price is one among many to make this observation:

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[112] John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology* (London: SCM, 1977), p.366.

[113] I.T.Ramsey, *Freedom & Immortality* (London: SCM, 1960), pp.130-131; see also the chapter "Hell", in *Talk of God* (London: Macmillan, 1969), pp.207-225, where in pp.207-210 he draws out the main difficulties with belief in the doctrine of hell, and, to a lesser extent, the chapter "Eternal Punishment" in *On Being Sure In Religion* (London: Athlore Press, 1963), pp.1-25.

> I suspect that [the fear of hell] has been an important factor in the steady decline of religious belief during the past three centuries.[114]

For a number of scholars, their intolerance in the face of a retributive model of hell is made clear. Barnhart believes that, on this model, God is either "a cosmic sadist whose goals are morally inferior, or he is a bungler of the worst sort." If we attempt to argue from God's holiness, "holiness takes on the appearance of pathology."[115] Paul and Linda Badham's criticisms of the doctrine follow similar lines, resulting in the question, "Is God less merciful than we are?"[116]

The lack of correspondence between finite sins and infinite punishment lies at the heart of most of these criticisms. Hans Küng finds a retributive model that demands an eternity of punishment for finite sin incredulous. "Does the infinite God really require all this because of a supposedly infinite offense

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[114] H.H.Price, *Essays In The Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), p.83; Badham and Badham believe that hell "has aroused moral revulsion as well as intellectual attack, and from Hume to Russell to Flew it has formed a central plank in the case against Christian belief. It is therefore probable that ever since the mediaeval world-view was superseded, the existence of the doctrine of hell has positively militated against serious consideration being given to the case for life after death." - Paul and Linda Badham, *Immortality or Extinction?*, (London: SPCK, 1984 - 2nd ed), p.66; for a statement of Flew's objection see A.Flew, *God and Philosophy* (London: Hutchinson, 1966), pp.56-7; see also below the similar comments made by Moberly concerning moral revulsion.

[115] J.E.Barnhart, *Religion and the Challenge of Philosophy* (Totowa: Littlefield, Adams & Co., 1975), p.129.

[116] Badham and Badham, p.61.

(as a human act, sin is merely finite), for the restoration of his 'honour', as his defenders think? Is he such a hardhearted creditor?"[117]

In his recent work on human responsibility, Richard Swinburne discusses the traditional retributive doctrine of hell and concludes that "to punish a man with such punishment would be horribly vindictive, and a good God would not do that."[118] Even those who claim to stand within the more conservative wing of the church confess to an unease with retributive models of hell. Stephen Davis writes that, "While I believe that hell in some sense can be spoken of as punishment, I do not believe that it is a place where God, so to speak, gets even with those who deny God - which is to say, I do not believe that it is primarily a place of retribution."[119]

Others rule out of court any talk of justice and retribution at all. John Baillie wrote early in this century that forgiveness is the highest spiritual attitude and is a "higher kind of justice". Thus if we do talk of God judging human individuals, he would only judge them for what they might be, not for what they are.[120] Yet theologians such as Brunner, whilst not classical

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[117] Küng, *Eternal Life?*, p.136.

[118] Swinburne, *Responsibility and Atonement* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), p.182.

[119] Stephen Davis, *Risen Indeed* (London: SPCK, 1993), p.154.

[120] John Baillie, *And The Life Everlasting*, p.243; at a similar time, John McTaggart took a more radical line believing

retributivists, resist the urge to dispense with any category of judgement, believing that "without the conception of judgement all talk of responsibility is idle chatter."[121]

There are many other contemporary theologians that could be used to illustrate the modern trend against retributive punishment.[122] However, some of them fall within the universalist camp, and so usually pay little attention to the actual doctrine as it has been traditionally stated. Rather, they make the case for universalism usually on the primacy of God's love, or the universality of Christ's salvation.[123] For this reason, the rest of this paper will outline criticisms made by three different theologians, two of which hold open the possibility that some may end up in hell. Walter Moberly was keenly attracted by universalism, but as a result of his reading of Scripture, and his study of sin and punishment, could not rule out the

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that God's eternal judgement would make him out to be a "monster of wickedness" - *Some Dogmas of Religion* (London: Edward Arnold & Co., 1930), p.213.

[121] Emil Brunner, *Eternal Hope* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1954), p.179; R.Niebuhr makes a similar point in *The Nature and Destiny of Man. Vol II: Human Destiny* (London: Nisbet & Co, 1943), p.304, arguing that "it is unwise for Christians to claim any knowledge of either the furniture of heaven or the temperature of hell ... but it is prudent to accept the testimony of the heart, which affirms the fear of judgement."

[122] For just two examples, see David Edwards in David Edwards and John Stott, *Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue*, pp.292ff., and Keith Ward in *Divine Action* (London: Collins, 1990), p.38, and *A Vision to Pursue* (London: SCM, 1991), p.90.

[123] See the distinction made by Trevor Hart in "Universalism: Two Distinct Types" in Cameron, Ed., *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, pp.1-34.

possibility of hell. Similarly, Jonathan Kvanvig wishes to hold on to a doctrine of hell (although modified) because of the important place that it plays in the whole structure of Christian belief. Marilyn McCord Adams, although a universalist, examines in detail the central elements of a retributivist's defence of hell. The helpful characteristic of these three studies is that they outline in detail their difficulties with any model of hell that entails eternal retribution.

(iv) MOBERLY, KVANVIG AND ADAMS

Walter Moberly

In Walter Moberly's work, *The Ethics of Punishment*, he concludes his thorough investigation of the history and theory of punishment with a consideration of the doctrine of eternal punishment. He wishes to pursue the question of whether it is "a morally tenable belief that lost souls will exist for ever in a conscious condition of unrelieved, penal misery?".[124] As with many other modern commentators on the doctrine, he feels compelled almost to apologise for his treatment:

> Indeed, so completely does the belief seem to belong to a past of which we are rather ashamed and so little to the living world of today, that it may perhaps seem hardly a theme for serious discussion in 1968.[125]

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[124] London: Faber & Faber, 1968, p.329.

[125] Ibid.

In charting the history of the doctrine, and the modern reaction against it, he shares with H.H.Price the view that hell has played an enormous part in "the estrangement from Christianity of so many of the noblest minds."[126] Having treated the change of emphasis in theology (by comparing for example the restatement offered by Brunner with the traditional doctrine held by Jonathan Edwards[127]), Moberly turns to the specific issue of retribution.

For Moberly, the doctrine of endless retributive suffering is intolerable, for two main reasons. The first is the more common reaction against it, one which we have seen amongst other modern theologians. That is, a God of love could possess no motive in inflicting an eternity of punishment. "For punishment cannot be inflicted for the sake of retribution and nothing but retribution by a Being who is at once good and rational."[128] There is no motive, as there is no suggestion that the traditional arguments concerning God's holiness and the infinite nature of sin can hold any water.

The second reason that Moberly suggests for rejecting retributive punishment in hell is less common, and concerns the supposed nature of the condemned person. For this reason hell

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[126] Ibid., p.334.

[127] Ibid., p.337ff.

[128] Ibid., p.339.

"is unthinkable because it combines elements that are really contradictory."[129]

However, what are these contradictory elements? Moberly aims to demonstrate this by two different arguments. The first declares that where there is punishment, there is hope. In an eternity of retribution there is no hope, and "any attempt to assert literally that 'the commission of sin is the angry God's punishment for sin', must be rejected as monstrous and incredible."[130] As a result of this, Moberly argues that Christians should emphasise the verdict rather than the sentence of eternal punishment, the verdict being one which humans pass on themselves. In saying this, Moberly reacts against two different aspects of the doctrine of hell. Firstly, in avoiding the sentence, he moves away from the eternity of the punishment. Such an eternity could have no hope. Secondly, in insisting that the verdict is passed by humans on themselves, he is attacking the idea that God is the active partner who condemns people to hell.

The second argument that Moberly offers states that where there is no hope, there is no punishment. Both of these arguments involve a particular view of retribution. In actual fact, the retribution that Moberly defends begins to look like a retribution *plus*, and this is why eternal retribution could not

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[129] Ibid., p.339.

[130] Ibid., p.340.

even be recognised as such when it holds no offer of hope. Elsewhere in the work he concludes that, when retribution calls for punishment, such a punishment acts as an expiation. To do this, retribution must achieve some change in the sinner.

> In short, retribution, when fully understood, includes the moral amendment of the wrongdoer. Where there is no such amendment, retribution remains incomplete and unsatisfying.[131]

Therefore,

> From God's side there is no credible motive for inflicting retributive suffering on a really incorrigible sinner, even if that were not intrinsically meaningless.[132]

But why would that punishment be meaningless? Moberly argues that punishment can only be labelled 'retributive' by the person who recognises it as such. Presumably the person in hell is so base and vile that there is no possibility of redemption. If they are so disfigured, they then no longer possess the possibility of moral choice, and so are not able to sin. This means that their punishment must be for sins committed in the past. However, retribution for past sins can only be recognised as such if the person being punished has some sense of guilt. The base and vile person in hell has no moral insight, and therefore is not able to recognise the guilt of their past actions. After an analysis of, amongst others, Augustine and St.

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[131] Ibid., p.120.

[132] Ibid., p.342.

Catherine on this point, Moberly concludes:

> My contention then is this: Any persons who had become completely and irredeemably evil would no longer be denizens of the moral world. ... they would no longer be possible receivers of a retributive punishment that is rationally directed.[133]

Having reached this conclusion, Moberly considers the view of F.D.Maurice, and believes that together they reach a similar point (although along slightly different lines):

> Any belief in eternal, unrestorative penal retribution is untenable. It is a hypothesis to be repudiated, in the spirit of St. Paul, as morally monstrous: 'God forbid!'[134]

Moberly's analysis rests on his particular understanding of retributive punishment, as outlined throughout the rest of the book. Such a view is debatable, especially when considering the element of hope which he believes to be essential to retributive punishment. Thus, those defending the death penalty may admit that such a punishment holds out no hope for the criminal, but it is still properly defined as a punishment in return for the murder of someone else. In response to Moberly's analysis of the punished person, it may be that there are many people condemned who still persist in rebellion, who do not experience guilt, and perhaps who do not recognize the punishment for what it is. Does this make the punishment any less just?

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[133] Ibid., p.349.

[134] Ibid., p.353.

In the case of the person in hell, different analyses of the psychological make-up of the damned person are possible. Perhaps they continue to sin, and although remaining morally culpable, have so degenerated that they will never repent. If they will not, then the existence of people in hell may be a contingent fact. If they cannot, then perhaps God sets a limit to the amount of chances a person has, and once past that point, the person has no more opportunities for repentance. Either way, it is still possible that the person in hell is morally culpable, recognising their sin and so their appropriate punishment. On the other hand, some elements of the tradition have suggested that although the damned do not continue to sin, they do recognize their guilt, and beg that God forgive them and allow them to go free. Unfortunately, they have gone too far, and it is too late. The damned bow down and acknowledge God, yet suffer in the knowledge that they can never again set things right (much of this thought has sprung from the parable of Lazarus and the rich man - Luke 16).

Therefore, Moberly's concentration on the nature of the condemned person is not necessarily helpful or convincing (although this analysis becomes more important when we examine the free will defences of hell). His definition of retribution introduces elements that all retributivists may not be happy with. Within his attack on eternal retribution there are remarks that hint at more persistent problems, and it is these which we

shall continue to examine in the arguments of Kvanvig and Adams.

Jonathan Kvanvig

The approach taken by Kvanvig examines the central elements of the traditional doctrine of hell, and isolates the retribution element as the most problematic. This thesis he defines in the following way:

> The Retribution Thesis: The justification for and purpose of hell is retributive in nature, hell being constituted so as to mete out punishment to those whose earthly lives and behaviour warrant it.[135]

Throughout the first half of his study, he demonstrates how retribution remains as the heart of the problem of hell. Any attempts to alter other parts of the doctrine (the three other main parts he calls the anti-universalism thesis, the existence thesis, and the no-escape thesis) falter if they do not come to terms with this part of the problem first.

So, what is the problem with the retribution model that Kvanvig identifies? Initially, he takes the doctrine of hell that assumes that all in hell receive the same punishment - the 'equal punishment version'. There are two primary objections to this view - first the fact that each person in hell receives the same punishment (and it is objected that this is not fair as not all deserve the same), and the fact that the punishment is

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[135] Kvanvig, *The Problem of Hell*, p.19.

infinite (it is objected that this is unjust, as not all sin deserves an infinite punishment). The common reply argues that God makes the rules so we cannot question them, yet this does not wash with Kvanvig as such a statement makes God's morality to be arbitrary. The proponents of a retributive model who argue that this hell is self-vindicating, or just because God is just, do not convince Kvanvig. Would this, for example, justify the torturing of infants if God so commanded us? Therefore, other explanations are sought.

As an explanation to these objections, Kvanvig wonders whether we can examine the evi1 caused (or the suffering experienced) as the result of a sin, together with the intent behind that particular sin? Possibly, yet these do not necessarily justify an equality of punishment for the sinners. Therefore, defenders of hell have traditionally looked towards the status of the harmed. The argument believes that the guilt of the wrong-doer is proportional to the status of the offended party (or what Kvanvig names the 'status principle'). As we have already observed, this brings us to the heart of justifications provided for the retributive model.

Such a theory is based in a non-egalitarian society, and so for us today the concepts are difficult to assess. Perhaps we could make a comparison between the killing of a plant and the murder of a human being. This may then allow us to imagine the process involved. The status principle would then work on the status of

the being harmed, together with the amount of actual or intended harm. Kvanvig imagines this working in a similar fashion to the way a mathematical function operates. Yet there are problems. How is the theologian to measure status? Would longevity help? God would certainly come out on top on this criteria!

In asking this question, Kvanvig illustrates that the status principle which attempts to defend this equal punishment view of hell relies on the idea that God is the one being who is harmed as the result of a sinful action. That is, problems with the status principle break down into several different questions. If it is the case that God is the one harmed as a result of a sinful action, it must be that one sin against God deserves an eternity of punishment. For if it is not one sin, then the number of sins would become arbitrary. If it is one sin against God, which sin? All those who defend the equal punishment view are traditionally committed to the belief that all are headed for hell unless the grace of God intervenes. Therefore, this one sin against God must be a particular sin which no one person avoids committing. Or, perhaps the one sin that counts is just any sin? Whichever conclusion is reached, everyone must sin against God.

If this is granted, when is a sin one which is done 'against' God? Kvanvig isolates two choices here for the defender of this view of hell - either the restrictivist view (that is, some specific sins are those which are done against God) or the

generalist view (that is, every sin is a sin against God). If one is a restrictivist, then it appears that those sins must be ones that are intended towards God. However, assuming that the defender is committed to the view that all are destined for hell, have all human beings struck out against God in equally the same fashion? Therefore, regardless of the object of the sin or the intention of the sinner, the defender of the equal punishment version of hell follows the route which argues that all sin is against God.

The next question for Kvanvig then is, 'Is All Sin Against God?' Jonathan Edwards argued that true virtue is love towards God and anything else is not virtue.[136] As God is identical to, or rather involved with, being in general, any behaviour not aimed at the love of God is against God. That is, all sin is against God. Kvanvig then proceeds to analyse these claims. He believes that if there is a legitimate claim to be made concerning the relationship between two persons or a person and an item, then it seems right that an action can be harmful against someone even if there was no harm against that person intended. However, Edwards went further and argued that if 'good' acts do not have God, or the love of God, as their intention, then they are not good but rather evil acts. Kvanvig replies that there is a difference between a good action and a flawed character. Thus even though I may be flawed and not love God, this does not

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[136] See Jonathan Edwards, *The Nature Of True Virtue* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1970).

necessarily affect everything I do. Therefore Kvanvig believes that a reasonable argument can be made for the claim that all sin is against God, although this does not commit one to Edwards' further position.

> This argument relies on the claim that our most fundamental obligation is to God and therefore any sin is sin against God.[137]

Kvanvig argues for a strong sense of obligation towards God. God is the sustainer and creator of all, and so there is an intimacy and immediacy involved in the relationship between the creator and his creation. As when harm is done to parents by wronging their children, so God is sinned against when his creation is violated in any way. Kvanvig labels this the 'transivity phenomenon.' Although he admits his model may be a little vague, he believes it to be sufficient. The conviction that all sin is against God rests on the doctrine of divine conservation of creation.[138]

Having dealt with the possibility that all sin is against God, Kvanvig returns to the essential issue of status, by considering what criteria may be used in order to determine the status of an individual. Most rankings of people, at some time or another,

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[137] Kvanvig, p.36.

[138] Kvanvig refers to a fuller discussion of the doctrine of divine conservation in the following paper: Jonathan Kvanvig and Hugh J.McCann, "Divine Conservation and the Persistence of the World", in Thomas V.Morris, Ed., *Divine and Human Action: Essays in the Metaphysics of Theism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp.13-49

break down or appear to be inadequate. Perhaps we could use the moral character or dignity of the person sinned against? However, there may be cases when we should consider the moral character of the sinner rather than the sinned against - for example, '*you* should have known better ... .' In our day to day experience, ordinary cases of wrongdoing do not depend on the traits of victims for their seriousness. Perhaps our ranking is too fine grained, Kvanvig asks. Therefore, could we use a coarser model? Perhaps we could 'carve nature at its joints', on the basis of some metaphysical belief. Kvanvig points to William Wainwright who uses ontological grounds as a dividing classification between the divine and the non-divine.[139] This may provide the best account of the status principle, but Kvanvig wonders whether Wainwright is 'question-begging'. He appears to argue that as sins against the divine are worse, this divide between the creator and the creatures is where the division in reality shall be made. Kvanvig also points to the fact that this does not explain the foundational features of morality. That is, it does not tell us anything about what should determine the significance of an action.

So Kvanvig asks whether a more useful classification exists. If there is to be one which works, the emphasis on status must be irreducible. In our every day thinking, what are the properties which a thing possesses that cause us decide as to how it ought

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[139] William Wainwright, "Original Sin", in Thomas V.Morris, Ed., *Philosophy and the Christian Faith* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), pp.34-35.

to be treated? Perhaps the fact that something is morally sentient is significant? However, this does not appear to possess the ability to maintain a useful distinction between God and other creatures, for God is a morally sentient being. Are there then attributes of God which may prove to be morally explanatory for the equal punishment view of hell? However, this does not appear to be so. For example,

> God is perfectly good and essentially so, but degree of perfection in moral character is not morally explanatory either. If it were, then killing a saint would be worse than killing a non-saint, and it is not (all else being equal).[140]

Thus Kvanvig concludes that,

> Although we should not underestimate the differences between God and us, none of the intrinsic characteristics of divinity as opposed to humanity seems capable of sustaining this response to the moral objection to the equal punishment version of the strong view of hell.[141]

Thus Kvanvig has shown that the use of the status principle has failed to satisfy the questions, and that no principle has been found which is morally explanatory and enables status to be determined adequately. This is not to say that it cannot be done, only that it has not been done so far.

However, assuming for a moment that this principle of status can be defended, Kvanvig turns to another objection to the

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[140] Kvanvig, p.48.

[141] Kvanvig, p.49.

traditional model - that is, the equal seriousness of all sin and the punishment deserved. Perhaps there is a function relating to status and harm done that may help in determining the moral disvalue of an action? Given that the status principle can be defended, why then are all sins equally serious? Kvanvig considers the answer that the distinctions between wrongs done disappear when all sin is against God, for what is the difference between sin 'against' God and all other sin? However, the fact is that we do accord different positions to different wrong acts. For instance, a deliberate sin is considered worse than one which may not have been intended. In the course of his discussion, Kvanvig isolates at least six different types of action, depending on the following functions: intention, clouded awareness of God, and perspicuous awareness of God. For example, we consider a wrong action that was intended to harm, and which was performed by someone who had a clear awareness of God, to be several times worse than one which was not intended, and performed by someone who was completely unaware of God.[142]

In this context, Kvanvig looks at the examples and difficulties which penal systems may provide. If in fact we do wish to accord a place for the differences between different actions, why then

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[142] In the realm of criminal punishment, H.L.Parker admits that intention must be taken into account, but punishment is primarily concerned with conduct and an action which has taken place, rather than intent or personality - the criminal law is therefore in the business of limiting conduct - see H.L.Parker, *The Limits of the Criminal Sanction* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), with the relevant section reprinted in Gerber & McAnany, pp.16-18.

would capital punishment be given for both murder and mass murder - should there not be a difference in degree if we assume a fit between the crime and the punishment? Possibly, but it may be the case that our penal system allows for other factors. This is in fact what occurs, for if it was not the case that our emotions caused an outrage against the idea of torture, mass murder may receive a more severe sentence involving such torture.

> Just so, even if all sin is against God, this is not the only factor in determining what punishment is deserved, for different intentional components are possible. ... Hence the equal punishment version of the strong view of hell cannot be rescued from the moral objection to it.[143]

Kvanvig is careful to take into account one common belief held by retributivists - what he calls the differential punishment version of the strong view of hell. This argument maintains that all punishments are infinite, yet there are different types of infinite punishment. Thus the person who did not intend to harm God has an infinite punishment of less severity. However, Kvanvig sees that this pays attention to the realm of intentionality only *after* the person has been damned. A basic judgement is passed, that of eternal punishment, *before* intentionality is considered. If intentionality was taken into account first of all, such punishment might even be mitigated - "the intentional realm is intrinsically involved in determining

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[143] Kvanvig, p.55.

what sort of basic punishment is due."[144]

Kvanvig's work on this material is important, for it refines some of the common objections to the retribution model of hell. The common objection states that eternal punishment cannot be justified by claiming that human sin deserves an eternal punishment because it is committed against an infinite being. Kvanvig examines what might be the workings of that supposed justification, and finds them wanting. Although retributivists affirm that sin against God's holiness deserves eternal retribution, Kvanvig cannot find any basis for this conviction. We usually do take into account factors other than status when deciding punishment. However, even the essence of the argument, the so-called status principle, does not appear to find a sufficient basis when dealing with an infinity of punishment.

Marilyn McCord Adams

In a recent paper in Religious Studies, Marilyn McCord Adams considers the retributive model of hell, under the title, "Hell and the God of Justice". Leaving aside the possibility that there may be other defences of the doctrine of hell that are coherent, she aims to analyse and critique the view that "on the day of judgement God will condemn some persons who have disobeyed him to a hell of everlasting torment and total unhappiness from which there is no hope of escape, as a

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[144] Ibid., p.63.

punishment for their deeds up to that time."[145] Although her paper considers the arguments of Anselm and Aquinas, it is relevant to modern theology as it unpacks their particular arguments which are still in use today. It is especially relevant, as it examines the argument for an eternity of punishment based on God's holiness, and more precisely, God's honour.

Adams argues that for the retributive model of hell to be sustained, the principles of justice used must include the principle that God "treats no one better than he deserves to be treated"[146]. If this were not so, then even if eternal hell were a just punishment based on other principles, God could choose to rescue damned sinners from hell, and so treat them better than they deserve. Once this is granted, the defender of hell still needs to find principles which would support the punishment of human beings for an eternity.

Adams asks what these principles may be. The first and most obvious is the *lex talionis*, 'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth'. In fairly simple examples, this principle seems obvious. If I make you unhappy and cause you harm by knocking out one of your teeth, then an appropriate punishment may be to similarly knock out one of my teeth. However, taken literally, human beings do not sin against God in the sense of making God

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[145] Marilyn McCord Adams, "Hell and the God of Justice" Religious Studies 11 (1975), p.433.

[146] Ibid., p.434.

'unhappy' forever.[147] Christian theists shrink from this position (Adams shortly turns to the idea of sin against God's honour), and therefore use the principle in another way - that is, God is repaying human beings for what they have done to other fellow human beings (as Adams argues, this is perhaps one of the strongest psychological motives for believing in hell; however, the question still remains as to its coherence in defending the doctrine). Taking simple examples, Adams demonstrates that such a principle may justify a finite amount of punishment. I may cause my wife harm for seventy years, and so God may then repay me with seventy subsequent years of misery. Thus the principle may justify some punishment. Yet, "given the finite length of human life and the finite extent of human power to cause suffering, it could not by itself justify God in making someone totally unhappy forever."[148]

This then leads Adams into considering the arguments put forward by Anselm, suggesting that humans rob God, not of happiness, but of honour. Adams interprets Anselm as saying that God's honour exists in having all creatures subject to him. Those that are not subject to him voluntarily are forced to become subject to

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[147] This raises another objection against retribution concerning harm. That is, in what sense can we harm God such that we deserve punishment? However, in recent literature there is little reference to this issue. Only Robert Hoyler observes in a footnote that the "central difficulty" of formulating the retributive principle may be "in applying the concept of harm to God." - Robert Hoyler, "Justice and Mercy: A Reply to Thomas Talbott", Religious Studies 30 (1994), p.290 n.4.

[148] Adams, p.436.

him. In addition to this, they are given extra punishment, having their own honour removed for their refusal to voluntary obey God. Once again, this may seem coherent for a finite amount of dishonour to God. Yet who can harm God's honour totally and eternally? No amount of sin can 'remove' God's honour to this extent, and therefore, however much punishment for the lack of obedience may be appropriate, an eternity of punishment could never be appropriate.

What if the 'eye for an eye' principle was applied to cases of offending an enormous, or even an infinite, number of people? Consider the example that Jones knocks out one tooth from 32 different people. Would it then be appropriate for Jones to have all his 32 teeth knocked out (applying the *lex talionis* literally)? Adams judges that having no teeth is a greater inconvenience for Jones, than the inconvenience caused to the 32 people who have only one tooth missing. Therefore, "we do not judge that liability to punishment increases linearly with the number of persons involved."[149] Following this line of argument, Adams concludes that the *lex talionis* would not justify an eternal hell even if an infinite number of persons were sinned against:

> ... it seems to me that more harm is involved in one person's suffering unhappiness than in even infinitely many persons' suffering unhappiness for a finite period of time.[150]

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[149] Ibid., p.439.

[150] Ibid., p.441.

Adams now returns to the issue of honour. Anselm appears to have argued not only that hell is deserved because God's honour is harmed, but rather because God, who is *infinitely* worthy of honour, is sinned against. Guilt is proportional not just to the sin committed, but to the worthiness and status of the one sinned against. If this is so, then eternal retributive punishment may be defended.

As Kvanvig and others have done, Adams believes that historically Anselm can be understood to fit into the feudal society that demanded different punishments according to the status and worth of the person sinned against. However, historical background does not necessarily help contemporary understanding.

Rather than social status (whereby a king is better than a serf), Anselm defends the principle in the form of ontological status. God deserves infinite honour because of his infinite status. Men and women deserve different honour, depending on their moral and intellectual superiority. Taking this on board, Adams questions whether guilt is directly proportional to the honour of the one offended against. If this were so, for example, we would commonly believe that Jones slapping Gandhi in the face would be worse than Gandhi slapping Jones. However, we do in fact say that Gandhi 'should have known better', and may in fact be more culpable than Jones. Thus the link between the

honour of the offended and the guilt appropriate to the offender is not as straightforward as may be assumed.

Adams admits that Anselm may in fact not take the argument this far - all he argued was that there was something about God's majesty which made all sinners against God worthy of infinite guilt and punishment. This may be so - yet without a defence of this premise, how can we believe in this mysterious quality of God's majesty? The examples from human morality make this principle even less credible.

Finally, Adams turns to Aquinas' arguments concerning intentionality. This believes that if someone wills to do an act that will eventually result in the eternal deprivation of happiness, they then actually will to be deprived of this happiness for all eternity. Yet what of the lack of knowledge about the ultimate fate? Even given that they have some knowledge, "is it true that to will it is as bad as to do it?"[151] Intentions are important in our judgement of the punishment deserved, yet ultimately we do not punish someone for their intentions, but rather for their deeds. If Jones tries to shoot Smith, yet the mechanism of the gun fails, we still find Jones guilty of something. Yet the punishment is usually less severe than if Jones had killed Smith. And if Jones had not had the physical ability to even try and shoot Smith (perhaps he was a paralytic), we would not punish him for an evil he could never

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[151] Ibid., p.445.

commit, even though he would have liked to commit it.[152]

Considering even the case of willing to do some bad to someone forever, we would generally admit that doing this harm forever would be a greater evil than merely forever willing to do this harm. As Adams admits, although willing to do something evil mars ones character, "it is not a general truth that willing something evil is as bad a reflection on one's character as is the actual doing."[153]

Having considered all these possible explanations for eternal punishment, Adams concludes that there are no principles of justice on which it can be justified. As with Kvanvig, the justification for the status principle is missing. To those who argue that God's justice is something different to the principles used here, Adams replies that if a theologian takes this option, "we shall have a right to wonder whether his God is morally perfect."[154]

(v) CONCLUSION

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[152] See the discussion of intent and whether the use of the term 'harm' is helpful in H.L.Parker, "Conduct and Punishment", in Gerber & McAnanly, p.17.

[153] Adams, p.446.

[154] Ibid., p.447.

Returning to the case presented by modern day retributivists, the elements we isolated from them have come under considerable attack. Against the vindication of eternal retribution (in particular the line that argues hell is just because God is just), both Kvanvig and Adams find that such an attitude leaves us wondering where we stand - God is either not morally perfect, or God's justice is so different from ours that, if God commanded someone to murder thousands of innocents, there would be no questioning of the justice of such an act. Against such a hell being 'natural', modern theologians would still insist that even if we granted this the case, the 'natural' system of eternal retribution would itself still remain to be justified. Against the argument that retributive punishment glorifies God and proclaims his majesty, the same point can be made. Such an argument presupposes that sense can be made of the punishment. Additionally, if a form of aesthetic principle is behind this argument, then such a principle still remains morally questionable. All these three arguments have forced us to examine the central contention of the retributivist view, namely the argument concerning human sin, and God's holiness and honour.

The detailed analysis provided by both Kvanvig and Adams questions whether justification can be provided for this principle. Interestingly, both admit that the fact that they cannot find justification for this principle does not mean that such a reason cannot be found. Yet the examples introduced from

common morality and criminal justice make the discovery of such a principle even less certain.

In conclusion, then, the central difficulty with the retributive model of eternal punishment, is that it can furnish no justification as to *why* sin against God, of whatever amount or intention, deserves to be punished by an eternity of suffering. If retribution is granted in principle, there may be reasons for accepting that God punishes the sinner. However, the fact that such a punishment has traditionally been conceived as eternal, leaves many modern theologians rejecting this strong version of hell. Therefore, modern theology has turned elsewhere to discover what would justify the doctrine of hell.

AMBIGUITY IN KARL BARTH:

HELL AND APOKATASTASIS IN THE THEOLOGY OF KARL BARTH

Attempting to assess any point of doctrine within Barth's whole theological enterprise is a challenging task. Not only is this due to the vast amount of material that Barth generated, but also due to the fact that much of his theology is orchestrated in such a way, that it is extremely hard simply to isolate a particular doctrine. In this instance, for example, when examining what Barth had to say concerning the doctrine of hell, we are almost immediately swept up into the question: 'Was Barth a universalist?', a question vital in assessing Barth's contribution to a modern defence of hell. This in turn depends heavily upon Barth's conception of election, which is also affected by related ideas of grace, time and eternity, and freedom.

Therefore, in the light of these difficulties, two provisos are put on this chapter. In the first place, an attempt has been made to cover as much of Barth's material as possible, in the hope that anything overlooked is not central to the argument. However, due to the vast amount of material written by Barth, it may always be possible that some hitherto unnoticed fact may arise. The second proviso is that there is much still which could be said. In spite of the wealth of scholarship that has been produced about Barth, there is still more scope for

analysing and using his work. In this study, the doctrines of election and grace in particular could be examined much more extensively. However, it is again hoped that any omissions are not of central importance to this discussion.

Having set these cautions, what then did Barth have to say about the doctrine of hell, and about the possibility of some experiencing eternal ruin? Well, before we can even begin this study, it may be objected that the answer to this question is well known. Many claim that Barth was a universalist. Others recognise that Barth refused to associate himself with the doctrine of apokatastasis, but that his theological framework logically led him to such a doctrine. Others still refuse to push Barth into such systems, systems which Barth himself would have disliked. So they recognise the difficulties, yet rest content with the ambiguity that they see within Barth. Given that most scholars now recognise this ambiguity, and thus opt for one of the positions given above, why then the need for another analysis of Barth?

There are in fact two reasons why this is necessary. Firstly, in approaching the material from the standpoint of trying to understand how various theologians defend the doctrine of hell, this study attempts to isolate the reasons why Barth would defend such a doctrine, if in fact he does. So, the usual question is 'Was Barth a universalist?'. Now the question may become, 'If Barth was not a universalist, on what grounds would

he defend the possibility of eternal ruin?'. It must be granted that this second form of the question depends on a negative answer to the more usual form. This therefore leads to the second reason for a re-appraisal of this part of Barth's theology. John Colwell has recently published three works in which he argues in favour of reconsidering the traditional universalist question.[155] These works are based on a doctoral thesis which attempts to argue that if a proper understanding of Barth's doctrine of eternity is reached, then the difficulties concerning universal restoration disappear. Thus the challenge has once again been set. Barth is not a universalist, and all who have interpreted him in this way have misunderstood Barth's approach.

In order to make some headway then, the issues will be examined in the following order. 1. An examination of Barth's writings, and in particular evidence that demonstrates the apparent problem within his theology. 2. A look at Barth's interpreters, the conclusions they have reached, and some of the problems involved with these interpretations. 3. Evaluation and conclusion, with particular reference to the two issues that have been set up - determining on what grounds Barth would

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[155] John Colwell, *Actuality and Provisionality: Eternity and Election in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House Books, 1989); "Proclamation As Event: Barth's supposed 'universalism' in the context of his view of mission" in *Mission To The World: Essays In Honour Of G.R.Beasley-Murray* (Didcot: Baptist Historical Society, 1991); "The Contemporaneity of the Divine Decision: Reflections on Barth's Denial of 'Universalism'" in Cameron, Ed., *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*.

defend the doctrine of hell *if* he were not a universalist, and the validity of Colwell's new approach.

BARTH'S WRITINGS

Barth's Romans commentary has little explicit material on hell or universalism, yet large amounts of the work concentrate on the doctrine of election, and it is from this angle that we get some indication of Barth's view. In this respect, Schmitt has isolated two sources within the commentary that point to Barth's leaning towards universalism.[156] The first is the view strongly expressed by the fact that the reconciliation accomplished by Christ has a universal scope - Barth has no time or room for the more traditional doctrine of limited atonement, and hints at an openness within his theology.

> Those who do not see Christ according to the flesh and have no direct experience of Him are not less reconciled to God through Him than others are.[157]

The second source which Schmitt isolates is Barth's strong use of the dialectic. In a line of thought for which he would become famous, Barth explained how the divine 'No' preceded the divine 'Yes' - one was not possible without the other. This has two implications for universalism and hell. Salvation could not come

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[156] see K.Schmitt, *Death and After Life in the Theologies of Karl Barth and John Hick: A Comparative Study* (Amsterdam: Leiden, 1985), pp.19ff.

[157] Barth, *The Epistle To the Romans*, p.160.

until God's judgement, his No, the very essence of hell, was declared. However, the divine No was always followed by the divine Yes. God's mercy is infinite, and therefore always follows in ways and amounts which we do not, indeed which we cannot, know. This dialectic is expressed in the following passage:

> We are not saved by our knowledge of God. Our knowledge brings us under judgement. God is Alpha, and therefore Omega; He rejects, and therefore elects; He condemns, and therefore is merciful. God conducts men down into Hell, and there releases them.[158]

Apart from the *Church Dogmatics* (CD), there are two other sources which demonstrate similar hints of openness towards final judgement. In *The Resurrection Of The Dead* Barth examines the possibility of Christian monism:

> That God is all in all, is not true, but must become true. Christian monism is not a knowledge that is presently possible, but a coming knowledge.[159]

To what extent Barth would take this is not clear. The only universal that is definite is that all will be raised from the dead. Any implications of this for apokatastasis are left in the balance.

In *Credo*, Barth, as usual, places a strong emphasis on the accomplishment of a universal reconciliation in Christ. Logic

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[158] Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p.393.

[159] Barth, *The Resurrection of the Dead* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1933), p.170 - quoted in Schmitt, p.37.

would lead to the doctrine of universalism, yet elsewhere in the text Barth demonstrates something of his reluctance to go so far, declaring that not even those who praise "grace, the whole grace, and nothing but grace"[160] can count on being justified. Reconciliation is not something which men can presume of God.

Within the CD there is obviously a huge amount of material that could be relevant to this topic. As a result of this, it is also difficult to analyse and arrange the material in any systematic order. However, an attempt will be made here to break down the material in such a way that it will be easier to observe where and why problems arise within Barth's theology.

Election and Predestination

One of the main contentions concerning Barth and universalism has been the fact that Barth's doctrine of election logically leads to universalism, as all are elect in Jesus Christ, the man who was elected from the very beginning. Thus Barth denies either an Arminian position, or the more traditional Calvinist position of double predestination:

> I have had to leave the framework of theological tradition to a far greater extent than in the first part of the doctrine of God. I would have preferred to follow Calvin's doctrine of predestination much more closely, instead of departing from it so radically ... but I could not and cannot do so. As I let the Bible itself speak to me on these matters, as I meditated

[160] Barth, *Credo* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1962), p.125 - quoted in Schmitt, p.45.

> upon what I seemed to hear, I was driven irresistibly to reconstruction.[161]

What did this reconstruction consist of? Barth's view can still be classified as being predestination, yet he is against any type of legalistic statement which implies "an arbitrary divine power overruling the life of the creature."[162]

What then does election mean? Election is God's completion of the covenant, his act of grace, in the person of Jesus Christ.

> Is it only an invitation or a demand to enter? All that and more. Jesus Christ is God's mighty command to open our eyes and to realise that this place is all around us, that we are already in this kingdom, that we have no alternative but to adjust ourselves to it, that we have our being and continuance here and nowhere else. In Him we are already there, we already belong to it. To enter at His command is to realise that we are already inside.[163]

> In this free act of the election of grace there is already present, and presumed, and assured into unity with His existence as God, the existence of the man whom He intends and loves from the very first and in whom He intends and loves all other men, of the man in whom He wills to bind Himself with all other men and all other men with Himself.[164]

These two passages indicate two problems, issues which shall be considered later when we look at the responses of other theologians. Firstly, is conversion merely the recognition of the fact of being elected, just the 'opening of our eyes'? If

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[161] Barth, CD II/2 p.x.

[162] CD II/2 p.183.

[163] CD IV/1 p.99-100.

[164] CD IV/1 p.66.

this is so, then is salvation from men and women's point of view not just a realisation of something that is true for everyone? Conversely, can we be saved without recognizing it? In the second passage, is there any sense in which God's love and intention for 'all other men' is restricted or defeated? If this is not the case, then universalism would appear to be the result. Elsewhere, in the context of speaking of the covenant, and of Christ as the goal of history, Barth makes the extent of God's covenant and election undeniably clear:

> Just as there is no God but the God of the covenant, there is no man but the man of the covenant: the man who as such is destined and called to give thanks.[165]

As shall become apparent, the extent of Christ's work is due to the fact that he has taken all punishment upon himself. What is the extent of this work? That all men died in Christ, and that Christ died for all men:

> We died: the totality of all sinful men, those living, those long dead, and those still to be born, Christians who necessarily know and proclaim it, but also Jews and heathen, whether they hear and receive the news or whether they tried and still try to escape it. His death was the death of all.[166]

Christ Takes The Rejection Of All Upon Himself

It is interesting to note that in the CD, most of the statements that consider hell, judgement and rejection are found in the

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[165] CD IV/1, p.43.

[166] CD IV/1, p.295.

context of a discussion of the work of Christ. This is probably as a result of Barth's dialectic being at work, an idea which we have already considered in the context of the commentary on Romans. Thus the divine Yes and the divine No are inextricably linked together. So, in the following passage, Barth explains how God's attitude is always to seek fellowship. Even his judgement must be seen in this context:

> He wills to belong to us and He wills that we should belong to Him. ... This is God's conduct towards us in virtue of His revelation. There is no lack of contrariety in this conduct. It establishes and embraces the antithesis between the Creator and His creatures. It establishes and embraces necessarily, too, God's anger and struggle against sin, God's separation from sinners, God's judgement hanging over them and consummated on them. There is death and hell and eternal damnation in the scope of this relationship of His. But His attitude and action is always that He seeks and creates fellowship between Himself and us.[167]

This same parallelism is also seen when Barth talks of the relationship between the pain which we experience due to our sin and guilt, and the pain and anguish that God has already suffered in Christ, due to the same sin and guilt.[168]

In CD II/2 Barth makes the link between Christ and rejection explicitly clear. Jesus "tasted Himself the damnation, death and hell which ought to have been the portion of fallen man. ... He elected our rejection. He made it His own."[169] Only rarely do we

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[167] CD II/1, p.274.

[168] See CD II/1 p.373.

[169] CD II/2, p.164; see also p.346, p.349.

find Barth talking explicitly of hell. Yet, even there, the incarnate Word is not omitted: "It is a serious matter to be threatened by hell, sentenced to hell, worthy of hell, and already on the road to hell. On the other hand, we must not minimise the fact that we actually know of only one certain triumph of hell - the handing-over of Jesus - and that this triumph of hell took place in order that it would never again be able to triumph over anyone. We must not deny that Jesus gave Himself up into the depths of hell not only with many others but on their behalf, in their place, in the place of all who believe in Him. ... We know of none whom God has wholly and exclusively abandoned to Himself. We know only of One who was abandoned in this way, only of One who was lost. This One is Jesus Christ. And He was lost (and found again) in order that none should be lost apart from Him."[170] Elsewhere we read that in his death Christ "suffered *eternal* corruption".[171]

So Barth ties up the divine No of hell with the divine Yes of the cross. It is when this combination is also united with Barth's doctrine of election that the hints of universalism once again reappear and become stronger.

> It is to the effect that, in order to elect men to share His own glory, God willed to elect and actually has elected for Himself the necessary rejection of sinful men. ... He will do all this without any reservation, in the confidence that there is in God's grace no ungraciousness in virtue of which any man is

[170] CD II/2, p.496.

[171] CD III/2, p.602; see also p.602, and CD IV/1 p.93.

> fundamentally debarred by God - as if he were rejected, as if Jesus Christ were not the One rejected on his behalf - from being His elect, and from receiving the corresponding calling.[172]

Hell And Judgement

As has just been observed, most of the statements concerning hell appear in a Christological context. However, what do these statements consist of? Are there realities such as hell and judgement of which we can speak? At some points it may appear to be so. The problem for the systematician, however, is that these statements always appear in the context of a dialectic. So,

> There is death and hell and eternal damnation in the scope of this relationship of His. But His attitude and action is always that He seeks and creates fellowship between Himself and us.[173]

The divine No is always one half of the divine Yes. Barth acknowledges that the fact of the matter is that we deserve death and hell.[174] Hell is something within God's knowledge. Yet hell is classed amongst the 'merely possible and the impossible':

> Within the limit of being imposed by God Himself, God knows everything. Again, this includes even non-being, even the merely possible and the impossible, even evil, death and hell, all things in their own way -

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[172] CD II/2 p.416.

[173] CD II/1, p.274.

[174] In the context of the pain God experiences in Christ, Barth claims that we must acknowledge this "before we feel the greater terror that we are such sinners as have deserved death and hell" - CD II/1, p.373; see also CD II/2, p.496.

but still all things.[175]

We shall return to the question of the impossibility of hell and man's rejection of God. Death, the devil and hell are "works of God's permissive will which are negative in their effects".[176] What does Barth mean by this? Merely that everything, whether 'impossible or merely possible', exists within God's grace - once again the divine No and the divine Yes go together. Therefore elsewhere he argues that if hell were to be real, "even in hell we shall be in His hands. Even in its torments we shall be shielded with Him."[177] Perhaps then hell is not an ultimate state in the traditional sense, but rather a journey on the way?

In spite of all this, the facts that we have already considered, namely that Christ has taken on the rejection that all men deserve, mean that hell cannot be considered as an isolated fact, whether possible or not.

> Jesus Christ is *the* Rejected of God, for God makes Himself rejected in Him, and has Himself alone tasted to the depths all that rejection means and necessarily involves. From this standpoint, therefore, we cannot regard as an independent reality the status and fate of those who are handed over by the wrath of God. We certainly cannot deny its reality ... In faith in Jesus Christ we cannot consider any of those who are handed over by God as lost.[178]

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[175] CD II/1, p.553.

[176] CD II/2, p.92.

[177] CD III/2, p.609.

[178] CD II/2, p.496.

The Impossibility Of Sin

Above we have shown the hints that hell is only a possibility, and drawn attention to some of Barth's phrases which have caused scholars to wipe out this possibility and accuse Barth of being a universalist. In the next two sections, two further reasons for this conclusion will be highlighted.

Due to Barth's huge emphasis on God's grace and election, it is not surprising that he then goes on to describe man's rejection of God as an impossibility. However, what Barth strictly means by such an impossibility is harder to say. There are times when it is clear that rejection of God has been evacuated of any definitive power:

> In relationship to this divine good-pleasure, both [man's] sin, which is of course disclosed and taken very seriously, and also the sinfulness of his thinking and speaking, no longer have any power of their own, any definitive power.[179]

Definitive power, that is power which has a final say, is lost. Does this then not appear to make Barth's doctrine of election something that he did not want it to be (i.e. "an arbitrary divine power overruling the life of the creature"[180])? This certainly seems to be the case in the following passage:

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[179] CD II/1, p.213.

[180] CD II/2, p.183.

> The resolve and power of our opposition cannot put any limit to the power and resolve of God. Even in our opposition there comes upon us that which God has foreordained for us. But that means that what comes upon us cannot alter in the slightest the nature and character of the foreordination which is God's decree. In that decree as such we find only the decree of His love. In the proclaiming and teaching of His election we can hear only the proclaiming of the Gospel.[181]

Elsewhere the impossibility of rejection is known as a "tragic self deception",[182] and as the sinner's "foolish attempt to change his pardon into its opposite".[183] Again, the power of the rejector seems to be gone. Yet Barth does not go this far. God's condemnation exists upon the sinner, yet time has not yet run out, and it is still to be seen whether the rejection will be definitive. If it were to be so, it would not be man's rejection, for man has no power in the face of God's grace. It would be God's rejection.[184]

Why does Barth, with all this logical weight building up behind him, not follow the universalist route? At issue here is God's very nature, God's freedom. This comes out most clearly in the passages where Barth explicitly denies the charge of holding the

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[181] CD II/2, p.27.

[182] CD IV/1, p.77.

[183] CD IV/3, p.464.

[184] CD IV/3, p.465; see especially the denial of apokatastasis on pp.477-8, where Barth brings together the impossibility of man's rejection, a denial of universalism, and the issues of God's freedom which we turn to next.

doctrine of apokatastasis, yet the principle exists throughout the CD.

> God is He who, without having to do so, seeks and creates fellowship between Himself and us. He does not have to do it, because in Himself without us, and therefore without us, He has that which He seeks and creates between Himself and us.[185]

God is therefore not under any obligation towards human beings.

> God's being consists in His being as the One who loves in freedom. Thus in thinking of His love we have constantly to bear in mind His freedom (and later, in thinking of His freedom, we must not forget His love).[186]
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> God is God in His being as the One who loves in freedom.[187]

This must be seen as one of the keys to Barth's thought. It would be unwise ever to proclaim that one had found *the* key to Barth's theology, the governing principle. However, in the sense that the doctrine of the freedom of God enables us to understand Barth's attitude towards a final restoration to a greater extent, this principle can be labelled as key in this area.

In a discussion of the 'crossing of frontiers', that is conversion, and the relation of this to the doctrine of apokatastasis, Barth demonstrates his commitment to the

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[185] CD II/1, p.273.

[186] CD II/1, p.352.

[187] CD II/2, p.14; see also p.92; such a statement must lead us to ask whether human love therefore corresponds in any way to God's love, or must human love be similarly free?

principle of God's freedom. It is worth quoting in full, as it clearly reveals Barth's whole approach to the question, and how all the elements we have thus far isolated fit together:

> It is His concern what is to be the final extent of the circle. If we are to respect the freedom of divine grace, we cannot venture the statement that it must and will finally be coincident with the world of man as such (as in the doctrine of the so-called *apokatastasis*). No such right or necessity can legitimately be deduced. Just as the gracious God does not need to elect or call any single man, so He does not need to elect or call all mankind. His election and calling do not give rise to any historical metaphysics, but only to the necessity of attesting them on the ground that they have taken place in Jesus Christ and His community. But, again, in grateful recognition of the grace of the divine freedom we cannot venture the opposite statement that there cannot and will not be this final opening up and enlargement of the circle of election and calling. Neither as the election of Jesus Christ, the election of His community, nor the election of the individual do we know the divine election of grace as anything other than a decision of His loving-kindness. We would be developing an opposing historical metaphysics if we were to try to attribute any limits - and therefore an end of these frontier-crossings - to the loving-kindness of God. We avoid both these statements, for they are both abstract and therefore cannot be any part of the message of Christ, but only formal conclusions without any actual substance. We keep rather to the clear recognition that whenever an individual is elected and called, a new man is created out of the old, the reconciled world is fashioned out of the unreconciled, and to that extent, in secret, it becomes the kingdom of God and at the same time a new witness and messenger of the truth of the divine election of grace.[188]

So, rather than what has become the more common approach and using *human* freedom to oppose a commitment to universalism, Barth utilises *divine* freedom. Barth is determined to avoid

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[188] CD II/2, pp.417-8.

either affirming universalism, or withdrawing hope for it. Part of this reluctance also stems from his belief that such conclusions are "abstract" and "formal". The question remains as to whether he is able to do this consistently or not. Or even, should Barth be pushed to the point of being consistent? This is a question to which we shall return. Nevertheless, divine freedom together with the rejection experienced by Christ, means that hell can "be considered only as an eschatological possibility."[189] However, considering that Jesus has taken the rejection that all deserve, and that God is ultimately free with regards to the universe, Barth nevertheless considers that it is not forbidden to pray and hope for such a universal outcome.

> If we are certainly forbidden to count on [apokatastasis] as though we had a claim to it, as though it were not supremely the work of God to which man can have no possible claim, we are surely commanded the more definitely to hope and pray for it as we may do already on this side of this final possibility ...[190]

Such a statement makes it manifestly clear that universalism is a possibility. For God to command us to hope for universalism, such a universalistic outcome must at least be possible. This position is certainly a long way off from traditional theological approaches to hell.

Much force is attached to this hope due to Barth's conviction that God's universal salvific will is powerful for all, that the

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[189] CD II/2, p.496.

[190] CD IV/3, p.478.

number of the elect remain open,[191] and that no eternal covenant of wrath exists.[192]

Having considered these five themes that present themselves in the CD, and the way in which they interlock, it is now more than apparent why Barth has been charged with being a universalist. However, before proceeding to look at Barth's interpreters, there are a few more places in the Barthian corpus where he writes material relevant to the topic.

In his lecture *The Humanity Of God,*[193] Barth presents three observations concerning the doctrine of apokatastasis. The material is in the context of a discussion on the proclamation of the covenant, and so the question arises as to whether there will be those who eventually lie outside this covenant. The first point is advice to avoid "that panic fright which this word [apokatastasis] seems to have a way of spreading around it."[194] Barth warns against such reaction, "at least before one has come to an understanding with regard to its possible sense or nonsense."[195]

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[191] see CD II/2, pp.421-2.

[192] see CD II/2 p.450.

[193] "The Humanity Of God", in Barth, *God, Grace and Gospel,* trans. J.S.McNab, Scottish Journal Of Theology Occasional Papers No.8 (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1959).

[194] Barth, "The Humanity Of God", p.49.

[195] Ibid.

Secondly he urges the church to be spurred on by Colossians 1.19, that God resolved to reconcile all things unto Himself. Attempts must be made to search out good and valid interpretations of this and other similar texts, texts which have been avoided because of fear of universalism. And thirdly, Barth warns against theological legalism, a characteristic common to those against whom he cautions in his first point. The positive corollary of this is then given:

> One thing is sure, that there is no theological justification for setting any limits on our side to the friendliness of God toward man which appeared in Jesus Christ - it is our theological duty to see and to understand that as even greater than we had done before.[196]

The *Dogmatics In Outline* demonstrates that side of Barth which is disinclined towards a dogmatic universalism.[197] However, one of the most interesting expressions of his attitude towards systematic questions of this type comes across in a personal letter. G.W.Bromiley was once asked by the editor of Christianity Today if Barth would answer some questions from American theologians (such as Kloester and van Til). Bromiley notified Barth of this, yet Barth declined to answer questions due to the attitude of his interlocutors:

> ... they can adopt toward me only the role of prosecuting attorneys, trying to establish whether what I represent agrees or disagrees with their

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[196] Ibid., p.50.

[197] Barth, *Dogmatics In Outline* (London: SCM, 1949), p.136.

> orthodoxy, in which I for my part have no interest! None of their questions leaves me with the impression that they want to seek with me the truth that is greater than us all. They take the stance of those who happily possess it already and who hope to enhance their happiness by succeeding in proving to themselves and the world that I do not share this happiness.[198]

It was known that universalism was to have been amongst the questions put to Barth. His objection, however, was not necessarily aimed against the doctrine itself. Rather, the systematic way in which the questions would have been set caused the problem for Barth. It is best to keep this in mind as we read Barth and attempt to make sense of the apparent confusion present in his work.

BARTH'S INTERPRETERS

There have been many attempts to understand Barth's attitude towards universalism and the possibility of hell - this is by no means the first, and probably will not be the last. In order to gain some understanding of the interpretations made thus far, we will attempt to highlight some of the more serious studies that have been made, and to examine the conclusions which they have drawn.

Brunner

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[198] Jürgen Fangmeier and Heinrich Stoevesadt, Eds., *Karl Barth's Letters 1961-1968*, trans. G.W.Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), p.8 - quoted in Schmitt, p.96.

Brunner is well known for his opposition to Barth on the question of natural theology. In addition they did not see eye to eye on the issue of the extent of salvation. Alasdair Heron sums up the opposing positions well. Brunner, against Barth, wanted "to speak of man as created and fallen, as standing in guilt under the wrath and judgement of God, *apart* from Jesus Christ." However, Barth saw "both judgement and mercy, reprobation and election", as necessarily working through Christ.[199] Brunner believed that Barth's conception of human rejection of God, and the impossibility thereof, allowed for no damnation. Barth had ruled out "the possibility of damnation" and the "final divine judgement" - hell has been "blotted out, condemnation and judgement eliminated".[200] That is, grace is for all who believe, and the decision remains with men as to what they do with this grace. The two could not agree, as Barth's whole enterprise ruled out the type of decision which Brunner wanted to hold on to. The most famous image which came from this debate was that drawn by Brunner of a shipwreck.[201] Men on the boat fear for their lives as the storm rages around them, only to discover that their boat is in shallow water - there never was any possibility of them drowning. In fact, as soon as they realise this, they are saved from their perceived peril. In using this imagery, Brunner draws out the implication that he

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[199] Alasdair Heron, *A Century Of Protestant Theology* (Cambridge: Lutterworth, 1980), pp.88-89.

[200] Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine Of God. Dogmatics Vol. 1* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1949), p.348.

[201] See Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine Of God*, pp.351-2.

perceives in Barth's position. That is, according to Barth, "faith can make no difference in the destiny to which men have been elected."[202] The ghosts of this accusation, as we shall observe, were to remain with many of the other interpretations made of Barth's position.

Colin Brown

Colin Brown argues that the impression of Barth being a universalist arises from Barth's account of double predestination - the fact that Christ is both the elect for all, and also the reprobate for all. This general impression is made worse by Barth's talk of the righteousness of God and of justification. Justification is, "in other words, ... a matter of man conforming in time to a *decision* which has been taken by God in eternity."[203] Because of Barth's denial of universalism, Brown deems that Barth is indeed ambiguous. Accordingly, Barth's mistake is to have misconstrued the universal significance of Christ. "Barth has made Him the universal object of atonement. The New Testament depicts Him as the universal criterion of judgement."[204] As well as taking the role of judge away from Christ, Barth has also caused "the decisive factor of human

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[202] Ibid.

[203] Colin Brown, *Karl Barth and The Christian Message* (London: Tyndale Press, 1967), p.131.

[204] Ibid., p.134.

response [to be] taken out of time."[205] Thus conversion is no longer a transition, but merely an awakening to forgiveness (a criticism similar to Brunner's). In the end Brown lives with the ambiguity within Barth, and although not condoning it, refuses to press it home either way.

Berkouwer

Berkouwer's assessment of Karl Barth was one of the earliest attempts to analyse the theologian in a systematic fashion. The guiding principle was, as the title of the book indicates, 'the triumph of grace'.[206] Berkouwer notes how there is a sense of double predestination in Barth, but only in terms of Golgotha - the divine Yes and No.[207] Berkouwer's analysis of Barth would have led him to think that Barth was a universalist, but with Barth's rejection of apokatastasis, Berkouwer poses the question as to whether we have understood Barth properly.

> How is it possible that Barth can reject the, it would seem, logical conclusion of the apokatastasis?[208]

He examines Barth's comments on man's rejection of God's redemptive work in Christ, drawing the helpful analysis that

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[205] Ibid., p.136.

[206] Berkouwer, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth* (London: Paternoster, 1956).

[207] See ibid., p.102.

[208] Ibid., p.112.

"this substitution can be *denied*, but it cannot be *undone*".[209] Yet Barth still talks of the danger of unbelief. In the light of this, and the other problems that we have examined, Berkouwer has no choice:

> There is no alternative to concluding that Barth's refusal to accept the apokatastasis cannot be harmonized with the fundamental structure of his doctrine of election.[210]

Barth has reached this impasse because of his great emphasis on the 'triumph of grace', and hence the impossibility of man's rejection of God. The upshot of this is that "no serious *kerygmatic* significance can be ascribed to what Barth calls the 'final danger' of unbelief."[211] In the light of these criticisms, Berkouwer continues to advocate a double decree which takes the call to repentance seriously and thus leaves the mystery of faith and sovereign salvation to be held together. Berkouwer sees that mission is not merely the announcement of a changed situation, but the exhortation to repentance. Berkouwer is aware that Barth is cautious with regard to the traditional doctrine of election, yet believes that this fear has turned itself back on Barth.

It is interesting to note that although Barth praised Berkouwer's interpretation of his work, at the same time he

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[209] Ibid., p.113.

[210] Ibid., p.116.

[211] Ibid., p.267.

criticised Berkouwer for pressing home a system which did not originate in the CD. Thus Highfield thinks the key to the inconsistency in Barth's position is due to the forcing of Barth's dialectic by his interpreters (a point to which we shall return).[212] Barth himself expressed the difference between faith in a system and faith in a person in the following way:

> We can trust a person ... but we cannot grasp a person.[213]

Bettis

In an article that has been influential within this whole debate, J.Bettis attempted to clarify Barth's position. The problem, as he saw it, was that modern Protestantism had three basic answers to the particularity of election. These were double predestination, Arminianism and universalism. His conclusion is that "for Barth, one can reject both Arminianism and double predestination without having to accept universalism."[214]

For Brunner's part, he wanted Barth to fit into his more Arminian position. He was concerned with what Barth's position meant for human freedom and faith (hence the example of the

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[212] R.Highfield, *Barth and Rahner in Dialogue: Toward an Ecumenical Understanding of Sin and Evil* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), p.154.

[213] CD IV/3, p.176.

[214] J.D.Bettis, "Is Karl Barth A Universalist?", Scottish Journal Of Theology 20 (1967), p.423.

shipwreck and the impossibility of drowning). Berkouwer agrees with these criticisms, yet thinks that Brunner is too Arminian.[215] Therefore, according to Bettis, Berkouwer's concerns over God's freedom (that it is limited if he can decree nothing but election), God's grace (that it is minimized if all men stand in an open situation), and God's holiness (that inclusive election leads to a denial of eternal judgement), lead him to reaffirm the very double-decree which Barth could not go along with.[216]

Having rejected these two alternatives, Bettis states the question which now confronts him: "The question is whether his explicit rejection is consistent with the major emphasis of his theology."[217] Basing his argument on the evidence from *The Humanity Of God*, Bettis details how "Barth rejects the attempt to bridge the gap between the divine possibility and a theological statement of its actuality."[218] Barth does not deny universalism in order to preserve human freedom (which finds its truth in total subjugation to God's love) or to preserve divine justice (which is merely an aspect of God's love). In Bettis' eyes, Barth keeps hold of the possibility of reprobation for one

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[215] See Berkouwer, pp.287ff.

[216] However, see Colwell's analysis of this situation, which suggests that Bettis has misunderstood Berkouwer's point - "It is not that universalism is an apparent logical consequence of God's love *ad intra*, but that universalism is an apparent logical consequence of God's free but constant decision to love *ad extra*" - Colwell, *Actuality and Provisionality*, p.271.

[217] Bettis, p.426.

[218] Ibid., p.427.

reason, and one reason alone.

> For Barth, retention of reprobation as a permanent possibility is predicated on the refusal to identify the goodness of God's love with human salvation. ...Barth retains reprobation as an indication that the goodness of God's love does not depend on what blessings it might bring to men. Universalism, Barth argues, limits divine love in that it defines it in terms of what it can do for men. Universalism limits the freedom of God's love, and in limiting its freedom, limits its goodness.[219]

According to Bettis, therefore, Barth is not a universalist. Bettis' argument is at times confusing, but it appears to proceed along the following lines. Barth's concept of freedom is fundamental. Freedom is not the ability to choose any number of things, but rather the freedom to act free from all external considerations. Therefore, God's love is not defined in terms of his relationship to men (in opposition to both Berkouwer and the universalist who define God's love in terms of the salvation, or not, of men). "Barth does not reject universalism because of its reach to all men but because its premise defines God in terms of what He does for men."[220] Barth argues that God's love is good in itself. And this love is even manifested in reprobation. God allows disobedience, the impossible possibility, to be real (contra Brunner's interpretation), although this disobedience is still ineffective. Bettis uses the image of a man walking up a 'down' escalator, where the action is real, but the effect of the action appears to be nothing. In the same way, God removes

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[219] Ibid., pp.428-429.

[220] Ibid., p.429.

the "creativity, effectiveness, and vitality" from human disobedience.[221] Even if we may grant Bettis' example of the escalator (and it is arguable whether such an action may properly be called "ineffective"), it is hard to imagine how God can both allow human disobedience to be both possible and impossible. Bettis believes that such a position retains the threat of eternal rejection as real. Yet we may be pushed to ask, in what sense 'real', if the effects of rejecting God are negated?

Bettis argues that if rejection and destruction were possible, then this would imply that God was limited. Yet is this not in danger of falling in to the trap that Bettis believes Barth wishes to avoid, that is, of defining God in terms of what he does for men? If we leave all these difficulties aside, Bettis still has to grapple with the implications of Barth's universal atonement and doctrine of election. Given Barth's refusal to identify God's love with what he does for men, can Barth still consistently reject universalism? According to Bettis, the problem here is that Barth's interpreters have forced him into 'objective' theories of the atonement. However, for Barth,

> Grace is not the cosmological restructuring of the universe, but is God's participation as a man in human history which enables men, through the fellowship of the Church, to participate in the divine life.[222]

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[221] Bettis, p.430; see CD IV/3, pp.461-478.

[222] Ibid., p.434 - Bettis refers to CD II/2, pp.184-8.

Granted that Barth envisages grace as God's participation in human life, it is hard to see how Bettis can deny that some cosmological structuring of the universe is involved in Barth's theology, when Barth specifically claims that all men are elect in Christ. In fact, for Barth we can know nothing of what it means to be human apart from Christ. This aspect of Barth's theology is crucial for understanding his denial of universalism, and it is at this central point that Bettis' defence of Barth is most disappointing. We are provided with no reasons why Barth may be able to escape logical inconsistency, however much Bettis explains Barth's reasons for denying universalism.

As for Bettis' defence of Barth on the grounds that Barth does not wish to identify God's goodness with the destiny of any number of human individuals, Bettis articulates a strong form of this argument in a paper attacking the doctrine of universalism. Believing that some universalists argue that universalism follows necessarily from the premise that God's love is both good and sovereign, Bettis argues that "the implicit assumption which must be questioned is that God's love is to be defined in terms of the salvation of men."[223] Rather, human beings would not exist without God's love, and it is God's free love which has brought them into being. God's love would be neither better nor richer if it reaches all individuals. Nevertheless, Marilyn

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[223] J.Bettis, "A Critique of the Doctrine of Universal Salvation", Religious Studies 6 (1970), p.336.

McCord Adams has criticised Bettis' use of love in this way.[224] Consider the example of parents who give birth to twins, asks Adams. The parents are, in some sense, the cause of both twins. If they torture one, whilst nurture another, are they to be considered loving to each? In the same way, would God be loving, even if he allowed all his creatures to not reach their fulfilment? If Bettis is arguing that God may have love in himself even if there was no human creation, then such an argument may be acceptable. However, Bettis' problem is that he is talking about God's love for his creatures. If God creates and then does nothing to help his creation reach salvation, can God still be said to be good?

At the end of his paper on Barth, Bettis concludes that universalism rests on a decree and denies justification by faith. Universalism says that the universe is arranged like this, so live in this knowledge. Yet for Barth, people are justified not by knowledge, but by faith. Universalism prescribes life on the basis of knowledge, thus denying the way of living by faith. Thus Barth refuses such a *decretum absolutum*, and affirms faith as the way to participate in the life of Christ. If universalism were a reality, faith and life in the church would be denied. Bettis' attempt to justify Barth's position is at times helpful. In particular, his isolation of Barth's use of 'God's freedom' helps us to

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[224] Marilyn McCord Adams, "Universal Salvation: A Reply to Mr Bettis", Religious Studies 7 (1971), pp.245-9.

understand that this is not freedom to do as he chooses, but freedom to love as he chooses. God's love for men is *ad extra*, and God's freedom is freedom to act in that love.[225] However, the attempt to have both the 'objective' eternal election of all and the 'subjective' element of faith and fellowship in the Christ-event is less clear. Even if Barth intended to hold these two elements together in this way, ambiguity remains concerning the outcome of such a dialectic. Bettis emphasises the fact that God rejects man's disobedience. Does this not just nullify such a decision to reject? If this is the case, election of all men remains. The use of the non-objective atonement still leaves those passages which unambiguously declare that all are elect. However hard we try to resist the logical conclusions presented, their strength returns. Therefore, this is a question which will have to be followed up.

Other Interpreters

Many other interpretations of Barth point out the ambiguity, and then either criticize what often seems the logical conclusion of universalism, or criticize one of the implications of the ambiguity. An example of the latter can be seen in an article by David Kelsey, in which he declares that Barth's over-emphasis on sovereign divine freedom has adverse effects on human freedom.

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[225] For Barth's own account of what he means by both human and divine freedom, see Karl Barth, *Table Talk*, Scottish Journal Of Theology Occasional Papers Series no.10 (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1963), p.37.

> While it allows for full stress that the God-relation is grace and that the ones begraced are irreducibly finite subjects dependant on grace, what happens to their autonomy? In many places it is clear that Barth intends to affirm our autonomy. But it is not clear that this strategy will permit one to affirm it consistently.[226]

Bloesch also believes that Barth's universalist teaching undercuts personal faith, and criticizes him on this level. Thus he labels Barth as a 'tacit universalist'.[227] A. McGrath, in his survey of the doctrine of justification, attempts to understand the roots of Barth's position on this and other issues. As Barth's theology was a reaction against the anthropocentricity of the liberal school, his focus is on the knowledge of God, with an accompanying lack of interest in man's bondage to sin. One helpful perception is the way in which McGrath parallels Barth's theological method to that of Reformed Orthodoxy, rather than the method of Calvin. The former is deductive from a general principle (such as the decree of the elect) to an event, whereas Calvin was inductive (from the event of the cross) to the principle (the decree). This immediately rings true with what has been observed concerning Barth and universalism - the problem has arisen because of the insistence that all are elect

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[226] David Kelsey, "Human Being", in Hodgson & King, Eds., *Christian Theology: An Introduction to Its Traditions and Tasks* (London: SPCK, 1983), p.163.

[227] Donald Bloesch, *Jesus Is Victor! Karl Barth's Doctrine of Salvation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), p.138 - quoted in Schmitt, p.97; Schmitt also includes a reference to one of Barth's former students who "termed Barth an incipient universalist" - I.J.Hesselink, Jr., personal letter (Holland, Michigan: August 6, 1979), in Schmitt p.98.

in Christ. Putting this together with man's inability to refuse God, McGrath argues that the inevitable conclusion for Barth's theology is universalism:

> His doctrine of election, when linked with his understanding of the capacities of fallen man, necessarily leads to a doctrine of universal restoration: all men are saved, whether they know it or not, and whether they care for it or not.[228]

What then becomes Barth's concern is whether men know of this salvation or not - for, "as all men will be saved eventually, it becomes of some importance that this salvation be actualised in the present - for such is the basic presupposition of Christian dogmatics and ethics alike."[229]

Conservative scholars, together with fundamentalist writers who operate on a popular level, provide examples of the position where Barth is explicitly criticized for being a universalist. E.Davies and L.Dixon characterize Barth as a universalist, whilst acknowledging that there is some uncertainty concerning his true position.[230]

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[228] A.McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: Vol II, From 1500 To The Present Day* (Cambridge: CUP, 1986), p.181.

[229] Ibid., p.182.

[230] E.Davies, *An Angry God*, pp.41ff.; L.Dixon, *The Other Side of the Good News*, pp.32ff.; the American evangelical Carl F.H.Henry provides a reasoned assessment of Barth, accusing him of denying election by "implying universalism" - *God, Revelation and Authority: Vol VI: God Who Stands and Stays Part 2* (Waco: Word Books, 1983), p.95.

In an important treatment of Barth's ethics, Nigel Biggar observes that Barth has often been accused of holding an inadequate account of human freedom.[231] J.Machen claims that Barth denies the possibility of resisting God's grace, as all human being is constituted in Christ.[232] Yet Biggar helpfully points out how this criticism fails to distinguish between human being (*esse*) and real human being (*bene esse*). When speaking of human freedom, Barth more often than not speaks of humans as they should be, in terms of their fulfilment. This fulfilment can only be found in Christ. Having provided this distinction, Biggar however goes on to concede that Barth persistently speaks of humans as if they were determined by God's grace. Universalism is the necessary outcome, "For 'when the lordship of Jesus Christ over all creation is manifested, and with it the reconciliation of the world to God that has taken place in him', those who are not yet liberated to cry 'Our Father''will not fail to do it'."[233] Biggar is sufficiently confident to proclaim that "at this point in his account of human freedom we believe that Barth fails",[234] putting in danger notions of Christian responsibility, dignity, and the mission of the church.[235]

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[231] Nigel Biggar, *The Hastening That Waits* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p.3.

[232] John Machen, *The Autonomy Theme in the 'Church Dogmatics': Karl Barth and His Critics* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), pp.152-3.

[233] Biggar, p.5, quoting Barth in *The Christian Life. Church Dogmatics IV/4*, Lecture Fragments, trans. G.W.Bromiley (Edinburgh: T.& T.Clark, 1981), p.101.

[234] Ibid., p.6.

[235] Ibid., pp.151 & 162.

There are many other writers and scholars who have attempted to understand Barth on this issue.[236] Perhaps B. Ramm sums up the situation well:

> Barth has not taught universalism in so many words and cannot be charged formally with teaching it ... [However,] the very fact that the charge persists indicates that Barth shows a strong bent towards the doctrine.[237]

Before we turn to the latest interpretation of Barth presented by J.Colwell, we will turn briefly to examine two scholars who have been greatly influenced by Barth's position.

Barth's Influence

In two articles, T.F.Torrance clearly shows how similar his position on the question of universalism is to that of Barth. The first appeared in 1949, when considering the case that John Robinson put forward which argued that universalism was a biblical doctrine. After criticizing Robinson for equating divine love with human love, and for making sin and evil into something logical and comprehensible (whereas Torrance considers

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[236] For example, see Paternoster, *Thou Art There Also* (London: SPCK, 1967), pp.108-109, J.Sanders, *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), p.127, and J.Hick, *Death and Eternal Life*, p.260.

[237] B.Ramm, *After Fundamentalism: The Future of Evangelical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), p.201

these to be fundamentally irrational), Torrance clarifies his position on universalism. This doctrine is inconsistent as it makes God's free movement into a necessity, and "it commits the dogmatic fallacy of systematizing the illogical."[238] - that is, sin is rationalized. What does this mean in practice? That judgement regarding universalism should be suspended:

> Whether all men will *as a matter of fact* be saved or not, in the nature of the case, cannot be known.[239]

The similarities with Barth's refusal to answer the questions of the American theologians are clear to see. Even more obvious is Torrance's account of election. Election is not an arbitrary process, but an act of love in Christ.[240] Election does not mean "double decree, except that God has decreed death and life in Christ."[241] Even more strikingly, election has occurred for all.

> The amazing message of the gospel is that Christ has chosen all men, died for all men.[242]

Even if there were to be a person in hell, they would still be supported there by God's grace.[243] In the conclusion to the article, Torrance betrays the same ambiguity that we have

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[238] T.F.Torrance, "Universalism or Election?", Scottish Journal Of Theology, 2, 1949, p.313.

[239] Ibid., p.314.

[240] See ibid., pp.314-315.

[241] Ibid., p.315.

[242] Ibid., p.316.

[243] Ibid., p.317.

already noticed in Barth. On the one hand, he declares that "If it were not for the fact that all men are already chosen in Christ there would be no hope."[244] On the other hand, he declares that it is still possible to choose between life and death - any doctrine that denies this is an "abiding menace to the Gospel and to mankind."[245] Perhaps the only difference thus far is that Torrance lays a greater emphasis on the possibility of that choice than we have seen in Barth.

In a more recent article, Torrance deals with the question of the atonement, and whether the work of Christ is limited in nature and extent at all.[246] After considering God's relationship to the world in Christ, and God's relationship to Christ, Torrance argues that every human being is ontologically linked to Christ via the incarnation. Therefore,

> to limit the range of atoning redemption would be to limit the range of the nature, being and love of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.[247]

Torrance sees the possible conclusion of this position. If Christ died for all, then all must be saved - if some go to hell, then Christ did not die for all. However, if Christ only died on behalf of some sinners, then the divine judgement

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[244] Ibid., p.318.

[245] Ibid.

[246] T.F.Torrance, "The Atonement: The Singularity Of Christ And The Finality Of The Cross: The Atonement And Moral Order.", in Cameron, Ed., *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*.

[247] Ibid., p.244.

executed on the cross is only partial on sin. The traditional options (universalism or limited atonement) arise because the model of relation being used between the act of atonement and forgiveness is a 'logico-causal' one. However, in Torrance's theology, this connection is ineffable, and cannot be reduced in this manner. Any attempt to do so rationalizes evil, and 'makes nonsense' of the cross.

> Any such attempt at logico-causal explanation of the efficacy and range of the atonement is surely a form of blasphemy against the blood of Christ.[248]

The rest of the paper goes on to explore the connection between this 'ineffable' model of the atonement, and the basis of a moral order. Leaving that aside, we once again observe that after more than forty years, Torrance's position is similar to Barth's. All are elect, and Christ died for all, yet we cannot say that all are saved.

In a similar fashion, the theologian R.S.Anderson also betrays his roots in Barth. In *Theology, Death And Dying* he only wishes to speak of divine judgement in relation to Christ - and for this he actually acknowledges his debt to Barth.[249] Thus Christ is the centre of humanity around which all stand in one place or another. How then may we speak of hell?

> Barth may have pointed the way towards a better theory of eternal punishment when he insisted that God has

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[248] Ibid., p.248.

[249] Oxford: Blackwell, 1986, p.75.

> taken this punishment upon Himself, not merely as an abstract possibility, but as a concrete, real, human and absolute experience through His own Son.[250]

Does this not then imply universalism? No, such an abstract, according to Anderson, cannot be made into a general truth. Any such speculation which makes universalism *de facto* "disregards the personal relationship to God through Christ by which we are related to God."[251] Thus Anderson's only understanding of hell is as the divine No which was declared against Christ. This model is the only one favoured throughout his whole book on the theology of death and after-life. There is no doubt that, in this area of doctrine at least, Anderson could be declared a modern-day Barthian.

John Colwell

Part of the reason for re-analysing Barth with respect to the question of universalism is due to Colwell's recent hypothesis that, read correctly, Barth did not imply the apokatastasis doctrine. Colwell presents his thesis with a wealth of scholarship, and has followed it up with two further articles. His argument is powered by two concerns, which we shall now consider.

God's Eternity

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[250] Ibid., p.76.

[251] Ibid., pp.76-7.

> It is the contention of this thesis that Barth's distinctive understanding of the doctrine of Election is determined as much by his concept of eternity as it is by his concern for Christocentricity.[252]

We have seen how Barth's understanding of universalism is inextricably linked to his understanding of election. Therefore, if, as Colwell argues, the concept of eternity is crucial to our understanding of election in Barth, this might then affect our perspective on the question of universalism. The point that Colwell observes Barth making is that the traditional theological method of negation has pushed God into being seen as timeless, whereas man is within time. Barth refuses this move, as he refuses to see God as eternal within the categories of human time. However, if God is neither eternal within time, nor timeless, what options remain? According to Colwell, a proper understanding of Barth acknowledges the following premise:

> It is not that God is authentically in time but that time is authentically in Him.[253]

God is not timeless, but overcomes the limits of time.[254] Yet this image does not have the consequence of denying God the distinctions of past, present and future. These are retained by Barth "within the contemporaneous simultaneity of God's time."[255] God's eternity is 'pre-temporal', yet not to the extent of his

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[252] Colwell, *Actuality and Provisionality*, p.11.

[253] Ibid., p.39.

[254] See ibid., p.45.

[255] Ibid.

eternity being 'supra-temporal' and 'post-temporal'.[256] This understanding of God's time gives real meaning to God being the One who loves in freedom.[257]

Having traced this idea, Colwell poses the question on everyone's lips - is Barth trying to have it both ways? Colwell criticizes Gunton and Roberts for attacking Barth in this way, and sides with David Ford when, in response to "Robert's quest for a 'clear conceptual resolution of the relation of time to eternity', [Ford] interprets Barth as 'suggesting that there can be no such resolution.'"[258] It is the idea of the "dynamic" that may in fact be key to Colwell's thesis. Eternity is not a static mode of being, but rather for God eternity is a dynamic process, encompassing all time, where "past, present and future are simultaneously present to God without those distinctions between them being forfeited in this way."[259] Perhaps this is understood more easily when we think of omnipresence. God is able to be present in two places at once, fully present to each place, whilst knowing the differences between the two places. As this idea does not negate real space, neither does his eternity

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[256] Elsewhere Colwell writes on this that for Barth God is "*authentically temporal*" - Colwell, "The Contemporaneity of the Divine Decision", p.150.

[257] See Colwell, *Actuality and Provisionality*, p.53.

[258] D.Ford, "Barth's Interpretation of the Bible", in S.Sykes, Ed., *Karl Barth: Studies Of His Theological Method* (Oxford: OUP, 1979), p.75 - quoted in Colwell, *Actuality and Provisionality*, p.73.

[259] "The Contemporaneity of the Divine Decision", p.151.

negate real time.

Moving forward in his thesis, we see Colwell later trying to tie up this understanding of eternity with what Barth has to say concerning universalism. He acknowledges Barth's rejection of apokatastasis, and the reasons why Barth does this.[260] Yet the question remains - how to harmonize this rejection with Barth's doctrine of election. Rejecting the interpretations that we have examined (such as Berkouwer), Colwell claims that either Barth was an idiot, or we the interpreters of Barth have overlooked something and so misunderstood him. At this point Colwell is right in part. It is the very fact that interpreters have been unable to understand Barth that the question is so troubling. The issue though is whether the interpreters have overlooked some fact or issue, or whether Barth was, although not an idiot, actually attempting to live with a contradiction. To put the issue more bluntly, perhaps Barth was blinkered to the implications of his beliefs, or simply inconsistent in his portrayal of them.

Colwell proceeds to criticize Bettis' defence of Barth. For Bettis concludes that the atonement in Barth's theology is not an "ontological reorganisation"[261] which men must acknowledge. Yet Colwell asks,

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[260] see Colwell, *Actuality and Provisionality*, p.249, and pp.264-265.

[261] Bettis, p.434.

> How can Barth's location of the ontological definition of man in Jesus Christ, the principal content of Christian proclamation, be reconciled to the denial that the work of Jesus Christ represents an ontological reorganization of the universe?[262]

Thus in Colwell's assessment, Bettis compounds the problem. This analysis is fair, for in his attempt to clear Barth of the charges that Brunner and Berkouwer raised, Bettis also removes from underneath Barth the very ground on which he originally stands.

Colwell therefore continues to attempt to discover what would free Barth from the charge of contradiction. He observes that "Barth clearly prohibits too simplistic a relationship between the ontological definition of man as elect in Jesus Christ and the actual election of individual men."[263] Therefore, if it is not something which is simple, what does enable us to understand Barth more clearly? Colwell's contention is that it is Barth's distinctive concept of God's eternity that achieves this end.[264] It is this very point which Hanson's study[265] misses, and so commits the same error that tripped Berkouwer up. For Hanson, Barth cannot avoid the charge of universalism, as the decision for all men has already taken place in Christ. Colwell claims

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[262] Colwell, *Actuality and Provisionality*, p.272.

[263] Ibid., p.274.

[264] See ibid., p.275.

[265] Hanson, *Hope and Participation in Christ: A Study of the Theology of Barth and Pannenberg* (dissertation, Princeton, 1970).

that this is an "utterly one-sided" interpretation.[266] Barth's God is not static or Platonic, but dynamic. God's decision is not static, but "the living event of Jesus Christ."[267] To support this Colwell quotes from Torrance's article on universalism.[268] As a result of man's definition as elect not being in static or 'Platonic' terms, election does not invalidate man's history and free decisions.

> Only when the doctrine of election is understood in dynamic and not static terms, only when the primal decision of God is understood as an event of His eternity which includes human history and not as timeless abstraction, only when election is understood as a Trinitarian event and not as a unitarian or binitarian event that excludes its subjective realization in the Holy Spirit and thereby invalidates the authentic futurity of God's eternity, only then can universalism be avoided without logical contradiction.[269]

Yet in what specific terms does this concept of eternity help Barth's doctrine of election? To elect all mankind does not now mean that such a decision occurred in the infinite past, nor that it is taken in some timeless abstraction. In encompassing the whole of human time, God's election also encompasses human decisions. The question then remains as to what standing the decisions of men and women have in the election process. Colwell admits that much of Barth's portrayal leads us to assume that

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[266] Colwell, *Actuality and Provisionality*, p.277.

[267] Ibid., p.279.

[268] Torrance, "Universalism or Election?", p.315; quoted in Colwell, *Actuality and Provisionality*, p.280.

[269] Ibid., p.283.

faith is only the acknowledgement of an existing election. However, such a role can only occur in the power of the Holy Spirit (and it is chiefly here that Colwell locates Barth's doctrine of the Spirit), and so faith has a creative power as well.

Barth can therefore speak of "the elect *and other* men."[270] All men are ontologically defined in Christ, although some do not possess the Holy Spirit and so carry out the 'impossible possibility'. What can be said of these people?

> The uncalled man who lives a godless life may be described as 'apparently rejected' but, in the light of his solidarity with the elect in the free grace of God, no more and certainly no less can be asserted against him. The determination of this godless man is that of God's non-willing; he has no autonomous existence apart from God's positive election in Jesus Christ and only continues to exist because God is patient.[271]

It is interesting to note that although Colwell avoids the usual parallelism which pairs together the election of all in Christ objectively, with the fact that some do not subjectively acknowledge it (as Brunner portrays Barth), Colwell later adds that objectively all are elect in Christ, but subjectively not all are touched by the Spirit.[272] Therefore, what is the difference in the two conceptions? It is in the use of time, with reference to man's history and to Jesus' history.

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[270] Ibid., p.285 - quoting CD II/2 p.345 - Colwell's emphasis.

[271] Ibid., pp.285-286.

[272] Ibid., p.288.

> The ontological basis of man's election is the election of Jesus Christ, an election that has happened *to* man rather than *in* man's history; all men are ontologically elect in Jesus Christ though this event has not yet been realized in the power of the Holy Spirit in the history of all men.[273]

Thus Colwell concludes that the contention of his thesis is that "Barth considers that the ontological definition of man, itself ontically actual in Jesus Christ, only becomes ontically actual in the being of man through the action of the Holy Spirit."[274] In terms of the Holy Spirit, Colwell then agrees with the critics of Barth on this issue - that Barth's work suffers from a lack of detail on the person and work of the Spirit, an omission that results from Barth's reaction to eighteenth and nineteenth century subjectivism. It is this reticence regarding the Holy Spirit which "is also the root of the persistent charges of incipient universalism".[275]

Proclamation Of the Gospel

A second contention that Colwell puts forward is that Barth's direct statements concerning the apokatastasis have been "wholly misunderstood", as they have been taken out of their original context.[276] That context belonged to a discussion of Christian

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[273] Ibid., p.295.

[274] Ibid., p.299.

[275] Ibid., p.304.

[276] Ibid., p.267.

witness, the proclamation of the gospel by the church. It was this proclamation with which Barth was concerned, not with questions regarding the fate of individuals.[277] Colwell draws this out in his paper on Barth's view of mission.[278] The question he addresses is, if Barth was a universalist, what does this do to his view of mission? However, Colwell contends that this question approaches the issues wrongly. Barth himself treated the issues together. Is preaching the means whereby change is brought about by the Holy Spirit? Or is it declaring what has already occurred? Neither, as "Barth is properly interpreted only when this tension is recognized as irresolvable."[279] Due to the foundation that Colwell has laid concerning eternity, the relationship is not static, but dynamic. Therefore faith is the recognizing of an event, "but, since this act can only occur in the power of the Holy Spirit, it is also a creative event: the positing of a new being, a new creature, a new birth, a total change in man's whole situation."[280] Thus the incentive for mission is not withdrawn, even when the *possibility* of universalism remains.

> In the expectation of a genuinely creative event taking place within the Church's proclamation in the power of the Holy Spirit lies an incentive for the Church's mission that it would be hard to reconcile

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[277] see CD II/2, p.416, and *The Humanity Of God*, p.50.

[278] Colwell, "Proclamation As Event: Barth's Supposed Universalism In The Context Of His View Of Mission".

[279] Ibid., p.44.

[280] Ibid., p.45.

with any form of 'universalism'.[281]

Thus Barth's concern with the church's witness, that it be inclusive rather than exclusive, that it preach a universal rather than limited atonement, also created the impression that Barth advocated universalism when it came to individual choices.[282]

With these two points, Colwell attempts to clarify Barth's position, and the misunderstanding that has arisen. He warns against isolated or reductionist interpretations of Barth.[283] The refusal of Barth's critics to accept his view of divine freedom and eternity is their problem, not Barth's.[284] However, is this so? Has Colwell, or Barth for that matter, presented a defensible thesis?

It appears that Colwell is right when he presents the ambiguity concerning Barth's concept of God's eternity, and the effect that this has on the decision to elect. He therefore argues that,

> God's eternal decision of election is therefore to be conceived in a manner which does not preclude the

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[281] Ibid., p.46.

[282] see also J. Colwell, "The Contemporaneity of the Divine Decision", p.147.

[283] Ibid., p.158.

[284] Ibid., p.160.

> reality of human history and decisions. ... When Barth's doctrine of election is considered in the context of this understanding of eternity the divine decision to elect is seen to be contemporaneous with the human history of those elected.[285]

The problem is, is this in fact possible? Can we understand God's eternity in this way? Can we comprehend the decision and act of election in this way? Colwell accurately describes how Barth grounds his understanding of doctrine in revelation, rather than in pre-conceived ideas of what eternity or election might be.[286] Yet where do we stand when we attempt to appropriate such understanding with our usual ideas of what, for example, eternity might mean? As creatures which exist and operate within time, how do humans relate to a God who is neither timeless nor eternal? How far can we stretch the boundaries of language before we reach nonsense? The same question can be raised against many of Colwell's assertions. It seems that all Colwell has achieved is to highlight the problem. Yes, there is a contradiction between Barth's doctrine of divine election, and his denial of universalism. Scholars, as we have seen, are well aware of this fact. However, to resolve such a contradiction by appealing to a concept of time which does not appear to be comprehensible only multiplies the problems, not simplify them. How can we know what it would mean to say that God is neither timeless nor everlasting within time, that the eternity of God

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[285] Ibid., pp.152-153.

[286] p.231; "It is the essence of Barth's theological method that actuality determines rationality, that the event of revelation determines epistemology, that the act in which God is known determines the form and manner of His knowability.", p.69.

is somewhere 'between' these two poles?[287] Perhaps there are many who would like to achieve this glorious synthesis, but neither Barth nor Colwell presents us with an explanation of how.

Even if we could make sense of what Colwell means by such an understanding of time, the problem raised by Barth's doctrine of election still remains. For even when it is a dynamic election, even when the decisions of humans are involved in the process, it is an election of all, outside of which no one can exist. If election neither occurred in the infinite past, nor in a timeless existence, and if we can accept election as taking place in some other concept of time, we are still forced by the universal application of such election towards universalism.

As for the statements concerning the context of the apokatastasis statements in Barth, that they appear in passages where Barth is concerned with mission, this is manifestly true. This was indeed Barth's chief concern. However, this in no way minimizes the fact that when Barth speaks of all men being elect in Christ, not only does this have implications for the proclamation of the church (thus the church can address all men and say "Christ died for you"), but it also implies something about the individual destiny of men (that each man is elect in Christ).

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[287] See ibid., p.150.

It is our contention, therefore, that although Colwell's detailed analysis highlights the difficulty within Barth, and even demonstrates how Barth would have proceeded on the basis of certain contradictions, Colwell does not succeed in clearing Barth of the accusations. Colwell claims that his aim was "to identify that fact of Barth's doctrine of Election which may preserve him from such an obvious contradiction if not from an element of ambiguity."[288] However, it seems that Barth remains not only ambiguous, but also contradictory.

Equally, Colwell warns against reductionist interpretations of Barth. This is an important note to make, for Barth himself was cautious of such reductions (such as his comments on Berkouwer's work). However, what are we to do? We are left with one set of data which points to Barth being a universalist, and one set which does not. When studying Barth's interpreters, we have seen how some rested at this point. It is probable that Barth knew he was resting at this point too - and so he would not dogmatise either way! In fact, such a conclusion would betray one of the problems of dealing with Barth the theologian. Is he to be treated in a systematic fashion, as most other theologians would be examined? Or does this go against his own premise, and so break down the dialectic and reduce it to one strand or another? This is the wider question of how to treat and read Barth's whole theological enterprise.[289] One can surely ask for

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[288] Colwell, *Actuality and Provisionality*, p. 274.

[289] For an excellent discussion of this topic, see

consistency, even in a dynamic system.

CONCLUSION

Those interpreters who label Barth a universalist without acknowledging the problems and issues involved are irresponsible. Those that try to defend him against such charges take on an enormous job and responsibility, a job which Barth himself refused to do. Barth was certainly a *hopeful* universalist, yet his doctrine of election, not-withstanding some ambiguous understanding of divine eternity, earn him the title that Bloesch coined, a 'tacit universalist'. Or, as one of his students labelled him, an 'incipient universalist'.[290]

It is thus difficult to label Barth as a 'defender' of hell. What he did say about hell was with respect to Christ's condemnation. The only traditional strand in Barth concerning the doctrine was his belief that men deserved hell. Yet Jesus took it upon himself. However, before we force Barth into a corner, there is one piece of evidence that cautions us against so doing, and would remind us that Barth was not oblivious to charges against him. The story is related by Ebehard Busch, personal secretary to Barth from 1965 onwards. One day Barth,

> was very nervous. I saw this and asked him what had

G.Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology* (Oxford: OUP, 1991).

[290] See footnote n.78.

> happened. Then, as was typical for him, he said, 'I had an awful dream.' And Barth had a very great sense of dreams. I asked him, 'What have you dreamt?' He said, 'I was dreaming that a voice asked me, "Would you like to see hell?" And I replied, "Oh, I am very interested to see it once."' Then a window was opened and he saw an immense desert. It was very cold, not hot. In this desert there was only one person sitting, very alone. Barth was depressed to see the loneliness. Then the window was closed and the voice said to him, 'And that threatens you'. So Barth was very depressed by this dream. Then he said to me, 'There are people who say I have forgotten this region. I have not forgotten. I know about it more than others do. But because I know of this, therefore I must speak about Christ. I cannot speak enough about the gospel of Christ.'[291]

When considered within the four-fold paradigm developed at the start of this thesis, Barth moves away from the traditional doctrine. Barth's ambiguity leaves us uncertain as to whether hell is a *possibility*, for in fact saying no to God is the impossible possibility. Barth has little to say on the *nature* of hell, and we are prevented from drawing any barriers around God's grace and talking about the *finality* of hell. Interestingly, Barth's *justification* for hell would lie not in human freedom, but more traditionally in the idea of divine wrath. The hell that Barth does talk about is the wrath of condemnation poured out on the elect one, the divine no carried out on Jesus Christ for all those elect in him.

Thus with respect to our two original reasons for embarking on this study, we may conclude the following. If Barth were not a universalist, his defence of hell and its possibility rests on

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[291] In Donald McKim, Ed., *How Karl Barth Changed My Mind* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1986), pp.13-14.

the freedom of God, and God's freedom acted out in love. However, as the recent attempt of Colwell to clear Barth's name of the accusations levelled at him in the past fifty years does not appear to have made any considerable headway, apart from isolating where the ambiguity does lie, those charges of incipient universalism remain. This conclusion is made even when considering the material where Barth denies such a charge. There is much in Barth which could be used fruitfully when discussing hell, especially as it relates to the events of the cross. Yet Barth's theology could not be classified as 'defending hell', and we must therefore look elsewhere for theologians who leave the possibility of hell open.

HOPEFUL UNIVERSALISTS OR DEFENDERS OF HELL?:

HANS KÜNG, KARL RAHNER AND HANS URS VON BALTHASAR

Whilst differing on a variety of theological topics, the three influential figures of Karl Rahner, Hans Küng and Hans Urs von Balthasar nevertheless approach doctrine in a similar fashion in one particular area - that is, when considering the doctrine of hell. This chapter will set out to examine in turn the thought of these three theologians concerning the doctrine of hell, and then to draw a comparison between them.[292]

KARL RAHNER

In Vorgrimler's introduction to Karl Rahner's life and work, he extols the virtues of his one time friend and colleague, commending especially the way in which he combined academic excellence with a desire to share the message of Christianity with those around him. Rahner aimed to be an apologist for those who had never had this experience of God for themselves. However, Vorgrimler points out that,

> Karl Rahner did not attempt to operate with threats

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[292] In "Current Eschatology: Universal Salvation and the Problem of Hell", Theological Studies 52 (1991), John R.Sachs provides an in-depth and useful treatment of Rahner and von Balthasar amongst others. However, he does not examine the work of Hans Küng, and avoids some of the criticisms of their positions that this chapter brings to light.

> and intimidation in order to make people see; he did not spell out what happens to a human being who does not enquire into his or her own deepest mystery. Rather, in constantly new ways he sought to show that in the process of a life a human being 'makes' something of himself or herself which will remain for ever - because no one, not even God, can undo what human beings have done in freedom: they acquire a form, a profile, a format in which they will be God's partner for eternity. Every human being makes himself something that he entrusts to God for ever.[293]

This appraisal neatly sums up Rahner's approach to issues of eternal importance. Again and again the literature will reveal how Rahner makes strong use of this attitude whereby an emphasis on free will is combined with a certain amount of agnosticism and mystery.

Rahner's theological writings are in themselves voluminous. Within this corpus, there is also an enormous amount of material relating to issues of death and the last things. This is witnessed to by the fact that one whole volume has already been written analysing Rahner's approach to death and the after life, and it is plain that more work could easily be done on these issues.[294] Here we shall attempt to cover most of the material that addresses the doctrine of hell directly, and those writings that also have an indirect but important bearing on the subject. These will particularly include Rahner's work on death, immortality, and eschatology.

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[293] Herbert Vorgrimler, *Understanding Karl Rahner: An Introduction To His Life and Thought* (London: SCM, 1986), p.15.

[294] See Marie Murphy, *New Images Of The Last Things: Karl Rahner On Death and Life After Death* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1988).

Rather than tirelessly catalogue all the material relevant, it will prove to be more helpful and illuminating to isolate certain themes within Rahner's thought. These will then enable us to describe his approach to the doctrine of hell, and to clarify the method that he uses.

Hermeneutics

Rahner's whole approach is under pinned by a particular hermeneutical method. This is not just a general hermeneutic, but one that is particular to eschatological statements. Therefore, when constructing a theology of the last things, one must obey the rules of such hermeneutical method. Accordingly, Rahner believes that what Scripture says concerning hell is in the format of a 'threat-discourse'. Hence this is "not to be read as a preview of something which will exist some day. In so far as it is a report, it is rather a disclosure of the situation in which the persons addressed are actually to be found. They are placed before a decision of which the consequences are irrevocable. They can be lost for ever if they reject God's offer of salvation."[295] This hermeneutical approach is influenced by the belief that Jesus used terminology from within contemporary apocalyptic. That is, Jesus is speaking in the context of a first century Jew, utilising language and ideas

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[295] Karl Rahner, "Hell", in *Sacramentum Mundi Vol.3*, Ed. K. Rahner (London: Burns & Oats, 1969), p.7.

which are foreign and distant to the modern mind. Having said this, Rahner's hermeneutic does not mean to say that such 'threat-discourse' is distant from us due to the fact that we are culturally imprisoned. Rather, even if we were first century Jews, the distinction would have still remained between the content of the discourse, and the mode or method in which it was presented.

Rahner developed this approach in some depth in a paper entitled "The Hermeneutics Of Eschatological Assertions".[296] Here he is cautious with regard to a thorough-going programme of demythologization, as such work literally mythologizes man "because his linear direction in time towards what is still to come in time, and hence the dimension of his historicity, has been omitted."[297] Rather, Rahner's thesis is "that the assertion or revelation concerned with the present situation of Christian existence is not completed by an *additional* and quite different communication about the future: the assertion in question is already this communication."[298] Rahner is arguing that the Christian already knows of the future through his relationship with Christ. Thus the future is not some distant and separate entity from the present.

To extrapolate from the present into the future is

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[296] *Theological Investigations IV* (London: DLT, 1966), pp.323-346.

[297] Ibid., p.331.

[298] Ibid., p.334.

> eschatology, to interpolate from the future into the present is apocalyptic.[299]

Any eschatological statement must be related to God's act of love in Christ. Rahner summarizes these thoughts in the Concise Theological Dictionary:

> Freely adopting the notions of later Judaism, the NT rather assumes than affirms the existence of a special place of punishment; what it says in this matter is to be interpreted according to the principles governing the interpretation of apocalyptic and eschatological texts of Scripture. That is, such statements are not 'advanced coverage,' as though Scripture were reporting a future that had so to speak already arrived; rather their purpose is to shed light on the present existence of men before God.[300]

Such a hermeneutical foundation has implications for what Rahner will go on to say concerning hell. On the one hand, Rahner will maintain throughout that in eschatological statements there are distinctions to be made between form and content. Thus such a passage as the parable of the talents in Matthew 25 describes the 'weeping and gnashing of teeth' in the outer darkness. The content of such a message is the real possibility of loss. No weight should then be put on the description of hell as a mode of discourse, and the descriptions of hell as literally given.

> If we understand that eschatological statements are a transposition into the future of something which a Christian person experiences in grace as his present, then we have a practical principle, and one which is very important for faith today, for distinguishing between the conceptual mode and the real content of an

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[299] Ibid., p.337.

[300] *Concise Theological Dictionary*, Eds. K.Rahner & H.Vorgrimler (London: Burns & Oats, 1965), p.205.

eschatological statement.[301]

Secondly, and more importantly, Rahner argues that because all eschatology is related to the work of Christ, "it follows that the eschatology of salvation and loss are not on the same plane."[302] This is a theme which will continuously reoccur, but we must notice its roots here. Eschatology must always be related to Christ, and on that basis, Rahner believes that hell and heaven are not parallel paths. The options may remain, but Christianity must not present them as two equal ways.

Rahner's hermeneutical approach also lays the foundation for other important themes. One is his sense of agnosticism, faced with the possibility of eternal loss of universal salvation.

> It follows that true eschatological discourse must exclude the presumptuous knowledge of a universal apokatastasis and of the certainty of the salvation of the individual *before* his death, as well as certain knowledge of a damnation which has actually ensued.[303]

Eternity and Death[304]

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[301] *Foundations Of Christian Faith* (London: DLT, 1978), p.433; for more on the distinction between form and content of eschatological assertions, see "The Hermeneutics Of Eschatological Assertions", pp.344ff.

[302] "The Hermeneutics Of Eschatological Assertions", p.338.

[303] Ibid., p.339.

[304] For a brief summary of Rahner's theology of death, see W.V.Dych, *Karl Rahner (Outstanding Christian Thinkers Series)* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1992), pp.139-144.

One theme that is recurrent throughout Rahner is the emphasis that he gives to a particular understanding of the notion of eternity and the experience of death. With regard to eternity, there are two extremes that Rahner wishes to avoid. Firstly, that eternal life after death is simply time stretching out endlessly beyond death. Secondly, that death is the ultimate end of all, as in annihilation - this, to his mind, would be worse than hell. Rather, Rahner believes that eternity is 'in' time:

> In reality, it is *in* time, as its own mature fruit, that 'eternity' comes about. ... Eternity is not an immeasurably long-lasting mode of pure time, but a mode of the spirit and freedom which are fulfilled in time, and hence can only be comprehended in the light of a correct understanding of spirit and freedom.[305]

Hence, Rahner prefers to say not that eternal life begins <u>after</u> death, but <u>through</u> death.[306] Eternity and death are intimately bound together, for at death "what has come to be is the liberated, final validity of something which was once temporal, which came to be in spirit and in freedom, and which therefore formed time in order to be, and not really in order to continue on in time."[307] Death therefore is liberation, being made mature, and the process through which eternity comes to be. If eternity were an infinite expanse of time, death would not achieve any sense of finality, and humans would then still have an open

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[305] "The Life of the Dead", *Theological Investigations IV*, p.348.

[306] Ibid., p.348.

[307] *Foundations of Christian Faith*, p.437.

future before them. Rather death is a final and decisive point in human life.

> For it seems to me that things cannot simply go on after death in temporal extension, since that would mean that the finality of judgement at death (at least for someone who has come to a radical personal decision in this earthly life) is no longer credible.[308]

In this perspective, Rahner paints a picture of death as a decisive and absolute moment. Not that a decision for or against God is made in the moment of death, but rather that such decisions are made binding at death - a person's life is therefore consummated at death.

> Eternity as the fruit of time is an entrance into God's presence either in an absolute decision of love for him, love for his immediacy and closeness face to face, or in the finality of closing oneself against him in the consuming darkness of eternal godlessness.[309]

In an essay entitled "Theological Observations On The Concept Of Time," Rahner explicitly links this concept of time with the Christian gospel, the consummation of which occurs at death. He asserts that Christianity,

> ascribes to the human existence of the individual a personal history developed in a freedom which does not give the subject concerned the power to go back over his course at will, or the possibility of limitless

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[308] "Purgatory", *Theological Investigations XIX* (London: DLT, 1983), p.183; see also Rahner, "Ideas For A Theology Of Death", *Theological Investigations XIII* (London: DLT, 1975), pp.169-186, where Rahner expands on these themes of death as a radical consummation, and life after death as a deliverance from time.

[309] *Foundations of Christian Faith*, pp.440-441.

> revisions, but consists rather in the forging of that which is definitive, that in which time as a process will be raised to its definitive outcome, that which is called the 'eternity' of man in salvation or perdition.[310]

Elsewhere Rahner describes death as "the confrontation of man, with the whole of his history as a free person now consummated and complete, with the absolute mystery, with God."[311] This confrontation may also be known by the theological terms 'immortality of the soul', or 'resurrection of the flesh.' Such is the importance of death as a consummation that Rahner regards death as "that towards which the will of the free person tends at its deepest and most ultimate."[312] Death is the point at which a person's decision regarding God is taken seriously. We shall return to these issues of choice and decision, suffice it to say here that for Rahner, death is the finality of such a choice. It is for this reason, amongst others, that death came to play such a large part within Rahner's theology.[313]

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[310] "Theological Observations on the Concept of Time", *Theological Investigations XI* (London: DLT, 1974), pp.289-290.

[311] "Theological Considerations on the Moment of Death", *Theological Investigations XI*, p.319.

[312] Ibid., p.319.

[313] Rahner wrote much on the doctrine of purgatory and the intermediate state. Although these do not concern us here directly, Rahner's discussion of the issues involved, and his attempt to stay within the bounds of orthodoxy whilst re-interpreting these doctrines for a modern age, prove most interesting. See *Foundations of Christian Faith*, pp.441f.; "The Life of the Dead", pp.347-354; "The Intermediate State", *Theological Investigations XVII* (London: DLT, 1981), pp. 114-124; "Purgatory", pp.181-193 - part of this last article is in the style of a dialogue between two theologians, and is extremely accessible.

Decision, Free Will and Judgement

We have already seen some hints of the hinge on which Rahner's doctrine of hell stands. As with many modern theologians, this is the notion of free will. Essential to all he has said concerning death and eternity is the idea that this event is a consummation of a choice made throughout human lives. The chance of hell being a reality exists because it is possible that,

> the subject in the last resort culpably refuses to accept any freely bestowed love from another person, regarding itself as condemned to an absolute autonomy and autarchy as to absolute futility, against which only a radical protest is possible. .. death is the event of final perdition.[314]

Rahner has no time for the more traditional doctrines of double predestination or original sin.[315] Hence the responsibility for perdition does not lie in the hands of God, rather "a man can only lose the possibility of salvation through serious personal sin of his own."[316] "Thus the dogma of hell means that human life is threatened by the real possibility of eternal shipwreck,

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[314] "Following the Crucified", *Theological Investigations XVIII* (London: DLT, 1983), p.164.

[315] Elsewhere, in connection with a discussion of the punishments of hell, Rahner removes any of the responsibility from God. The issue again returns to human free choice, as God is only 'active' in the punishment of hell "in so far as he does not release man from the reality of the definitive state which man himself has achieved on his own behalf." - *Sacramentum Mundi Vol.3*, p.8.

[316] Rahner, "The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation", *Theological Investigations XVI* (London: DLT, 1979), p.200.

because man freely disposes of himself and can therefore freely refuse himself to God."[317] At the same time Rahner wishes to make clear that he is not talking of a once-for-all choice, nor is he advocating death-bed conversions. Rather, "our eternal life ... will be the definitiveness of that moral and free act of our life in which (beyond all the dividedness of time) as one and whole, we made ourselves the persons we wanted finally to be."[318] Our life constitutes our choices for and against God, and it is only at death do these become "the *finality of man's basic option*".[319]

However, if the stress is on freedom to choose for God or for sin, then what does Rahner mean by such freedom? In a theme which continues to run throughout Rahner's thought, he conceives of the freedom to reject God to be radically different from the freedom to love God.

> In any genuine ontology of freedom the good or bad exercises of freedom are not ontologically equal as possible uses of it. It is true that in God's sight freedom can achieve its final outcome as a consummation of the self in final and definitive evil. But still the nature of being, of good and therefore of freedom too, is such that this is not a possibility open to the free being which is ontologically on the same level. Such an outcome of the history of the free

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[317] "Hell" in *Concise Theological Dictionary*, p.205. Rahner explains this choice in similar terms elsewhere: "Hell" in *Sacramentum Mundi Vol.3*, pp.7-8; *Foundations of Christian Faith*, pp.435f.

[318] "Eternity From Time", *Theological Investigations XIX* (London: DLT, 1983), p.176

[319] "Christian Dying", *Theological Investigations XVIII*, p.236.

> person as intrinsically involved in the definitive state he has reached is, on the contrary, to be understood as the final and definitive state of *non*-consummation. There is the same dialectic of being and non-being in this as in the evil actions in the concrete of the personal agent in general.[320]

Thus here again we see the way in which hell is not a parallel option to heaven - there is a significant and important difference between the two paths.

Relying so heavily on human choice, Rahner cannot avoid the notion of judgement for long. He actually has no wish to avoid such a topic, as long as the proper hermeneutical considerations have been made, and the language is neither literalised or demythologised to empty the idea of any meaning. In fact, Rahner laments the way in which judgement and the call to decision have all but vanished from contemporary Christian theology and preaching.[321] Interestingly, Rahner combines his discussion of judgement with that of death. Therefore, although for the purposes of this discussion we have separated the two ideas, it must not be forgotten how closely Rahner holds them together. So, in his article entitled "Theological Considerations On The Moment Of Death," comes his clearest expression of the concept of judgement:

> ... death brings man into the presence of God, God who does not permit the personal history of man as rounded

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[320] "Immanent and Transcendant Consummation of the World", *Theological Investigations X* (London: DLT, 1973), pp.276-277.

[321] See "The Human Question of Meaning in Face of the Absolute Mystery of God", *Theological Investigations XVIII*, p.103.

> off and completed to fall into nothingness, God to whom man has to answer as to how he has used his freedom, whether he has used it to love his neighbour and God himself, for he cannot escape from being called to account in this way by taking refuge in a mere cessation of existence from which he could no longer be recalled.[322]

With regard to the actual occurrence and time-table of judgement, Rahner believes that such a doctrine is impossible to systematize. Perhaps it may happen at death, perhaps at the end of history. Whenever it happens, there is no avoiding the consummation and the confrontation it entails.[323]

Having emphasised that the choice of hell is due to the individual's actions and decisions, what of the role of God's will? Does not God's will, which is prior to the will of individuals, then determine the final outcome? In the context of a discussion of hope as one of the virtues, Rahner declines to present any great philosophical discussion of the problems involved with traditional statements of free will and determinism. With a certain air of agnosticism and mystery which we discover elsewhere, Rahner admits that,

> This is a question which no-one can answer by turning the fundamental statement of theoretical faith with regard to the general promise of God's will to save all men into an absolute statement.[324]

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[322] "Theological Considerations on the Moment of Death", p.319.

[323] See "Christian Dying", p.240.

[324] "On the Theology of Hope", *Theological Investigations X*, p.254.

Instead of an absolute statement, such an assertion of God's salvific will must be turned into a positive use. Such a use is the specifically Christian doctrine of hope. It is this stress on God's salvific will, which Rahner combines with the possibility of hell, to which we shall now turn.

God's Salvific Will versus The Possibility Of Hell: Agnosticism

The chance of some ending up in hell is, for Rahner, a real possibility. However, God's will to enable all to be saved is not only a possibility, but a fact. In the face of these conflicting beliefs, Rahner's response is one of considered agnosticism. Such a policy enables the theologian to remain within the bounds of the Catholic faith, whilst admitting a great wideness in God's mercy. Perhaps Rahner is most famous for this in his work on the salvation of those who have never heard of Christ, and of those who adhere to other religious traditions. He has come to epitomize the position known as 'inclusivism,' and has brought the term 'anonymous Christian' to the whole debate concerning religious pluralism. The ideas which he developed in this sphere are also applicable to our study.

Taking an example from the gospels, Rahner illustrates the conflict that he sees between the possibility of hell, and God's universal salvific will. In conclusion to his study on the theology of death, Rahner refers to the thief on the cross who

was told by Jesus that he would be in paradise.

> This is what he says to us too. As a warning, however, of the holy fear which is so necessary if his message of a happy death is not to become vain for us, he spoke no word to the other thief. The darkness and the deadly silence which hovered over this second death warn us that death can also be the beginning of the eternal death.[325]

Rahner believes that the paths to God are "long and devious," but that many will find one of these so called paths. Nevertheless, there is the possibility that a grave sinner can turn these paths into false ways that lead to perdition - "and about this we can make no final judgement."[326] Hence here we clearly see Rahner's agnosticism concerning the reality of hell. According to Rahner, we cannot say whether any will <u>in fact</u> end up in hell, thus preventing us from making final judgements. Only God is in such a position to judge and pronounce on eternal destiny.

There are two issues which are brought into focus at this point. Firstly, there is the question of whether the tension can be resolved at all, and secondly, should a resolution even be attempted? Rahner would give an emphatic 'no' to both of these questions. Rather, such an attempt "would be inconsistent with the purpose of the doctrine of hell, which is not to provide abstract data or to satisfy our curiosity but to bring us to our

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[325] "On the Theology of Death", in *Quaestiones Disputatae* (London: Nelson, 1961), pp.87-88.

[326] "Church, Churches and Religions", *Theological Investigations X*, pp.48-9

senses and to conversion. Without seeing how they can be reconciled, we must confess the two doctrines: the omnipotence of God, who wills all men to be saved, and the possibility of eternal perdition, though we do not see both of them as equally powerful."[327] Thus we cannot say whether apokatastasis will result, or whether an individual will be damned. In fact, neither the doctrine of the church, Scripture, nor the magisterium compel us to say that some are damned - only that hell is a possible result. The church may be allowed to say that some have been saved, for example in the case of martyrs, but such pronouncements cannot work the other way. Any dogmatic statement would take away the existential import of eschatological discourses. Rather than debate theological niceties, we must allow these questions to address us directly.[328]

> Possible damnation can only be spoken of, but must be spoken of, in so far as, and only in so far as it is forbidden to man to take the sure triumph of grace in the world as providing him himself with already fixed and acquired points in his estimation of an existence which is still to be lived out in the boldness of freedom.[329]

One of the results of this conflict is a phenomenon which we have seen throughout this analysis. This is Rahner's belief that heaven and hell are not mere alternatives, they are not equal paths to be chosen. Rather, "Christianity is the proclamation of

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[327] "Hell", in *Concise Theological Dictionary*, p.206.

[328] See "The Hermeneutics Of Eschatological Assertions", pp.339-40.

[329] Ibid., p.340.

the victory of God's grace and not actually merely the ambivalent offer to man's freedom of two possibilities, of salvation or of eternal perdition."[330] Elsewhere he states that "the eschatology of salvation and of loss are not on the same plane."[331] We saw this belief demonstrated most clearly when Rahner scrutinized what he meant by freedom and the decision to choose for or against God.

One of the results of this emphasis that hell and heaven are not equal options may be seen in other statements that Rahner makes concerning ultimate salvation. Although in most of the cases we have examined, Rahner wishes to hold together both the possibility of hell and the actuality of God's salvific will, there are times when statements which originally intended to hide human finitude begin to appear as if they are actually saying more. In the following passage, it definitely appears to be the case that God's salvific will, and thus the 'world's redemption', has the last say:

> In so far as hope is supported by the eschatological salvific event of Jesus Christ, salvation is not *one* of two possibilities, with damnation as another of equal status, and between which human freedom can make an autonomous choice. By means of his own sovereign effective grace, God has already determined the entire history of freedom (which comprises the area within which an individual makes his or her free choice) in favour of the world's redemption in Jesus Christ.[332]

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[330] "The Human Question of Meaning in Face of the Absolute Mystery of God", pp.103-4.

[331] "The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Assertions", p.338.

[332] "Salvific Will of God" in *Concise Theological Dictionary*, p.459.

Is Rahner a secret universalist, not wishing to show his true colours? This can certainly not be the case. There are many instances where Rahner denies such a position.[333] What he does not deny is a hope for universal salvation. This is most apparent in his influential article "The One Christ and The Universality Of Salvation." Here, in his discussion of salvation for those outside the church, Rahner affirms that "the theological truth of the universal possibility of salvation may be taken without reserve to possess binding dogmatic force."[334] Thus the <u>possibility</u> of apokatastasis actually occurring is not only raised, but it is affirmed and used for a theological purpose - that is, in his discussion of religious pluralism.[335]

However, in one important essay the ambiguity creeps in once again. Rahner affirms that Jesus Christ is the final revelatory event of history, yet a certain amount of openness does remain *due* to that very Christ event.

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[333] This is most clear in the articles entitled "Hell", in *Encyclopedia of Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, Ed. K.Rahner (London: Burns & Oats, 1975), pp.602f., and *Concise Theological Dictionary*, pp.205-6.

[334] "The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation", p.202.

[335] Elsewhere Rahner describes how apokatastasis has been rejected by the church "at least and certainly also merely as a firm, theoretical statement, as distinct from a hope, that respects God's sovereignty and unknown disposition and the openness of every history of freedom known to us." - "Christian Dying", pp.236-7; see also p.241.

> History remains open in all its dimensions, even those of grace and revelation, and now moves in its openness within the historically accomplished promise of an absolute salvation, a promise which, from God's side, encompasses victoriously the ambivalence of the world's freedom for salvation or perdition.[336]

This passage occurs at the start of Rahner's article on the closure of revelation, in which Rahner proceeds to examine how the death of Jesus has significance for the finality of God's dealings with the world. However, the context of this passage makes it unclear as to what "absolute" means, and why Rahner utilises the phrase "from God's side." Does absolute salvation imply universalism? Are we unable to subscribe to an apokatastasis doctrine, solely because we do not view the world "from God's side"? In the rest of the article, Rahner's use of "absolute" appears to indicate something that is authoritative and final. Therefore, do we here have an indication of a doctrine to which Rahner would deeply desire to subscribe, yet felt prevented for theological and ecclesiastical reasons?

Rahner provides another hint of such a leaning when writing on the apostles creed. Whilst attempting to give a fresh understanding to the credal statement "He descended into hell," Rahner writes,

> ... since he has descended into the unfathomable and bottomless depths of the world there is no longer any abyss in human experience in which man is abandoned and alone.[337]

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[336] "The Death of Jesus and the Closure of Revelation", *Theological Investigations XVIII*, p.135.

[337] "He Descended Into Hell", *Theological Investigations VII*

In this passage 'human experience' refers to the whole of humanity, not just to specifically Christian experience. Does Rahner therefore mean to imply that even in hell, even for those who have decisively rejected God, there is no abandonment and loneliness?

In Foundations Of Christian Faith, Rahner ends his piece on the doctrine of hell by re-affirming that heaven and hell are not parallel options, and that "the existence of the possibility that freedom will end in eternal loss stands alongside the doctrine that the world and the history of the world as a whole will in fact enter into eternal life with God."[338] It is the original emphasis on the phrase 'in fact' that could lead to the conclusion that, although the conflict between God's salvific will and the possibility of hell permeates Rahner's writings about this subject, perhaps it is not quite as fierce as once thought. Yes, there is a conflict, but do we here get an indication that one 'side,' that is God's will, is in actuality 'stronger' than the other? Rahner remains agnostic to a point, but here he explicitly claims "the world as a whole" will be saved. We must be cautious and not take the statement out of context. In the next section of the essay Rahner proceeds to discuss 'the anthropological necessity of collective statements', emphasising the communal nature of the Christian

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(London: DLT, 1971), p.150.

[338] *Foundations Of Christian Faith*, p.444 - italics original.

faith. Even so, his emphasis on the fact of world-wide salvation still remains. Would it be possible to borrow a phrase from Barthian scholarship and label Rahner a "tacit universalist"?[339]

Conclusion

What we can definitely say is that Rahner was clear about his belief in a hope for the salvation of all. Dych sums up Rahner's attitude in the following way:

> Statements in the New Testament about eternal loss can be interpreted as asserting this as a possibility for every individual, not as affirming its actuality. Indeed, Christians must hope that in the end God's grace will ultimately triumph over every evil. For Christianity is essentially a message of faith and hope in the power of God's love.[340]

Another commentator, W. M. Thompson, sees how the ambiguity that we have seen in Rahner concerning hell as a possibility may concern traditionalists. However, Rahner believes that "we need to maintain in dialectical tension both the redemption of all by Christ *and* the real possibility of eternal loss. No faithful Christian doubts that God wants to redeem him or her in Christ. But we also need to come to terms with the radically closed heart and mind of a Nazi torturer, a Papa Doc Duvalier, and an

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[339] A term taken from D.Bloesch, *Jesus Is Victor! Karl Barth's Doctrine of Salvation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), p.138.

[340] W.V.Dych, *Karl Rahner (Outstanding Christian Thinkers Series)*, p.145; see also Marie Murphy, *New Images of the Last Things*, p.30.

Idi Amin."[341]

Therefore, whatever questions we may have at this stage, Rahner provides a number of valuable contributions to discussion of the doctrine of hell. His reluctance to annul the radical difference between good and evil is brought out in the section by Thompson given above, and Rahner's desire to take seriously a person's history of freedom is a clear theme throughout.[342]

HANS KÜNG

Richard Bauckham claims that the work of Hans Küng has been dominated by three main concerns. These are the concerns of ecumenism, apologetics, and reform in the Roman Catholic Church.[343] Many of his works could be cited to justify each of these observed themes. For example, his study on justification as found in Karl Barth demonstrates the first,[344] his recent work

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[341] W.M.Thompson, "The Hope For Humanity: Rahner's Eschatology", in Leo J.O'Donovan, Ed., *A World Of Grace: An Introduction to the Themes and Foundations of Karl Rahner's Theology*, (New York: Crossroad, 1981), p.161.

[342] See Dych, *Karl Rahner*, p.145.

[343] R.Bauckham, "Küng, Hans," in *New Dictionary of Theology* (Leicester: IVP, 1988), pp.373-4.

[344] *Justification: The Doctrine Of Karl Barth and a Catholic Reflection* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1964).

Credo: The Apostles Creed Explained Today[345] would exemplify his apologetic approach for the ordinary person, and Küng's most controversial material (at least from the perspective of the Vatican), such as Infallible[346] and Why Priests?[347] would highlight the third concern. Interestingly, the truth of this hypothesis is also observed by the fact that these three themes are also to be found powerfully present in Küng's work on the after life - Eternal Life?[348]

Considering the little amount of attention that modern theologians give the doctrine of hell, Hans Küng's treatment in *Eternal Life?* is especially generous. Perhaps this coheres with the fact that one of his main aims as a theologian is to work as an apologist, and it is clear that the doctrine of hell desperately needs such work in our modern age. Yet whether Küng actually defends the doctrine of hell is part of the question in hand. As David Powys comments, Küng

> does not draw firm conclusions on questions of human destiny, opting rather for a 'dialectical approach'.[349]

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[345] London: SCM, 1993, E.T.

[346] New York: Doubleday, 1971.

[347] New York: Doubleday, 1972.

[348] *Eternal Life? Life After Death as a Medical, Philosophical and Theological Problem* (New York: DoubleDay & Co., 1984).

[349] D.Powys, *The Hermeneutics of 'Hell': The Fate of the Unrighteous in New Testament Thought*, dissertation submitted to Australian College Of Theology, 1993, p.530.

It is as a result of this ambiguity that similarities will begin to appear between the work of Küng and Rahner. Küng's work on the doctrine falls into four main sections, and it is these to which we shall now turn.

Jesus' Descent Into Hell

The first section in Eternal Life? looks at the complicated issue of Jesus' descent into hell. A doctrine that is still reflected in the creeds, it is in actual fact much neglected in modern theology, and hence the attention that Küng gives to it. Küng briefly examines a number of theories that have been put forward to account for this doctrine, but draws most from parallels with early Jewish apocalyptic. However, due to the lack of New Testament evidence for such a belief, and the fact that any such doctrine must rest on a world view and understanding of death which Küng argues that we can no longer accept, he is prepared to re-examine the doctrine and question its place in the Apostles' Creed. Historically speaking the placing of this article in the creed is late, and although the whole creed must be interpreted for each generation, Küng makes the following concession:

> Not every statement in the Apostles' Creed has to be understood literally. And the statements about a journey to hell and a journey to heaven in particular - apart from their problematic basis in Scripture - are tied more than others to the different ancient world pictures.[350]

[350] p.129.

Problematic Belief In Hell

Secondly, Küng examines the way in which the doctrine of hell has become problematic for belief. He charts how, pre-Vatican II, all non-Catholics were deemed as destined to hell, and comments on the harmful effects that the fear of hell has had on the life of the church; "The result was that intimidated, browbeaten Christians suffered from fear and created fear."[351] Sartre's characterization of hell as 'other people' in the play *No Exit* has been popularized, and so today the question of hell,

> becomes *theologically shattering* when we ask whether a hell in the *hereafter* possibly corresponds to these experiences of hell *here and now*.[352]

In Credo Küng cites the changes in the criminal justice system since the Enlightenment which have altered attitudes towards punishment forever. These changes have resulted in a position whereby pure retributive justice has been deposed as the central theme for punishment, with ideas of reform taking centre stage.[353] In both Credo and Eternal Life? Küng examines the history of the doctrine of hell in the Christian church, claiming that Christians have to come to terms with that history, and see the

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[351] p.131.

[352] p.130.

[353] *Credo*, p.174.

horror that has been done in the name of the church for what it is. In order to do this, a fresh critical study of the roots of that history is required, and this is what Küng claims to provide.

Jesus And Hell

Turning to Jesus and hell, Küng charts the changing view of apocalyptic at the time of Christ, and notes the influence of the Ethiopian book of Enoch with its prevailing ideas of Gehenna. Küng adopts a hermeneutic that is epitomized in the following statement:

> In regard to hell *Jesus* undoubtedly largely shared the apocalyptic ideas of his contemporaries.[354]

Although this is a common assumption amongst modern theologians and New Testament scholars, Küng also proceeds to pick up on two distinctive features of Jesus' ministry in relation to hell, distinguishing him from both later historical characters and writings who delight in the details in hell, and from those who believe the whole idea of hell to be superfluous. Firstly, he notes how Jesus was not a 'hell-fire preacher,' being disinterested in details and specifics to do with the doctrine. Thus he is put in stark contrast to those in church history who

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[354] *Eternal Life?*, p.133 - italics original.

have terrorized congregations with images of evil. Secondly, Küng points out that Jesus involved himself in the ministry of freeing people from demons. For Jesus the supernatural world was a reality, and part of that world consisted of an evil from which people needed rescuing.

Having said this, elsewhere Küng is ready to concede, along with other representatives of modern historical criticism, that some of the sayings attributed to Jesus concerning hell may have been inserted into the gospel accounts at a later date. After all, Jesus came with a message of good news. However, Küng would not be as naive as to put all judgement sayings in this category.[355]

What then is the core element to Jesus' preaching on hell? As with many modern commentators, Küng highlights the fact that "for Jesus then the challenge to decision is essential."[356] Jesus' message was given so that his audience could be made aware of the choice and responsibility that faced them. However, Küng warns against drawing from this conclusion anything more terrific or fanciful:

> What is absolutely indefensible is that stupid dualistic systematization which thoughtlessly assumes that, because there is a personal God, there must also be a personal devil; because there is a heaven, there must also be a hell; because there is an eternal life, there must be an eternal suffering.[357]

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[355] See *Credo*, p.173.

[356] *Eternal Life?*, p.134.

[357] p.135.

Thus here Küng is drawing a distinction between heaven and hell -the two are not necessarily parallel options, and Küng distances himself from any simplistic dualistic system.

Is Hell Eternal?

Having examined the gospel testimony, and so keeping true to his desire to present theology based thoroughly on the historical Jesus, Küng turns to the essential, and final question: Is hell eternal? Küng questions the doctrine of the eternity of hell on a number of grounds. Will God and the redeemed watch others in conscious torment forever? Is God in fact so concerned about the honour due to his name that he punishes those who refuse to believe forever? The following passage makes the issues painfully clear:

> The question becomes increasingly insistent: should the God of love, perhaps with the blessed in heaven, watch for all eternity this endless, hopeless, pitiless, loveless, cruel physical-psychological torture of his creatures? Does the infinite God really require all this because of a supposedly infinite offence (as a human act, sin is merely finite), for the restoration of his 'honour', as his defenders think? Is he such a hard-hearted creditor? A God of mercy from whose mercy some dead are excluded? A God of peace who perpetuates discord and irreconcilability? A God of grace and love of enemies who can mercilessly take revenge on his enemies for all eternity? What would we think of a human being who satisfied his thirst for revenge so implacably and insatiably?[358]

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[358] p.136.

Küng's desire is to confront these issues in a manner that is neither ambiguous nor dishonest.[359] That this is due to his role as an apologist is clear. In this vein, he is not pacified by simple answers. Not even the argument that eternal hell is self-inflicted will suffice for Küng, for surely the God who is ultimately good would find a way to overcome such resistance. In the course of this discussion, Küng examines the nature of death as expounded elsewhere in the book. Death is not an isolated experience, but in fact we 'die into God'. Perhaps Küng's characteristic understanding of death is best expressed in the following section from *Does God Exist?*:

> Death is not cancelled, but definitely conquered. Neither does it mean a continuation of this life in space and time. The very expression 'after death' is misleading; eternity is not characterized by 'before' and 'after'.
>
> '*Resurrection*' *means* a life that bursts through the dimensions of space and time in God's invisible, imperishable, incomprehensible domain. *This is what is meant by 'heaven' - not the heaven of the astronauts, but God's heaven. It means going into reality, not going out.*[360]

Thus, with this concept of death in mind, the idea of punishment may have a place similar to that of Purgatory - not that Küng's anthropology is dualistic, for he, like many modern theologians, assumes the idea of a 'psycho-somatic unity'.

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[359] Elsewhere Küng criticizes those theologians who "when asked directly about hell tend to give confused, evasive answers on the subject: they say that it is 'no longer on the agenda'" and who "avoid giving a clear new answer". *Credo*, p.171.

[360] *Does God Exist?* (London: Collins, 1980) - originally published as *Existiert Gott?* (Munchen, 1978), p.678.

> *Purgatory is God himself* in the wrath of his grace. Purification is encounter with God in the sense that it judges and purifies, but also liberates and enlightens, heals and completes man.[361]

This then is one of the keys to Küng's understanding of hell and purgatory. For, if this process is included into God himself, then traditional ideas are left with little to stand on.

What of the biblical witness that seems to insist on the traditional idea of torment? Küng notes that there are various possible interpretations of 'aionios' (hence eternal punishment is a definitive act, rather than eternal duration of torture), and also that some of the images may be interpreted as complete destruction (2 Thessalonians 1.9). Even the verses that appear to speak of universalism are mentioned, but in the end of the day these are not of utmost concern to Küng.

The reason for this is that, however the theologian interprets the biblical material, Küng insists that the eternity of hell can never be regarded as absolute. Any such act remains subject to the will and grace of God.

> Neither in one way nor in the other can we tie God's hands or dispose of him.[362]

Thus the New Testament statements concerning hell demonstrate the claim that God has on this present life, and the seriousness

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[361] *Eternal Life?*, p.139.

[362] p.141.

with which that is to be taken. Judgement is brought upon the individual who ignores this.

> The eternity of the 'punishment of hell' (of the 'fire'), asserted in some New Testament metaphorical expressions, remains subject to God and to his will. Individual New Testament texts, which are not balanced by others, suggest the consummation of a salvation of all, an all-embracing mercy.[363]

Thus Küng is seen to be a universalist. Or is that so? Küng denies such a position, wishing to avoid any statements expressing "a superficial universalism which regards all human beings as saved from the very outset."[364] It therefore appears that Küng is pushing his version of the wider-hope theory as far as it can go, without pushing it to the point of 'tying' God's hands.

Towards the end of the book, when considering judgement and the possibility of a final separation between righteous and wicked, Küng summarizes his position in the following way:

> Someone who is in danger of recklessly overplaying the infinite seriousness of his personal responsibility is warned by the possibility of a dual outcome. His salvation is not *a priori* guaranteed.
>
> But someone who is in danger of despairing of the infinite seriousness of his personal responsibility is encouraged by the possible salvation of each and every human being. Not even in 'hell' are there any limits set to the grace of God.[365]

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[363] p.142.

[364] p.141.

[365] p.212.

Küng's view of hell is therefore in the end dismissive. He appears to give the doctrine credit, especially in the way that he draws attention to the kerygmatic role of the doctrine in the New Testament and the life of the church. Yet in reality, he is as close to a universalist position as is possible without restricting the element of freedom in human and divine activity. In the following passage from the conclusion to Eternal Life?, Küng appears to be a dogmatic universalist - it is only the caution from the rest of the book that forces us not to label him such:

> *God all in all*: I can rely on the hope that in the eschaton, in the absolutely last resort, in God's kingdom, the alienation of Creator and creature, man and nature, logos and cosmos, the division into here and hereafter, above and below, subject and object, will be abolished.[366]

Positively, Küng refuses to ignore the importance of this life, the moral situations it involves, and the responsibility that is therefore involved. Elsewhere, when discussing the question 'No salvation outside the church?,' Küng demonstrates the importance he gives to human freedom:

> Man's free will must be respected. The sole criteria for entering the community of believers should be a profession of faith. The fact that those outside the 'Catholic Church,' that non-Christians too, are included in Christ's grace and so can be saved, should not lead us to the conclusion that such people can be regarded as members of a specific ecclesial community

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[366] p.233.

against their will.[367]

In this context Küng warns against using the dictum 'No salvation outside the church' as a phrase with which to damn people - rather the positive idea that salvation exists within the church should be professed.[368]

So Küng is keen to avoid any speculation concerning hell, while maintaining the idea of judgement. Perhaps his weakest aspects come when he deals with the textual evidence, and with the interpretation of these texts as warning. Jesus certainly shared similarities with his contemporaries when it came to apocalyptic, but a brief examination of the material demonstrates the vast difference between the statements attributed to Jesus, and the wild speculations that occurred elsewhere in intertestamental Judaism.[369] Although Küng makes the contrast between Jesus and later hell-fire preachers, the distinctiveness of Jesus' message in his own time may perhaps have been lost to Küng at this point.

With regard to the New Testament evidence, Küng's views on authority and Christology make this evidence important, but not necessarily binding for the theologian. Küng draws attention to the fact that many New Testament doctrines concerning the

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[367] *The Church* (London: SCM Press, 1968), p.317.

[368] Ibid., p.318.

[369] For an excellent survey of this material, see G.Nickelsburg, *Resurrection, Immortality and Eternal Life In Intertestamental Judaism* (London: OUP, 1972).

eschaton have long since been abandoned (for example, the millennium and the imminent expectation of the return of Christ[370]), so why not now the literalistic interpretation of verses concerning the end of the wicked? Having said this, Küng is much more positive about the final outcome than the New Testament itself appears to be. His belief that the New Testament texts which point to a universal home-coming "are not balanced by others"[371] would be criticized by most modern exegetical work - most universalist texts do not display the meaning that is desired of them, especially when they are considered in their context.[372]

Powys is extremely critical of Küng's use of the literary evidence, and in particular his avoidance of the texts concerning apocalyptic:

> He is particularly impatient with what he terms 'apocalyptic', and tends to disregard all such New Testament material. He makes no real attempt to justify this, assuming that his readers share his presupposition that no apocalyptic material could be authentic. This is an unsatisfactory approach to

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[370] For recent work demonstrating the vulnerability of the delay of the parousia thesis see the following: N.T.Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: SPCK, 1992), pp.459-464; B.Witherington, *Jesus, Paul and the End of the World* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1992), pp.13-48; R.T.France, *Divine Government* (London: SPCK, 1990), p.79.

[371] p.142.

[372] So, for example, see Baird, *The Justice of God in the Teaching of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1963), p.231; N.T.Wright, "Towards A Biblical View Of Universalism," Themelios 4 (1979), pp.54-8; even John Hick admits that "I would not in fact claim with confidence that [Paul] was a universalist" - *Death and Eternal Life*, p.248.

awkward but significant material.[373]

As Powys has clearly demonstrated in his thesis, the New Testament material that is often ambiguously labelled 'apocalyptic' is vital in understanding the words attributed to Jesus concerning hell and judgement. Any discussion of the gospel sayings without reference to and proper appreciation of this material is in danger of removing Jesus from his context. That Küng is in danger of doing this is clear from the lack of space he gives the actual text itself, texts which he then proceeds to argue are used mainly for their kerygmatic force. In Credo Küng parallels the apocalyptic material of the New Testament with the creation narratives of the Old:

> ... if we want to avoid over-hasty theological conclusions about the end of the world, then our starting point must be that just as the biblical protology cannot be an account of events of the beginning, so biblical eschatology cannot be a prognosis of events at the end.[374]

While the comparison may illustrate the care which is needed when treating both types of material, classifying the two genres together immediately passes by any specific treatment of the apocalyptic literature in its historical context. It is this jump to which Powys is objecting.

Conclusion

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[373] Powys, p.530.

[374] *Credo*, p.165.

In conclusion, does Küng defend the possibility of hell? For the most part, it seems that Küng does not, for he concentrates not on the possibility that some will ultimately reject God forever, but on the possibility that God will ultimately draw near in hell, and restore all creation forever. In attempting to categorise Küng with other modern positions on the after life, he may be termed a 'hopeful universalist.' However, it appears that when pushed into a corner, he would have to deny the enduring reality of an eternal hell - any hell that there may be could not escape God's mercy. Thus he could not be classified with those 'hopeful universalists' who may yet wish to defend the possibility of an eternal hell for a minority of people. Küng will never be a dogmatic universalist, yet "condemnation to hell is not the last word in the light of the crucified and risen Christ."[375] Expanding on the text of 1 Timothy 2.4-6, Küng writes:

> Of course the whole world is in the hand of God, who is the God of all men and not just of Jews and Christians, as both the Old and New Testaments testify. In Christ the whole world receives God's grace. If we could see God's plan of salvation there would be no outside, only an inside.[376]

HANS URS VON BALTHASAR

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[375] p.142.

[376] *The Church*, pp.318-9.

By far the most extensive and illuminating discussion of hell by a modern Roman Catholic theologian has been that given by Hans Urs von Balthasar. As a central motif to his whole theological enterprise, the theme of Holy Saturday and the descensus has been formative. However, it is not only in this form that von Balthasar has considered the doctrine of hell. Amongst the last things that he wrote were two works dealing with hell and universalism, eliciting much controversy and debate. The first, *Dare We Hope 'That All men Be Saved'?*, deals with the possibility of apokatastasis using largely historical material. The second work was provided as a commentary on the first, and as a response to its critics, and is entitled *A Short Discourse on Hell.*[377] Of all the modern works dealing with hell, Balthasar's work ranks amongst the best due to its engaging style and awareness of a wide variety of issues. The following study attempts to draw out some of the major themes in von Balthasar's writing that determine his doctrine of hell.

Holy Saturday

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[377] The German originals were: *Was durfen wir hoffen?* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1986), and *Kleiner Diskurs uber die Holle* (Ostfildern: Schwabenverlag AG, 1987); the two works are translated into English by D.Kipp and L.Krauth in *Dare We Hope "That All Men Be Saved"?, with a Short Discourse on Hell* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988). These will be referred to here as *Dare We Hope* and *A Short Discourse* with the relevant page numbers, in order to maintain the original distinctions between the two works. For von Balthasar's own description of and reaction to the controversy surrounding his thought, see the first two chapters of each of these works, entitled "The Issue and the Charge", and "On the Situation."

John Riches has contended that von Balthasar "is an expository, rather than an argumentative theologian."[378] For this reason, much of von Balthasar's work appears to be highly mystical and even paradoxical. This is seen most of all in his doctrine of the Holy Saturday, which dwells on the event of Christ's descent to the world of the dead, and the implications this has for theology.[379] The theme of the harrowing of hell has a strong history, but in modern theology it has been much neglected, perhaps even ridiculed. Nevertheless, von Balthasar employs it as a central motif to his theological enterprise. "It is for the sake of this day that the Son became man."[380] Riches, in describing this concentration on the descensus as "an almost wilful act of remythologization of the gospel",[381] identifies three important motivations behind this theology. Firstly is the pervasive influence which Adrienne von Speyr had on von Balthasar, and the mystical experiences which she related to him. Secondly, von Balthasar's exegesis of the divine kenosis as presented in the Pauline writings backs up the implications that the descensus has for Trinitarian doctrine. Finally, Riches

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[378] John Riches, "Hans Urs von Balthasar", in David F.Ford, Ed., *The Modern Theologians* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p.251.

[379] Henri de Lubac described Balthasar's work as a "contemplative Holy Saturday", contrasting it with Hegel's "speculative Good Friday"; cited in John Riches, "The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar: 2", Theology 75 (1972), p.647.

[380] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale: The Mystery of Easter*, translated with an introduction by Aidan Nichols (Edinburgh: T.& T.Clark, 1990), p.49.

[381] *The Modern Theologians*, p.250.

rightly believes that von Balthasar is driven by the conviction that hell must be included in God's plan of redemption, otherwise an element of human evil would persist forever.

In treating the passion of Christ, von Balthasar concentrates on the period of time between the cross and the resurrection, whereby Christ descends into the depths of hell and so identifies with human sin. In this respect his theology also provides a theodicy, for as a result of this descent there are no elements of human sinfulness that God does not reach. The divine Christ enters the God-forsakenness of hell and, devoid of all power and majesty, identifies with those who have determined themselves as hopeless and sinful. "And so it is really God who assumes what is radically contrary to the divine, what is eternally reprobated by God, in the form of the supreme obedience of the Son towards the Father."[382] This exposition of Holy Saturday not only has enormous implications for the doctrine of the Trinity, but also plays a central role in von Balthasar's approach to the doctrine of hell. Those in hell have themselves chosen to be there, and thus von Balthasar relies heavily on the determining importance of human freedom (as will be discussed later on). Nevertheless, even in this hopeless situation, God confronts those in hell in the person of Christ. Commenting on this unique approach, and its implications for a doctrine of hell, O'Hanlon writes,

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[382] *Mysterium Paschale*, p.52.

> In a series of approximations to what the reality of hell may consist of he suggests a difference between the eternities of heaven, hell and the state of Jesus on the cross, such that the condemned sinner may experience the definitive timelessness, the isolated *nunc stans*, of being forsaken by God and yet - because hell is a New Testament, christological place also in the sense that Christ's cross is raised at the far side of it - still be separated from his sin and transferred into the quite different, inclusive supra-time of the eternity of heaven.[383]

In hell Christ experiences not just abandonment and loneliness, but the worst possible form of these conditions. In considering the biblical witness, von Balthasar concludes that "all the experiences of night in both Old and New Testaments are at best approaches, distant allusions to the inaccessible mystery of the Cross - so unique is the Son of God, so unique is his abandonment by the Father."[384] Thus those who have placed themselves in the most hopeless situation possible, cannot even there escape God's love.

> Sinners, separated from God, wanting to be damned, in their loneliness find God again, but God in the absolute powerlessness of love who, unfathomably, makes himself one in the place-without-time with the self-damning. The words of the psalm, "If I make my bed in Sheol, thou art there" (139:8), thereby take on an entirely new meaning. And even "God is dead" as the autocratic decree of the sinners for whom God is something done away with, receives an entirely new, objective meaning provided by God himself.[385]

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[383] Gerard O'Hanlon, S.J., *The Immutability of God in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.74.

[384] Mysterium Paschale, p.79.

[385] *Pneuma und Institution* (Einsiedeln: Johannes-Verlag, 1974), p.408, translated in M.Kehl and W.Loser, Eds., *The von*

Kehl declares that part of von Balthasar's thinking in this doctrine is to attempt to do justice to two halves of Christian history - that is, to hold together the universalism of the Eastern church fathers, and the emphasis on freedom and responsibility of the Western church.[386] Such a desire, together with the mystery in which it results, will be further examined in what follows.

Hope

The category of hope is fundamental to von Balthasar's thinking on the doctrine of hell. However, it is important to be aware that his concept of hope is held in stark contrast to secular theories of hope. Christian hope is not the hope that things will get better (a secondary hope which excludes or avoids the notion of death), but "Christian hope is characterized by the involvement of Jesus Christ, by his victory over death through the resurrection."[387] Von Balthasar challenges his readers to bring such a hope into the secular world. However, this hope not only shatters any secular historical hope, but also looks for the overcoming of sin and death in all human experience.

Balthasar Reader (Edinburgh: T.& T.Clark, 1982), p.44; see also p.153 of *The von Balthasar Reader*, which is also a section from *Pneuma und Institution*.

[386] M.Kehl, "Introduction: Hans Urs von Balthasar. A Portrait" in *The von Balthasar Reader*, p.45.

[387] *In Gottes Einsatz leben* (Einsiedeln: Johannes-Verlag, 1971), pp.64-69, translated in *The von Balthasar Reader*, p.411.

This hope has enormous consequences for von Balthasar's thoughts about hell. In the following context, he examines the question of whether anyone will ultimately refuse to accept God's love:

> To this there are two possible answers: the first says simply "Yes". It is the answer of the infernalist. The second says: I do not know, but I think it permissible to hope ... that the light of divine love will ultimately be able to penetrate every human darkness and refusal.[388]

In considering the biblical evidence, von Balthasar finds two streams of thought. The first consists of the threat discourses, predominantly found in material from the "pre-Easter" Jesus,[389] and the second stream consists of those texts that appear to point to a final homecoming of all. Von Balthasar is adamant that a strict logical synthesis of these two streams is not possible.[390] However, his category of hope persuades him to give much more weight to the second class of texts, such that they "give us a right to have hope for all men".[391]

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[388] *A Short Discourse*, p.178.

[389] See *Dare We Hope*, pp.21-22 and p.44 - this hermeneutic is employed by von Balthasar to mark out the radical changes that the passion brought not just to Jesus' ministry, but to the whole world; although the threat discourses relate predominantly to this pre-Easter era, von Balthasar is not attempting to avoid the implications of such threats by categorising this as 'second-class' material.

[390] In fact, "a synthesis of both is neither permissible nor achievable" - *Dare We Hope*, p.29.

[391] *A Short Discourse*, p.187.

Von Balthasar's work at this point is especially distinctive, for he gives considerable thought to what it may mean to have hope *for all*. The implications of hoping are wide-ranging and serious, challenging those who would happily envision anyone in hell. Hope for the salvation of all means exactly that. That is, anyone who truly loves God, and so has such a hope, can in no way delight in the fate of any who may be damned. We must not in any sense objectify hell for other people, not even for the likes of Stalin and Hitler.[392] Our love should be like divine love. Any person who believes that a single soul will be damned may not in fact have discovered the reality of divine love for themselves. "To hope for oneself alone would be unbearable egotism and arrogance."[393] The Christian is a person standing in relation to others, part of a community for the world, and therefore there is an obligation to hope for literally all.[394]

This hope, not just for oneself but for all, is based on the belief that, in the end, there are no limits to God's love. Commenting on 1 Corinthians 3.11-15, von Balthasar writes the following:

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[392] *A Short Discourse*, pp.190 & 191; this is in contrast to other theologians who use Hitler and Stalin as examples of those people for whom there may, or even must be a hell.

[393] *Dare We Hope*, p.83.

[394] *A Short Discourse*, pp.211-3.

> The fire of which Paul speaks here is the testing and purifying fire of the judgement of Christ. It is meaningless to distinguish here between 'purificatory fire' and 'eschatological fire'. It is a matter of a single process, that of judgment, which for each person can have different lengths and depths.[395]

The indication here may be that the lengths and depths of the fire (whether purgatory or hell) may in fact be finite. That he identifies the one fire with the other certainly suggests this, as the purgatorial fire is the one that eventually leads to eternal bliss. However, in his concern to avoid a God who judges at one time, and then loves at another, von Balthasar identifies the two fires into a single process - a process which may for some be ultimately endless.

As shall be illustrated later on, one strand that makes hell a *possibility* is that of human freedom. However, the other side of this coin is the limitless of God's love. In this sense, human rebellion may ultimately be conquered.

> Human freedom can be neither broken nor neutralized by divine freedom, but it may well be, so to speak, outwitted. The descent of grace to the human soul is a free act of divine love. And there are *no limits* to how far it may extend.[396]

Although von Balthasar never makes this victory a certainty, a question may be raised at this point. What would the act of God

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[395] *Pneuma und Institution*, pp.441-444, translated in *The von Balthasar Reader*, p.421.

[396] *A Short Discourse*, p.221; italics original.

"outwitting" human freedom mean, and what implications would it have for the reality of that freedom?

Judgement

Although not a fundamental theme for von Balthasar, he retains a place for a judgement which must be both impartial, and separate from the good will of human beings.[397] In this sense, there will be a judge in the person of Jesus Christ. The Son, "having experienced all the forms of sin and abandonment in his own body" therefore has "the highest competence as judge, and in no way compels his majesty and freedom to pass sentence in a certain direction."[398] The mere presence of Christ, together with believers who act as co-judges, will cause judgement and separation. These co-judges indicate an important role for the church in judgement. "The church in its pure core is co-advocate. It is not for itself, but there for the world."[399] Von Balthasar would attack those who overly concentrate on individual salvation, again emphasizing his concern with love and hope for the whole community, indeed the whole world.

When will this judgement take place? Von Balthasar believes that

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[397] *Pneuma und Institution*, pp.431-3, translated in *The von Balthasar Reader*, p.415.

[398] *Pneuma und Institution*, pp.434-41, translated in *The von Balthasar Reader*, p.417.

[399] *Pneuma und Institution*, pp.434-41, translated in *The von Balthasar Reader*, p.419.

speculation about judgement is not wise, as it "is located on the threshold of eternity or more exactly ..., on the threshold between the 'Old' and the 'New Eon,' that cannot be grasped with our chronological understanding of time."[400] When writing specifically of hell, Balthasar seems to indicate that the warnings of damnation come as a judgement to the individual, rather than as a final judgement at the consummation.[401] Thus the threat discourses in the New Testament address the individual person in the here and now, demanding of them repentance and a recognition of God's undeserved grace. The threat of hell reveals "the situation in which the person addressed now *truly* exists."[402] Mark 16.16 is not a report of what will happen in the final judgement, "but a final being-placed-in-the-position-of-having-to-decide."[403] In fact, such a coming to terms with the real possibility of hell is necessary for every believer, for "would not every one who, in earnest faith, would like to direct his life toward this love first have to become existentially aware of the infinite distance from it?"[404]

> "Hell" here is something that falls to me personally - not hypothetically but by full rights - which, without any side glances at others, I have to withstand in

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[400] *Pneuma und Institution*, pp.431-433, translated in *The von Balthasar Reader*, p.415.

[401] These warnings are "personally addressed" - *Dare We Hope*, p.87.

[402] *Dare We Hope*, p.32, italics original.

[403] *Dare We Hope*, p.33.

[404] *A Short Discourse*, p.188.

utmost seriousness.[405]

If there is to be a final and ultimate sense of judgement, if hell is to be a reality, then it must be emphasized that heaven and hell are not parallels as conceived in the popular imagination. There is not an eternity of misery and an eternity of blessedness. If there were to be a hell, von Balthasar believes that this would be "complete withdrawal to the point of shrivelling into a disconsolate immovable now."[406] Heaven and hell are extreme opposites, but in no way are they parallel states or places in the future life.

Human freedom

As with Küng and Rahner, von Balthasar's doctrine of hell attempts to take seriously the possibility of human rejection of God. The stumbling block before any doctrine of apokatastasis is human freedom. Thus, "God even as redeemer respects the freedom which God has bestowed upon his creature and with which it is capable of resisting his love. This respecting means that God does not overrule, pressure, or coerce with the omnipotence of his absolute freedom the precarious freedom of the creature. In doing so he would contradict himself."[407]

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[405] *A Short Discourse*, p.189.

[406] *Dare We Hope*, p.133; see also pp.125-8.

[407] *Pneuma und Institution*, pp.441-44, translated in *The von Balthasar Reader*, p.422.

Nevertheless, how powerful is such freedom? Into this situation comes the doctrine of the Holy Saturday. Even those who have freely rejected God are confronted in their loneliness by the abandoned Christ who descends into hell. This Christ can identify with the sinner as one who is even more lonely, as one who is even lower in the lost world. Von Balthasar can affirm that "even what we call 'hell' is, although it is a place of desolation, always still a christological place."[408]

> The question is whether God, with respect to his plan of salvation, ultimately depends, and wants to depend, upon man's choice; or whether his freedom, which wills only salvation and is absolute, might not remain above things human, created, and therefore relative.[409]

The implication of this stress on human freedom is that, as with other modern theologians, any responsibility for the reality of hell coming to pass is laid at the feet of the human decision, rather than the divine will. There may be a judge and a judgement, but any resulting sentence is entirely due to the judgement free human individuals have brought upon themselves. In this context von Balthasar cites Luke 19.22: "I will condemn you out of your own mouth, you wicked servant."[410] As well as referring to prominent Catholic theologians (including Rahner

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[408] Ibid.

[409] *Dare We Hope*, p.15.

[410] *Dare We Hope*, p.58.

and Ratzinger[411]) von Balthasar emphasises this aspect of human freedom by several lengthy quotes from C. S. Lewis' *The Great Divorce.*[412]

Therefore, any possible hell would be known as "self-judgement."[413] In responding to his critics, von Balthasar chides them because, "the solution that I had suggested, namely, that God does not damn anyone, but that the man who irrevocably refuses love condemns himself, was not considered at all."[414] He is ultimately convinced that God will have mercy upon all. However, the real problem for his doctrine of hell is the question as to whether "all will have mercy on this mercy, that is, will [they] allow it to be bestowed upon them?"[415]

The importance of this aspect cannot be overemphasised in von Balthasar's theology. Without this emphasis, he would undoubtedly embrace the apokatastasis doctrine enthusiastically. Nevertheless, it is the very real danger that some may ultimately refuse this mercy, that the possibility of hell remains.[416]

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[411] See *Dare We Hope*, pp.79 & 91.

[412] *Dare We Hope*, pp.56 & 91.

[413] *Dare We Hope*, p.94.

[414] *A Short Discourse*, p.165.

[415] *A Short Discourse*, p.185.

[416] *Dare We Hope*, pp.219 and 237.

Mystery

The clear implication of the themes discussed so far is that the key for von Balthasar's doctrine of hell is that hell is a *possibility*. The textual evidence points in two directions, and neither of these can be synthesized together. Whether the threats will be actually realized is a question which is "ultimately unanswerable for us."[417] He derides those who take either of the two streams and make it into a certainty. In this context, Augustine comes in for particular criticism, especially since it was his legacy that had such a determinative effect on the history of the church.[418] When responding to his critics he makes it clear that "I never spoke of certainty but rather of hope."[419]

With respect to Barth, von Balthasar is critical of a position which ends up as apokatastasis, despite all attempts to avoid this result.[420] Universalism as a certainty is rejected.[421] "It is

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[417] *Dare We Hope*, p.183.

[418] *Dare We Hope*, p.65; see also *A Short Discourse*, p.165, where he states that Augustine's "opinion ... has cast an enormous shadow over the history of Western theology, to the extent that the biblical warnings .. have been transformed - indeed, actually vitiated - into information about the outcome of the judgement by God that awaits us."

[419] *Dare We Hope*, p.18.

[420] See *Dare We Hope*, pp.44-45, p.154, and p.94, where he approvingly quotes W. Kreck's comment (*Die Zukunft des Gekommenen [The Future of What Has Come]* Munich, 1961, p.144) that Barth's rejection of the label of apokatastasis remains

not for man, who is *under* judgement, to construct syntheses."[422] Von Balthasar is adamant that the choice is not a simple 'either-or.'[423] Certainty and knowledge is not possible. The actual outcome of this world, whether all will in fact be saved, and whether any end up in hell, is a mystery. In surveying the historical material and accounts that have been given of the doctrine of hell, he reports that "in all of them, even in those entirely foreign to our mentality, we sense the deep reverence due a mystery."[424]

> I deem it appropriate simply to be content with this existential posture. Whoever wants to go further would enter a realm where things can no longer be reasoned out.[425]

Conclusion

Von Balthasar has provided a rich study of the doctrine of hell. Besides the main themes already outlined, he presents an illuminating history of the doctrine which concentrates

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ultimately "rhetorical."; see also *A Short Discourse*, p.197, where von Balthasar comments that "what remains for me an object of hope becomes for [Barth] practically a certainty."

[421] *A Short Discourse*, p.166.

[422] *Dare We Hope*, p.23, italics original.

[423] See the quote from Adrienne von Speyr, *Dare We Hope*, pp.69-70.

[424] *A Short Discourse*, p.237.

[425] *A Short Discourse*, p.253.

particularly on the theology of Augustine and Origen. He points out how Origen has often been misinterpreted as categorically stating the apokatastasis doctrine, rather than as merely discussing it hypothetically.[426] Von Balthasar addresses the important question, left out by most theologians, of whether God did in fact create hell. Categorically denying this, his emphasis is on human freedom and divine love.[427] The strength of such love and freedom has often led those amongst the saints to desire condemnation to hell in the place of others.[428] And it is from such saints, and more especially the mystic religious experiences which von Balthasar relates, that he draws much inspiration and thought for his doctrine of hell.[429] Ultimately, it is not for a Christian to believe *in* hell. The creed speaks of many objects of belief, and such belief is much more accurately described in terms of faith and trust. As such, a Christian does not have faith in hell.[430] In the end, hell is only a distant possibility.

We must accept von Balthasar's cautions about possessing certain knowledge with humility, and the church must repent of believing in hell only for the sake of the others it wishes to cast there. Von Balthasar's consistent defence of hell as a *possibility*,

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[426] *Dare We Hope*, pp.59-60.

[427] *Dare We Hope*, pp.53-5.

[428] *A Short Discourse*, pp.204-210.

[429] *Dare We Hope*, pp.97ff.; *A Short Discourse*, pp.216ff.

[430] *A Short Discourse*, pp.173-4.

together with his rejection of a necessary universalism, attempts to make clear the ambiguities that result from other hopeful universalists. However, despite these positive aspects to his theology, an element of uncertainty persists in this account. Von Balthasar admits this, yet it may not be inappropriate to wonder how these tensions may in fact be worked out. Of primary concern is the interaction between divine love and human freedom. In the end, von Balthasar believes that human freedom may in fact be "outwitted" by divine freedom.[431] If God 'wins' because he is more astute than us, does this then imply that human beings never had the chance of 'winning' themselves? If so, was such human freedom genuine if it did not involve the real possibility of saying no to God? As has been noted, such questions are left in the category of 'mystery' by von Balthasar. In addition, such questioning is not too damaging at this point, as von Balthasar's refusal to be a categorical universalist avoids this problem. Nevertheless, it would be interesting and helpful to know how such difficulties would be resolved if all were ultimately saved by the process of God outwitting human freedom.

A similar problem presents itself in the doctrine of the Holy Saturday. In what sense is hell a "Christological" place? That Christ presents himself to all in hell is clear, thus giving them a chance to freely respond or reject. Von Balthasar would find it hard to see why anyone would persist in rejecting in the

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[431] *A Short Discourse*, p.221.

face of such love, but the possibility remains. Nevertheless, if John Riches is correct in identifying von Balthasar's desire to include all of human evil in redemption, can anyone persist in such evil? That is, given this premise, and given the doctrine of Holy Saturday in which all of human evil was included, could hell ever be a real possibility? Hell is a "Christological place" because "the world, with all its destinies of human freedom has been founded anticipatorily in the mystery of the sacrificed Son of God."[432] Therefore the descensus is a priori deeper than that which any human resistance could sink to. It is hard to systematize such thought. However, if this line was to be taken to its extreme, would not the fact that hell has been founded in Christ mean that any ultimate rebellion is doomed to failure? In addition, what does such 'founding' do to von Balthasar's claim that God did not create hell? If hell is created by human rebellion, no one can ever go deeper than Christ's descent on Holy Saturday, and so the lost and lonely will always be confronted by God. Whether anyone would eternally persist in rejecting such love is a question never answered by von Balthasar. Indeed, it is a question that he refuses to answer.

In addition, it remains unclear as to how this confrontation in hell takes place. As O'Hanlon comments,

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[432] *Pneuma und Institution*, pp.441-4, translated in *The von Balthasar Reader*, p.424.

> ... since von Balthasar wants to retain the traditional position that there can be no repentance of a definitive choice after death, it is not clear (unless one supposes some experience of hell in this life) how and when the sinner condemned to hell may with his or her own free consent be saved by the cross of Christ.[433]

Despite these critical questions, von Balthasar must be appreciated for his willingness to confront and deal with such a controversial issue. He succeeds in building more positively on the line developed by Rahner and others, and rather than defending hell as a possibility, defends the position that refuses to say with certainty that either some will be lost, or that none will be lost. In response to the question, "Dare we hope that all men will be saved?", von Balthasar's answer is in the affirmative, as long as it is merely a hope.

RAHNER, KÜNG AND VON BALTHASAR - A COMPARISON

The approaches of these three theologians do in fact appear to be extremely similar at a number of points. All three start from similar hermeneutical standpoints. Rahner explicitly writes on the hermeneutics of eschatological statements; from the criticisms of Küng that have been examined, together with what Küng has to say concerning Jesus and hell in *Eternal Life?*, it is clear that he shares similar assumptions; and von Balthasar,

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[433] Gerard O'Hanlon, *The Immutability of God in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, p.74.

although less explicit about the hermeneutics involved, treats the text in a similar way. Namely, that Scripture employs what Rahner labels 'threat discourses,' passages whose content is aimed at achieving an existential decision within the person being addressed. Rahner and von Balthasar differ from Küng's brief but explicit concern with historical criticism, and Rahner reacts against an over-emphasis on the demythologizing programme of Bultmann. Rahner's over-riding concern is that the relationship between the present and the future is one which is intrinsically connected rather than separate in a dualistic fashion.

Küng demonstrates a similar belief, although it is voiced through what he has to say on the theology of death. He uses the explicit term of "death into God," whereas Rahner talks of life "through death." Obviously the two theologians employ different conceptual frameworks, and wish to make slightly different points. The implications, however, are similar. Death is not an end, it is a beginning. Eternity is not conceived as never-ending time, but as a new mode of being. At death consummation and confrontation occur, and judgement is carried out. Although von Balthasar does not deal with this theme explicitly in his writings on hell, he does employ similar ideas. Eternity is not something to which a human being is captive, but is an opening up of a "plenitude of dimensions".[434]

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[434] *Pneuma und Institution*, pp.449-450, translated in *The von Balthasar Reader*, p.425.

One major consequence of this view of eternity is that it then proves extremely difficult to understand the relationship between this life and the next. If death is a new beginning, what is being begun in death? According to this understanding, not never-ending time, but rather some new mode of being. Rahner in particular expresses this new mode of being as something which is non-temporal, reacting against the idea of time stretching out endlessly beyond death. Küng also exhibits such a reaction, suggesting that "the very expression 'after death' is misleading."[435] The question now to ask is how can such an existence be said to 'begin' if it is non-temporal? All three theologians are keen to keep some type of causal link between this life and the next. This is clearly demonstrated by their emphasis on free will, and how the threatening nature of the discourses on hell may shape our lives for the future life by the decisions we make now. However, for some causation to occur between this life and the next, a temporal continuity must also exist between this life and the next. Not only does this problem have implications for their understanding of heaven, but also for their doctrine of hell. Thus, when we ask Küng, for example, whether he would ultimately deny the reality of an eternal hell, we may in fact be asking an inappropriate question. That is, if hell as heaven is conceived as in some sense 'beyond time,' to ask how long hell will exist for is not only inappropriate, but irrelevant! In a similar fashion, if Rahner were to concede that

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[435] *Does God Exist?*, p.678.

someone could actually end up in hell, we may then ask whether such a hell would be temporal. From his definition of eternity, Rahner would probably reply in the negative. If so, we may then push the question a point further. If hell is not temporal, how is it then possible to conceive of hell as occurring <u>after</u> death?

The nature of the relationship between time and eternity is therefore of great importance. Even though the hell conceived by Rahner, Küng and von Balthasar is a possibility, the ambiguity in their language concerning eternity makes this possibility even more puzzling.

Another striking similarity between the three concerns the idea that hell and heaven are not parallel and equal options.[436] Christianity proclaims the gospel of life and salvation, hoping for the ultimate victory of God's love. In the light of this gospel, the possibility of hell is only a small part of a much larger picture. This leads to their specific statements concerning hell. Once again, the tension that we have seen in any one of the three is shared by the others. They heavily emphasise the responsibility shared by all to account for their actions. None of them wish to diminish in any way the seriousness of free decisions and actions, nor do they wish to

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[436] Amongst others to have made a similar point are Baron Friedrich von Hügel, *Essays and Addresses on the Philosophy of Religion: First Series*, pp.213-214, and Peter Geach, *Providence and Evil*, p.133 - although Geach is making the point that as the blessed do not reach a state beyond all time and change, neither will the damned, for "Hell is not Heaven reflected upside down in a black mirror."

mock the radical nature of evil. Yet in the very same breath, all three wish to provide a theological basis for hope, asserting the salvific will of God. Küng explicitly claims that the eternity of hell is subject to God's will. The ambiguous comments made by Rahner also imply such a belief - that even though the two themes stand in tension, the will of God is the power that will eventually thwart the possibility of hell. Von Balthasar is more explicit, speaking of the 'out-witting' of human freedom.

However, even if they all move within this tension to stress hope and the sovereignty of God's will, they also deny an explicit and dogmatic universalism, whilst not being afraid to hope for it as a final outcome.

Rahner, Küng and von Balthasar arrive at this 'hopeful universalist' position from different routes. However, one main ingredient that contributes to this position is their hermeneutical standpoint. This is the way in which emphasis is put on the kerygmatic value of the sayings concerning hell, at the expense of emptying them of any reality. Although none of these three are explicitly guilty of this crime, the end result is similar. Having ascribed to the warnings of Jesus this role, the step to hopeful universalism is made easier. What is almost forgotten in this swift move is the possibility that a reality may well remain behind the 'warning.' Küng is right to condemn the fanciful speculations and fearful sermons of generations

past, and in drawing attention to Jesus' avoidance of these tactics he does the church a great service. But then to virtually empty what Jesus does say goes a step too far. Yes, Jesus does call to decision, but this does not necessarily mean that the reality of that decision, and its eternal importance, will eventually fade. How will it eventually fade? According to Küng, by the very fact that even in hell there are no limits to God's grace. If this is true, then a question is raised concerning Jesus' original warning and call to decision that was given in the first place. Warning does not make sense when there is no danger, so perhaps the warnings that Jesus gave also make no sense. Not only does such a warning make no sense, it also begins to resemble the traditional preaching of hell-fire that Küng so wishes to avoid.

By interpreting Jesus' message in such a way, Küng (and Rahner and von Balthasar to a lesser extent) takes a similar line to a number of other theologians. Most notable of these is John Hick, who, writing before Küng, minimises the role of hell in Jesus' teaching, questions the authenticity of some of the sayings attributed to him in the gospels, and claims that those words that do refer to hell are calling for an existential decision, rather than necessarily referring to an objective reality.

Küng differs from Hick in the way that he gives little attention to the question of human freedom. Hick devotes a chapter to the

question of universalism and human free will,[437] whereas Küng simply claims that there are no limits to God's grace. As we have seen, Rahner makes some consideration of freedom and its relationship to God's will, yet admits that the issues remain a mystery, and that Christians must live in hope in the face of such perplexity. Von Balthasar is left in a similar position. What would it mean for God to 'outwit' human freedom? Perhaps the work of all three theologians would have benefitted from a more thorough discussion of these central themes, thus giving more substance to the wider hope theory to which they subscribe.

CONCLUSION

Rahner, Küng and von Balthasar, in their individual ways, strive to stay within the mainstream of Catholic orthodoxy.[438] John Sachs believes that there is something of "a clear consensus among Catholic theologians today in their treatment of the notion of

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[437] Hick, *Death And Eternal Life*, p.242ff.

[438] Phan, commenting on the Roman Catholic International Theological Commission's document, *De quibusdam quaestionibus actualibus circa eschatologiam* (translated into English in The Irish Theological Quarterly 58 (1992), pp.209-43, as *Questions in Eschatology*), briefly yet favourably compares Rahner and von Balthasar to this document for their attempt to "formulate a version of apocatastasis that is consonant with the Christian faith". However, as this analysis has attempted to show, although this aim may be partly in their minds, the scope of their discussion is much wider. Indeed, their "version of apocatastasis" can never be categorical universalism. See Peter C.Phan, "Contemporary Context and Issues in Eschatology", in Theological Studies 55 (1994), pp.531-2.

apocatastasis and the problem of hell".[439] For Küng and Rahner, traditional discussion of hell has been coloured by many ideas which they both wish to reject - namely, original sin, double predestination, and the wrath and punishment of God. Such discussion has also implicitly assumed that some are already in hell. The decree of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* has often been taken in this manner. Rahner and Küng, together with von Balthasar, refuse to state categorically whether this is in fact the case. In addition, von Balthasar has provided a more thorough exploration of other themes connected with the doctrine, yet having said this, there are questions still left, if not unanswered, then shrouded in mystery.

Returning once again to the four theses developed out of Kvanvig's model of the traditional doctrine of hell, we can observe how these three theologians fit into the respective categories. Hell is certainly a *possibility*, and although we have seen hints of universalist tendencies, none state their belief in this position categorically. The *nature* of hell may be some form of existence, although all three steer clear of speculation, and Rahner's concept of time, for example, make it hard to understand what this existence would be. This also

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[439] Sachs, "Current Eschatology: Universal salvation and the Problem of Hell", p.252; Sachs breaks down this approach into five elements: i) a stress on human freedom to reject God; ii) hell is self-chosen by the sinner, and not an additional punishment from God; iii) although hell is a possibility, neither Scripture nor the church teaches that anyone will be lost; iv) heaven and hell are not two equally possible outcomes; v) an insistence on the hope that all shall be saved.

presents problems for the issue of *finality*, where there is a strong hope that any who may make the choice to refuse God's grace will ultimately be brought home. As for the *justification* for hell, human free will is paramount, leaving aside aspects of divine retribution.

It appears that these three Catholic theologians have wrestled with a hard doctrine and come up with some 'half-answers'. The use of dialectic is an important and appealing stream for all three writers, as is the category of hope. Any criticism of their approach should neither diminish the value of hope, nor claim something that the Christian faith has never claimed - that is, that the ways of the Creator are completely comprehensible to His creatures.

Neither Rahner, Küng, nor von Balthasar may themselves be worried that their approach leaves certain matters unsettled, as this is part and parcel of their dialectical approach. However, such a position remains unsatisfactory when it leaves many issues of detail unanswered.

C.S.LEWIS - A POPULAR Defence OF THE DOCTRINE OF HELL

INTRODUCTION

If the theological influence of C.S.Lewis is ever in question, there is one area in which he has had an undoubted impact - that is, in theological discussions concerning the doctrine of hell. If there is one set of references that seem to appear almost as often as references to the biblical material, then it is to the fictional and apologetic material of Lewis. At least eighteen modern authors refer to, cite and make use of Lewis when discussing the doctrine of hell. The extensive influence of Lewis in this area will be examined towards the end of this chapter, but it is partly for this reason that his thought is worth considering.

However, before proceeding, some may raise the question as to whether Lewis is a proper case for consideration. As C.S.Kilby writes,

> There are critics who accuse Lewis of word-juggling and a diabolical cleverness used to promote what they call an outdated fundamentalism. Some dismiss him as little more than a popularizer.[440]

Lewis himself often pleaded that certain matters on which he merely speculates should be left to the theologians, and was

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[440] C.S.Kilby, *The Christian World of C.S.Lewis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), p.5.

aware of his lack of formal training in theological discussion.[441] His primary work was as a literary critic, specialising in medieval and Renaissance literature. However, because of the very fact that Lewis was a 'popularizer', the influence of his theology has been great. As a Christian apologist, he is perhaps one name that would spring to most people's minds. James Patrick believes that,

> One must reach back to G.K.Chesterton, whose work deeply influenced Lewis, to find another apologist as powerful.[442]

In the literature on hell the numerable references to Lewis bear witness to this claim, and although it is often difficult to assess the impact of an author, Lewis undoubtedly has a high claim to this positive appraisal. To dismiss a person's work because it is 'popular' would be a mistake. The only mistake would be to believe that Lewis thought that he himself wrote as a theologian, grappling with all the complexities and details of an argument. His aim was to provide the non-theologian with the tools to understand the faith. Thus Jacques Sys writes the following:

> Beyond ambiguities - and there are theological ambiguities in Lewis' apologetics - the reader must be

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[441] For example, see the preface to *The Problem of Pain* (The Century Press, 1940): "If any real theologian reads these pages he will very easily see that they are the work of a layman and an amateur ... Any theologian will see easily enough what, and how little, I have read."

[442] James Patrick, in the introduction to Andrew Walker and James Patrick, Eds., *A Christian for all Christians: Essays in Honour of C.S.Lewis* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990), p.5.

> aware that Lewis was not a theologian *stricto sensu*, but a man of goodwill whose constant effort was to bring back his 'neighbour' to Jesus Christ. What he says is not addressed to theologians, and not primarily to the church, but to the 'modern Western man', puzzled or spellbound by the shallow rationalism of our age.[443]

Nevertheless, "the truth is that Lewis holds up a higher standard of literary discipline than most writers and a higher standard of Christian discipleship than most clergymen - standards which bespeak the very antithesis of popularization."[444]

In actual fact, Lewis' writing on hell is quite minimal. As an apologist, his main concerns lay elsewhere - reconciling the modern mind with orthodoxy and demonstrating the coherence of the Christian world view. Perhaps the fact that he did write so little on the question of hell is again a testimony to his great power and influence - that such a small amount could have such an impact illustrates how Lewis is not a thinker to be lightly ignored. The apologetic material that he wrote consists of a chapter in *The Problem Of Pain*, and a short essay entitled "The Trouble With 'X'...".[445] The only other relevant material came in a sermon preached at the University Church of St. Mary the Virgin in Oxford on October 22, 1939. Lewis stated that,

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[443] Jacques Sys, "'Look Out! It's Alive!': C.S.Lewis on Doctrine", in Walker & Patrick, *A Christian for All Christians*, p.187.

[444] Kilby, p.5.

[445] C.S.Lewis, "The Trouble With 'X'...", in W.Hooper, Ed., *God in the Dock* (London: Fount, 1979), pp.74-78; first published in the *Bristol Diocesan Gazette*, vol. XXVII (August 1948), pp. 3-6.

> to a Christian the true tragedy of Nero must be not that he fiddled while the city was on fire but that he fiddled on the brink of hell. You must forgive me for that crude monosyllable. I know that many wiser and better Christians than I in these days do not like to mention heaven and hell even in a pulpit. I know too, that nearly all the references to this subject in the New Testament come from a single source. But then that source is our Lord himself. People will tell you it is St. Paul, but that is untrue. These overwhelming doctrines are dominical. They are not really removable from the teaching of Christ or of His Church. If we do not believe them, our presence in this church is great tomfoolery. If we do, we must sometime overcome our spiritual prudery and mention them.[446]

Lewis was not afraid to state his beliefs, and this sermon, together with the other apologetic material, demonstrates why he considered hell as a serious theological topic.

However, perhaps the work which has had the most imaginative impact is the fictional work *The Great Divorce*.[447] The images portrayed in this work are vivid, thus making the scenario even more believable. However, in what sense can we take this work as a defence of the doctrine of hell? Lewis himself writes a preface to discourage readers from taking the story too literally:

> I beg readers to remember that this is a fantasy ... The last thing I wish is to arouse factual curiosity about the details of the after-world.[448]

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[446] C.S.Lewis, "Learning in War-Time," in W.Hooper, Ed., *Fern-seed and Elephants and Other Essays on Christianity* (Fount: 1977), pp.26-27.

[447] C.S.Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (Geoffrey Bles, 1946).

[448] Ibid., p.9.

Are we therefore able legitimately to study *The Great Divorce* as a theological work? In spite of this comment by Lewis, it appears that there are many underlying themes which agree with his other work. The way in which decisions are made, and the nature of existence in hell are but two examples. Although the work of fiction is a multi-coloured fantasy tale, a structure and world-view remains in existence beneath the surface of the narrative. Lewis recognises this himself: "It has of course - or I intended it to have - a moral."[449] Lewis would be the last to claim that *The Great Divorce* was 'pure fiction', being a genius at recognizing how stories work and the power that they can yield. Duriez makes the following point:

> C S Lewis casts his story in the form of a dream, with himself as narrator, and does not wish his reader to think that information is being presented about the actual state after death. This of course does not mean that Lewis denies an actual heaven and hell. He is, in fact, concerned in this story to show their plausibility and reality.[450]

Study of Lewis' work on hell will itself warn us of the dangers of labelling material as fact or fiction, popular or theological, ethical or doctrinal. In Lewis many different styles are combined to present the Christian world-view as a coherent one.[451]

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[449] Ibid., p.9.

[450] Colin Duriez, *The C.S.Lewis Handbook* (Eastbourne: Monarch, 1990), p.75.

[451] See Kendall Harmon, *Finally Excluded From God?*, p.285, who labels Lewis as a 'remythologiser'.

Therefore, any attempt to comprehend Lewis' understanding and defence of the doctrine of hell must come to terms with the main works detailed. The two apologetic works will be examined first, with a study of *The Great Divorce* used to illustrate the powerful themes that Lewis develops.

THE PROBLEM OF PAIN

One of the central notions in Lewis' *The Problem Of Pain* is that of free will. In attempting to understand evil and suffering in the world, Lewis adapts a theodicy which grants men and women the power to frustrate God's plans. This is a theme that runs throughout Lewis' writings. Perhaps one of the clearest expressions of his position is the following:

> God created things which had free will. That means creatures which can go wrong *or* right. Some people think they can imagine a creature which was free but had no possibility of going wrong, but I can't. If a thing is free to be good it is also free to be bad. And free will is what made evil possible. Why, then, did God give them free will? Because free will, though it makes evil possible, is also the only thing that makes possible any love or goodness or joy worth having. A world of automata - of creatures that worked like machines - would hardly be worth creating. ... Of course God knew what would happen if they used their freedom the wrong way: apparently He thought it worth the risk.[452]

That Lewis' theodicy is a strong version of the free will defence is clear. How certain aspects of it are worked out is a

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[452] C.S.Lewis, "What Christians Believe", in *Broadcast Talks* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1942), pp.47-48.

little more ambiguous (for example, the nature of God's foreknowledge, and the meaning of a free choice), but Lewis' concern was not with such philosophical abstractions. Lewis was prepared to acknowledge that God had limited Himself when granting free will to his creatures. God knew what the outcome may be, but rather than create automata lacking moral choice and discernment, he was prepared to make a gamble. The possibility of a free-person only choosing the good is out of the question, the reason being that Lewis cannot imagine such a person.

The implications of this position for the doctrine of hell are clear. God is not able to guarantee that every person will choose the good, that every person will turn to God and therefore escape hell.

> ... the Divine labour to redeem the world cannot be certain of succeeding as regards every individual soul. Some will not be redeemed. There is no doctrine which I would more willingly remove from Christianity than this, if it lay in my power.[453]

If Lewis feels such abhorrence at the doctrine of hell, what therefore leads him to defend such a notion? Lewis appears to give three arguments, one of which we have just noted. That is, reason, by which the nature and importance of the free will that God gives us is considered, and this leads Lewis to the conclusion that some will eternally reject God.

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[453] *The Problem of Pain*, p.106.

A second, but perhaps more primary argument, is one which has already been mentioned - the witness of Scripture. Lewis gives the sense that if the statements on hell were not so closely tied with the life and teaching of Jesus, this particular problem of pain would be somewhat less. In the war-time sermon he attacks the popular notion that Paul was the distorter of the gospel of grace and mercy that Jesus presented. Hell is to be found on the lips of Jesus, and any systematic removal of them would leave us with a very different gospel.[454] Although Lewis has been attacked for the lack of attention that he gives to biblical criticism, and the nature of the New Testament documents,[455] his appeal to the dominical utterances has powerful force. Nevertheless, in the *Problem Of Pain*, Lewis provides a warning concerning this material. The dominical utterances are to our "conscience and the will, not to our intellectual curiosity".[456] Thus, although Lewis lays great stress on the biblical evidence, he is cautious against over-use and morbid fascination with the details of the after life. Indeed, this is reminiscent of the warning that Lewis gives concerning *The Great Divorce*.

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[454] Compare the portrayal of Aslan in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, who is not just a tame lion.

[455] For example. Lewis' essay "Fernseed and Elephants", in W.Hooper, Ed., *Fernseed and Elephants and Other Essays on Christianity*, pp.104-125; see also A.Heron's assessment of this in "What is Wrong With Biblical Exegesis? Reflections Upon C.S.Lewis' Criticisms" in A.Walker, Ed., *Different Gospels* (London: SPCK, 1993), pp.86f.

[456] *The Problem of Pain*, p.107.

The third reason why Lewis cannot abandon the doctrine of hell is his appeal to church history. A doctrine which has been held by the historic churches for their entire existence cannot easily be dispensed with. Lewis' concern for orthodoxy gave him a subsequent concern for church history and the creeds of the faith.

In *The Problem of Pain* Lewis argues that although the doctrine of hell appears intolerable, a sentiment which he himself shares, it is in fact moral. In spite of the manifold greatness of God's love, hell exists as a reality. "And here is the real problem: so much mercy, yet still there is Hell."[457]

Lewis proceeds to justify this by dealing with five objections to the doctrine. The first concerns the concept of retributive punishment. All punishment involves some retribution, but the problem that concerns hell is that this punishment may never lead to repentance. However, Lewis paints a picture of a cruel person who commits evil acts without remorse or recognition of the wrong he or she has committed. This person has no wish to repent. Therefore, is it just that this person remains in such a state forever? Lewis contends that justice should be asserted and what is right should be demonstrated to be so.

> In a sense, it is better for the creature itself, even if it never becomes good, that it should know itself

[457] Ibid., p.108.

> to be a failure, a mistake.[458]

Thus, although the retributive punishment of hell may not lead to repentance (and this 'may not' is one of several to which we shall return), right and wrong has been asserted, and the self-destructive creature is aware of its state. In one sense, punishment is not evil added, but the recognition of this evil.

Lewis' second reply to this objection connects with one of his major apologetic weapons, namely that hell is a punishment which men and women bring upon themselves. Traditional presentations of hell picture a wrathful God punishing his creatures. However, men and women also cause themselves to be judged and Lewis cites John 3.19 and John 12.48 as biblical evidence. Elsewhere we will discover how powerfully Lewis uses this image - especially in *The Great Divorce*. What, therefore, is the relationship between the wrath of God as punishment, and punishment as a direct result of doing evil? Lewis argues that,

> the two conceptions, in the long run, mean the same thing.[459]

The second objection which Lewis deals with is the apparent disproportion between eternal damnation and transitory sin. Is there not a great injustice when people are condemned for all eternity, for sins committed in finite time. Lewis replies that such thinking betrays wrong notions of eternity. Time is similar

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[458] Ibid., p.110.

[459] Ibid., p.111.

to a line, and eternity is a plane or solid with width. Time in our earthly lives therefore provides the base-line for this eternity, the plane, and any distortions of the base line in turn distort the plane. Hence it is a grace that life is so short.

The apologetic appeal of such a response is clear. Eternity is to many a vague and vacuous concept, yet Lewis provides it with content and relates it to earthly life and the decisions made there. The impact of those decisions are felt throughout eternity, and so we should not object that such a link exists, but rather be grateful that this life is not any longer and thus does not affect eternity to a greater extent. The coherence of this idea will be examined later.

In the same section Lewis deals with the question of a second chance after death - that is, not does a state such as purgatory or limbo exist, but rather, is death really the final barrier which we are lead to believe it is? Has Lewis not hinted at another possibility in his concept of free will? For if the will does decide to turn to God, will God not be there to receive it, even after death? It is here that we are provided with some hints concerning Lewis' concept of omniscience:

> Finality must come sometime, and it does not require a very robust faith to believe that omniscience knows when.[460]

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[460] Ibid., p.112.

God, in his omniscience, knows the choices of an individual, and with such knowledge, knows when and whether a person is going to repent. We cannot complain that we were not given the full amount of time in which to make a reasonable response, for God knows the truth of the person's disposition.

What of the pains of hell? With this third question, Lewis sensibly warns against confusing doctrine with imagery. He isolates three symbols which are used in the New Testament: punishment, destruction, and exclusion. All of these are terrible pictures to use concerning the fate of the lost, but none of them should be concentrated upon at the expense of the others. This is especially relevant to the symbol of punishment, an idea on which many preachers, and many critics of the faith, have focused on. What of destruction - does this not imply annihilation, and therefore exclude the other images? No, experience shows that destruction of one thing often leads to the emergence of something else. Thus, being cast into hell is being the remains of a person, the 'un-human', a will utterly centred in itself.

This last explanation of the person in hell touches on another theme central to Lewis' discussion of the eternal state -that of the nature of the wicked. With the characters in *The Great Divorce* Lewis paints a vivid picture of human nature, and here in his apologetic argument the idea is central. Hence, in

discussion of the pains of hell, Lewis believes that all these three images clearly describe the state of the wicked person. Hell is hell from the heavenly point of view - those in hell, those punished, destroyed into nothingness, and excluded, have turned evil in on themselves and created their own state.

The fourth objection with which Lewis deals is the blessedness of the redeemed. How can those in heaven be happy while even one soul is in hell? Lewis relates this to his previous comments concerning eternity. This objection arises from the false idea that heaven and hell are "co-existing in unilinear time".[461] However, Jesus speaks of hell not as duration but as a finality. It is not a parallel to heaven, for hell was not made for man as heaven was. Thus Lewis wonders whether hell can even be described in terms of duration at all. He is building on his idea of hell as 'near-nothingness' - the power of the apologetic is once again clear. If hell is so nearly nothing at all, can such an existence be 'in time'?

Finally, Lewis deals with the question of whether hell defeats God's omnipotence. In the light of many other discussions that deal with this question, Lewis presents us with a position which is refreshingly honest.

> In creating beings with free will, omnipotence from the outset submits to the possibility of such defeat.[462]

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[461] Ibid., p.114.

[462] Ibid., p.115.

God's omnipotence is defeated (although Lewis maintains that logically God is still omnipotent in the sense that he can do anything which is not self-contradictory), but this defeat is in fact a miracle. The miracle because God is able and willing to create something that actually resists its creation. It is in this context that one of Lewis' most famous and oft-quoted statements concerning hell appears:

> I willingly believe that the damned are, in one sense, successful, rebels to the end; that the doors of hell are locked on the *inside*.[463]

Thus omnipotence is defeated. This was the price to pay for free will.

> In the long run the answer to all those who object to the doctrine of hell, is itself a question: 'What are you asking God to do?'[464]

Are you asking God to compel all to love him, to disregard the free will with which he created men and women, and to lock all people within the gates of heaven, even if that is not their desire? In his typical style, concerned with the pastoral implications of such a terrible doctrine, Lewis ends his chapter on hell with a personal warning:

> This chapter is not about your wife or son, or about Nero or Judas Iscariot; it is about you and me.[465]

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[463] Ibid., p.115.

[464] Ibid., p.116.

[465] Ibid., p.116.

THE TROUBLE WITH 'X'...

In this short essay Lewis introduces the idea of how many people possess a 'fatal flaw' which causes them to always stumble, to always cause trouble and to have trouble:

> You know, in fact, that any attempt to talk things over with 'X' will shipwreck on the old, fatal flaw in 'X's' character.[466]

External factors will not change 'X's' particular flaw, and however hard you try to tell them, they will not change unless they are willing to try. Having sketched a situation that we can all recognize, Lewis then draws God into the picture:

> And now comes the point. When you have seen this you have, for the first time, had a glimpse of what it must be like for God. For, of course, this is (in one way) just what God Himself is up against.[467]

God is like the person who can see the flaw in the other, and provides the other with all that it needs. Yet he cannot force the other to change its character. He has the power to do so, but has chosen free creatures rather than machines, chosen to offer the free choice of reform, rather than compelling it. In a passage reminiscent of much of what we have already seen, Lewis writes:

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[466] *God in the Dock*, p.75.

[467] Ibid., p.75.

> God has made it a rule for Himself that He won't alter people's character by force. He can and will alter them - but only if the people will let Him. In that way He has really and truly limited His power. Sometimes we wonder why He has done so, or even wish that He hadn't. But apparently He thinks it worth doing. He would rather have a world of free beings, with all its risks, than a world of people who did right like machines because they couldn't do anything else. The more we succeed in imagining what a world of perfect automatic beings would be like, the more, I think, we shall see His wisdom.[468]

God's situation differs from ours in two respects. Firstly, God sees *our* situation, as well as 'X's'. Secondly, he continues to love the other, despite his or her faults, despite their 'trouble'. "He goes on loving".[469] Therefore, this essay is not just about free will and evil. Lewis uses it to teach us that we should be more like God in this respect - we should look at ourselves rather than delighting in the faults of others, and we should learn to love as God.

Having said this, the implications of this line of thought are clear, and Lewis draws them out specifically at the end of the essay:

> You see clearly enough that nothing, not even God with all His power, can make 'X' really happy as long as 'X' remains envious, self-centred, and spiteful. Be sure there is something inside you which, unless it is altered, will put it out of God's power to prevent your being eternally miserable. While that something remains there can be no Heaven for you, just as there can be no sweet smells for a man with a cold in the

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[468] Ibid., p.76; the same point is made when John, in *The Pilgrim's Regress* (Glasgow: Fount, 1977 edition), asks whether the landlord was cruel to make hell - pp.28-31.

[469] *God in the Dock*, p.77.

> nose, and no music for a man who is deaf. It's not a question of God 'sending' us to Hell. In each of us there is something growing up which will of itself *be hell* unless it is snipped in the bud. The matter is serious: let us put ourselves in His hands at once - this very day, this hour.[470]

Note how Lewis does the same here as he did in *The Problem of Pain*, relating the debate to personal life. This is not just a matter for academic debate, it is a matter of the utmost importance and urgency.

THE GREAT DIVORCE

This same warning is given in the preface to *The Great Divorce*. In describing his work as an antidote to Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Lewis believes that it is a disastrous error to believe that evil can eventually be turned into good. It is not true that all roads will eventually draw near to the centre. Although not all who choose the wrong roads in life will perish (a clear demonstration of Lewis' 'wider hope'[471]), those who make such a choice do need to be put back on the right road. Evil cannot develop into good, but only be undone. Before he even starts the work, Lewis describes how earth can either be "a region in Hell", or "a part of heaven". Thus the idea which

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[470] Ibid., p.78; Lewis also employs these themes in a similar way in *Mere Christianity* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1957), pp.69-70, and also p.115, where he states that "God and evil both increase at compound interest. That is why the little decisions you and I make every day are of such infinite importance."

[471] For an evaluation of Lewis' approach to world religions and the salvation of those who have never heard the Christian gospel, see J.Sanders, *No Other Name*, pp.251-257.

resurfaces throughout the work is that the dispositions that we have and develop here and now are the ones that subsequently develop into eternity. This is a clear reminder of Lewis' discussion of the 'base-line' of eternity in *The Problem of Pain*. It is how these dispositions develop and are allowed to dictate the course of individual lives that Lewis seeks to illustrate in *The Great Divorce*.

The story begins in the grey town, a town "always in the rain and always in evening twilight."[472] At a bus stop, the author joins others queuing for a bus that will eventually take them to heaven. One of the first characters he meets is a youth who neatly sums up the problem:

> They won't like it at all when we get there, and they'd really be much more comfortable at home.[473]

The grey town, which we soon realise is hell, turns out to be the natural environment for all who are there. In fact, those in hell do not want to be in heaven. Even if they were there, they would not fit in or be 'comfortable'.

As the dream continues, the bus arrives in the "grassy country", in heaven. When the passengers leave the bus, the driver makes a telling comment:

> You need never come back unless you want to. ... Stay

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[472] *The Great Divorce*, p.13.

[473] Ibid., p.15.

as long as you please.[474]

With this comment one of the more obvious questions concerning Lewis' story arises. Is there then a possibility of a second chance after death? Or rather, is Lewis developing the idea that hell or heaven is the continuation of the life lived on earth? At this stage the answer is not clear.

From now on the narrative centres around a number of incidents, confrontations between the bright people (the residents of heaven) and the ghosts (those from the grey town). Most of these serve to illustrate the perverted characters which the inhabitants of the grey town have developed, and the choices made to remain in that state. In one encounter, a theologian who derides the idea of a literal heaven and hell is told that,

> You have been in Hell: though if you don't go back you may call it Purgatory.[475]

Thus it appears not to be a second chance in the strict meaning of the term. If the ghost accepts the invitation to stay in heaven, hell would have been a step on the way to heaven, i.e. a form of purgatory. However, the issue is at this moment far from clear.

One of the more telling sections of the book is the author's conversations with George MacDonald. The author is now able to

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[474] Ibid., p.28.

[475] Ibid., p.36.

ask the question that has already been prompted by earlier scenes of the dream:

> Is judgement not final? Is there really a way out of Hell into Heaven?

The answer echoes the thoughts given on the subject by Lewis in the preface:

> It depends on the way ye're using the words. If they leave that grey town behind it will not have been Hell. To any that leaves it, it is Purgatory.[476]

MacDonald explains how it is impossible to understand eternity from this side of time. On the other side of the boundary, good and evil become "retrospective". Damnation will spread backwards for the wicked, and contaminate even the pleasures of sin. And the reverse is true for the blessed.

In the course of this conversation, we are again reminded of Lewis' major concern when discussing hell. MacDonald tells the author that his purpose of coming on the bus trip is not to ascertain the details of the hereafter.

> What concerns you is the nature of the choice itself: and that ye can watch them making.[477]

The choice comes in many forms, some of which are illustrated by the conversations that are overheard. But the choice always consists of the ghosts determining to hold onto something.

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[476] Ibid., p.61.

[477] Ibid., p.63.

However, if this is so, why do the solid people not do more to rescue the ghosts? The powerful response is what we have come to expect from Lewis:

> There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, in the end, '*Thy* will be done.' All that are in Hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no Hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find. To those who knock it is opened.[478]

In the confrontation between the Tragedian and the Lady, the choice is once again offered, and the Lady declares that *if* it would help him, she would go down into hell. In an attempt to tackle the issue of the joy of those in heaven, the narrator turns to MacDonald to question this point.

> 'Is it really tolerable that she should be untouched by his misery?'
> 'Would ye rather he still had the power of tormenting her?'[479]

The narrator believes that hell would affect the joy of those in heaven. However, the issue runs deeper. If this were to be the case, then those in hell would in fact have the final power over heaven - they would be able to hold in check the joy of those in heaven. The truth is that, for the Lady, "nothing can trouble her joy". Thus the question of the blessedness of the redeemed turns into the question of who has the victory.

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[478] Ibid., p.67.

[479] Ibid., p.110.

A second attempt to deal with this objection follows. Asked whether the Lady did in fact ever enter hell, MacDonald answers that Hell is smaller than one atom of the real world, and thus the Lady could not fit in.

> For a damned soul is nearly nothing: it is shrunk, shut up in itself. God beats upon the damned incessantly as sound waves beat upon the ears of the deaf, but they cannot receive it. Their fists are clenched, their teeth are clenched, their eyes fast shut. First they will not, in the end they cannot, open their hands for gifts, or their mouths for food, or their eyes to see.[480]

The remainder of the work examines the question of universalism (which MacDonald himself believed when alive and acting as Lewis' mentor), and whether it is possible to look at the answer to these questions from within time. There is a free choice before death, but time is the lens through which to see this freedom. "For every attempt to see the shape of eternity except through the lens of Time destroys your knowledge of Freedom."[481]

Finally, the author is given a warning, the same warning that Lewis himself gave in the preface to the book:

> 'And if ye come to tell of what ye have seen, make it plain that it was but a dream. See ye make it very plain. Give no poor fool the pretext to think ye are claiming knowledge of what no mortal knows.'
> 'God forbid, Sir.'
> 'He *has* forbidden it.'[482]

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[480] Ibid., pp.113-114.

[481] Ibid., p.115.

[482] Ibid., pp.116-7.

Thus we see a powerful story, a fantasy which captures the imagination and yet at the same time reverberates with many of the ideas that Lewis uses elsewhere in his apologetic material. *The Great Divorce* could never be a systematic defence of the doctrine of hell. However, to ignore it and treat it as irrelevant would be to miss the force of Lewis' other arguments. For in the fantasy the main themes (the nature of choice, the development of character and the perversion of humanity that takes place) are explored and developed in a way not possible in other theological work.

CRITICAL EVALUATION

As has already been noted, care must be exercised when evaluating the work of C.S.Lewis. While exercising a considerable power as a Christian apologist, he intended to be neither a theologian nor a philosopher. The styles with which he works create a picture world which is convincing enough to be persuasive, yet may not cover all the aspects which a theologian would wish or expect to be tackled.

Therefore it is necessary to pull out of Lewis' work the basic framework with which he operates, and then ask questions about the coherence and function of this world-view. At the same time,

the respective genres of the different works must be kept in mind, and the cautions given above heeded. Whatever criticisms we may find with Lewis, it is not with his work as a popularizer or a story-teller. Instead, it will be with the framework that lies behind his various works, a framework which in turn can and has been utilized by other Christians.

What then is this framework? As we have demonstrated, central to Lewis' defence of hell is the free will defence approach to theodicy. Lewis readily accepts a notion of freedom which includes a real choice - the ability to do otherwise. In this system, he also concedes that God has chosen to take the risk involved with such a strong definition of freedom, such that his plans and desires may ultimately be frustrated.

Into this situation men and women are introduced who have characteristics which possess one of a number of fundamental flaws. The choice consists in what people allow these flaws to take root and grow. For those who choose the direction of hell, it is not the large and obvious sins that drag them down, but the gradual wearing away of the character, as it becomes more and more involved in self. The flaw slowly develops into a principle that overtakes that person. Thus the free choice not to listen to God develops such that the person cannot listen to God, and hence the description of a damned person as one who cannot hear. This is the self-choice of hell, for in hell the person becomes what it has chosen to be. That is, the remains of

a person, a person so nearly nothing that it almost ceases to exist.

This basic structure is clear throughout the works that we have examined. In order to gain greater insight into this scheme, particular elements will be examined in turn.

The Choice

Central to Lewis' notion of choice is his doctrine of sin. Harmon has isolated two strands in Lewis. The first is an Augustinian strand which sees man curved in upon himself, and the second a Thomistic strand where choices become habits (although choice remains). There are many examples of this evil choice, not just in the literature we have considered. Other examples are Edmund, in *The Lion, The Witch And The Wardrobe*, Satan in *Preface To Paradise Lost*, and the dwarfs in *The Last Battle* who continuously declare that "the dwarfs are for the dwarfs."[483]

Till We Have Faces[484] has no direct bearing on the topic of hell, but illustrates how selfishness can destroy while it pretends to be an act of love. Orual, the main character, appears to be similar to many on the bus in *The Great Divorce*. As the story

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[483] See Harmon, pp.286f.; the quote is from *The Last Battle* (London: Collins Lions, 1980), pp.70 & 72.

[484] London: Collins Fount, 1978.

develops, her love turns to possessiveness, jealousy and then to hatred. She becomes absorbed into her own selfishness.

Kilby sums up Lewis' approach to human choice in the following passages:

> A man's choices through a period of years slowly turn him into a heavenly or hellish creature.[485]
>
> Self-choice, however, is the key to hell. Without it there would indeed be no hell. ... Hell is inhabited by those who through thousands of little daily acts have elevated self above God. ... There is nothing left but self, and this is nothing more or less than hell.[486]

Lewis therefore paints a strong picture with which many people can sympathize. The way in which a character can become bitter, twisted and then hardened to anything but itself is clearly seen. However, is it credible to believe that even such a person, when confronted with the love of God, will not realise the folly of their ways and then turn to God? On the contrary, Lewis seems to believe that our characters can become so self-destructive that we can no longer 'hear' or 'see' the love of God. If that is so, does the choice that Lewis is so keen to promote remain? If persons become 'deaf' to God, then the implication is that some finality has occurred.

In such questioning, we touch on other areas of Lewis' thought. For example, if Lewis believes that for all men and women there

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[485] Kilby, p.170.

[486] Kilby, p.182.

will always be the possibility of a second chance, then these inwardly-turned characters must still be able to hear God. If they could not, would not the benevolent God treat such sickness and so enable the damned to hear him? However, whether Lewis believes in a second chance or not (a question to which we shall return), such a solution is not possible for him. He is prepared to defend a God who has limited his omnipotence such that He cannot force or compel those who have chosen not to listen to him into repenting.[487] The question remains as to whether psychological 'healing' of the one who is 'deaf to God', so that they can then make a reasoned decision, counts as coercion or not. And even if it were so, is not such an act one which is done out of love?

A Second Chance?

The preceding discussion is intimately bound up with this question. For although Lewis might wish that the wicked will always be able to hear God so that they may repent, he is prepared to admit that there is a time when those who have become self-centred can no longer hear. Hence, the radical self-cleaving which is caused by sin ultimately cuts the individual off from all hope.

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[487] In *The Logic of Damnation* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), Jerry Walls compares Lewis' idea of a destructive choice to that given by Richard Swinburne in "A Theodicy of Heaven and Hell" in A.Freddoso, Ed., *The Existence and Nature of God* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), pp.48-49.

However, as we have seen in our examination of Lewis' works, there is some ambiguity. In *The Problem of Pain*, when discussing the problem of retributive punishment, Lewis argues that although such punishment *may not* lead to repentance, it does indeed demonstrate justice. What is of concern is this 'may not'. For here, at least, there is a hint that those in hell may repent as a result of retribution. If this is so, then death for these people has not become the final cut-off point that orthodoxy has taught, but rather they have been provided with a second chance.

Further on in the chapter, when dealing explicitly with the question of a second chance, Lewis defends the omniscience of God by claiming that he alone knows when finality is to come. With his foreknowledge of free choices, God presumably knows that those who freely choose to be in hell will forever choose to do so. We have already noted how it is difficult to locate Lewis' understanding of the relationship between God's knowledge and free human choices, but here at least is a possible understanding. For Lewis such foreknowledge would not involve determinism, although no clarification of this issue is provided.

Nevertheless, when Lewis contends that the gates of hell are locked "from the inside", the image brings to mind the possibility that if those in hell would so choose, they could

unlock the gates and so enter heaven, thus having a second chance.

This ambiguity is also present in "The Trouble With 'X'..." Lewis believes that God cannot force humans to worship him, for to do so would be an infringement of their free will. Yet when discussing the nature of the flaws in people which grow up 'into' hell, Lewis contends that,

> *While* that something remains there can be no Heaven for you, just as there can be no sweet smells for a man with a cold in the nose, and no music for a man who is deaf.[488]

The implication of the 'while' seems to be that a change may occur. Although the imagery is powerful, it raises again a question already considered. Does a person who has experienced the beauty of country smells choose to have a cold in the nose? Does a someone who delights in the variations of tone and melody in music opt to become deaf? Thus, even though Lewis provides us with many powerful dramatisations of the choice of evil, does he actually make sense of that choice?

It is in *The Great Divorce* that Lewis develops his understanding of the finality of death and judgement. For earth is either "a region in hell" or a "portion of heaven". Dispositions develop to take over characters, and this life forms the base-line for eternity. However Lewis then allows the bus driver to declare

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[488] "The Trouble With 'X'...", p.78 - emphasis mine.

that those from the grey town who have arrived in heaven need never come back. The theologian is told that he has been in hell, but if he stays, then the grey-town will become purgatory. Good and evil are, in this fantastic scheme of things, retrospective. Therefore, for the person in hell all the good aspects of earth now look evil, and for the saint all the bad experiences of earth now appear to be good.

Elsewhere Lewis affirms a belief in purgatory,[489] yet how did Lewis envisage the rest of this system working? Perhaps the key is that for Lewis this was not a system, and we constantly need to be reminded of that. But if we are to pull out this element of his thinking, it could possibly be summarized as a model of judgement and condemnation that is *fluid* rather than *static*. Lewis clearly holds out the hope that more will be saved than is apparent by observing confessional faith in this life. He is dependent on the mercy of God, and also on His justice. It is this justice, in conjunction with the free choice of the individual which makes the situation fluid. There is a possibility of a chance, rather than a second chance, yet viewing the situation from this side of eternity makes the terminology inadequate and the usual system limited.

Having said this, Lewis is not afraid to admit that there is a cut-off point. God knows when the right time is for this to

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[489] *Prayer: Letters to Malcolm* (Glasgow: Fount Paperbacks, 1977 edition), pp.110-111.

occur, and God knows when this is just. The justice remains in the fact that the free person in hell always chooses to reject God, and God, knowing this to be true, eternally shuts the person out. Is death final? If death is not, then there is a point of finality at some time.[490]

The Nature Of Hell

One common theme is the near-nothingness that hell is supposed to be. Yet an issue which may be perplexing arises from Lewis' suggestion that those in hell are 'un-human', or are 'near-nothingness'. One of the reasons for this explanation is to answer the question of what affect the damned have on the blessedness of the redeemed. Again, we must be cautious in pushing Lewis too far. However, what can be meant by these terms? If hell is to have continuity with this life, then what can it mean to be the 'remains' of a person? Although Lewis' picture is a powerful one, it is questionable whether much sense can be made of this existence. It is one of Lewis' points that the matters of future existence are hard to comprehend from our earthly perspective. Even so, the questioning mind will wonder how the redeemed cannot be influenced by even the remains of those in hell. In *The Great Divorce* Lewis pushes this to the question of who has the victory. If those in hell, whether

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[490] See *Broadcast Talks*, p.61-62.

'remains' or not, can have an effect on those in heaven, then the victory is theirs. This is a fair point, yet the problem is that Lewis has pointed out the problem without giving an adequate response. For surely even 'near-nothingness' will cause those in heaven to grieve.

Eternity

It is with the idea of eternity that Lewis attempts to solve this problem concerning the blessedness of the redeemed. There are two issues here that must be questioned. Firstly, Lewis wonders whether hell can be spoken in terms of duration at all. He points out how Jesus speaks of hell as a finality, not a period of time. Can hell be thought of as being in time? There appear to be two options that Lewis is presenting. Either hell is timeless, in which case much clarification would be required, or hell is final in the sense that existence ends (annihilation). However, neither of these seem to be suggested by what Lewis writes elsewhere. Destruction is only one of three biblical images. Choices can be made in hell, thus implying change and a sense of time.

The second issue that arises in the discussion of eternity is Lewis' presentation of it as a 'plane', of which the base-line is this earthly life. Once again, the picture is powerful, and aims to show how the choices of this life are linked to the state of the next. Thus Lewis argues that we should be grateful

that this life is not longer, so that it will not affect eternity to a greater extent. However, it seems that both of these ideas are questionable. In terms of a picture, the idea of eternity being a solid is a good one, but what does this actually mean? As for the second idea, many may argue that this life should be longer, so that chances for more positive choices are available, and so that the disproportion between this life and the next may be somewhat less. Lewis may reply that being omniscient God knows when enough is enough. However, this does not give any further explanation to the content of his concept of eternity.

Once again it must be made clear that Lewis was not concerned with philosophical detai1s. However, the important point connected with eternity is how Lewis uses the concept to answer the objections concerning the blessedness of the redeemed and the disproportion between this life and the next. It is on these accounts that more work may need to be done.

Hermeneutics

One of the great benefits of Lewis' approach is the helpful way in which he uses the biblical pictures to portray the concept in which he believes. Thus, in the context of a discussion of heaven, he uses the image of banishment to great effect, redressing the imbalance that has been caused by excessive concentration on punishment. In heaven we will be known by God,

but elsewhere in the New Testament

> ... we are warned that it may happen to anyone of us to appear at last before the face of God and hear only the appalling words: 'I never knew you. Depart from Me.' In some sense, as dark to the intellect as it is unendurable to the feelings, we can be both banished from the presence of Him who is present everywhere and erased from the knowledge of Him who knows all. We can be left utterly and absolutely *outside* - repelled, exiled, estranged, finally and unspeakably ignored.[491]

Perhaps one of the greatest contributions that Lewis has made to the debate about hell is his analysis of the three biblical images used to refer to hell. Harmon comments on this analysis as follows:

> C.S.Lewis' literary sensitivity enabled him to see what many have missed, namely that the New Testament uses three images to portray hell, punishment, destruction, and 'privation, exclusion or banishment', and that these three images point in the same direction.[492]

Thus as an apologist Lewis was able to use all three of these images to his benefit, avoiding concentration on one at the expense of the others. His ability to recognise that all three images are used let him avoid the excesses that have been found in other interpreters. Although he was not a biblical scholar and paid little attention to the historical context of the gospel sayings, he was able to use the full amount of the biblical evidence to great effect.

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[491] "The Weight of Glory", in *Screwtape Proposes A Toast and Other Pieces* (Fount, 1965), p.106; originally preached at the Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Oxford.

[492] K.Harmon, "The Case Against Conditionalism", in Cameron, Ed., *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, p.213.

However, one question arises concerning his use of the idea of punishment. Lewis argues that retributive punishment and self-inflicted punishment (the choice to refuse God) are in the end, the same thing.[493] However, is this in fact the case? Lewis' framework, involving a strong concept of free will, may allow this to be so - God's judgement is that he allows men and women to experience the outcome of their own choices.[494] However, the question for hermeneutics which Lewis fails to address is whether the biblical texts do in fact lend themselves to such a reading. Does not the idea of an active punishment need to be accounted for when presented with images of being cast out, being destroyed and being thrown into the lake of fire?

INFLUENCE OF LEWIS

By far the most common of references to Lewis make uses of his portrayal of the choice to be in hell, and the resulting nature of those in the grey town in *The Great Divorce*. Paternoster believes that Lewis paints a picture with "frightening power"[495] of those who "are losing touch more and more completely with reality".[496] Dixon, Crockett and Pinnock also build on these

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[493] *The Problem of Pain*, p.111.

[494] For Lewis' aversion to ideas of wrathful punishment, see the conversation between John and the Steward concerning the angry Landlord in *The Pilgrim's Regress*, pp.28-31.

[495] Paternoster, *Thou Art There Also*, p.132.

[496] Ibid., p.121.

images, as does Jerry Walls when trying to develop Lewis' thoughts and understand what it would mean for someone to freely choose hell.[497] The way in which an evil character can deteriorate into itself is picked up on by Williams, Yandell, and Adams.[498] Hans Urs von Balthasar brings Lewis to an even larger audience, when he quotes substantial material from *The Great Divorce* as he explains the self-centredness that might result in hell.[499]

Another area where much is made of Lewis' theology is in the issue of human freedom. As an apologist with strong Arminian leanings, he attracted much popular appeal. Travis includes Lewis in a discussion of the respect that God's mercy shows human freedom, even in the face of evil choices.[500] Henri Blocher notes the influence of Lewis in this area, although not without

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[497] Larry Dixon, *The Other Side of the Good News*, pp.149-150; William Crockett, "The Metaphorical View", pp.61-2, and Pinnock, "The Conditional View", pp.137 & 150, both in William Crockett, Ed., *Four Views on Hell*; Jerry Walls, *The Logic of Damnation*, pp.123, 126 & 145.

[498] Rowan Williams, "Heaven and Hell: A Modern Embarrassment?", Epworth Review 21 (1994), pp.18-19; Keith Yandell, "The Doctrine of Hell and Moral Philosophy", Religious Studies 28 (1992), p.85; Marilyn McCord Adams, "The Problem of Hell: A Problem of Evil for Christians", in E.Stump, Ed., *Reasoned Faith: Essays in Philosophical Theology in Honor of Norman Kretzmann* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), p.323 - note that Adams uses the imagery to argue against the doctrine of hell, believing that God would stop someone becoming so psychologically unstable.

[499] Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Dare We Hope "That All Men Be Saved"?*, pp.91-94.

[500] Stephen Travis, *I Believe in the Second Coming of Jesus* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1982), p.186; see also Dixon, *The Other Side of the Good News*, pp.67 & 108.

some critical comments.[501] Even the evangelical theologian Jim Packer uses Lewis' oft quoted phrase, "the doors of hell are locked on the inside", whilst cautioning that this is "an aspect that the idea of retribution readily covers."[502] On the issue of retribution, other pieces of Lewis' teaching have been referred to in this context, especially his essay criticising humanitarian concepts of punishment.[503]

Some have been critical of the apparent second chance teaching in Lewis' work.[504] Fudge glosses over the ambiguities in Lewis' work by criticizing the open-ended nature of his portrayal of hell in *The Great Divorce*. He claims that Lewis painted a scene where those in hell "might some day have a change of heart and go to heaven instead".[505] Stephen Davis uses Lewis in his

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[501] Henri Blocher, "Everlasting Punishment and the Problem of Evil", in Cameron, Ed., *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, p.296.

[502] Jim Packer "The Problem Of Eternal Punishment", Evangel 10.2, Summer 1992, p.16 & p.19 n.7; originally an address given as the Leon Morris Lecture for the Evangelical Alliance (Victoria) in Melbourne, August 1990.

[503] John Wenham uses this material when discussing hell, evil, punishment and justice - John Wenham, *The Goodness of God* (Leicester: IVP, 1974), pp.58-61; Lewis' essay is "The Humanitarian Theory of Punishment", reprinted in Stanley Grupp, Ed., *Theories of Punishment* (London: Indiana University Press, 1971), pp.301-308; Wenham also uses a story from Lewis' *The Pilgrim's Regress* to similar effect in "The Case for Conditional Immortality", in Cameron, Ed., *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, pp.185-7.

[504] See Dixon, *The Other Side of the Good News*, p.139.

[505] Edward Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes* (Houston: Providential Press, 1982), p.351 n.20.

conjecture that "Christ has the power to save human beings *wherever* they are, even in hell".[506]

Hermeneutics and the state of the blessed are other topics where Lewis has been brought in. Cotterell notes Lewis' emphasis on the dominical origin of the gospel sayings concerning hell, whilst Dixon observes Lewis' appraisal that the New Testament sayings are *images* which point to something which is possibly far worse than what we can ever imagine.[507] As for the state of the blessed, Stephen Davis admits ignorance as to how they can remain happy when others are suffering, yet approvingly quotes Lewis' argument that it would be unjust of God to allow the wicked to destroy the joy of the blessed.[508]

The discussion at the beginning of this chapter noted that Lewis wrote primarily for a popular audience, and therefore may not have fitted into the usual categories of theological

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[506] Stephen Davis, "Universalism, Hell and the Fate of the Ignorant", Modern Theology 6 (1990), p.183 & p.186 n.13; John Sanders uses Lewis as an example of someone holding an 'inclusivist' soteriology where the post-mortem situation offers hope for those who have never heard the gospel - J. Sanders, *No Other Name*, pp.251-257; Zachary Hayes uses Lewis' belief in purgatory to positive effect in "The Purgatorial View", in W.Crockett, Ed., *Four Views on Hell*, p.130.

[507] Peter Cotterell, *Mission and Meaninglessness* (London: SPCK, 1990), p.73, and Dixon, *The Other Side of the Good News*, p.81; we have already noted the helpful work Harmon has undertaken on Lewis' use of imagery - see "The Case Against Conditionalism", pp. 213 & 216ff.

[508] Stephen T.Davis, *Risen Indeed*, p.159, and "Universalism, Hell, and the Fate of the Ignorant", p. 186 n.9.

investigation. Nevertheless, examination of his work is justified by the great appeal that it has had, and the influence which it continues to wield on the subject in hand. The direct nature of the relationship between Lewis' work and the work of some of the authors given above would be extremely difficult to establish. Yet it would seem fair to say that Lewis has had the ability to make some difficult concepts come alive for a large number of people. He at least has tried to make sense of what it would be like to reject God, and to imagine how this would work out. His work (including the main themes examined above) has been increasingly used by theologians who have built on these ideas and attempted to investigate them further. The influence of C.S.Lewis on the doctrine of hell has been large, and any discussion of modern defences of the doctrine that fails to examine Lewis' legacy would be deficient. As Kilby writes elsewhere, hell was real to Lewis, "and, thanks possibly to Lewis' emphasis, so is it to a good many recent theologians."[509]

CONCLUSION

In dealing with the justice of retribution, Lewis firstly argues that such punishment is needed so that the evil person may themselves recognise the mistaken path which they have chosen. However, he recognizes that this cannot justify an eternity of punishment for a finite amount of sin, and therefore attempts to

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[509] Kilby, p.38.

modify our understanding of eternity. Time is the 'base-line' to eternity's 'solid' or 'plane'. Nevertheless, even if we could understand what Lewis might mean, justification is still required for this 'plane' of eternity consisting of punishment. The model may demonstrate how time is related to eternity, yet this eternity still appears to be something many times greater than the time in which the sins were committed. As a result of the weaknesses of these attempts to explain retribution, Lewis' main appeal is made to the human choice to be self-determinative and so choose hell. Nevertheless, in maintaining that divine punishment and human self-determination do, "in the long run, mean the same thing",[510] Lewis is keen not to abandon all of the traditional talk of hell.

Therefore, with respect to the four components of the traditional doctrine of hell, Lewis has made the following moves. Hell is certainly a *possibility*, due mainly to the witness of Scripture, and in this regard Lewis is thoroughly traditional. He would never have been a convinced universalist. In the same way that Lewis was not a universalist, neither was he an annihilationist. The ultimate *nature* of hell for Lewis is something between these two extremes, an existence which he labels the remains of a person. As for the *finality* of hell, Lewis is less traditional in that he allows for a more fluid model, extending the chance to repent beyond this life time alone. Nevertheless, there will come a time beyond which there

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[510] *The Problem of Pain*, p.111.

will be no further opportunities, a time which God alone knows. Finally, for Lewis divine retribution is no longer the prime *justification* for hell. Human choices and the characters they form determine how people will then be judged. Free will provides the clue as to why there will be a hell, but Lewis is perceptive enough not to abandon all accounts of God's punishment. It is this careful thinking that may offer a modern defence of hell which also retains elements of the traditional doctrine. That is, a hell which not only results from human free will and the desire to be without God, but which is also a result of God's just punishment.

Lewis' imaginative story-telling enables difficult and repugnant ideas to become real for his readers.[511] To the theologian, this latter strength can also be a frustration, for, as has been demonstrated, there is much more detail that could have been provided. Lewis was an able and influential defender of the doctrine of hell, yet unfortunately difficulties and ambiguities remain within his thought. It is the conditionalist theologians who take up the issues of nature in their defence of hell, and 'free will' theologians who attempt to build on Lewis' images of the sinful choice.

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[511] In a letter to Sister Penelope dated 9 August 1939, Lewis wrote that "any amount of theology can be smuggled into people's minds under cover of romance without them knowing it" - quoted by Paul S.Fiddes, "C.S.Lewis The Myth Maker", in Walker & Patrick, *A Christian for All Christians*, p.136.

HELL AND CONDITIONAL IMMORTALITY IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

INTRODUCTION

In attempting to come to terms with hell in the context of a society which is extremely resistant towards the doctrine, a major alternative to the traditional interpretation has re-surfaced in recent years. This is known as either *annihilationism*, or *conditional immortality* from which annihilationism can derive, and has re-appeared mainly in the conservative, evangelical wing of the church. However, it is by no means a new doctrine, and has appeared at different times throughout church history.[512] It was perhaps the Victorians who made the doctrine most widely known, and it is in the context of this era that Geoffrey Rowell provides the following helpful introduction:

> The basic doctrine of the conditionalists was that God created man mortal but with a capacity for immortality. At the Fall of man God passed a sentence of death on man, but in his mercy did not put it into effect, so that, with the coming of Christ, immortality might once again be offered to man. This immortal life was only to be gained by faith in Christ, though an increasing number of conditionalists divines allowed that those non-Christians who lived according to their own highest lights would be given the opportunity of responding in faith to Christ and so sharing his immortal life. Those who did not have faith in Christ were unfitted to receive the gift of immortality, and so were annihilated. Those of the school who were more strongly influenced by Darwinism believed this annihilation to occur at death, but for

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[512] See especially Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers* (Washington: Review and Heal Publishing Association, 2 Volumes, 1965, 1966), and E.Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes*.

> other conditionalists, who insisted on the biblical language about the 'second death', and the homiletic value of retributive punishment as an ethical sanction, annihilation occurred after the wicked had been punished according to their deserts.[513]

In the modern day literature, the terms 'conditionalist' or 'conditionalism', and 'annihilationist' or 'annihilationism', are used interchangeably, but for most defenders of the position the former categories are the most helpful and accurate as they refer to the origin of the belief in annihilation. Conditionalism (the belief that the immortality of human souls is conditional upon God's gift) leads to the belief that the wicked will finally become extinct and be no more, for God alone is immortal, and grants immortality to the righteous through his grace. Thus, after judgement, the wicked are annihilated. It must be noted at the outset that there are various views concerning the time-scale of events, but most conditionalists believe that all will be raised to face judgement after which the wicked are destroyed, possibly (and for most, definitely) after a period of punishment. The term 'annihilation' is close to the materialist, non-Christian belief that there is no after-life, in any form what so ever. In this debate, none of those who are labelled annihilationists wish to be associated with this materialist position, although many are often suspected of it! However, there is some confusion concerning terminology. Some who accept annihilationism distance themselves from conditional immortality, and some traditionalists who interpret

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[513] G Rowell, *Hell and the Victorians*, p.181.

hell as eternal conscious torment accept the premise of conditional immortality. This confusion will be reflected in our discussion of the idea of conditional immortality in the present debate. Such a problem also existed in the nineteenth century, where conditionalists,

> objected to the label 'Annihilationists', which, they considered, classified them with materialist non-believers in their understanding of death. Despite their objections, however, it remained a common name for adherents of the conditionalist school.[514]

Notable nineteenth century conditionalists were Edward White, Henry Constable and, on the continent, Emmanuel Petavel-Oliff. Yet one of the most interesting issues that the study of conditionalism brings to light is that, after raising an enormous amount of discussion in the Victorian age, the view largely disappears by the time the twentieth century is under way. John Wenham lists two British evangelical authors who came to these views in the early half of this century, yet the works on hell by both Harold Guillebaud and Basil Atkinson could find neither public interest nor publishing support, and so had to be issued privately.[515] Perhaps one of the reasons is that both authors were strong figures in the rise of British evangelicalism, and Atkinson in particular had a prominent role in the growth of the conservative student movement, the Inter-

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[514] Ibid., p.197.

[515] See John Wenham, *The Goodness of God*, p.40; the works are Harold Guillebaud, *The Righteous Judge* (Privately published, 1964), and Basil Atkinson, *Life And Immortality* (Privately Published, 1966).

Varsity-Fellowship (now the Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship). It is possible that this restricted the spread of their speculative views, as they were then observed to be. However, it is fascinating that conditionalism is now gaining most interest from churchmen who are within those very same circles.

RECENT DEBATE[516]

Therefore, only recently have evangelicals opened up the issue of conditionalism. A possible historical link may be made with the views of the Jehovah's Witnesses, yet Froom[517] is careful to distance his conditionalist position (at which he arrives from within a Seventh-day Adventist context) from the Witnesses' denial of the wicked ever rising from their graves.[518]

John Wenham, who admits to having taught conditionalism for many

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[516] For a detailed discussion of three modern annihilationists (John Mackintosh Shaw, Clark Pinnock and Edward Schillebeeckx), see the chapter on "Theories of Hell as Destruction" in the thesis by Kendall Harmon, *Finally Excluded From God?*; although this material is extremely thorough and perceptive, it does not specifically examine the place of annihilationism and conditionalism as attempts to defend the doctrine of hell.

[517] *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers*, v.2, pp.663-7.

[518] Pawson therefore incorrectly makes the contemporary, but not the historical, link; see David Pawson, "God of Love, God of Justice", in Alpha (New Malden: Elm House Publications), February 1993, pp.32-33.

years, first published the idea in *The Goodness Of God* in 1974.[519] He argued that although tradition must not be surrendered lightly, conditionalism as a doctrine should have a fresh study. John Stott, one of the most famous evangelical leaders in the world and considered a 'statesman' for the conservative community, brought the issue out into the open when challenged by David Edwards:

> I do not dogmatise about the position to which I have come. I hold it tentatively. But I do plead for frank dialogue among evangelicals on the basis of Scripture. I also believe that ultimate annihilation of the wicked should at least be accepted as a legitimate, biblically-founded alternative to their conscious eternal torment.[520]

Michael Green, in the context of a discussion concerning the fate of those who have never heard the gospel, adopts the annihilationist position and states:

> Christians, therefore, should reject the doctrine of conscious eternal torment for those who have never heard the gospel just as firmly as they reject universalism.[521]

New Testament scholar Howard Marshall raised annihilation as a

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[519] He also details when he learnt the doctrine from Basil Atkinson, and how the idea progressed in his own career - John Wenham, "The Case For Conditional Immortality", pp.163-164.

[520] David Edwards & John Stott, *Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue*, p.320; Stott voiced uncertainty about the traditional view as early as 1975, when he confessed agnosticism concerning annihilation - see the account given in Eryl Davies, *An Angry God?*, p.14.

[521] Michael Green, *Evangelism Through the Local Church* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990), p.70.

possibility,[522] and the late Philip Edgcumbe Hughes was among others who favoured conditionalism.[523] Understandably, the response to this has been strong. Peter Cotterell, principal of London Bible College, emphasises the use of imagery in the Bible, yet declares:

> However much we may shrink away from this, the most startling and horrific of biblical doctrines, the doctrine of eternal hell, that doctrine cannot easily be eliminated from Scripture.[524]

A number of recent paperbacks have defended the doctrine of a literal hell against the conditionalist and other attacks. David Pawson, author of one of these, writes:

> Hell is the most offensive and least acceptable of all Christian doctrines. We try to ignore it but it won't go away. We attempt to explain it away but it keeps coming back. Better to face the truth, even if it hurts"[525]

Conservative scholar Jim Packer has also criticised Stott and others in a paper given in Melbourne to the Australian

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[522] I.H.Marshall, *Pocket Guide to Christian Belief* (Leicester: IVP, 1978), p.136.

[523] Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *The True Image* (Leicester: IVP, 1989), pp.398-407; a briefer treatment of annihilationism from a dispensational background is provided by Colin Sweet, *Hell and Judgement In The Book of Revelation.*

[524] Peter Cotterell, *Mission and Meaninglessness*, p.73.

[525] David Pawson, *The Road to Hell*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1992), back-cover; in addition to the other books to which reference will be made, Dick Dowsett provides a popular defence of traditionalism in *God That's Not Fair* (Carlisle: OM Publishing, 1993 - 2nd Edition).

Evangelical Alliance.[526] Here he describes the conditionalists' attempts to evade the natural meaning of dozens of passages as "a prime case of avalanche-dodging."[527]

From this brief summary of recent statements, it can be seen that the nature of hell is once again a live issue. This is an issue which is central to the evangelical concerns of evangelism and communicating the gospel, and an issue which has been largely ignored by the rest of the ecclesiastical or theological community.[528] The conviction with which some evangelicals held their beliefs concerning conditional immortality led to the formation of the 'Conditional Immortality Fellowship', later to become the 'Resurrection Fellowship'. It has been instrumental in producing a large amount of material on the issues of immortality and annihilation, with booklets such as 'Conditional Immortality: A Statement Of Its Doctrines' by R.Strang, and a regular magazine entitled 'Resurrection'. It appears to have had strong circulation in Britain, although it's publication has now moved to the United States.

In America, Clark Pinnock has adopted the position of conditionalism, and integrates this doctrine into a whole system of beliefs which are fairly unusual within evangelicalism.

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[526] Packer, "The Problem Of Eternal Punishment".

[527] Ibid., p.18.

[528] See later for the adoption and use of annihilationism outside the evangelical community.

Pinnock's move in theology has been labelled as a 'megashift', and includes other doctrinal changes such as an inclusivist rather than exclusivist approach to other world religions, and also subjective, exemplarist theories of the atonement, rather than objective and substitutionary models.[529] It must be noted that conditionalism is not necessarily accepted along with the rest of this package, and those evangelicals who do embrace conditionalism do not by any means take on board all that Pinnock advocates.

SUMMARY OF THE CONDITIONALIST / ANNIHILATIONIST ARGUMENTS

Before presenting a detailed survey of the issues involved, a brief survey of the conditionalist argument will be helpful in providing orientation to the material. This will follow the outline given by Travis:[530]

a) The name 'conditional immortality', points us to the fact that its premise (and one often ignored by traditionalists) rests on the belief that men and women are not created with a soul which is naturally immortal. The resurrection subsequent to death is due to the power of God; those who are amongst the saved are raised to eternal life and so have immortality given to them, whilst those who do not repent pass out of existence

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[529] See Modern Reformation, Spring 1993; see also C.Pinnock, *Tracking the Maze* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990).

[530] Stephen Travis, *Christian Hope and the Future of Man* (Leicester: IVP, 1980), pp.134f.

after judgement.[531]

b) Much of the biblical literature, when talking about hell, uses imagery of annihilation rather than continued existence - such as fire, death, destruction, and being cast out. Thus, as one author observes, the distinction could be said to be between incarceration and incineration![532]

c) Interpretation of the Greek *aionios* is known to be controversial, yet when used in connection with hell it relates the outcome of judgement and punishment, that is destruction, rather than ongoing suffering. Eternal punishment is an irreversible act of punishment.

d) The traditional view provides no reason for eternal punishment - except perhaps that God is vindictive. "This vindictiveness is incompatible with the love of God in Christ."[533]

e) Lastly, if the traditional view is correct, it appears that the total reign of God, the truth that he will be 'all in all', has not been achieved.

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[531] However, this issues in the confusion already noted, which will be explored later in detail under 'Conditional Immortality'.

[532] Pawson, "God Of Love, God Of Justice", p.32.

[533] Travis, *Christian Hope and the Future of Man*, p.135.

Initial Observations

Before examining the doctrines used in the debate, there are a number of observations that can be made which will be helpful and instructive when first approaching the issue.

Hidden Motives

Firstly, the impetus for someone reaching a conditionalist position, although always declared as being the testimony of Scripture by evangelicals, can often be discerned to come from elsewhere. Many have often wondered how to reconcile a God of love with the eternal existence of the damned in hell. Just a moment's imagination, and the thought of a close relative or friend suffering eternal conscious pain, will demonstrate the appeal of universalism, or a half-way house such as conditionalism. Such a concern was noted by Rowell amongst those advocating conditionalism in the nineteenth century:

> It [conditionalism] emerged as one of the attempts to find a mediating position between the extremes of universalism and eternal punishment, and, in particular, it was influenced by a revulsion from the cruder forms of missionary theology. Its exponents relied heavily on a learned, though not always discriminating, appeal to Scripture, and were to be found for the most part amongst Congregationalists and Anglican Evangelicals.[534]

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[534] *Hell and the Victorians*, p.181.

Thus the temptation is often to decide for what appears to be a 'softer option', and this has clearly been seen by modern evangelicals. John Stott honestly explains how,

> I find the concept [of eternal conscious torment] intolerable and do not understand how people can live with it without either cauterising their feelings or cracking under the strain.[535]

However, he immediately warns that decisions of this nature must not be made on the experience of our emotions, but on what the Bible says concerning the matter. This is true of the other advocates of conditionalism we shall consider. Michael Green writes:

> If universalism will not qualify as an authentic Christian option, what about its opposite, the conscious unending torment of all who have never heard the gospel of Jesus Christ? There is no doubt that many earnest Christians hold this view, but all the same I doubt very much if it is a genuinely *Christian* option. What sort of God would he be who could rejoice eternally in heaven with the saved, while downstairs the cries of the lost make an agonizing cacophony? Such a God is not the person revealed in Scripture as utterly just and utterly loving.[536]

Stephen Travis, lecturer in New Testament at St. John's College, Nottingham, decides for conditionalism after a considered evaluation of the issues. Yet even when he takes into consideration arguments that primarily are of a theological nature, they also have a strong emotive force:

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[535] *Essentials*, p.314.

[536] *Evangelism Through the Local Church*, p.69 - italics original.

> The belief that some, or most, of mankind will suffer in everlasting torment has been felt by many to be both philosophically and theologically intolerable. The seemingly uncreative vindictiveness of eternal punishment ... might tip the scale in favour of annihilation.[537]

In his large volume on New Testament Theology, the late Biblical scholar Donald Guthrie summarized in the following way:

> The doctrine of eternal punishment is not an attractive doctrine and the desire to substitute for it the view that, at the judgement, the souls of the wicked will cease to exist, is understandable"[538]

This is not to claim that all conditionalists reach such a position due to a hidden emotive force, but only to note the importance of this factor, as most proponents of conditionalism do. John Wenham cautions against this very issue:

> Beware of the immense natural appeal of any way out that evades the idea of everlasting sin and suffering. The temptation to twist what may be quite plain statements of Scripture is intense. It is the ideal situation for unconscious rationalizing.[539]

Defenders of the traditionalist position have also been too swift to accuse conditionalists of being susceptible to this hidden agenda.[540] On the other side of the fence, the universalist

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[537] *Christian Hope and the Future of Man*, pp.124 & 135.

[538] Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Leicester: IVP, 1981), p.892.

[539] Wenham, *The Goodness Of God*, p.38.

[540] See Pawson, "God of Love, God of Justice", p.33, and Packer, "The Problem of Eternal Punishment", p.17: "Its advocates appear to back into it in horrified recoil from the thought of billions in endless distress, rather than move into

Nels Ferré has accused conditionalists of desiring "to escape the Christian contradiction in eternal hell."[541] For some, this may be the deciding factor, yet this is not necessarily so for all on the conditionalist side.

Approaching The Issue

The second point to note is the caution with which conditionalists promote their views. This stands together with the reluctance to fly in the face of centuries of church teaching which advocated conscious eternal punishment. John Wenham proposed conditionalism initially as a possible alternative, listing five reasons why "traditional orthodoxy should not ... be surrendered lightly."[542] John Stott refused to "dogmatise about the position to which I have come."[543] Stephen Travis admits that "If pressed, I must myself opt for conditional immortality"[544], yet as well as seeing this debate as one of secondary importance, admits that "it is difficult to

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it because the obvious meaning of Scripture beckons them."; Bray accuses annihilationists of having shifted their focus from divine justice to human suffering - see G.Bray, "Hell: Eternal Punishment or Total Annihilation" in Evangel 10 (1992), p.24.

[541] Nels F.S.Ferré, *The Christian Understanding of God*, p.243.

[542] *The Goodness of God*, pp.37f.; however, in the second edition of this work, he is much more forceful about his views - *The Enigma of Evil* (Guildford: Eagle, 1994).

[543] *Essentials*, p.320.

[544] Stephen Travis, *I Believe in the Second Coming of Jesus*, p.198.

decide between annihilation and eternal torment on purely exegetical grounds."[545]

Exceptions to this point do exist, such as Michael Green's brief but convinced summary, and the conclusion to Fudge's survey, yet it was for the very reason of avoiding debate that John Stott had to be pressed by David Edwards to come out into the open with his views:

> I am hesitant to have written these things, partly because I have a great respect for long-standing tradition which claims to be a true interpretation of Scripture, and do not lightly set it aside, and partly because the unity of the world-wide Evangelical constituency has always meant much to me.[546]

Traditionalists also pick up on this tension, and argue that the caution with which conditionalists present their views is another chink in the armour.[547] However, such caution is understandable, especially when apparently 'new' views are coming from within a community that is more at home in defending traditional views against the 'liberal' attack. In spite of evangelicalism's tendency to move away from church authority, the history of interpretation within the church still exerts a considerable amount of power.[548] It is partly for this reason that

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[545] *Christian Hope and the Future of Man*, p.135.

[546] op.cit., p.319.

[547] Pawson, "God Of Love, God of Justice", p.32.

[548] Note Kendall Harmon's advice to approach the work of the annihilationist E.Fudge with reverent scepticism, due to the testimony of twenty centuries of Christian tradition - "if we are going to disagree with Augustine and Aquinas and Luther and

the conditionalist argument attacks the very basis and origins of the traditional interpretation, accusing it of being clouded by alien philosophical influences concerning immortality. This shall be considered shortly.

Scripture As The Final Authority

(i) Lack Of Critical Assessment

A third observation to make is the nature of the recent debate, and the grounds on which it is made. As has already been indicated, Scripture rests as the final authority for evangelicals. Other motives may be apparent, but the temptation to decide such an issue on any other basis is resisted. Therefore, the majority of the debate has centred on the interpretation and exegesis of particular biblical texts which appear mainly in the gospels and the apocalypse. The latter is renowned for being beset with problems of interpretation and questions of meaning and historical reference. From the former, a large amount of the relevant material comes from the parables, a notoriously difficult genre on which to base any specific and detailed doctrine.[549] For example, in their survey of studying the synoptic gospels, Sanders and Davies comment that,

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Calvin and Jonathan Edwards (to name only a few among so many) we need to have extremely strong grounds for doing so" - "The Case Against Conditionalism", p.200.

[549] It must be remembered that important verses such as Mark 9.47, 48 are not taken from a parable, yet these still provide their own challenges.

> The parables are the most complicated and most studied form we shall consider.[550]

There is a vast amount of literature on the genre of parables, concerning the history of their interpretation, questions of historical context, and the modern day concerns of literary theory.[551] The absence of any reference to this material in the evangelical debate is an issue which needs further attention.

Although some evangelicals who have written on the topic in a more popular form are themselves open to the positive uses of biblical criticism, there is a vast gap in this literature when it comes to the texts concerning hell. Conservative scholars engaged in critical appraisal of the gospel material do not relate themselves to the present debate in any great detail,[552] and those who write extensively on the debate rarely relate to any scholarly opinion concerning the texts[553]. Therefore, in spite of these issues of interpretation, and other difficulties

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[550] Sanders and Davies, *Studying The Synoptic Gospels* (London: SCM, 1989), p.174.

[551] For introductions on the parables and their interpretation see Snodgrass, "Parables", *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, Eds. Green, McKnight & Marshall (Leicester: IVP, 1992), pp.591-601; G.Stanton, *The Gospels and Jesus* (Oxford: OUP, 1989), pp.204-214; Sanders and Davies, op. cit., pp.174-186; C.Rowland, *Christian Origins* (London: SPCK, 1985), pp.136-142; for more detailed study see C.H.Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (London: Nisbet, 1936), and J.Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1954).

[552] For example, see Lunde's article "Heaven and Hell", in *The Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, pp.311f.

[553] For two out of many examples, see Stott on the conditionalist side, and Blanchard on the traditional side.

involved in using the texts, conservatives have not been hesitant in analysing and interpreting the material. Thus the debate may seem strange, if not a little naive, to an outsider who is used to more critical assessment of the New Testament.

However, there are two reasons for why there is such discontinuity between the evangelical works on conditionalism and critical assessment of the texts. Firstly, most of the conditionalist debate has been aimed at a popular audience, with the wider church more in mind than the scholar. Therefore, the expertise is not utilised nor required. Secondly, the debate has occurred *within* the evangelical community, where the authority of Scripture and its supremacy in all matters is automatically assumed. This then explains why those who are New Testament scholars, who in other circles would be used to defending authenticity and other such issues, do not attempt a critical assessment of the texts in question - they are writing to people within evangelicalism, not those outside.

Perhaps the only indication of a concession to modern study is the willingness to admit that the passages concerned make use of imagery that is extremely vivid, and so caution must be taken when extracting doctrinal details from these pictures.[554] Therefore, some evangelicals warn about the over-use of the

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[554] See. for example, Forster's general comments in *Eternal Destiny: Heaven and Hell* (London: Ichthus, 1992), p.16.

parable of the rich man and Lazarus,[555] although others are still happy to use the details.[556] If the traditionalist position is to have a wider appeal, especially to those outside the evangelical community (a point to which we shall return), then there is a need for work establishing the background and authenticity of the gospel texts, and a need for work illuminating the interpretation of other texts, especially those in the book of Revelation. In short, it may be fair to say that little thought has been given to the hermeneutical processes involved in interpreting such passages.

(ii) Scripture The Major Battle-Ground

Another result of the evangelical insistence upon Scripture is that this has been the main battle-ground for the debate, thus the issues which are more doctrinal in nature are only treated in passing by most authors. Although a fine dividing line cannot, and should not, be placed between the two disciplines of biblical studies and systematic theology, conditionalism does in

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[555] Stott, p.317; Lunde remarks that "It remains unclear whether or not Jesus used this story to describe the actual situation beyond the grave." - Lunde, "Heaven and Hell", in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, p.311; see also the comments of Snodgrass in "Parables", p.600 of the same volume.

[556] Guthrie is fairly happy to use details, although he does introduce a note of caution - p.889; see more especially John Blanchard, *Whatever Happened to Hell?*, p.154, who argues strongly for a traditionalist view, using the parable detail explicitly for doctrine; in spite of Forster's warnings about imagery and its use for doctrine, he utilises the material in Luke 16 to describe the intermediate state in a certain amount of detail, as other evangelicals (both conditionalist and traditionalist) have done - see Forster, p.19.

fact have implications for, and perhaps can learn lessons from, a large number of other doctrines which are not usually treated in full. For example, the issue of immortality is obviously crucial. However, a conditionalist will argue on the basis of certain texts that humans do not inherently possess an immortal soul, but that they gain immortality as a gift from God alone. In defence, a traditionalist will either agree with their interpretation and respond that God sustains the soul as 'immortal' even in hell, or disagree with the conditionalists' interpretation of the text and argue that the immortality talked about is altogether different from that commonly conceived. The point is that immortality, creation, anthropology and a range of other doctrines are only dealt with in passing, in so far as they are touched on by a specific biblical interpretation. There is much that could be said, for example, on the possible implications for an evangelical theory of atonement. Thus, despite the *biblical* attempt to sustain a conditionalist position, there has been little clear thinking on the wider implications of conditional immortality and other issues. It may be surprising that even after Wenham's call in 1974 for a fresh study of the issue,[557] little of outstanding quality has been written. However, the same reasons as mentioned above, concerning the audience in mind and views concerning the authority of Scripture, will explain this lack of what we shall call 'doctrinal integration'.

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[557] *The Goodness of God*, pp.39f.

Conditionalism and Doctrine

In the outline given above, points (b) and (c) derive from close scrutiny of the relevant texts. Such detailed exegesis is not the aim of this thesis, and some of this work has already been carried out elsewhere.[558] For this reason we shall now consider points (a), (d) and (e) which, although resting heavily on evangelical exegesis of Scripture, are influenced by more doctrinal concerns (although this does not mean that the lack of doctrinal integration we discussed above has been overcome).

Conditional Immortality:

The basic meaning of this fundamental premise has been explained in the introduction and elsewhere. The conditionalist's understanding is based on texts from 1 and 2 Timothy, where God alone is ascribed immortality, and immortality is brought to light through Christ and the gospel.[559] Thus Stott proclaims that,

> According to Scripture only God possesses immortality in himself (1 Tim 1.17; 6.16); he reveals it and gives it to us through the gospel.[560]

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[558] See Powys, "The Hermeneutics of Hell".

[559] 1 Timothy 1.17, 1 Timothy 6.16, 2 Timothy 1.10.

[560] *Essentials*, p.316.

Likewise, Wenham argues that man is mortal due to the self-destructive force of sin, and that immortality is

> part of the gift of eternal life bestowed on those who come to partake of the divine nature through union with Christ.[561]

The argument continues that traditional interpretation concerning hell has been coloured by the assumption that humans are inherently immortal. They will always exist, and so annihilation after judgement has not been a possible option. The biblical texts are therefore interpreted in what appears to be their 'natural' way, with the underlying assumption that men and women possess immortality as part of being created 'in the image of God'. Wenham argues that this may be due to Greek philosophy influencing Christian interpretation,[562] and that traditionalists unwittingly assume immortality of the soul although the biblical evidence for it is lacking.[563] Rather than immortality of the soul being a biblical doctrine, Forster argues that the force of passages such as Ezekiel 18.3 and Matthew 10.28 actually teach the death and destruction of the soul as a biblical concept.[564]

Traditionalists have responded in a number of ways. Packer seems

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[561] Wenham, *The Goodness of God*, p.35.

[562] Ibid., p.36.

[563] Wenham, "The Case for Conditional Immortality", pp.174-176.

[564] Forster, p.10.

to ignore the whole issue, a complaint which Wenham has against his paper.[565] Helm admits "that Scripture does not teach the immortality of the soul in so many words",[566] but that there is sufficient positive teaching regarding eternal punishment to make the argument for conditionalism irrelevant.[567] Fernando and Pawson adopt a similar view. Traditional understanding of immortality has been incorrect, and some may have reached their conclusions concerning hell due to this, but even so, their conclusions were correct due to the positive teaching of Scripture on the subject.[568] Pawson also wonders why the wicked should be re-embodied after the intermediate state, if they are just going to be destroyed again?[569] Blanchard, whilst admitting that there is nowhere in the Bible an explicit statement that 'Man is immortal', argues that neither is there such a statement regarding the doctrine of the Trinity - yet all evangelicals accept this as true.[570] Thus immortality is assumed throughout Scripture, and hinted at by the fact that men are made in the image of God, and by verses such as Ecclesiastes 3.11 ("He has ... put a sense of past and future into their minds"). Regarding

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[565] Wenham, "The Case for Conditional Immortality", p.167.

[566] *The Last Things*, p.118.

[567] Although the conditionalism that he refers to is not the usual doctrine found in this discussion - see the comments by Wenham, "The Case for Conditional Immortality", p.165.

[568] Fernado, pp.42-43; Pawson, "God of Love, God of Justice", p.33.

[569] Pawson, *The Road to Hell*, p.39.

[570] *Whatever Happened to Hell?*, p.215.

the passages in 1 and 2 Timothy, Blanchard states that conditional immortality

> misses the crucial point that Paul is speaking of God's essential immortality, as distinct from what we might call 'endowed immortality'.[571]

Thus the immortality given through grace is a quality of life, not the immortality of the soul which humans already possess.

In spite of his usually clear explanations, Stott at this point confuses the issues. He argues for a strict difference between the doctrine of 'annihilation' and the doctrine of 'conditional immortality'. In the introduction, the dissociation which most evangelicals wish to make from the term 'annihilation' due to its non-Christian connections was noted. However, Stott wishes to consciously use this term, as his case is not based on the premise of conditional immortality. Although he admits that God alone possess inherent and therefore indestructible immortality, he views the difference between annihilation and conditional immortality as follows:

> According to the latter, nobody survives death except those to whom God gives life (they are therefore immortal by grace, not by nature), whereas according to the former, everybody survives death and will even be resurrected, but the impenitent will finally be destroyed.[572]

This is different from the conditionalist position we have been

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[571] Ibid., p.214.

[572] *Essentials*, p.316.

assuming. The likes of Wenham and Travis also believe that everybody will survive death, and that the wicked will be annihilated, although they tend towards the label of conditional immortality for the reasons that we have already noted. Pawson highlights a similar confusion, claiming that conditional immortality describes the belief that the impenitent will cease to exist at the first death, and that annihilationism is the belief that the wicked will survive death and then *after* judgement will cease to exist.[573]

A further example of the disagreement amongst 'conditionalists' (it is now becoming apparent that a more appropriate label may be helpful[574]), is that of Fudge. He believes that the argument from immortality should have no bearing on the final decision concerning the nature of eternal punishment. Thus, his position regarding the authority of Scripture is such that, even if conditional immortality were taught, the existence of positive teaching on eternal conscious torment would convince him otherwise (as it does for Helm).

> In *either* case - among mortalists or immortalists - there is no reason why anthropology should govern eschatology. The true Christian position about final punishment must finally stand on a thorough exegesis of the Word of God.[575]

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[573] *The Road to Hell*, p.23.

[574] See the perceptive comments made by Kendall Harmon, "The Case Against Conditionalism", pp.196-199.

[575] *The Fire that Consumes*, p.76.

Thus, it may appear that in the end of the day for evangelicals, the argument from conditional immortality, giving the doctrine of conditionalism its name, may be a 'red herring'! For if Scripture teaches eternal punishment in the form of conscious torment, then other considerations such as immortality are irrelevant. However, on closer inspection this is not the case.

Firstly, many evangelicals who are conditionalists do wish to use the argument - including Wenham, Travis and Hughes. They may not use the doctrine as *the* governing principle for all their other arguments and exegesis (except perhaps for the case of Hughes), yet the consideration is part of a number of arguments on a finely balanced scale, helping to tip the final decision away from traditional interpretation. Secondly, if it is true that Greek philosophy regarding the immortality of the soul *has* influenced the church's traditional interpretation of the texts, then for an evangelical there is a strong case for going against 2000 years of teaching.

> However, the claim of the conditionalist is that the 'traditional orthodoxy' of eternal torment arose in the early church precisely because biblical teaching was (illegitimately) interpreted in the light of Platonic philosophy, which involved belief in the immortality of the soul and everlasting punishment.[576]

Obviously, the force of this argument would depend on the individual's attitude towards church history. It would be wrong to accuse evangelicals of having no regard for tradition, and as

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[576] Travis, *Christian Hope and the Future of Man*, p.135.

hinted at in the introduction, this is one reason why conditionalists speak out with reluctance. However, evangelicals do aim to have Scripture as their final authority, not a tradition of interpretation. If that interpretation is ambiguous then arguments from elsewhere which are based on Scriptural support may tip the balance.

The traditionalist who acknowledges the premise of conditional immortality, must therefore argue that the wicked who suffer eternal conscious torment in hell are being sustained, not by something they inherently possess, but by the very hand of God. And this brings us to issues of God's love and justice.

God's Justice:

Evangelicals have in common with other Christians the proclamation of a God who has love and justice as two of his most important attributes. On the issue of hell, universalists have distanced themselves from evangelicals by emphasising God's love to a great extent. It would also appear to be true that difference of emphasis upon these two attributes divides the conditionalist from those who interpret hell in a more traditional nature. For the conditionalist the argument is simple. Where is the love and justice in a punishment that appears to be nothing less than vindictive? Travis and Wenham both agree that this argument has great force:

> This vindictiveness is incompatible with the love of God in Christ.[577]
>
> Unending torment speaks to me of sadism, not justice.[578]

Stott argues that the bible is consistent in portraying the last judgement as exact justice - the penalty will fit the crime. Therefore, an eternal suffering would be unjust as the crime of rejecting God was committed in a life-time alone.

> Would there not, then, be a serious disproportion between sins consciously committed in time and torment consciously experienced throughout eternity? I do not minimise the gravity of sin as rebellion against God our Creator, but I question whether 'eternal conscious torment' is compatible with the biblical revelation of divine justice, unless perhaps (as has been argued) the impenitence of the lost continues throughout eternity.[579]

Thus Stott preempts the accusations of the traditionalists that the annihilation of the wicked does not take seriously enough the nature of sin against God. In fact, most traditionalists will argue that eternal conscious torment glorifies the creator, rather than counting against Him.[580] Gerald Bray provides the most explicit statement of this view:

> ... if the non-elect have no hope of salvation and God does not want them to suffer unduly, why were they ever created in the first place? Their existence must serve some purpose, and once that is admitted the view

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[577] Ibid., p.135.

[578] Wenham, "The Case for Conditional Immortality", p.187.

[579] *Essentials*, p.319.

[580] Packer, p.18; Fernando, pp.95f.; Dixon, pp.83-84.

> that their eternal punishment glorifies the justice of God seems perfectly logical.[581]

There is also mention of the idea that rejection of God is a sin against an infinite being, therefore a sin requiring infinite punishment, that is, everlasting torment.[582] However, Forster makes the point that the atonement made by Christ was paid for by the finite event of his death, and so an infinite punishment would not be appropriate.[583] This offers an interesting line for further study, that is the connection between the doctrines of atonement used by evangelicals, and their positions on hell and conditionalism.

Packer accuses conditionalism of being as unjust as traditional beliefs concerning hell, if not more so. In keeping the wicked in the interim state, in the miserable anticipation of the judgement, God is also being needlessly cruel. If he were to be just along the lines that conditionalists argue, God should annihilate the wicked at death.[584] Conditionalists reply that the issue is not concerned with the existence of punishment, either

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[581] "Hell: Eternal Punishment, or Total Annihilation", p.23.

[582] Dixon, pp.84 & 104.

[583] *Eternal Destiny: Heaven and Hell*, p.14.

[584] "The Problem of Eternal Punishment", p.18; Bray asks a similar question, accusing conditionalism of having no logical place for suffering - see "Hell: Eternal Punishment, or Total Annihilation", p.23. However, the conditionalist argues that suffering and punishment does exist after judgement, as God's justice deserves it. The difference is that this punishment is proportionate to the crime committed, and not of infinite duration.

during the intermediate state or at judgement, but whether that judgement is of limited duration or not. In *The Righteous Judge*, Guillebaud answered criticism similar to Packer's by claiming that, although punishment before destruction seems vindictive, it is actually necessary to judgement and the redressing of the inequalities that we experience in this world.[585]

Gerald Bray contends that the apparent justice of conditionalism is illusionary - he parallels it with euthanasia in modern day science. The argument is that, although unending torment sounds horrific, at least it preserves the dignity of the person:

> However bad it may be, continuing existence is a better state than total annihilation, because it preserves the dignity of the individual person.[586]

Those advocating annihilation contend that the sinful state of being in hell has already destroyed any dignity that they may have. They no longer have any rights or opportunities - where is the dignity? At this point, at any rate, it appears that Bray has not thought out the enormity of what it means to suffer without end. The same question ultimately arises - is an infinite amount of punishment truly just?

Either of the two main approaches by traditionalists (eternal punishment glorifying God, and an eternal sin deserving an eternal punishment) are also backed up by the possibility that

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[585] op.cit., p.66.

[586] "Hell: Eternal Punishment, or Total Annihilation", p.23.

the lost are continually impenitent - the answer which Stott hints at, and which Carson takes up. He argues against the conditionalists that,

> Quite apart from the fact that in my view their interpretation of individual texts is mistaken, there is not even any moral impetus for their view if in hell sinners go on sinning and receiving the recompense of their sin, refusing, always refusing, to bend the knee.[587]

Dixon points out that if eternal conscious torment is disproportionate to a finite sin, as conditionalists argue, then so too is annihilation, as it is a punishment with eternal consequences for a sin committed in time alone.[588] However, according to conditionalists, they are not arguing whether rejection of God deserves eternal punishment or not, but whether an eternal punishment of conscious suffering is just or vindictive. Nevertheless, this issue shall reappear as one of the important factors to consider when judging conditionalism as a defence of the doctrine of hell.

If conditionalism were true from the biblical texts, then the abhorrence felt at eternal suffering would cease, and perhaps it would be easier to make sense of God's judgement. Does suffering truly glorify, or would He rather be glorified by being victorious? This then takes us to the next argument.

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[587] *How Long O Lord*, p.103.

[588] *The Other Side of the Good News*, p.82; this is the important point made by Kvanvig, which shall be covered in more detail later.

Victory:

Most conditionalist writers can see the appeal of universalism. It makes sense of those biblical passages which point towards a complete victory, and does away with any dualism implicit in the traditionalist view. However, they resist the doctrine due to the Bible's apparent insistence on judgement and a division existing between the righteous and the impenitent. In the doctrines of conditional immortality and annihilation, they find that some of the advantages of universalism can be had without selling out to its apparent shortcomings. Stott comments on the texts in question:

> These texts do not lead me to universalism, because of the many others which speak of the terrible and eternal reality of hell. But they do lead me to ask how God can in any meaningful sense be called 'everything to everybody' while an unspecified number of people still continue in rebellion against him and under his judgement. It would be easier to hold together the awful reality of hell and the universal reign of God if hell means destruction and the impenitent are no more.[589]

Wenham believes that Philippians 2.10 does teach an ultimate reconciliation of all things to God, but only after judgement has been carried out, and hell and all those within it has been destroyed.[590] Travis believes that God being 'all in all' (1 Cor 15.28) would be compromised by the traditional view of hell,

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[589] *Essentials*, p.319.

[590] Wenham, *The Goodness of God*, p.33.

whereas conditionalism would facilitate a simpler understanding of God's victory.[591] Baillie (although far removed from the context of the modern debate) briefly asks whether in fact conditional immortality still compromises God's final supremacy, as some have been resistant until the end - that is, until their own end.[592] However, Blanchard still maintains that God's victory of being 'all in all' would not be challenged by the existence of hell - rather hell glorifies God's justice.[593] Fernando claims that all will kneel at Christ's throne and acknowledge him with fear and regret if they are in hell, and that all is reconciled to God as he crushes the impenitent's rebellion by consigning them to hell - an area still under the jurisdiction of God.[594] As the existence of heaven and hell side-by-side promoted no problems to the minds of biblical writers, it should not therefore promote a difficulty to the minds of modern day conditionalists.[595]

Connected with this issue is the blessedness of those in heaven. Will this be marred by the existence of those in hell suffering

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[591] Travis, *I Believe in the Second Coming of Jesus*, p.199; see also Hughes, pp.405-406.

[592] John Baillie, *And the Life Everlasting*, p.245.

[593] *Whatever Happened to Hell?*, pp.221f.; once again Nels Ferré views matters differently, arguing that conditional immortality paints a picture of a God who is frustrated with those in hell, and so "liquidates them" - *The Christian Understanding of God*, p.242.

[594] *Crucial Questions About Hell*, pp.72f.

[595] Bray, p.23.

eternal torment? For the conditionalists, the memory will exist of the lost, but perhaps healing can take place in heaven, where the justice of God's action is understood. From a traditional point of view, Ajith Fernando argues that "we will be able to agree *wholeheartedly* with the judgement of God upon our lost loved ones",[596] and that in heaven perfect joy can co-exist with regret over the lost due to the love of God's care and the justice of God's actions.[597] Packer states that,

> since in heaven Christians will be like God in character, loving what he loves and taking joy in all his self-manifestation, including his justice, there is no reason to think that their joy will be impaired in this way.[598]

Therefore, the problem of God's victory not being complete is not felt by traditionalists, whereas conditionalists believe that this, and the blessedness of those in heaven, will be marred by an eternal hell.

Other Considerations:

One of the charges made by traditionalists is that "conditionalism devalues the terror of the biblical deterrent."[599] and lessens the impetus for evangelism. Thus we enter another

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[596] *Crucial Questions About Hell*, p.69.

[597] Ibid., pp.70-71.

[598] "The Problem of Eternal Punishment", p.18.

[599] See Wenham, *The Goodness of God*, p.37, where he considers this argument.

whole area of debate, concerning the motive behind, reasons for and nature of evangelism. Is the gospel, particularly within the evangelical tradition, preached in such a way so as to scare people into heaven (as, for example, writers often characterise Jonathan Edwards)? Or is evangelism more a case of *good news*? With these questions we also encounter considerations about the exclusivity of the Christian faith as against other world religions, and the necessity of hearing the gospel and responding in faith for salvation. Perhaps the doctrine of hell also acts as an ethical sanction, a deterrent from evil behaviour in this life? Does the conditionalist position devalue any merit that this may have?

Conditionalists all affirm that their position is just as much a threat as the traditionalist is, even though perhaps not as horrific. Wenham considers the horrific nature of having to hear God say 'Depart', whatever the nature of the punishment, and argues that it is doubtful whether anyone truly desires to be annihilated.[600] Contrary to this, Pawson states that,

> Thoughts of annihilation do not impose terror and can even be a welcome idea. Perhaps this is why those who believe it rarely preach it ... sinners who have had their fling would probably be glad of it.[601]

Travis disagrees. In fact, he is ambivalent as to which would be the most fearful - unbelievers will be separated from Christ,

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[600] Ibid., p.37.

[601] Pawson, *The Road to Hell*, p.40.

and

> Compared with that tragic fact, there is - according to the New Testament writers - little point in asking whether the lost continue to be conscious or are annihilated.[602]

If that is so, then concerns over the loss of fear in the face of teaching about hell are groundless. If some are still to be 'lost', whatever form that takes, then the good news still needs to be preached, and a certain amount of deterrent remains concerning ethical action and decisions in this life which effect eternal destinies. It is with the other questions concerning the exclusivity of salvation through Christ that impetus for evangelism may be in danger - but this is not the place for that discussion.

Analysis

In this survey of the debate, much of what was stated in the initial observations has been emphasised by the way in which the argument between traditionalist and conditionalist has been carried out. The argument rests on Scripture, and for an evangelical, even when disputing the more doctrinal areas, this is the final authority. The purpose of this analysis is not to question or support this assumption. However, just by the very fact that two sides can so clearly disagree over what is the

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[602] Travis, *Christian Hope and the Future of Man*, p.136.

'natural meaning' of Scripture,[603] it would seem that one of the outcomes of our analysis is to point towards the need of a much stronger and more convincing hermeneutical method. Does the conclusion of conditional immortality count against any possible reading of eternal punishment for those who are convinced conditionalists (although some claim that this is not the over-riding force in their arguments)? On the other side, does an assumption of immortality discount any examination of annihilation for traditionalists, as some have argued? Such an issue requires further examination. We have noticed the reasons why this is lacking, and the truth of this absence has been shown in the survey of the material. Without further critical tools, decision on all this material is difficult, and this is even admitted to be so by evangelicals within the debate. Powys, in charting different positions concerning hell and universalism, argues that clear answers will only be achieved when all presuppositions are cleared away, and the text is allowed to speak for itself. However, the possibility of such a task is in principle questionable.[604]

Without detailed exegetical work, a decision as to which side of the divide remains most faithful to Scripture is hard to make. Conditionalism is attractive, yet there are a number of

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[603] See Packer's use of this term, pp.15 & 18, and how Conditionalists attempt to "evade the natural meaning of some dozens of relevant passages".

[604] David Powys, "The Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Debates About Hell and Universalism", in Cameron, Ed., *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, p.135.

stumbling blocks to accepting it whole-heartedly. Firstly, passages such as Revelation 14.11 and 20.10, although highly symbolic, would nevertheless suggest an existence in hell other than annihilation. For an evangelical these remain the hardest texts with which to deal. In addition, as Harmon has pointed out, conditionalism attempts to introduce a temporal framework that is nowhere apparent in the Scriptural evidence. In examining Fudge's exposition of Revelation 14.11, Harmon points out how Fudge introduces a chronology into the apocalyptic scenario. Unfortunately, "Fudge is unsuccessful in his attempt to chronologize these apocalyptic texts: he is introducing a time lapse which is simply not there."[605]

A third point, also indicated by Harmon, is a weakness that is characteristic of both the traditional and conditionalist positions. This is the attempt to systematize a number of biblical images into one unifying concept (either eternal suffering or annihilation). In fact it may be the case that the images of punishment, destruction and exclusion point to something beyond all three. As Harmon writes,

> The crucial point is that the different images each refer to a single reality and that combining different images is not like putting together the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, but rather like letting the sunlight reflect through a diamond and seeing each ray's colours as pointing toward a single eschatological truth.[606]

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[605] Harmon, "The Case Against Conditionalism", p.212.

[606] Ibid., p.224, n.70.

A much more coherent case is required for both positions. The need for doctrinal precision has been a major area highlighted by the survey. Concerning immortality, most evangelicals in the debate would benefit from describing their doctrine of humanity, and providing support for belief in life beyond the grave, whether due to immortality, conditional immortality, or resurrection. Some of those within the Resurrection Fellowship have moved towards this, building on the work of Cullmann's *Immortality Of The Soul Or Resurrection Of The Dead?*[607], although it must be noted that certain objections do stand against this work[608]. Also, work on even the possibility of life after death, connected with the philosophical concepts of immortality, would prove a valuable addition to the debate.

Much work could also be done on defining terms such as 'justice', 'goodness', and 'victory'. Which presuppositions govern what we count as just, and with what moral theory are we working to achieve such ends? Another area for doctrinal consideration is that of creation. Were men and women created with immortality or not, and with an built in sense of 'justice' so that they would recognise the righteousness of hell? Connected with creation is the question of theodicy. What

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[607] Oscar Cullmann, *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?: The Witness of the New Testament* (London: Epworth Press, 1958).

[608] See appendix to Nickelsburg, *Resurrection, Immortality and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism.*

approach is taken towards the problem of evil, and as hell is an integral part of that issue, what advantages and disadvantages do the two theories have? Do either of them in fact cope with theodicy in an adequate manner?

In all these matters, the evangelical may argue that Scripture alone is sufficient, and therefore discussion of related theological and philosophical matters is unnecessary. However, without directly addressing the issue of Scriptural authority, adding these issues to the debate will have two advantages.

(i) Firstly, determining the meaning and implications of terms such as 'justice' and 'immortality' will serve the purpose of clarifying the use of these ideas within evangelical circles. Arguments such as these may not prove to be decisive, yet as we have seen, they may tip the balance one way or the other, and provide a secure structure in which the material can be articulated. For example, traditionalists maintain that eternal conscious torment is just, whereas conditionalist believe it to be 'vindictive'. In order to make a judgement, arguments need to be put forward as to why this may be just / unjust, and whether we can even decide what amounts to 'justice' if we are not viewing the world from God's perspective (an argument often used by traditionalists[609]).

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[609] Packer, p.18.

(ii) Secondly, an attempt at integrating the arguments into a whole such as we are suggesting, may then on this issue serve as a bridge between the evangelical community and those outside of it. Annihilationism and conditional immortality do indeed deserve a wider hearing in the rest of the theological community. Although the doctrines are not unknown elsewhere, they are some what distanced from the evangelical debate, and discussion between those inside and outside evangelicalism may prove to be fruitful, as both communities attempt to come to terms with the doctrine of hell. Therefore, we will now examine the doctrines of annihilation and conditional immortality outside of evangelicalism.

NON-EVANGELICALS

Although conditionalism is largely an evangelical issue, it would be wrong to say that some of its ideas are not known outside of the conservative community. Annihilation is an idea that has found favour with a number of biblical scholars, systematic theologians and philosophers of religion alike. Although they may vary according to their churchmanship, they appear to be unaware of the extent to which the idea of annihilation after judgement has gained ground in the evangelical community. It is difficult, if not impossible, to determine whether there are any links between these theologians and evangelicals, and whether there existed a causal

relationship in either direction. Whether there can be any benefit from bringing the two together is another question, but before that is considered we will examine those scholars who have favoured ideas of annihilation.

John Macquarrie discusses eschatology in his *Principles Of Christian Theology.*[610] Although his bias is heavily towards universalism as "this seems more in line with the eschatological hope that all things will indeed find their fullness in God"[611], he does mention conditional immortality, and how that specific doctrine could be inferred from his own approach.

> These remarks might seem to favour the doctrine usually known as 'conditional immortality', for we seem to be saying that if the individual achieves selfhood and so is caught up into the constructive moment of Being, then he has his place in that structure of Being that transcends the passage of time; and the implication seems to be that if the individual fails to achieve self-hood, then he slips back into the nothing out of which he has come. A doctrine of conditional immortality is at least preferable to the barbarous doctrine of an eternal hell...[612]

Macquarrie is uncertain whether anyone will actually be lost, but if this were to be possible, then he commits himself to a doctrine of conditional immortality where the "utter limit of hell would be annihilation".[613]

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[610] John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology.*

[611] Ibid., p.361.

[612] Ibid., p.361.

[613] Ibid., p.366.

Richard Swinburne also explores the idea of annihilation in two places. In 'A Theodicy Of Heaven And Hell' he presents the idea as a possible answer to the incompatibility of endless torment and God's goodness.[614] In the second work, *Responsibility and Atonement*, Swinburne is more positive about the doctrine, using arguments from both a doctrinal and biblical perspective. As for the latter, he believes that the biblical evidence, especially concerning the effect of fire and the meaning of 'aionios', is ambiguous. The texts are certain concerning a final separation between the righteous and the impenitent, but as for duration the issue is far from clear. He therefore argues that eternal sensory punishment would be a vindictive act by God. In fact, to keep a man alive for the pure intention of punishing him would be a pointless task, as that person, being estranged from God, would have "lost the centre of his being".[615]

> Annihilation, the scrap heap, seems an obvious final fate for the corrupt soul. There is an obligation on God not to punish anyone beyond what he deserves, and that ... involves an obligation not to punish a man who has sinned on earth with everlasting sensory punishment. But there is no obligation on God to keep any man alive in a world to come.[616]

Although he is reluctant to go against church tradition, Swinburne also has another point of his argument in common with

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[614] Swinburne, "A Theodicy of Heaven and Hell", in A. Freddoso, Ed., *The Existence and Nature of God*, p.52.

[615] Swinburne, *Responsibility and Atonement*, p.182.

[616] Ibid., p.182.

conditionalist evangelicals. That is, he considers that belief in an immortal soul led the Fathers to affirm eternal conscious torment:

> Even if God could eliminate the soul (and some of their arguments have the consequence that he could not), it would in their view require an action of God of a quite extraordinary supernatural kind to eliminate a soul. The extinction of the wicked was therefore seldom entertained as a possibility open to God.[617]

Another philosopher who entertains annihilation as a possibility is Peter Geach. However, he does not in anyway dogmatise about the doctrine, and is prepared to defend eternal conscious torment.[618] In a study of reincarnation in Christianity, Geddes MacGregor concludes that annihilation makes most sense of hell, accepting the "possibility of spiritual entropy."[619]

Biblical scholars who have been attracted by the idea of annihilation include Strawson and Baird. Although both fairly conservative in their assessments, they were writing prior to the modern day debate, and show no indication of the idea being an issue within evangelicalism. Strawson, in his analysis of 'hades' and 'Gehenna', believes that in the meanings that the words carry the thought of annihilation can be dimly perceived. The question of conditional immortality also crops up, but is

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[617] Ibid., p.184.

[618] Peter Geach, *Providence and Evil*, p.124.

[619] Geddes MacGregor, *Reincarnation in Christianity* (Wheaton: Quest Books, 1978), p.123.

not pursued at length:

> If man is not naturally immortal but can receive from God the gift of eternal life, the question of refusal of that gift must arise.[620]

Baird believes that three options arise from the New Testament texts - eternal torment, universalism, and what he terms conditional salvation. In examining the three, he argues that the first presents problems concerning interpretation of Scripture, a cosmic eternal dualism and God's justice; the second ignores the biblical idea of the wrath of God and offends the free will implicit in Jesus' call to decision; only the third makes sense of the imagery used by both Jesus and Paul, coupled with the belief that men and women are not naturally immortal.

> So abundant is the evidence, that one may say with a rare degree of certainty that indeed Paul had the mind of Christ when ... he wrote, 'They shall suffer the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord.'[621]

CONCLUSION

It is evident that much more work could be done on the issues of conditionalism and annihilationism. However, the crucial area

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[620] Strawson, *Jesus and the Future Life*, p.149.

[621] Baird, *The Justice of God in the Teaching of Jesus*, p.234; W.Temple also argued that because we are not immortal, annihilation is therefore the fate of the impenitent - *Nature, Man and God* (1934), p.472

for our discussion is the contribution that these ideas make to a *defence* of the doctrine of hell. As has been demonstrated, the belief that conditionalism justifies hell in a way more convincing than traditionalism is held by many. Such evangelicals have been attacked on this matter for using an idea because it seems more reasonable, rather than being more Scriptural. However, there is a more important problem. To cut short the duration of hell does not necessarily provide an adequate defence of the doctrine. Even if that doctrine is something less than traditionally conceived, can such a hell be justified?

The problem is that such an approach to hell does not deal with the justification for hell. In the terms borrowed from Kvanvig's discussion, conditionalism achieves the following. As for *possibility*, hell is still very much a possibility, there is no danger of universalism. As for *duration*, there is no hint of ever escaping hell and entering heaven - there are no second chances. As for *justification*, hell is inflicted as part of God's just retribution. This aspect is interesting in that, although most evangelical conditionalists hold to hell being due to retribution, they also make great use of human freedom. Perhaps the nod in this direction is indicative of the fact that a problem remains. For the fact that the *nature* of hell has changed, that is hell is no longer eternal conscious punishment but annihilation, does not deal with common objections to hell. These are that an eternity of punishment (whether eternal or

not) is not deserved by a finitude of sin. Thus we see the relevance of the debate between conditionalists and traditionalists as to whether annihilation or eternal suffering is the worse punishment!

Kvanvig believes that if annihilation occurs, the moral objection against the doctrine of hell still remains.

> Nothing is to be gained in responding to a penal theory by substituting metaphysical capital punishment for metaphysical life imprisonment.[622]

Thus, whether the damned are annihilated or not, the problems of morality and arbitrariness remain. The moral issue of the justice of annihilation for all in hell (are all equally guilty, and do all deserve such an infinite punishment?) still stands. Annihilation may appear to be a better option initially, but this may be due to the fact that 'nothingness' provides a contrast with images of fire and brimstone, rather than dealing with the specific moral objections themselves. Given the strong view of divine conservation which Kvanvig holds, he also believes that with conditional immortality God is failing to 'immortalize' some persons. There is no distinction between annihilation by commission, and annihilation by omission.

It is clear that some people both tackle the nature of hell (thus making it finite leading to annihilation), and also the

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[622] Jonathan Kvanvig, *The Problem of Hell*, p.68.

justification for hell (thus defending hell using human free will rather than divine retribution). Travis is one such theologian who defends hell by altering several of its more traditional premises.

However, on its own the attempt to defend hell by turning to conditionalism / annihilationism fails. As an exegesis of the biblical material, it may offer much that is helpful and illuminating in 'rehabilitating' the doctrine of hell (although it must overcome the problems indicated). However, theologians will have to look elsewhere for a more comprehensive defence of the doctrine of hell. As has been indicated, many have done this by turning to human freedom, rather than divine retribution, as a justification for hell. It is at this point that W.S.Anglin has criticized annihilation, that is for curtailing the free will of the damned person, free will which is essential to the justification of hell.

> The annihilationist thus denies to human persons the dignity of free will. Has the annihilationist consulted the person in hell about their annihilation? No. He has, with condescending paternalism, made the decision for them. No doubt they are unhappy in hell, but perhaps they still prefer to exist.[623]

However, Anglin is unfair in that many opt for a combination of free will and annihilation that respects the person's choice to cease existing. The most developed defence of this position has

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[623] W.S.Anglin, *Free Will and the Christian Faith* (New York: OUP, 1990), p.179.

been developed by Kvanvig, some of which shall be examined subsequently.

A MIDDLE KNOWLEDGE PERSPECTIVE ON THE DOCTRINE OF HELL

CRAIG VERSUS TALBOTT

A recent and innovative exploration of the doctrine of hell appears in the discussions between William Lane Craig and Thomas Talbott concerning the possibility of eternal damnation. This has so far been carried out in six papers, appearing in the journals 'Faith and Philosophy' and 'Religious Studies'.[624]

In this chapter an outline will be given of the discussion which has occurred between the two scholars, after which an evaluation will be made. Any possible implications for a doctrine of hell may then be examined.

To begin with, a working definition of 'hell' is needed which would be acceptable to both parties. Although lengthy, the following from Talbott provides a helpful backdrop to the debate:

> By the doctrine of hell I mean the doctrine that, as punishment for their sin, God will consign some

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[624] **WLCI**: Craig, "'No Other Name': A Middle Knowledge Perspective on the Exclusivity of Salvation Through Christ", Faith and Philosophy 6 (1989), pp.172-188; **TTI**: Talbott, "Providence, Freedom and Human Destiny", Religious Studies 26 (1990), pp.227-245; **TTII**: Talbott, "The Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment", Faith and Philosophy 7 (1990), pp.19-42; **WLCII**: Craig, "Talbott's Universalism", Religious Studies 27 (1991), pp.297-308; **TTIII**: Talbott, "Craig on the Possibility of Eternal Damnation", Religious Studies 28 (1992), pp.495-510; **WLCIII**: Craig, "Talbott's Universalism Once More", Religious Studies 29 (1993), pp.497-518.

> persons to a place of everlasting torment from which there will be, very simply, no hope of escape; I mean the doctrine that some of the very ones whom God has commanded us to love, if Christian theology is correct, are thus destined to be, in Peter Geach's horrifying expression, 'irretrievably miserable'.[625]

THE DEBATE

Craig, "'No Other Name': A Middle Knowledge Perspective On The Exclusivity Of Salvation Through Christ":

Craig's initial paper articulated a defence of the exclusivity of salvation through Christ alone. A result of such a doctrine is the proposal that certain persons would be damned, and so Craig has to show the compatibility of certain attributes of God with such a position. Having used the biblical evidence to show that such a view is widespread, Craig declares that the real problem he is tackling concerns the question of why the world in which we live is not one where all freely repent?

The main weapon of Craig's argument is the concept of Middle Knowledge (MK). In order to understand Craig's position throughout this debate, it is therefore necessary to explain the notion of MK.

Molinism and Middle Knowledge

Middle Knowledge is a concept that arises out of a system of

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[625] TTII, p.19.

thought known as *Molinism*. Named after Luis de Molina, a sixteenth century Jesuit theologian, Molinism attempts to steer a middle path between human freedom and the doctrines of providence, foreknowledge and predestination. In his historical context, Molina fuelled controversy within the Catholic church which the Protestant Reformation had begun in wider circles, yet unfortunately he died before knowing whether his views were to be accepted or not. In actual fact, Pope Paul V decreed in 1607 that neither one side of the argument nor the other could be considered as heretical, thus leaving Molinism as an official possible framework of thought in the Roman Catholic church.[626]

The model that Molina used to account for the compatibility of human freedom and divine foreknowledge proposed that God possesses three types of knowledge that are logically, rather than chronologically, distinct.[627] Via God's *natural knowledge*, God knows all possible worlds and essences. This knowledge is not dependent on God's will, it is essential to his nature, and it is knowledge of what *could* happen. Via his *middle knowledge*, God knows all true counterfactual proposition - that is, not just what a created essence could do, but what it *would* do in

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[626] See the Preface by Alfred J.Freddoso in Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge* (Part IV of the Concordia), Translated, with an Introduction and Notes, by Alfred J.Freddoso (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).

[627] Craig notes how the notion of conceptual, a-temporal priority in God's knowledge was not new - both Scotus and Aquinas had used it before. See William Lane Craig, "Middle Knowledge, A Calvinist-Arminian Rapprochement?", in Clark Pinnock, Ed., *The Grace of God, The Will of Man* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), p.145.

every conceivable situation. This knowledge is also not dependent on God's will, but it is essential to his nature, and it is knowledge of what *would* happen. Via his *free knowledge*, God knows all that is in fact true in the actual world. This knowledge is dependent on God's will, but is <u>not</u> essential to his nature, and it is the knowledge of what *will* happen in an actual world. 'Between' the second and third categories, God decrees to actualize one of the worlds he knows via his MK. Therefore, the claim is that God is able to create from a position where he knows all possible outcomes of all possible combinations of events. Yet his knowledge is of what free creatures would do in those situations, and so God is able to create a world in which he foreknows all events, whilst the free will of all created essences is maintained.

Freddoso states clearly the differences between the three 'stages' of knowledge:

> Natural knowledge has among its objects all the *possible* future contingents, whereas free knowledge has among its objects all *actual* or *absolute* future contingents. By contrast, middle knowledge has as its objects *conditional* or *subjunctive* future contingents that stand 'between' the actual and the merely possible. By His natural knowledge God knows that it is metaphysically possible but not metaphysically necessary that Adam will sin if placed in the garden; by his free knowledge He knows that Adam will in fact be placed in the garden and will in fact sin. What he knows by his middle knowledge, on the other hand, is something stronger than the former but weaker than the latter, namely, that Adam will sin *on the condition* that he be placed in the garden. So God has middle knowledge only if he knows all the conditional future

contingents.[628]

Molina's account of MK is given in the *Concordia* (1588), in which he demonstrates dissatisfaction with the determinism that was implicit in the Thomist views of his fellow Catholics, and the determinism made explicit by the Protestant Reformers. Luther and Calvin granted to humans only choice and voluntariness of will, not the ability to do otherwise. For Luther, this was due to God's foreknowledge and omnipotence - for Calvin, due to God's providence. So Molina defined MK in the following way:

> Finally, the third type is *middle* knowledge, by which, in virtue of the most profound and inscrutable comprehension of each faculty of free choice, He saw in his own essence what each such faculty would do with its innate freedom were it to be placed in this or that or indeed in infinitely many orders of things - even though it would really be able, if it so willed, to do the opposite.[629]

MK was also defended by Francisco Suarez, in his two *Opuscula* (1594-97), but its history from there is less certain. R.Cook points out how Leibniz accepted the idea of 'conditional futures' from Molina[630], but by far the most interesting modern candidate for accepting Molina's framework is Alvin Plantinga. Plantinga admits that at the time he developed his free will theodicy he was unaware of Molinism, yet he assumed that God

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[628] op. cit., p.47.

[629] Ibid., p.168 [Concordia 4.52.9].

[630] Robert Cook, "God, Middle Knowledge and Alternative Worlds", Evangelical Quarterly 62 (1990), p.296.

knows the truth-value of counterfactuals of human freedom - as Molina's theory of MK also assumed.[631]

At first glance, the advantages of MK seem obvious. One of these which conservative scholars have utilised is the possible reconciliation it may provide between the Calvinist and Arminian positions. William Lane Craig has explored this in detail, arguing that,

> With Luther, one could affirm God's infallible foreknowledge of future contingents and, with Calvin, God's sovereign providence over the universe and yet not thereby sacrifice genuine human freedom.[632]

Craig distinguishes between God's absolute and conditional intentions - God's providence extends to everything that happens, but God does not positively cause everything that happens. That is, he permits such events to happen. Molinism is therefore against Aquinas's use of concurrence in the form of promotion (that is, God causing a person's free will to choose to perform the action) as it is deterministic. Instead it argues for concurrence simultaneous to the decision to act - an influence along with a cause, similar to two men pulling a boat out of the water at the same time.

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[631] J.Tomberlin & P.Van Inwagen, Eds., *Alvin Plantinga. Profiles 5* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1985), p.50; see below, p.293, for definition of counterfactuals.

[632] "Middle Knowledge: A Calvinist-Arminian Rapprochement?", p.161.

Extending providence to predestination, Craig summarises how MK can appear to bring the two sides of divine sovereignty and human freedom together:

> ... it is up to God whether we find ourselves in a world in which we are predestined, but ... it is up to us whether we are predestined in the world in which we find ourselves.[633]

Perhaps it allows a way to reconcile a notoriously difficult passage such as Acts 2.23 (where Jesus' crucifixion is attributed to the plan and foreknowledge of God, yet his crucifiers are still held morally responsible)? Robert Cook explores the advantages that MK has for the notions of guidance and providence.[634] He argues that any God lacking MK may in fact offer guidance which is close to useless - such a God is only dealing in probabilities concerning what will happen in the future. In the example of a request from a girl concerning which suitor to marry, a God without MK cannot give adequate guidance.

> On the other hand, a being with Middle Knowledge assuredly knows what would have happened if the girl had married either suitor.[635]

There are also other Scriptural passages of which the concept of MK is supposed to make sense, most notably the revelation of the outcome of a hypothetical event to David in 1 Samuel 23.9-13.

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[633] Ibid, p.157.

[634] "God, Middle Knowledge and Alternative Worlds", pp.293-310.

[635] Ibid., p.301.

However, as Cook points out, sense could also be made out of this situation even if God possessed limited foreknowledge, as God could work out what would happen from the present trends of the personalities of the people in the situation.[636]

In spite of the exciting ways forward that MK appears to offer, there has been much discussion of not only the viability of these advantages, but also the viability of MK itself. Basic to the whole idea is the question of how God possesses such knowledge. That is, what is the ontological basis for MK? Is it in fact possible for even God to know about possible worlds which do not exist? Where are such worlds to be discovered? Do possible worlds exist such that they can be the basis of God's knowledge?

The real problem here lies in the truth value of counterfactuals of freedom. These are propositions which state what supposedly free persons would do in a given set of circumstances, if they were to be placed in these circumstances. Do all propositions carry a truth-value, or are those which refer to free creatures an exception? Do such propositions have truth value or, as Robert Adams maintains, are they without grounding? For, he argues, they are not based on any simple foreknowledge of what will happen, nor can present trends be used as this would ignore the presence of free choices and an agent acting out of

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[636] Ibid., p.299; see also D.Carson's treatment of Matthew 11.20-24 in *How Long O Lord*, p.146.

character. Although he admits that propositions about future free choices can be true as they may correspond to what actually happens, Adams maintains that these are different from counterfactuals and so the object of MK is evasive.[637]

Otte replies that the difference between counterfactuals and propositions about actual future free choices is not that great. Counterfactuals correspond to what *would* happen in certain situations:

> Both are true in virtue of corresponding to some state of affairs that is neither actual nor is necessitated in any way by what is actual.[638]

However, this argument can only demonstrate that counterfactuals are no worse off than propositions concerning future free choices.

Cook describes how Meinong, Plantinga and Craig all maintain that counterfactuals are propositions that must either be true or false. Non-existent propositions can carry a truth-value (such as a round square), and counterfactuals as propositions can either be true or false. According to Plantinga, Christians in the past have accepted counterfactuals of freedom relating to God's action as true - for example, the theological debate

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[637] Robert Adams, "Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil", American Philosophical Quarterly 14 (1977), pp.111f.

[638] Otte, "A Defence of Middle Knowledge", International Journal for Philosophy of Religion, 21 (1987), p.167.

concerning 'Even if Adam and Eve had not sinned, God would have become incarnate'. Duns Scotus held this to be true, whilst St. Thomas argued that the following was true: 'If Adam and Eve had not sinned, God would not have become incarnate.'[639] Craig uses examples from every day language where we employ counterfactual statements, such as "if I had known you were coming, I would have baked a cake". Recognising that objections which are similar to those of Adams rely on a correspondence theory of truth, Craig continues:

> All that the view of truth as correspondence requires of future-tense statements is that the realities described *will* exist. Similarly, at the time at which counterfactual statements are true, it is not required that the circumstances or actions referred to actually exist. The view of truth as correspondence requires only that such actions *would* be taken if the specified circumstances *were* to exist.[640]

Therefore, we can conclude that counterfactual propositions are true in so far as they express what *would* happen. It does not matter that we can not determine the truth-value of these propositions, as a future-tense proposition carries a truth-value which is present, even before we can verify it.

The quotation used earlier from Molina himself reveals something of how he saw God's MK operating. How does God have this knowledge? He knows "in himself". What does this mean? Perhaps

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[639] See Plantinga, "Replies to my Colleagues", in Tomberlin and Van Inwagen, *Alvin Plantinga*, pp.374f.

[640] Craig, *The Only Wise God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), p.140.

God sees in his own essence what free creatures would do, and all the conditional futures are reflections of God's essence. However, even if we could spell this out more clearly, how could God know the free future choices of un-created creatures? For Molina this was due to the depths of God's knowledge. Perhaps in his essence God could tell what sort of choices would be made, but he could not tell the actual free choices. Suarez went further and explained that God knows future conditionals because the conditional propositions concerning these events are bivalent - all truth is as such knowable.[641] On this the argument comes full circle, and as Freddoso admits, the "account of how God has middle knowledge is arguably the weakest link in the Molinist chain."[642]

Returning to Adams' attack, Basinger has an intriguing line of defence. He questions why MK should be thrown out if we cannot identify the basis for its constituent, that is counterfactuals. In fact, he asks why we should be looking for a basis in the first place:

> Why must MK be based on, or inferred from, anything else? Why can we not assume that such knowledge is simply a primitive, noninferential divine cognition? Or, to use more contemporary terminology, why should we not assume that MK is, for God, properly basic?[643]

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[641] Craig, "Middle Knowledge, A Calvinist-Arminian Rapprochement?", p.148.

[642] Freddoso, Introduction to Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge*, pp.52-53.

[643] David Basinger, "Middle Knowledge and Classical Christian Thought", Religious Studies 22 (1986), p.421.

Therefore, the ball is thrown back into Adams' court, where he now has to establish that God could not possess such a 'primitive understanding'.[644]

Another criticism along similar lines attacks not whether counterfactuals *are* true, but whether they in fact *could* be true at all. William Hasker comments:

> If a counterfactual is true, then it is not in [an agent's] power to reject the offer, and she is not free in the required sense. And on the other hand insofar as an agent is genuinely free there are not true counterfactuals stating what the agent would definitely do under various possible circumstances. And so the doctrine of middle knowledge is untenable: *there are no true counterfactuals of freedom.*[645]

Thomas Morris sees a similar problem in the very basic workings of MK, namely that it does not retain human freedom:

> How can there possibly be truths and infallible divine beliefs about which I shall freely do far in advance of any deliberation and decision making on my part? If there are truths and infallible divine beliefs about what I shall do, it is hard to see how they can really be beliefs and truths about what I shall do *freely*.[646]

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[644] For another attempt to defend MK against the 'grounding objection' (that is, how can God have such knowledge?), see A.Freddoso's discussion of arguments against realism regarding the absolute future, in the introduction to Luis Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge*, pp.71f.

[645] William Hasker, "A Refutation of Middle Knowledge", Nous (December 1986), pp.545-7.

[646] T.V.Morris, *Our Idea of God* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1991), p.97.

However, defenders of counterfactual statements never claim that an agent is determined to do a specific action in the given circumstances, but only that the agent would freely decide to do the action if placed in those circumstances. Craig attempts to deal with this objection in the following way:

> In fact, it seems reasonable to suppose that counterfactual statements of the following form must be either true or false:
>
> > If P were placed in c, then P would choose x (P is any particular free person, c is a particular set of circumstances, which includes all of past history up to the point of decision, and x is a particular action).
>
> To affirm that a statement of this form must be either true or false is not to affirm that P is determined or forced by the circumstances to choose x or to refrain from choosing x, but to affirm merely that if placed in such circumstances and left free, P would either freely choose x or freely refrain from choosing x. P would not *have* to do either one, but he would have to do one or the other. If, then, we are to believe that such counterfactual statements *cannot* be true, the objector must produce an extremely strong argument for this denial.[647]

However, the problem remains as to whether it is necessary that P would freely choose or freely refrain. Although Craig maintains that P would not have to do either, does not God's knowledge of which 'free' action is chosen make it necessary?

Another problem that Cook examines is the identity of possible persons throughout possible worlds. "What can it mean to refer

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[647] Craig, *The Only Wise God*, p.139.

to the same object inhabiting different possible worlds?"[648]. Although this question could provide a whole avenue of exploration, perhaps one possible explanation which Cook points to is that these possible objects, and possible people, have their continued existence in the mind of God.

Does the theory of MK make God dependent on free creatures for his creative decision? Cook admits that "human freedom partially dictates the activities which each possible world contains."[649] Walls makes a similar observation: "What God knows depends on what choices free persons would make of their own accord."[650] Craig also observes that God cannot control what he knows by his MK: "Since the content of divine MK thus depends on what creatures themselves would do, God cannot control what he knows by his MK."[651] And finally, Richard Rice plainly states that "it [MK] introduces an element of contingency into God's knowledge."[652] Does this dictate God's decision, making it less than a free independent decision by God of which world to create? However, is this not true of other sorts of knowledge? What God knows concerning future events is dependent on what will happen according to the choices of free creatures. As

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[648] "God, Middle Knowledge and Alternative Worlds", p.307.

[649] Ibid., p.302.

[650] Walls, *The Logic of Damnation*, p.38.

[651] "Middle Knowledge, A Calvinist-Arminian Rapprochement", p.148.

[652] Richard Rice, "Divine Foreknowledge and Free-Will Theism", in Clark Pinnock, Ed., *The Grace of God, The Will of Man*, p.124.

Freddoso explains,

> In general, for any created effect S such that S will or would obtain in circumstances H, if the relevant secondary agents were not going to cause S to obtain in H, then God would never have believed that S would obtain in H.[653]

Therefore, God's MK "is not merely the product of God's creative power, but also owes its content to God-and-the-creatures."[654] However, even if we admit that God's knowledge is a combination of "God-and-the-creatures", we are still left with perhaps one of the greater problems of MK. That is, it makes God a dependent knower, dependent on the free choices of un-created people. This returns to the point made by Morris, namely how can these people have free choices if they are un-created? It is in the categories of God's impassibility and human freedom that defenders of MK still have work to do.

MK also has a substantial problem concerning theodicy. At first sight it may appear to help the situation concerning evil, but in actual fact it is open to the charge of 'Leibniz' Lapse'. Is this surely the best possible world that God could have come up with via his MK? In the free will defence, Plantinga introduced the idea of transworld depravity to account for this accusation.[655] This was defined as a kind of 'malady', whereby

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[653] Freddoso, Introduction to Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge*, p.67.

[654] Rice, op.cit., p.127.

[655] Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford:

those suffering from it are such that God could not have created a world in which those persons would act freely and do no wrong.[656] In his treatment of theodicy Hick maintains (from Augustine) that human creatures were created with an innate bias towards God, and so would argue that any idea of transworld depravity, where some people are such that they would sin in any world they may have been created in, is implausible.[657] Hasker argues that for the advocate of MK, every gratuitous evil is intended (as a necessary part of the world) by God, and the implication is also that all other possible worlds have worst evil than this world does. Again, this is very much open to question on the face of the empirical evidence.[658] All theories of divine foreknowledge have significant problems with theodicy, but it is clear MK is not water-tight at this level either.

Middle Knowledge appears to be an attractive theory, bringing possible advantages to theology and to the philosophy of religion. However, MK, as it stands at the moment, fails to meet the challenges of three main arguments: How can truly free choices be made by un-created creatures in a possible world that is known by God via his MK? Does the theory of MK not render God passible? How does MK account for the existence of evil, and

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Clarendon, 1974), pp.184f.

[656] See later for an exploration of this issue.

[657] John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, p.369.

[658] W.Hasker, "How Good / Bad is Middle Knowledge? A Reply to Basinger", Philosophy Of Religion 33 (1993), pp.111-118.

evil on such a scale? Perhaps if a more cogent case could be made on these three fronts, then more theologians would be attracted to the possible avenues which MK promises to open up. The implications of these various issues will now be explored in the context of Craig and Talbott's discussion of hell.

Returning to Craig's argument, he maintains that this explanation of God's omniscience provides a sufficient distinction whereby God's absolute and conditional intentions can be discerned:

> God thus providentially arranges for everything that does happen by either willing or permitting it, and he causes everything to happen in-so-far as He concurs with the decisions of free creatures in producing their effects, yet He does so in such a way as to preserve freedom and contingency.[659]

In order to understand Craig's progression of thought, a brief consideration of his use of 'concur' will prove helpful. Does this make God responsible in the sense that he agrees with all the free decisions made, does he actually cause the making of these decisions, or does he only permit them? For Craig, in the theory of MK the decisions of creatures are free and not caused by God. However, these decisions come about by God's creation of that actual world. God's conditional intention permits

> many actions on the part of free creatures which he does not absolutely will; but in His infinite wisdom

[659] WLCI, p.179.

> God so orders which states of affairs obtain that His purposes are achieved despite and even through the sinful, free choice of creatures.[660]

Therefore, in line with the rest of Craig's thought it would be best to interpret his use of 'concur' as permit, rather than agree.[661]

Why, then, are some damned if God can make a world in which all repent, and God prefers a world in which all repent? Craig replies, however, that such a world may not exist, for there may be persons who, whichever world they inhabited, would not repent. Why then did God, by his MK, not choose a world in which only those who freely repent were created? The reply is that, although there are circumstances where each such person would freely repent, it is questionable whether these set of circumstances are compossible. Thus, Craig asserts that God created a world where the counterfactuals of creaturely freedom were such that he had to accept a number in hell. What are these 'counterfactuals'? They concern what a given person would have done in a different set of circumstances, and in this context describe the free choices of that person in those circumstances. It must be remembered that central to the concept of MK is the idea that God possesses knowledge of the truth value of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom - "propositions which are contrary-to-fact and therefore describe hypothetical

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[660] WLCI, p.179.

[661] Craig, "Middle Knowledge, A Calvinist-Arminian Rapprochement", pp.152f.

situations"[662]. Or, as Walls defines them, "propositions which state what free persons would do are commonly called 'counterfactuals of freedom'."[663]

Would God have refrained from creation if he knew this to be true? Not necessarily, for those who are lost would have been lost in all feasible worlds. Note that there is a distinction often drawn between that which is logically possible, and that which is feasible, although the distinction is not always made clear. Accordingly, the likes of Craig and Plantinga would argue that it is logically possible for God to create a world where all freely repent, or a world where no moral evil exists, but it is not feasible for God so to do, due to the counterfactuals of creaturely freedom. William Hasker helpfully describes this in the following way:

> The central idea of the Free Will Defence is that there are some logically possible worlds which God could not actualize, because the counterfactuals of creaturely freedom are such that, if placed in the appropriate choice situations, one or more free creatures would not respond in the way they would need to respond for those particular worlds to become actual.[664]

Therefore, in this situation Craig limits what is logically possible to what is feasible by extending Plantinga's notion of

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[662] Cook, pp.296-7.

[663] *The Logic Of Damnation*, p.38.

[664] William Hasker, "Middle Knowledge and the Damnation of the Heathen: A Response to William Lane Craig", Faith and Philosophy 8 (1991), p.387 n.4.

transworld depravity[665] to that of "transworld damnation".[666] In order to understand this, a brief examination of Plantinga's use of transworld depravity will be helpful. He employs the concept to support the free will defence, in order to "demonstrate that among the worlds God could not have actualized are all the worlds containing moral good but no moral evil."[667] He defines transworld depravity in the following way:

> A person P *suffers from transworld depravity* if and only if for every world W such that P is significantly free in W and P does only right in W, there is a state of affairs T and an action A such that
> (1) God strongly actualizes T in W and W includes every state of affairs God strongly actualizes in W,
> (2) A is morally significant for P in W,
> and
> (3) if God had strongly actualized T, P would have gone wrong with respect to A.
>
> What is important about the idea of transworld depravity is that if a person suffers from it, then it was not within God's power to actualize any world in which that person is significantly free but does no wrong - that is, a world in which he produces moral good but no moral evil.[668]

Plantinga maintains that it is possible that transworld depravity could affect the essence of every person (a property which a person has in every world), and so God could not have created other people in another world to overcome the problem. "If every creaturely essence suffers from transworld depravity,

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[665] Alvin Plantinga, *Nature of Necessity*, pp.184-189.

[666] WLCI, p.184.

[667] *Nature of Necessity*, p.185.

[668] Ibid., p.186.

then it was beyond the power of God himself to create a world containing moral good but no moral evil."[669]

Before continuing, it is interesting that in the same context, Plantinga hints at two implications of his view that tie in with the discussion. These are the limiting of God's power due to the actions of free creatures, and the possible possession of MK. These indications can be seen from the following quotation, and are highlighted by italics:

> The essential point of the free will defence is that the creation of a world containing moral good is a *co-operative venture;* it requires the un-coerced concurrence of significantly free creatures. But then the actualization of a world W containing moral good is not up to God alone; it also depends upon what the significantly free creatures of W *would* do if God created them and placed them in the situations W contains. Of course it is up to God whether to create free creatures at all; but if he aims to produce moral good, then he must create significantly free creatures upon whose co-operation he must depend. *Thus is the power of an omnipotent God limited by the freedom he confers upon his creatures.*[670]

The use of 'would' points to an idea of MK. More importantly, this structure renders God passible and limited by the actions of free-creatures. This hints at a whole area of weakness in the theory of MK, and the idea of possible worlds, as stated earlier.

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[669] Ibid., p.189.

[670] Ibid., p.190 - italics mine.

Craig therefore adapts the notion of transworld depravity to that of transworld damnation - there are those who would be damned in any world in which they were created. Accordingly, God has therefore

> actualized a world containing an optimal balance between saved and unsaved, and those who are unsaved suffer from transworld damnation.[671]

The results of the discussion therefore attempt to provide answers to the following three questions:

1. Why did God not create a world where all freely repent?
For the reason that no such world exists as feasible for God, given certain counterfactuals of creaturely freedom.
2. Why did God then create this world, knowing that some would be lost?
Out of his grace God wanted as many as possible to gain fellowship with him. He therefore chose to actualize a world with optimal balance between those who freely repent, and those who are damned.
3. Why did God then not give special revelation to those who are damned due to their rejection of general revelation?
There are no such persons, for those who refused general revelation would have refused special revelation had they been given it.

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[671] Ibid., p.184.

It is interesting to note that Craig insists these are only "possible" answers, yet here he has attempted, on the basis of MK, to defend both the exclusivity of salvation through Christ alone, and the doctrine of eternal punishment for those who have never heard.

Talbott, "Providence, Freedom and Human Destiny":

Thomas Talbott proceeds to attack the doctrine of hell in two papers. In the first of these[672] he sets out to show that the Rejection Hypothesis (RH), is not even possibly true, where RH equals

> Some persons will, despite God's best efforts to save them, freely and irrevocably reject God and thus separate themselves from God forever.[673]

The main argument addressed here is whether it is possible for God to create a free world where all will respond to him, and for the purposes of this paper he assumes that the choice to reject God (involved in RH) would be a coherent one. Elsewhere he questions the choice to irrevocably reject God[674], but here he reject the possibility of RH as God would necessarily prevent such a choice. Talbott follows this line using three models of providence:

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[672] TTI.

[673] Ibid., p.227.

[674] TTII.

(1) *Providence Without Foreknowledge*

Under this model, God has no MK or Simple Foreknowledge, as they are not possible forms of knowledge for God. This then leads Talbott to deduce that RH cannot even be possibly true, for the fact that God (let alone anyone else) is not able to tell whether certain future events are true or not, implies that propositions about these events are not true at all. This would have been different if RH had been phrased as a possibility (for example, 'It is possible that some persons will, despite God's best efforts to save them, freely and irrevocably reject God and thus separate themselves from God forever').

Talbott also counters the following argument - that is, if someone rejects God so decisively now, then it is apparent that this will be their decision forever, and so they know RH to be true. He maintains that it is not logically impossible that these people would later change their minds. If the decision to reject God was due to psychological bondage or illusion, then God would be well within his rights to remove such barriers.

(2) *Providence With Middle Knowledge*

Talbott asks whether it is possible that God is powerless to bring about repentance in every sinner? He uses the theory of "transworld reprobation":

> (D') A person S suffers from *transworld reprobation* if, and only if, every possible world in which S faces one or more free moral choices and either (a) always freely chooses rightly or (b) eventually and freely repents of all wrong doing is a world that God is powerless to make actual.[675]

Thus, with MK, God has a choice to actualize a world where either all suffer from transworld reprobation, none suffer, or some. The question is, whether God needed to create a balance, or as Craig argued, an increase of the number saved meant that some had to be damned. However, Talbott questions whether the concept of an irredeemable person is coherent, for "over the long run (by which I mean to include the after-life) evil will always undermine and destroy itself".[676] Even if Talbott were to grant transworld reprobation to some, he would argue that God would choose to do something else. For example, at creation, in the face of such a possibility becoming actual, God would have refrained from actualizing the world.

Talbott's argument now considers the effect the damned would have on the redeemed, for would they not bring intolerable suffering to their loved ones in heaven as well? If I could only be saved because of the damnation of others, would I want to be saved? For those who are redeemed, salvation is intended to bring happiness that does not come through ignorance, and that also perfects love for others. Therefore, Talbott continues, if

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[675] TTI, p.234.

[676] Ibid., p.237.

a saved person knew that a person was damned, they would either be made unhappy, or if this were not so, their love for others would not be perfected. On the other hand, if a saved person did not know of the damned, they would either be unhappy if they knew, or if they were not unhappy, they would not be saved as their love for others would then not be perfected - whatever the case, if they did not know, they would be deluded.

> Accordingly, for any two persons, S & S*, if S is eternally damned and therefore destined to be eternally miserable, then God cannot bring salvation to S*.[677]

Therefore, the 'optimum balance' that Craig argues for is impossible, and so God would not have created such a world, or, on the basis of MK, would have chosen other options.

(3) *Providence With Simple Foreknowledge But Without Middle Knowledge*

Under this model, God possesses knowledge about what will happen at every moment in the future but he does not have knowledge of what free creatures will do in hypothetical circumstances. However, Talbott points out a paradox. God is a dependent knower of our free choices. If, then, God faced a disaster where none repented, he would obviously prevent it. Yet he presumably could do this on the basis of knowledge of what would happen in a

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[677] Ibid., p.240.

different set of events - that is, Middle Knowledge. On this model, however, God does not possess MK. Therefore, if God has only simple foreknowledge, could free agents defeat God's purposes? No, for as moral evil destroys itself in Talbott's view, God accomplishing his plan rests not on his foreknowledge, but on the order he gave to the universe in the first place.

Thus Talbott concludes that in all three of these models RH is not even possibly true. That is, RH is necessarily false, given God's creative power and love.

Talbott, 'The Doctrine Of Everlasting Punishment':

Talbott's second paper aims to demonstrate that universalism alone is consistent with other Christian doctrines. He declares that no passage in the Bible requires belief in eternal damnation, and that Jesus' teaching did not provide the final systematic answers that many seek.

He then sets out to examine three varieties of theism, all of which vary according to their allegiance to the premise that God loves every created person. Conservative theists (Aquinas and Augustine) are unclear about the extent to which they embrace this, hard-hearted theists (Hoeksema) openly reject it, and moderately conservative theists (C.S.Lewis, Swinburne) modify the following premise: "God will irrevocably reject some persons

and subject those persons to everlasting punishment."[678] The modification occurs by transferring the responsibility for rejection to the free creatures - that is, the unrepentant refuse the grace of God, rather than God rejecting the unrepentant. Thus in the last model the unrepentant always refuse the grace of God.

Conservative Theism

This model involves not just the sinners' rejection of God, but also God's rejection of the sinner. Talbott argues that on this model God then acts contrary to the interest of those he loves. In the New Testament God's love is of such a type that he loves a person at all times subsequent to the time he first loved. That love is intended to provide 'supremely worthwhile happiness' (as Swinburne defined it[679]) where no false beliefs or no morally wrong actions contribute to this happiness. Talbott therefore sees a problem of immense proportions:

> If God loves all created persons, his intention is to do all that he properly can to promote the best interest of and to cultivate supremely worthwhile happiness in all of them; but if he irrevocably rejects some created persons, it is *not* his intention to do all that he properly can to promote the best

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[678] TTII, p.21; note that C.S.Lewis does not fit neatly into this category, as he retains some idea of retribution in addition to the human choice of hell. For him , the two ideas, "in the long run, mean the same thing" - *The Problem of Pain*, p.111.

[679] R.Swinburne, 'A Theodicy of Heaven and Hell', in Alfred Freddoso, *The Existence Of God*, p.39-40.

> interest of or to cultivate supremely worthwhile happiness in all of them.[680]

Conservative theism has therefore proved contradictory.

Hard-Hearted Theism

The main problem with this position which Talbott finds is that its premise, namely that God loves some but not all, is itself necessarily false. If God's loving-kindness is an essential property, then it is manifestly false. If it is an accidental property, then we must examine the conditions of happiness. Talbott has earlier argued that this happiness must be of a type which is based on beliefs which are true - that is, if a person in heaven was happy because of a false belief, this would not be supremely worthwhile happiness. This happiness must also entail love for others. If this is so, then the unhappiness of others alters my happiness. In addition, God's love for me leads to his love for all those that I love - in the Christian tradition, even love for enemies has been emphasised.

> ... even if loving-kindness is an accidental property of God, we still must do justice to this fact: there can be no exclusiveness in love... Accordingly, if God loves one created person, he also loves all created persons.[681]

Moderately Conservative Theism

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[680] TTII, p.28.

[681] Ibid., pp.33-4.

This position adapts conservative theism, and makes the damned person into the one who rejects, not God. However, to reject God, a person must sustain this commitment for eternity. Even if a person, as Swinburne argues[682], is being mastered by their desires, surely God can release them? If those in hell were in bondage, God could release them from this without infringing their freedom. Even so, what would the motive for such rejection be? Even if we could understand one, Talbott argues that a loving God would then interfere, even if human freedom was infringed. Once again, there is also the problem of the effect that destroying one's own happiness has on the happiness of others.

Thus, understanding evil in the way already described, Talbott argues for 'biblical theism', where evil will destroy itself and become a means of revelation, and where all will be reconciled. This, Talbott argues, avoids the logical impossibilities of the other three models, and is at least possibly true.

Craig, 'Talbott's Universalism':

In Craig's response to Talbott's two papers[683], he first criticizes Talbott's use of the New Testament material. He then goes on to explore how the Molinist position which he first

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[682] Swinburne, p.48.

[683] WLCII.

advocated could be defended in the face of Talbott's attacks. The challenge that Craig poses is that compossible sets of circumstances where all are saved do not exist.

Craig has a view of sin where those under God's punishment will grow even harder in their hearts. Evil does not rectify itself, and the idea that Talbott has of some repenting under some sort of purgatory "smacks of recantation under torture."[684] Given this, what could be the motive for rejection? In this important area, Craig considers the will to self-autonomy, and the fact of perverseness in human nature makes RH even more possible. Thus, Craig himself pinpoints one of the main differences he has with Talbott:

> it seems to me that he really does not have a serious doctrine of sin.[685]

Because Craig believes that Talbott does not demonstrate the logical impossibility of RH, he then asks whether God would have prevented such a state of affairs occurring? A Molinist rejects a world where all freely repent due to the problem of composite affairs. Talbott portrays Craig's optimum balance as the idea that those in hell are there because of those in heaven, but Craig replies that it is just "the unfortunate concomitant"[686] of the repentant.

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[684] Ibid., p.300.

[685] Ibid., p.303.

[686] Ibid., p.305.

What then of the suffering caused to others by the lost? Craig offers two possible answers: (1) God may obliterate the knowledge of the lost from the minds of the redeemed. Surely this is moral deception? No, Craig argues that such a move, preventing pain from coming to the redeemed, is not an immoral deception. God himself takes on the painful knowledge, as he took on the pain of the world at Calvary. (2) The beatific vision of Christ may drive the knowledge of the damned from the consciousness of the redeemed. Thus the knowledge is actually there, but the presence of Christ takes away the awareness of such knowledge. Therefore, Craig believes that the Molinist position (in Talbott's categories, moderately conservative theism with a model of omniscience which contains simple foreknowledge and MK) is a possible defence of eternal damnation.

Talbott, 'Craig On The Possibility Of Eternal Damnation':

Talbott's last contribution considers the Damnation Thesis (DT) which Craig thinks is at least possibly true:

> (DT) There exists at least one sinner S such that S will never be reconciled to God and thus never be saved.[687]

Talbott argues that Craig has failed to establish that (DT) is

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[687] TTIII, p.495.

possible, or to undermine Talbott's argument that (DT) is impossible. He criticizes Craig's appeal to the 'obvious' and asks for more than bare assertions of possibilities, together with accusing Craig of confusing epistemic and logical possibility.

In spite of these criticisms of Craig's general method of argument, Talbott goes on to criticize on a more specific level. For example, if (DT) entails some actual person, what would their motive be for rejecting God if "God wills for me exactly what, at the most fundamental level, I want for myself"[688] (that is, supreme happiness)? If such a rejection is a fully informed decision, then such a person would have the strongest motive not to reject God. Otherwise rejection would be irrational, and therefore not a free action ("only a rational agent ... can act freely"[689]).

Craig may reply that some people, if they received sufficient revelation to make a response, would then have their freedom infringed. If this were so, that is if receiving the truth is incompatible with freedom, "then so much the worse for free agency so conceived"[690]

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[688] Ibid., p.500.

[689] Ibid., p.501.

[690] Ibid., p.502.

If it was true that in every world God chose to actualise, some would freely reject God, then God would either refuse to create or have a sufficient reason to change their bondage or illusion. And if the problem is one of achieving a composite state of affairs where all freely accept, Talbott maintains that there is a possible world where all repent. This would be either a composite world, or some other state of affairs, or a world where God varies the appearances of circumstances to different people so that all repent. Is this deception? Perhaps, but God could have a morally sufficient reason to do so. Therefore, Talbott is arguing that in dealing with this world God's options are vast, and so the idea that God needs some to suffer for those in heaven is false.

What of Craig's attempts to protect the blessed from the knowledge of the damned? Talbott responds that Craig's first answer amounts to God performing "a kind of lobotomy on the redeemed"[691], an action that would amount to a destruction of some, if not all, of the mind of a given person. Craig's argument employs an eternal deception, whereas in the previous argument Talbott only uses a temporary deception so that two sets of circumstances are compossible. What of Craig's second answer, the beatific vision? However, if this were to drive out knowledge of the lost, then the redeemed would become less loving, or not saved in the proper meaning.

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[691] Ibid., p.508.

Therefore, Talbott concludes that Craig either needs to (i) challenge the analysis of supremely worthwhile happiness that Talbott gives, or (ii) challenge the assumption that this happiness is included in salvation. Otherwise, in no way is the DT or the RH possible.

Craig, "Talbott's Universalism Once More":

The final paper in this series of six is Craig's last reply to Talbott. Having surveyed their discussion thus far, and outlining how Talbott had found God's continual intention of love incompatible with the possibility of eternal punishment, Craig then notes how Talbott's position has shifted from proving his version of universalism, to asking the Christian exclusivist to prove their own position. In attempting to show that the conjunction of God's benevolence and omnipotence with the possibility of some being damned is inconsistent, Talbott must show that the Rejection Hypothesis (RH) is broadly logically impossible (Craig acknowledges that for both of them, such a task is extremely difficult).

To do this, Talbott has attempted to show that the choice envisioned in RH is incoherent. Craig accuses Talbott of some form of "hyper-congruism", whereby God necessarily extends congruent grace to everyone he creates, and that it is logically impossible for anyone to eternally and finally reject God.

Craig's response to this revolves around the contention that such a choice to reject God is not logically impossible. First of all, what about the will to self-autonomy? Would this not offer motivation for eternal self-damnation? Talbott maintains that such a choice must be fully informed, and that any fully informed person would have no motivation to reject God. Yet Craig replies that even fully informed sinners may still reject God, as the price for supreme happiness, "bowing the knee to God - is too high."[692] Craig suspects Talbott of believing that any decision to reject God is less than fully informed. Yet even if the person was fully informed, self-deception is still a possibility.

Craig's second attempt at making sense of the choice involved in RH is to talk of human perversity, a motivation that requires no further explanation. To Talbott such an explanation sounds irrational, and therefore not free. However, Craig argues that such perversity is not the same as drug addiction, whereby freedom may be infringed. Acts made from perverse wills result from agent causation, and such an explanation finds strong roots in the Christian tradition of having a free choice whilst being in bondage to sin.

Craig now proceeds to examine another argument which Talbott has employed against RH. That is, has Talbott proved that RH entails transcircumstancial (Craig's more specific term for transworld)

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[692] WLCIII, p.501.

damnation? Even if Craig concedes congruism of a type offered by Talbott, he still believes that the problem of the compossibility of different sets of circumstances means that there are no feasible worlds in which all freely repent. Talbott has maintained that without the notion of transcircumstancial damnation in some people, this is logically impossible. If some people do not suffer from this malady, then there is a feasible world where all freely repent. In order for God to actualize this feasible world, Talbott admits that God may have to include deception in order to overcome the problem of compossibility. However, for Craig this is unacceptable:

> In deceiving human persons in the way Talbott envisions, God would be violating their personhood and so acting immorally.[693]

Even if there is a feasible world where all freely repent because God has put them in such circumstances and overcome the compossibility problem by using some form of deception, Craig believes that God may prefer to create a world where some are damned, rather than to found a world on the basis of such moral deception.

Talbott's second line of attack on RH was that even if the choice involved was coherent, God would not allow it. That is, God would necessarily not create a world in which some were damned, otherwise the supreme happiness of the blessed would be

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[693] WLCIII, p.505.

infringed. As for the blessed, Craig has offered two possible scenarios - that either God removes from their memory any knowledge of those who are in fact damned, or that the beatific vision of Christ means that such memories are overcome. Replying to Talbott's objections to these hypothesis, Craig believes that removing a memory would not lead to a lack of love in the blessed, for how can they be accused of not loving people that they do not know exist? Such a removal of memory would also not be deceptive, as the blessed can have no false beliefs about lost people of whom they have no beliefs at all. Craig's main point, however, is that Talbott confuses supreme happiness with supremely worthwhile happiness:

> The problem is that Talbott has conflated supreme happiness with supremely worthwhile happiness. A happiness which is supremely worthwhile need not, indeed, in some cases, cannot be supreme happiness, that is happiness untinged by sadness. Aware of the fate of the lost, the blessed in heaven could have supremely worthwhile happiness without being supremely happy.[694]

At the end of his paper, Craig attempts to demonstrate the possibility of his own position (rather than merely attacking Talbott's criticisms). In a show of modesty, he admits that he cannot prove that there is some statement that will link propositions concerning the love and omnipotence of God with the possibility of some being damned in such a way that they are not inconsistent. However, he offers the following proposition as a *possibility*:

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[694] WLCIII, pp.508-509.

> Since there is no world (without over-riding deficiencies) feasible for God in which all persons are freely saved, God has chosen a world having an optimal balance between those who freely accept His grace for salvation and those who freely reject His grace for salvation.[695]

Craig believes that this is a much more modest position than Talbott's, which claims that in no possible world would a person freely reject God. Talbott's last line of reply would be that if the above proposition is possible, God would then have every reason to infringe human freedom and so cause all to accept him. However, in strong language Craig counters that "such an action on God's part amounts to salvation by divine rape."[696] Finally, Craig believes that his position is not only possibly true, but also plausibly true, as it provides the most comprehensive account that accords with the traditional Christian views of sin, humanity, and the world.

ANALYSIS

Definition Of Hell:

At the outset a working definition of hell was provided by Talbott. As this chapter concentrates on the specifics of the argument between Craig and Talbott, a certain amount of re-definition is required. The main reason for this is that their

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[695] WLCIII, p.512.

[696] WLCIII, p.514.

argument revolves around the idea of a person rejecting God eternally, rather than God rejecting a person eternally. Into this the Rejection Hypothesis should be incorporated, for this sums up the essence of the controversy. Therefore, a definition of hell more useful to this debate would be:

> Some persons will, despite God's best efforts to save them, freely and irrevocably reject God and thus separate themselves from God forever. This state of separation is known as hell.

So both Craig and Talbott remain committed, in these papers at least, to debating the possibility of what Talbott himself called the moderately conservative view of hell. Therefore, although Craig quotes Scriptures which talk about God's judgement, punishment and vengeance[697], his argument concerns the possibility of a person rejecting God. As Talbott observes, Craig is then included in the movement of theologians from being conservative theists, "committed to the idea that God actually *rejects* some sinners"[698], to moderately conservative theists who maintain that "the fate of the damned is the result of their own free choice".[699] Thus in this debate the 'entry conditions' for hell are up to the person. Craig does still maintain that hell

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[697] 2 Thessalonians 1.8-9, quoted in WLCI, p.173.

[698] TTII, p.24.

[699] WLCI, p.185.

is "God's punishment"[700], yet his arguments betray that although he would wish to hold the two ideas of rejection and punishment together, his emphasis is most definitely on the first. Craig defends hell as a *possibility*; the *nature* of those confined to hell is existence; the *duration* of hell is eternal; and the *justification* for hell is free human choice. Talbott directly questions the *possibility*, *duration* and *justification* of hell.

<u>God's Creation</u>:

Why did God not create a world where all freely respond? This is a central question in the whole argument, and leads to many avenues. Craig, arguing from the assumption of MK, declares that no such world is possible due to the problems of <u>compossibility</u> and <u>transworld damnation</u>, thus leading God to chose an <u>optimum balance</u>. These three ideas shall be examined in order:

a) *Compossibility*:

It may be possible for God to save a person S, in circumstances C. It may also be possible for God to save another person, S*, in circumstances C*. However, Craig argues, it may be that circumstances C and C* are not compossible. Therefore, God chooses to actualize a world, via his MK, in which the set of circumstances prevail where the optimum balance of people are

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[700] WLCII, p.300.

saved. Talbott replies that, even though C and C* may not be compossible, God's resources are such that other circumstances are available to him that are compossible. Even more so, God may have a justifiable reason to temporarily delude S* by varying the appearance of circumstances C*, so that S* is eventually saved. The moral reason is that if God does not delude temporarily, S* will be eternally damned, and Talbott draws an example to illustrate the principles behind such an option.[701]

If it is conceded that the set of circumstances are not compossible, then the central question in this section is whether God could deceive, even if temporarily, and even if there was a morally sufficient reason to do so. Craig's final reply is that God would not violate his moral character and the dignity of persons in such a way. It is implausible that God would create on the basis of his MK, knowing that to do so he would then have to act against his moral nature in a deceptive act, so as to sustain that creation in the way he intended it to be. Much simpler would be Craig's reply that there exists no possible world where such sets of circumstances are compossible, even if God were to deceive. Therefore, the central question here is not the deception given by God, but the premise of the theory of MK that no world of compossible circumstances where all freely repent exists. God did in fact choose the best possible world. How can such a claim be evaluated? The burden of proof must lie with the advocate of MK, who has to demonstrate

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[701] TTIII, p.507.

that out of all the possible worlds that God could have created, there were none which he could have created, whose circumstances would have resulted in the free repentance of all human beings. In order to cope with this tall order, Craig turns to the notion of transworld damnation (later specified as transcircumstantial damnation).

b) *Transworld Damnation*:

This is an extension of Plantinga's concept of transworld depravity[702] which Craig defines as follows:

> On the analogy of transworld depravity, we may accordingly speak of the property of transworld damnation, which is possessed by any person who freely does not respond to God's grace and so is lost in every world feasible for God in which that person exists.[703]

Talbott responds in two ways. (i) The nature of evil is such that it undermines itself, and therefore it is impossible for someone to be eternally irredeemable. Evil itself becomes a revelation, and over time the un-repentant will repent. On this premise the idea of transworld damnation is not tenable. However, the question of the nature of evil will be treated later. (ii) If God did confront the possibility of someone suffering from transworld damnation, would he not then refrain from creating, or cause some other, lesser state of affairs to

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[702] Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, pp.184-9.

[703] WLCI, p.184.

occur? Craig replies that, out of his grace, God chose to actualize this world where the optimum balance would be received into his fellowship. Craig does not counter the possibility that God could have chosen not to create. Presumably his love was such that he created. This however returns the discussion to a decisive point - was it worth it? Extending Dostoyevsky's concern with the problem of evil to the concept of hell,[704] would we not rather refuse to play the game than pay such a price for God's creation? Craig would reply that from God's viewpoint, and from that of the redeemed, it is worth it. Issues surrounding the state of the redeemed have yet to be investigated. Talbott would obviously conclude that such a price either does not warrant creation, or it warrants God to infringe our freedom in some way.[705]

c) *Optimum Balance*:

Craig argues that God chooses to actualize a world with this optimum balance between the number saved, and the number who do not freely repent and suffer transworld damnation. He extends this to assert that it is possible that God can increase the number of the people who repent by permitting others to be

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[704] Fyoder Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (London: Penguin Books, 1982 edition), pp.285-287.

[705] For a discussion of the implications of transworld damnation for a theology of mission, see William Hasker, "Middle Knowledge and the Damnation of the Heathen: A Response to William Lane Craig", op. cit., pp.380-389, with the response by William Lane Craig, "Should Peter Go to the Mission Field?", Faith and Philosophy 10 (1993), pp.261-265.

damned.[706] However, Talbott counters this by arguing that

> God's essential dispositions are far more important than the matter of which 'counterfactuals of freedom' happen to be true.[707]

Again, he argues that even if God could increase the number of the people who repent by permitting others to be damned (arguments against which shall be considered under 'The Redeemed'), God has a sufficient reason to act differently - by either not creating, creating in a limited way, or interfering in our freedom. Talbott is surely right in feeling disgust at this view given by Craig if it is understood as: "the company of the redeemed in heaven will remain faithful only because they have seen what happens to those who do not remain faithful".[708] However, Craig is not pushing such a hard-hearted line. All he argues is that, whatever world, some will reject God - this is an unfortunate fact that is the other side of the coin to those who freely repent.

Therefore, if this state of balance is the best that God chose to actualize out of all feasible worlds, then the issue revolves not around God's MK, but around his choice to actualize a world where hell is a reality and not to do otherwise. Craig emphasises freedom to the extent that it cannot be infringed,

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[706] WLCI, p.183.

[707] TTIII, p.504.

[708] TTII, p.235.

Talbott thinks that here again there is sufficient motive for acting differently. Whether the balance would make sense in practice leads into the next section for consideration.

The Redeemed:

Here Talbott uses powerful imagery, concerning a possible situation of a man and his daughter. Would the father be happy in heaven, knowing his daughter to be in hell? Even more so, would this man wish to be in heaven, if the "unfortunate concomitant" is that his daughter, who suffers from transworld damnation, is in hell? Further, is the man actually 'saved' if there exists even one other person in hell?

This argument centres on the definition of salvation and happiness. Talbott argues that there are two vital components to the happiness that the redeemed have:

i) they are not deluded, or deceived, or ignorant

ii) their salvation includes the perfection of their love for others.

For the first condition, the redeemed must know about the damned. Either of Craig's answers to this do not carry weight for Talbott - God shielding the redeemed from the knowledge, or the beatific vision of Christ blinding them to these facts. Although in his last paper Craig reiterates the two answers

already given (responding that neither do they lead to a lack of love for the damned, as you cannot lack love for people you do not know, nor is it deceptive, as you cannot be deceived about that which you do not know), he is still left with a much more major problem. His hypotheses would so alter the personality of the redeemed that we would have to question whether they remained the same person. Therefore, knowing about the damned, the redeemed would either be unhappy, or not totally loving if they remained happy.

This therefore has important implications for all the three concepts discussed under 'God's Creation'.

> ... the eternal damnation of a single person would undermine the salvation of all others; so an optimal balance between saved and unsaved could not possibly include any who are unsaved.[709]

Craig's possible answers do not appear to help us. Perhaps the only clue comes when he talks of God taking the pain, as he did on Calvary. However, it would be misleading for the blessed not to know about the fate of the damned, not because they would be deceived about people of whom they have no knowledge, but because they may not know about people whom they loved throughout their lives, and who had become an integral part of their lives. Heaven would not be desirable if all knowledge of loved ones was lost. Perhaps it is more plausible that the redeemed could live with the knowledge of the damned if the

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[709] TTI, p.240.

latter were annihilated. This only goes some of the way, however, and makes the notion of a perfected happiness even more difficult to comprehend. Perhaps another notion that could help would be the possibility of a suffering God. However, there is no room here to consider such an idea. Could we conceive of a state of affairs where the redeemed 'come-to-terms' with the reality of the damned? In Craig's terminology, those not suffering from transworld damnation would understand that those who did suffer such a malady would have been damned in any world that God actualized. The sadness is taken away by understanding that God's love and justice remains, even if such a concept of transworld damnation were operable.

Motive:

The motive of a person who chose freely to eternally reject God - this is perhaps the crux of the argument between Talbott and Craig. In other debates, perhaps with the hard-hearted theist, or the conservative theist, the issue would have been to discover God's motive for eternally rejecting someone. The argument here can still be traced back to God, yet of primary concern is the individual's choice:

> ... what could it possibly mean to say that some sinners are trying as hard as they can to damn themselves? ... What could possibly qualify as a motive for such a choice?[710]

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[710] TTII, p.37.

Talbott sets the challenge, maintaining that such a choice must be free, rational and fully informed. If not free, then the whole argument falls to pieces. If not rational, then the choice is not free for it may be caused by ignorance or bondage or desire, which God can thus transform without infringing freedom. If not fully-informed, then the choice is not complete, and God is able to restore the full information, again without infringing freedom. Anyone who is fully-informed, therefore, has the strongest motive possible not to make the wrong choice - that is, to repent. If they do not do so, they are irrational.

In defence of his position, Craig plays into the very idea of irrationality. For the fact of perverseness in human activity is irrational, but perversity does appear to be a free decision that is made in a fully informed environment, from a person who would otherwise be categorised as 'rational'. The 'will to self-autonomy' causes this perversity, and this causes someone to prefer damnation to God's salvation.

On the face of it, it is hard to understand motives for rejecting God. Perhaps this is more the area for psychology than theology! However, as Craig points out, this is an area that has a rich tradition in theology, and he criticizes Talbott for being deficient in this tradition:

> I should say that he greatly underestimates both human

depravity and human capacity to sin.[711]

The problem for Craig is that, although Christianity has a rich tradition with respect to human depravity, such a tradition does not yet *explain* such depravity. This leads into the next crucial area, that of sin and the nature of evil. However, at this first stage Talbott is correct to insist on the conditions that he gives for any choice concerning human destiny. On the other hand, the Christian tradition has had, as a central affirmation, the very fact that men and women do choose themselves rather than God. If such choices do occur, then we are bewildered as to why. Perhaps it is due to the fact of evil, the nature of which shall now be considered.

The Nature Of Evil:

Talbott has an intriguing notion of evil:

> In the end, according to the New Testament picture, moral evil will always destroy itself and thus become its own corrective ... Over a long period of time, moral evil inevitably destroys itself.[712]

Therefore, in this picture, the long term effects of evil are positive. There can be no eternal hell, for evil, or selfishness, will sooner or later realise the futility involved in such a path, and so opt for good.

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[711] WLCII, p.303.

[712] TTI, p.245.

> On this picture, the root of all moral evil as well as the ultimate source of human misery is separation from God (and from others); and the motive for moral evil is the *illusion* that we can benefit ourselves at the expense of others. So the more we separate ourselves from God, the more miserable we become, and the more miserable we become, the more likely we are to shatter the illusion that makes moral evil possible.[713]

However, in Craig's theology, evil corrupts continually - there is no way in which it will ever redeem itself, but for the grace of God. Thus Craig accuses Talbott of Pelagian heresy, insisting that the Christian message of the New Testament affirms that only because of God's intervention will evil be defeated. Is this difference due to presuppositions, unannounced and unaccounted for? Whatever causes it, the different understanding of sin and evil colour the whole picture painted. Craig can thus understand the motive of an unrepentant sinner in the face of the grace of God, whereas Talbott, not only does not understand the motive, but also insists that no one will ever have need of such a motive, for the evil within them will eventually become extinct. In time, including the after life, all will repent.

Additionally, Talbott argues along Augustinian lines. God has made us such that we desire him. To know God is supreme worthwhile happiness, and therefore the creator would not then leave his creation stranded eternally:

> God wills for me exactly what, at the most fundamental

[713] TTI, p.244.

level, I want for myself.[714]

Therefore, i) God would not let me be damned and ii) the most fundamental level of my being would not let me be damned.[715] Craig would counter that this does not take the doctrine of sin seriously. At the most basic level, the difference between Craig and Talbott is their outlook. Talbott is essentially optimistic about man's fate as well as about the love and power of God, whereas Craig is only optimistic about the latter. Perhaps this is why the two shall never meet.

On such a fundamental level, how can a decision between the two be made? The use of empirical examples is probably insufficient - the evidence can point either way, for there are instances of great depravity and horror in this world, as there are examples of great courage, love and progress. The other problem with this route is that examples portray how things are in a limited time-span, whereas this debate deals with eternity. Use of biblical evidence in this context is also questionable, for both sides would articulate the material in different ways.

Ultimately, the doctrine of sin and evil that one takes is intertwined in the corresponding doctrine of salvation. Can humans save themselves apart from God's revelation? At one point Talbott describes the consequences of sin as themselves "a means

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[714] TTIII, p.500.

[715] Interestingly, John Hick uses a similar argument - see *Death and Eternal Life*, p.251.

of revelation"[716]. However, Talbott is reluctant to go too far, as even in the after life he holds it open that it is in God's power to reveal himself to those who reject him. Evil is acknowledged to have a strong power here, such that God *must* intervene. Therefore Talbott must treat sin more seriously than he does when claiming that it will defeat itself.

There is a great amount of confusion in this whole issue, especially when treating sin as a consequence of being bound by evil desires. Talbott argues that any who may persistently resist God throughout eternity would be irrational and bound by desires:

> We are speaking of those who have already lost their freedom, who are prisoners of bad desires.[717]

However, this appears to be claiming that these people are bound, and have been bound, by these desires, against their free choice. Perhaps Craig would reply that a persistent resistance to God would be irrational, yet the initial rejection was a free decision that was not bound by a bad desire - that is, the free agent made themselves a prisoner initially. It is the initial choice which determines the route that follows, and even this decision may be made again and again.

The idea that God 'jump starts' sinners by repeatedly

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[716] TTII, p.39.

[717] TTII, p.36.

> removing them from their bondage and setting them on their course again until they go right might well strike us as manipulative and disrespectful of their freedom.[718]

Nevertheless, Craig must account for why a person would make such an initial free choice, knowing that it would ultimately result in the choice of hell. Talbott, on the other hand, appears at times to be in danger of proving too much. That is, if he cannot make sense of why someone would wish to choose the evil path of rejecting God (assuming that to do so they must be rational, fully-informed and not bound by any desire or illusion), Talbott begins to make it hard to account for any evil at all. In this way, any articulation of the free will theodicy would be useless, as no account could be given for the evil choice. In contrast, Craig maintains a strong belief in the perverse force of evil and its manifestation in sin. However, even if evil and sin were as drastic as Craig maintains, Talbott turns the question back to God. Would God, therefore, have sufficient reason to infringe freedom?

Can God Infringe Freedom?:

This has been a question that Talbott has continuously pressed home. He quotes Swinburne concerning free will: "Free will is a good thing, and for God to override it for whatever cause is to all appearances a bad thing."[719] Yet he sees that the possibility

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[718] WLCII, p.300.

[719] TTII, p.35; Swinburne, p.49.

of eternal damnation is a sufficient reason for God to interfere with our freedom.

> Just as loving parents are prepared to restrict the freedom of the children they love, so a loving God would be prepared to restrict the freedom of the children he loves; the only difference is that God deals with a much larger picture than that which human parents are immediately concerned.[720]

Given the questions concerning rationality of choice and whether anyone rejecting God is irrational such that they are not completely free, is it possible for God to infringe our freedom? In Swinburne's terms, would the interference with our freedom, a bad thing, be out-weighed by the salvation of all, a good thing? If it is not thus out-weighed, then we return to questions about the goodness of God in creation. Therefore, where MK claims an advantage, in asserting that certain counterfactuals of freedom are true, the problem remains. On the other hand, if we maintain that freedom should not be preserved at all costs, then questions concerning any sort of free will defence arise. Craig's powerful and emotive statement that an infringement of freedom would amount to "divine rape" expresses a widespread conviction which arises in all debates about hell.[721]

Again, Ivan's question is relevant. At what price do we maintain freedom? Is it worth it? If God is concerned to maintain this

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[720] TTII, p.38.

[721] Alister McGrath makes a similar observation in *Justification by Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), pp.105-106.

freedom, then questions still remain about the original creative act.

CONCLUSION

The preceding analysis has revealed the important issues at stake between Talbott and Craig. This then demonstrates the presuppositions at work between the two scholars, and from which the areas requiring further discussion can be highlighted.

Presuppositions:

Importance Of Freedom:

A basic value judgement separates the two scholars. Talbott supposes that freedom can be infringed if the dark possibilities of someone being eternally damned are real. Craig, on the other hand, defends the importance of free choice against any infringement by God. Resolving this issue would require an in-depth study of the nature of free will and its centrality to anthropology, and more importantly, theology. Craig argues that not even God can act against counterfactuals of human freedom, for no such worlds exist where this is possible. Talbott must show *what* would qualify as a sufficient moral reason for God to infringe human freedom, and *how* Craig's argument concerning

counterfactuals of creaturely freedom is deficient.

Nature Of Evil and Choice:

Both choice and motive are affected by the attitude each scholar has to evil. In comparison to Craig's doctrine of sin, Talbott's is certainly not as grave. Craig assumes, perhaps to his disadvantage, that a person would eternally wish to be damned. This may be true, but Craig has yet to demonstrate sufficiently the nature and purpose of such a decision. As has been noted, Talbott is basically optimistic concerning the outcome of evil, Craig is pessimistic.

Redemption and the Redeemed:

Craig assumes that the redeemed in heaven can be made happy by God, such that the fact of the unredeemed do not infringe this happiness. However, it has to be noted that his defence does not withstand Talbott's attack - if identity is tied up with memories of loved ones, than those memories can neither be eradicated so the pain dies with them, nor can they be changed so that the love for the damned is lessened. Talbott's presupposition, that the redeemed must be in some way affected by the damned, stands firm.

Creation:

A question of immense theological proportions is the 'why' of God's creation. Although neither party ever draws this out in the debate, Craig assumes that God's purposes in creation are sufficient, even given the fact that God knew some would be damned in this creation. Talbott replies that if this were so, then the price of creation was too high. Why would God create if he knew some were to be damned? Craig hints at some reason (incorporating some into God's fellowship), and some explanation as to why all do not come into this fellowship (that this 'some' is the optimum amount), but much still needs to be said, for Talbott presupposes that if God were faced with the prospect, he would have refrained from creation.

Conclusion:

The Molinist articulation of the free will defence has gone a long way in attempting to defend the doctrine of hell. However, from the problems highlighted in the last three presuppositions (evil and choice, the state of the redeemed, and the questions concerning creation in the light of middle knowledge), it appears that thus far Talbott (although not proving universalism) has the upper hand. Craig not only needs to provide firmer ground in these areas, but also must establish a more secure motive which the damned would have for their decision, and so explain how the mechanisms of death and

decisions not to repent work (for example, is there a point when God's offer of grace is cut off, and what would an 'irrational decision' consist of?).

Craig is sure of the *possibility*, *nature*, and *duration* of hell, being sure that some will be consigned to exist there with no hope of escape. The Middle Knowledge perspective on the doctrine of hell has one major effect, that of highlighting the issues involved in a modern defence of hell that makes strong use of the free human choice to reject God in its *justification* for hell, as against a more traditional attempt to justify God's retribution. However, the Molinist position has yet to establish itself as a fully fledged defence of hell.

THE FREE WILL Defence OF HELL

The previous chapters have largely concentrated on what were, or what may have been, defences of the doctrine of hell based on the principle of human free will. When retribution has failed as the justification for an eternity without God, theologians have made use of the idea that human beings have the ability to refuse to turn to God. In this sense, hell is a place of self-condemnation. Although the retributive model involved an element which affirmed that individuals were freely responsible for their own destinies, the free will defence of hell relies primarily on the idea that an individual chooses to go to hell, rather than on hell being a divinely inflicted punishment. This has been seen in the work of the Roman Catholic theologians Hans Küng, Karl Rahner, and Hans Urs von Balthasar, in the popular fiction and apologetics of C.S.Lewis, and in the Molinist defence of hell as articulated by William Lane Craig. This final chapter aims to examine other discussions which have taken the issues involved in a free will defence of hell several steps further and which have attempted to take a much closer look at some of the issues involved. A basic outline of the approach may be given as follows:

> For a particular reason (or perhaps, several reasons), God chose to create human beings with free will of the type which would give them the ability to choose not to repent / love God / do the good / pursue truth. Those who exercise their free will in such a way are those who will end up in 'hell'.

It will become clear in the following discussion that many of the terms used in this general description will require further clarification and specification. However, at present this outline will act as a guide.

In naming this particular articulation of hell the 'free will defence of hell', it is immediately apparent that this line of reasoning has very close ties with modern attempts to solve the problem of evil. Thus much of the debate takes place against the background of contemporary theodicies. Many of the contenders in the debate about hell recognize this, and so provide an important clue as to how the discussion may proceed. Two of the most recent and in-depth studies of the doctrine of hell demonstrate this approach. In attempting to demonstrate *The Logic of Damnation*, Jerry Walls notes that "The problem of evil is bad enough without the complication of hell, and it seems best to let it lie."[722] Jonathan Kvanvig tackles with *The Problem of Hell*, explaining in the introduction that "Hell is apparently paradigmatic as an example of truly pointless, gratuitous evil. Thus arises the problem of hell."[723] In her introduction to an article considering the problem of hell, Marilyn McCord Adams voices a similar opinion but with more force:

> My own view is that hell poses the principal problem of evil for Christians. Its challenge is so deep and decisive, that to spill bottles of ink defending the

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[722] Jerry Walls, *The Logic of Damnation*, p.5.

[723] Jonathan Kvanvig, *The Problem of Hell*, p.3.

> logical compossibility of ... [God exists, and is essentially omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good] with this-worldly evils while holding a closeted belief that
>
> ... Some created persons will be consigned to hell forever
>
> is at best incongruous and at worst disingenuous.[724]

Although not as voluminous as the material on theodicy, there is now an increasing body of literature dealing with the doctrine of hell from within philosophical theology. This material and the issues involved can be made more manageable by breaking the discussion down into the following six sections. It will then become clear where the main strengths and weaknesses lie in an attempt to defend the doctrine of hell by stressing human free will.

(i) **GOD'S KNOWLEDGE AND POWER**

In the outline given above, the free will defence of hell states that "For a particular reason (or perhaps, several reasons), God chose to create human beings with free will...". This immediately suggests a problem. If God knew that the world he was about to create would be a world where hell may be a

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[724] Marilyn McCord Adams, "The Problem of Hell: A Problem of Evil for Christians", in Eleonore Stump, Ed., *Reasoned Faith*, p.302. Commenting on Swinburne's attempt to defend heaven and hell, Michael Levine writes that "Swinburne's theodicy of heaven and hell, is the problem of evil revisited." - Michael Levine, "Swinburne's Heaven: One Hell of a Place", Religious Studies 29 (1993), p.528.

possibility, why would he then go ahead and create such a world? Jerry Walls quotes the following passage from J.S.Mill to illustrate the issues involved:

> Think ... of a being who would make Hell - who would create the human race with the infallible foreknowledge, and therefore the intention, that the great majority of them were to be consigned to horrible and everlasting torment."[725]

The problem revolves around the various accounts of omniscience given and what type of foreknowledge God possesses. William Lane Craig's Molinist account believes that God created the world knowing that some would choose to be damned, but preferred this world to certain other possibilities (not creating the world, or creating a world where only a few people existed and only a few people were saved).[726] A Calvinist approach to the issue, as seen in the *Westminster Confession*, is left with a similar problem. Even more so, it faces the problem that those who are in hell end up in hell because of God's decree. Turning to other models of divine foreknowledge, Jerry Walls has examined those offered

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[725] *Autobiography of John Stuart Mill*, p.29, quoted in Walls, *The Logic of Damnation*, p.33; Walls questions Mill's point concerning intentionality, but the problem with foreknowledge remains.

[726] What implications such divine foreknowledge would have for evangelism are discussed in the following papers: David P.Hunt, "Middle Knowledge and the Soteriological Problem of Evil", Religious Studies 27 (1991) pp.12-18; David Basinger, "Divine Omniscience and the Soteriological Problem of Evil: Is the Type of Knowledge God Possesses Relevant?", Religious Studies 28 (1992), pp.14-17; William Hasker, "Middle Knowledge and the Damnation of the Heathen: A Response to William Craig", op. cit.; and William lane Craig, "Should Peter Go to the Mission Field?", op. cit.

by Richard Swinburne (that God can only know what is logically possible to be known, to which category future free choices do not belong[727]), Peter Geach (the grand chess master, where "God knows the future by controlling it"[728]), and Richard Creel (similar to Swinburne, yet God eternally knows all possibilities and so can never be surprised[729]). The point of Walls' analysis is to demonstrate that all models of divine foreknowledge that he has considered come up against similar problems when dealing with the doctrine of hell.[730] Either God creates knowing for certain that some will be damned (Molinism, Calvinism, and Geach), or creates with an element of uncertainty (for Swinburne's God there will be complete surprise, and for Creel's God there is a probability that some may be damned). Which is more problematic? Is it worse to create on the knowledge of certain people being damned, or on the knowledge that there is a probability that some may be damned? Which (in Mills' eyes) would be more objectionable? The answer to this question lies partly in the answer given to a question considered below (why

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[727] See, for example, *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p.175.

[728] Peter Geach, *Providence and Evil*, p.57.

[729] Richard Creel, *Divine Impassibility* (Cambridge: CUP, 1986), pp.98-99.

[730] David Basinger comes to similar conclusions when comparing a Molinist account (which involves a thesis of transworld damnation) with other models of divine omniscience (namely God possessing present knowledge or simple foreknowledge). He believes that all models may be able to make account for the soteriological problem of evil, yet all face a similar spectrum of difficulties - David Basinger, "Divine Omniscience and the Soteriological Problem of Evil: Is the Type of Knowledge God Possesses Relevant?", pp.1-18.

does God allow such freedom?). If a satisfactory answer can be provided at this point, then the justification for God creating the world which he has created may be more discernable. If it is argued that God created this world (which contains the possibility of people choosing hell) which he foreknew (or the world which he was surprised by) because of the over-riding importance of freedom, the question to be considered then is whether such freedom is worth the price of hell. However, the problem of why create at all still remains.

A common tendency can be identified in these discussions. As Walls points out, anyone committed to defending the doctrine of hell must also believe that God possesses some form of infallible foreknowledge. This is the case if this doctrine of hell is in some form a modified traditional type where grace may be offered beyond death, yet some will choose to reject God forever and so be separated from him.[731] If God did not have infallible foreknowledge, those who continually reject God even though they are offered grace may in fact surprise God and one day accept his offer! If God did not have infallible foreknowledge, he would not have known that some would never receive his offer of life.[732] Most defenders of hell therefore

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[731] Walls uses C.S.Lewis as an illustration of this view of hell and ultimately aligns himself with this position as well - Walls, *The Logic of Damnation*, p.12 & p.54.

[732] Interestingly, Walls also believes that a convinced universalist must be committed to the idea that God has infallible foreknowledge, so that God could have fore-known that all the free creatures he created would repent - ibid., p.54.

wish to retain some belief in God's foreknowledge. Thus, before creation God knew that some could, or would, choose hell. In addition to this belief in foreknowledge, many have been prepared to admit that such a doctrine also results in limitations being placed on God. Such limitations take one of two forms - that God is involved in taking risks, and that God allows himself and his plans to be limited by the free choices of the human beings he has created.

The admission that God limits himself has already been seen in the work of C.S.Lewis. In the early years of this century, Baron Friedrich von Hügel mounted a free will defence of hell, conceding that this doctrine limits God's power due to our imperfect use of freedom. He held that "there are doubtless reasons, connected with the power of God or with His knowledge (concerning what will, upon the whole, produce the maximum of a certain kind of spiritua1 happiness), why He chose, or permitted, the existing scheme of imperfect liberty amongst human souls."[733] Von Hügel was convinced that whatever these reasons might be, they implied a limitation on God's power. Such a limitation is not necessarily a bad thing, for it is argued that God cannot do what is logically impossible for him to do - namely, control the actions of free creatures (implying that compatibilism is false). The second admission that this can lead to, and which stems from a consideration of God's knowledge at

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[733] Baron Friedrich von Hügel, *Essays and Addresses on the Philosophy of Religion: First Series*, p.221.

creation, is the belief that the doctrine of hell involves God in taking risks. Such a commitment to a free will defence of hell might not only involve the belief that God limits his power, but in so doing he takes the risk of creating a world where some may ultimately damn themselves. The Molinist will admit no such risk - God knows all that is going to happen and is in control of what will happen as he has created this world via his middle knowledge, actualising the best possible balance between those who will repent and those who will damn themselves (Craig's position). However, others who retain a strong commitment to libertarian freedom admit that God's choice to create human beings in this way involves a risk:

> God gave us the ability to say yes or no to God. One of the risks God ran in so doing was precisely that God's purposes *would* be frustrated, and this, sadly, is exactly what has happened. God's will is flaunted whenever anyone sins.[734]

It is this idea of God's will being frustrated on which the universalist seizes.[735] Nevertheless, defenders of hell such as Stephen Davis are ready to admit that, "It is just not true that 'God's will is always done.' (Otherwise, why did Jesus teach his disciples to pray, 'May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven' - as if God's will is not always done on earth?) Furthermore, it seems that sovereignty entails only the *power* to

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[734] Stephen Davis, "Universalism, Hell, and the Fate of the Ignorant", p.179.

[735] See John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, pp.343-344.

impose one's will, not the actual imposition of it."[736] The fact that God's will would be frustrated leads to the possibility of God, together with the redeemed, being unhappy because of the fate of the damned. This will be considered below.

(ii) **THE POSSIBILITY OF CHOICE**

Central to the free will defence of hell is the conviction that human beings have a quite radical form of free will. This is the will to do otherwise, to choose God or not to choose God. In our definition of the defence, this free will was formulated as the type that those having it would be able "to choose not to repent / love God / do the good / pursue truth." This range of possibilities is given because different versions of the free will defence of hell view a variety of goals as important. This in turn depends on why the free choice is so important, and why God allowed it (see below). However, the choice will ultimately come down to one of choosing God, or choosing not-God, for all the other paths (virtue, truth, repentance) arguably lead in this direction.

In the debates concerning hell, the focus of attention is less on particular attempts at defining free will than it is on what it means in practice to make such a choice. The issue of whether

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[736] "Universalism, Hell and the Fate of the Ignorant", p.179.

it would make sense for someone to eternally choose to be without God was highlighted in the debate between Craig and Talbott. Other scholars have also turned their attention to this issue, and their arguments will be considered shortly. However, in arguing for a universalist position Marilyn Adams has called into question the whole foundation of the free will defence of hell, what she calls the "idol of human agency".[737] Reading Genesis in an Irenaean fashion, Adams argues that human beings have never had ideal agency. As individuals we go through processes of human development starting from childhood immaturity and eventually reaching adulthood where we possess an impaired freedom due to a whole variety of circumstances beyond our control. Adult human beings are not sufficiently responsible for their own eternal destinies, and God would be irresponsible if he allowed human beings complete control over their ultimate destinies when they possess such impaired freedom. Adams illustrates her argument with an example of a two year old child left in a room full of gas. The gas is safe to breathe, but will explode if ignited. In the room is also a stove with brightly coloured knobs which if turned on would ignite the gas. The child's parent warns it not to touch the knobs, leaves the room, and subsequently the child disobeys and is killed. In this example, Adams believes that even if the child is marginally to blame, the parent would be held primarily responsible and culpable. With regard to hell, Adams believes that God would be held primarily responsible if he created humans who have

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[737] Adams, "The Problem of Hell", pp.311-314.

impaired freedom in a world where their impaired choices result in the determining of their eternal destinies.

However, even though we may agree with Adam's position in the case of the child, the parallels between this example and the case of someone choosing hell are small. Admittedly Craig's defence of hell employs the notion of transworld damnation to justify damnation for the unrepentant (whatever circumstances they may be in) is controversial. With this tool, Craig believes that he avoids the need to deal directly with the circumstances in which God has placed his creatures and how this makes them more or less responsible. He holds that in all circumstances all those suffering from transworld damnation would be damned. Other attempts to defend hell have grappled with this issue, and believe that God is not responsible and culpable in the way Adams imagines, *if* God has done everything within his power to save the individuals in question. If God has done everything within his power, then the freedom given to individuals may not be impaired by human development and other events, and so individuals may then be responsible for their eternal destinies.

Jerry Walls argues for this position to the extent that God must deal with some people in the after-life in order that they are given sufficient chance to know the full implications of their freedom and so choose. Part of the problem that Adams raises, and with which Walls grapples, is that circumstances beyond our control appear to be determinative for our eternal destinies.

Presumably these are within God's control, and thus his goodness is in question. Adams also maintains that these circumstances make our free agency less ideal than is often assumed. Walls' thesis is that God must eliminate such disadvantages by providing all persons with the optimum amount of grace *N* "which represents the optimum amount of influence toward good which God can exercise on that person's will without destroying his freedom."[738] *N* may not be static, but is sufficient grace such that a decisive response could follow. What is such a decisive response? It is not initial choices, but a disposition which is settled and ultimate in nature. Walls sums up the thrust of this thesis in the following statement:

> Unless one thinks there is some reason why God cannot make up for the disadvantages some how, it seems to follow from his perfect goodness that he will do so.[739]

In order to maintain this thesis, Walls briefly inserts the possibility of grace either at the moment of death, or after death. He hints at the doctrine of purgatory, although if utilised this would not be understood in the traditional manner. As it is apparent that not all disadvantages are done away with in this life, and that many do not have the time or opportunity to form a settled disposition toward God if they so willed, Walls introduces the possibility of grace after death.[740] Thus

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. [738] Walls, *The Logic of Damnation*, p.88

[739] Ibid., p.91.

[740] Walls' work suffers from the lack of any explanation of what this after life experience may be. He admits that the

returning to Adams' critique of the prevailing notion of human freedom, even if her criticisms are justified (and her Irenaean approach is certainly debatable), Walls' scheme provides a route whereby difficulties associated with the idea of agency in this life can be overcome.[741] If human agency is not as ideal as we would like it to be, God provides grace and opportunity such that a diminished human agency cannot be blamed for the wrong decision on eternal destiny.

Mental Deficiency

It may be argued that anyone who chooses to go to hell would be mentally deficient (as distinct from irrational). Thus this line is similar to the modern attempt by defence lawyers to clear their clients of guilt due to a plea of diminished responsibility. In reply to this, Anglin has affirmed that

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assumption may be controversial, yet it is helpful in solving the problems associated with hell. His only attempt at explanation is given in footnote 11, pp.169-170: "This involves, of course, some sort of idea of purgatory. Stripped of certain fanciful notions which have become associated with the doctrine, it plays an important role in some Protestant, as well as Catholic, theology."

[741] This links in with the related question which often occurs in discussions of hell - what of those who have never heard the gospel? This is more strictly a question for those studying the relation between the world religions, and how exclusive soteriologies account for a number of different phenomena. However, many writing on hell do cover similar ground. Stephen Davis "Universalism, Hell and the Fate of the Ignorant", pp.183-4, believes that there are chances for salvation after death, but only for those who are either ignorant of God, or psychologically impaired. Anglin, *Free Will and the Christian Faith*, p.180, insists that people who have never heard of Jesus will not go to hell.

someone who is mentally deficient can send themselves to hell, yet only if they have chosen at another point in time to be mentally deficient. In normal circumstances, God would not hold the mentally deficient person responsible, and would do all within his power to restore them to a normal state of mind so that they could choose properly.[742] Adams believes that human freedom is impaired by various "neuroses", and that God could rip out such "dysfunctions". However, taking into account later parts of this discussion, the question of the individual's will to subject themselves to such an operation remains.[743]

Ignorance and Deception

The theology of Duns Scotus is employed by Mark Pestana in an attempt to understand what a rational choice for hell would involve. Scotus' theory of human freedom involved three species of free volition - the freedom of specification, the freedom of contrariety, and the freedom of exercise (or the freedom of contradiction). He believed that "an individual first, is free to attend or not to attend to any object of consciousness, second, is free to attend to an object under its good aspect or under its not-good aspect and third, is free with regard to the volitional disposition elicited by such a conception."[744] Thus

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[742] W.S.Anglin, *Free Will and the Christian Faith*, p.181.

[743] Adams, "The Problem of Hell", p.319.

[744] Mark Stephen Pestana, "Radical Freedom, Radical Evil and

Scotus allows for inaction in the light of a clearly conceived good (second intention immoral acts). In the ultimate sphere, Scotus believed that even if God were present before the mind's eye, it is still within the agent's power to avoid this good, to not-choose God. Why would someone hold back from such a good? The reason Pestana gives is that such a refusal to acknowledge God is possible, on the grounds that we believe that such a refusal will demonstrate the greatness of the freedom of our will. A damned person will claim that "I withheld in order to prove myself capable of so refusing."[745]

> The supremely evil choice can then be conceived of as demurring the realization of the greatest known good (first intention) in order to realize the apparent good of proving to myself that I am capable of so demurring (second intention).[746]

Pestana acknowledges that no first intention would lead to hell, yet an intention of the second order may elicit this result.

> If a being is free to choose God then it is free not to choose God, even in the "face to face". That "not choosing" is a separation and a damnation and if I demur on the splendor (sic) of God in eternity then I damn myself in eternity.[747]

The problem with Pestana's account, illuminating as it is, will

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the Possibility of Eternal damnation", Faith and Philosophy 9 (1992), p.503.

[745] Ibid., p.505.

[746] Ibid.

[747] Ibid.

appear similar to a problem which troubles Jerry Walls (see below). It is that the good of proving myself free is only a good which is "apparent". If this is a deception, then could God not remove such a deception? If it is a self-imposed deception (as Walls argues), it is still not clear why this route to destruction is chosen. Presumably, before Pestana's individual chooses to deceive themselves that demonstrating their freedom by choosing hell is only an *apparent* good, they originally had knowledge that this apparent good is not an actual good. If they had no such knowledge, then they were not able to deceive themselves. And if they did have such knowledge, why choose in the first place to follow this evil path?

In trying to elucidate what it might mean to choose hell, Jerry Walls employs a theme from Kierkegaard. Walls isolates three elements from Kierkegaard's thought. Firstly, that God has given each the task of becoming a self, secondly the fact that sin is for Kierkegaard the theological term for despair, and thirdly the idea that dispositions continue throughout life - there is a sense of continuation of sin. Walls puts the first two together, and uses them along with the third in the following way:

> In this discussion, [Kierkegaard] wants to establish that there is a continuity forming in the life of each person. One kind of continuity is that of living consciously before God in faith. This is the sort of continuity which is established in those who are willing to become selves as God intends. In contrast to this, Kierkegaard wants to emphasize that sin can also be a source of continuity.[748]

[748] Walls, *The Logic of Damnation*, p.119.

The motive is that those who choose hell actually believe it to be better than heaven - that is, the damned get their just deserts (in their eyes), wishing to vindicate themselves and the evil that they have carried out, and at the same time believing that it is impossible for them to be forgiven. However, is this not a self-deception that God could remove? No, for the damned person is ignoring what he or she actually knows to be true. In fact, the deception is one which is self-imposed, where the true facts of the matter are ignored.

This description of the choice and motive of a damned person goes some way in explaining what it means to choose eternal damnation. With regard to Talbott's argument, Walls actually agrees that if a person were to have "fully formed awareness" of the fact that God is the source of true happiness, and that the choice for evil is the source of all misery, then that person would find it impossible to choose evil. However, Walls contends that the model of human freedom with which he works enables humans to have the power to avoid this knowledge of God.

> If it is not within our power to avoid this knowledge, neither is it within our power to choose damnation. And if this choice is not within our power - as opposed to being psychologically possible for us - then we are not free with respect to it. Hence God cannot always remove our (self-imposed) deception without interfering with our freedom. If God allows us to retain libertarian freedom, some illusions may endure forever.[749]

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[749] Walls, p.133.

However, what is not clear is why a person should wish to ignore the reality of God in the first place. Walls asserts that sinners start out on a path and life of evil that leads then to self-deception, yet the initial motive is unclear.

Different from Walls is Swinburne's position which believes that if someone did have a fully informed knowledge of God, and knew what they must do to avoid hell, such knowledge may not help them avoid hell (Walls argument is that people might choose heaven if they had such knowledge, but that human beings might also choose to ignore this knowledge).

> Strangely, it would not necessarily help someone attain the happiness of heaven if God did make it crystal clear to him that heaven existed and provided happiness for the good ... A man who sought the happiness of heaven for *its* own sake could not find it while that was his goal, for it is the happiness which comes from doing certain actions for *their* own sake. The happiness of heaven is a happiness which comes to those who are not seeking it.[750]

Michael Levine criticises Swinburne on this issue. If God made it crystal clear that true happiness exists in heaven, God should also make it clear how this happiness can be attained. That is, God should make it clear that happiness in heaven cannot be attained through seeking it for its own sake. If God did not make this clear, then he could not be said to make the nature of heaven and how to attain heaven's happiness clear. If

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[750] Richard Swinburne, "A Theodicy of Heaven and Hell", in A.Freddoso, Ed., *The Existence and Nature of God*, p.50.

he did make all this clear, then Levine believes that someone could know all this and therefore seek the good that leads to heaven.[751]

However, Swinburne's point remains concerning the motive for entry into heaven, and that whatever knowledge we possess, heaven must not be sought after for its own sake. It remains possible that someone can know about the happiness in heaven, they can know how to attain it, and they can know that it must be attained not for its own sake, yet they still insist on choosing to ignore this path, and so deceive themselves.

Adams has criticised William Lane Craig's defence of hell, not on the issue of self-deception, but rather on Craig's conviction that those choosing hell know what they are doing. Even if people could make such a choice, Adams believes that any choice for not-God (the result of which would be the experience of an horror) could never be properly informed. This is based on the conviction that "horrors are incommensurate with human cognitive capacities."[752] Evidence from the world around us has illustrated how those responsible for horrendous evils, such as Hitler and the concentration camps, had no capacity for knowing what the total outcome of their decisions would be. The ability to conceive of what the horrors of these concentration camps would

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[751] Michael Levine, "Swinburne's Heaven: One Hell of a Place", pp.528-530.

[752] Marilyn McCord Adams, "The Problem of Hell", p.309.

be is linked to the capacity to experience these horrors, yet such a capacity is not available to anyone. Extending this argument to the doctrine of hell, Adams continues:

> Returning to the problem of hell, I maintain that damnation is a horror that exceeds our conceptual powers. For even if we could experience for a finite period of time some aspect of hell's torments (e.g., the burning of the fire, deep depression, or consuming hatred) or heaven's bliss ... we are unavoidably unable to experience their cumulative effect in advance and so unable more than superficially to appreciate what is involved in either. It follows that human agents are unavoidably unable to exercise their free choice with fully open eyes, the way Craig implies we do.[753]

However, there are several criticisms of Adams' position that can be made. Using examples such as Hitler, Adams does not deny that responsibility is involved, only that "agents cannot be *fully* responsible for the horrendous consequences of their actions."[754] Hitler can still be responsible for a great deal. Presumably at some time Hitler had experienced some pain, and had some awareness of the great number of people experiencing this pain as a result of his actions. Even if he were not able to experience the pain of everyone affected, he would arguably have been able to imagine (or even see) what some of this pain may have felt and looked like. Hitler was still responsible in a very large way.

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[753] Ibid., p.310.

[754] Ibid., p.310 - italics mine.

Moving from the example to the doctrine of hell, Adams uses the image of fire perhaps unnecessarily. The tradition has often emphasized the nature of hell as being one of separation from God, and so her other two examples (depression and hatred) may be more apt. Although we can never know what the cumulative effects of these pains may be in an eternity, we do have knowledge of them in this life. All human beings also have some knowledge of what it is like to be without God. In reply to Adams, perhaps it is the case that before making their eternal decisions, everyone has a chance to see God (either in this life, or face to face). All people know therefore what it is like to be with God, and what it is like to be without God. If heaven and hell are final states, then to make the decision with "fully open eyes", all we need to know is that when we choose, there will then be no turning back. Perhaps we cannot imagine making such a choice as in this life we are never absolutely certain what the results of our decisions will be. Perhaps at the final judgement God could make us certain that our choices are irreversible. At that time it may be possible that God would give all human beings fully open eyes in a way that would not impair their freedom. Each person would know what choosing God would mean, and each person would know what choosing not-God would mean. On such a basis a choice could be made (as we have seen, Walls admits that such overt knowledge may occur, but even then people choose the path of self-deception). Swinburne's defence of hell acknowledges that the person choosing hell knows the choices involved and their outcome, because even if they

could not know or imagine heaven, that person would "know that he was choosing not to be a worthwhile kind of person."[755]

Perhaps a different reply could be given to Adams. This would come from those who believe that those in hell essentially get what they want. We all have experience of getting what we want. All that hell may be is an eternity of getting what we want. In the context of discussing whether someone would rationally choose to be in hell, Keith Yandell argues that one of the difficulties in making sense of the choice for hell is that all too often we have in mind a picture of hell that is overly graphic.

> Hell need not include the condition of one's being at one's pain threshold; and less elegant medieval artistic portrayals of the damned need be no more like hell than golden streets and pearly gates, or clouds and harps, presumably are like heaven. ... It does not follow that to live a life in which one ends up in hell is to have a life that one could not rationally prefer to live rather than not to exist.[756]

Irrationality

The preceding argument concerning the ability to see and therefore be responsible for the consequences of one's actions

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[755] Swinburne, "A Theodicy of Heaven and Hell", p.49.

[756] Keith Yandell, "Hell and Moral Philosophy", p.84; such thinking is developed in C.S.Lewis' *The Great Divorce*.

now leads into the important area of whether any decision to choose hell would in fact be rational. This was the line of questioning taken by Thomas Talbott. Even if a person were able to know the outcome of their choice to be in hell, even if they were neither mentally deficient, nor ignorant, nor in bondage to desire, such a choice to choose hell would be irrational. J.E.Barnhart made a similar objection against the Christian doctrine of hell. Listening to what he called the 'Arminian' argument that people choose to be in hell, Barnhart replies:

> Now, this is an unusual claim, to say the least. What it lacks is evidence to support it or, more precisely, it is stated in such a way as to make itself untestable. ... Such Christians have become convinced that unbelievers are more selfish, wicked, and vile than Christians. Hence, unbelievers are portrayed as destined always to choose hell wherever they are.[757]

Barnhart is convinced that the Arminian case rests on the mistaken assumption that unbelievers will make an essentially irrational choice. Some defenders of hell play into this very idea. Anglin, in response to the question "Can a person in hell choose to remain in hell?", writes:

> Yes, it is like a person who chooses to eat some noxious dainty by himself rather than join in a feast. Perhaps he regrets his decision but he sticks to it none the less, out of pride. This is irrational but, precisely, the damned are those who choose to make an irrational response to God's love.[758]

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[757] J.E.Barnhart, *Religion and the Challenge of Philosophy*, pp.124-5.

[758] Anglin, *Free Will and the Christian Faith*, p.181.

Jerry Walls, who attempts to describe the motive for an evil choice in a precise a way as possible, betrays the fact that the *initial* choice is possibly irrational. Having used various examples from literature (especially Milton's portrayal of Satan), Walls explains that,

> What all these cases show us, I want to emphasize, is that hell may afford its inhabitants a kind of gratification which motivates the choice to go there. In each case the choice of evil is *somehow* justified or rationalized. In each case there is an echo of satan's claim that hell is better than heaven. That belief is what finally justifies and makes intelligible the choice of hell.[759]

The 'somehow' betrays the fact that to give an account of the choice itself does appear to be extremely difficult. Thomas Talbott believes that any persistent will to reject God must be a bondage to desire. If it is, then God could remove such a bondage so that freedom is restored, and as there would be no motivation to choose hell, all would then accept the gospel. Yet Kvanvig questions whether desires affect freedom in such a drastic way as Talbott suggests. Talbott must show that an action based on an evil desire must imply some kind of bondage to that desire, yet this is apparently not the case, at least not all the time.

> It is therefore false that any non-ideal motivation constitutes a factor that interferes with a person's

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[759] Walls, *The Logic of Damnation*, p.128 (italics mine).

freedom.[760]

Yet once again, where does the "non-ideal motivation" come from?

In attempting to understand what it might mean for a person to choose hell, the literature often appeals to the example of suicide.[761] Although this may be helpful in understanding why God may prevent intervention in the choice to go to hell (similar to the conceivable but rare situations when we may not intervene in someone's choice to commit suicide), this model does not provide reasons why someone may choose hell. It is possible to understand why someone would rather not live faced with misery or depression or hopelessness. However, what reason could be given for someone choosing eternal misery in the face of a possible eternal bliss?

(iii) **THE JUSTIFICATION OF FREEDOM**

Why does God allow a person to choose hell, to ultimately 'get what they want'?[762] Talbott's contention, observed in the last chapter, is that even if we could understand this choice, even

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[760] Kvanvig, *The Problem of Hell*, p.82.

[761] See Jerry Walls, *The Logic of Damnation*, pp.135-137; the arguments are most developed in Jonathan Kvanvig, *The Problem of Hell*, pp.138-144, 149-152.

[762] See Anglin, *Free Will and the Christian Faith*, p.179, and Geach, *Providence and Evil*, p.139, for the theme that those in hell ultimately get what they want.

if it were possible, God would prevent people from making it. If necessary, he would infringe their freedom. However, defenders of hell have argued that God would not interfere with such freedom, for this freedom is important due to a variety of reasons.

Stephen Davis maintains that "it is not only just but loving that God allows [sinners] to live forever in hell."[763] God shows his mercy in letting people choose hell. In fact, Davis goes one step further and argues that a universalism which forces people into heaven is actually in conflict with God's grace. Hell is the more loving option. Why is it loving? Because God is respecting their human freedom. Most free will defenders of hell are committed to this position which claims that out of love and respect, God grants us freedom to choose for or against him.[764]

Jonathan Kvanvig provides an exploration into why God would allow people to have the freedom to chose hell. One of the observations that he makes concerning the discussion of hell is that there always appears to be a dramatic shift between the divine attribute of love and the divine attribute of justice when moving from talk about heaven to talk about hell. A typical response to this polarisation has been that God must be

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[763] Davis, "Universalism, Hell and the Fate of the Ignorant", p.179.

[764] See, for example, T.F.Torrance, "Universalism or Election?", p.317, and J.Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1988), p.216.

conceived as not only a God of love, but also a God of justice. This may be true, but Kvanvig observes that this only serves to illustrate the problem further, rather than solve it. Thus, when we speak of heaven we talk of God's love, and when we speak of hell we talk of God's justice. The extent to which this is taken can be seen in the thought of Aquinas, who seems to imply that God does not love those to whom he does not grant eternal life.[765]

> Whereas God's love and grace predominate in a discussion of heaven, the focus shifts completely when turning to the topic of hell.[766]

Kvanvig does not believe that this is necessarily inconsistent, only that it demonstrates an explanation that is *segregated* rather than *integrated*. Any explanation for the shift from love to justice cannot be due to a change in the character of God. Therefore, Kvanvig believes the remedy to such a dipolar view, and thus to solving the other problems of hell, must be based on an integrated account of heaven and hell. He pursues what he labels an 'issuant' conception of hell, whereby the same characteristic of God causes the possibility of both alternatives, that is both heaven and hell, rather than locating one alternative in one characteristic (love causing heaven and justice causing hell).

Rather than starting with God's goodness and love, Kvanvig

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[765] Kvanvig quotes from Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, Q.23, Article 3.

[766] Kvanvig, *The Problem of Hell*, p.109.

proposes to go one step back and examine God's sovereignty. Accompanying God's sovereignty is often the view that God's only 'duty' is to glorify himself. Kvanvig analyses Theodore de Beze's belief that salvation and damnation best glorify God.[767] However, it does seem reasonable to say that glorification could happen in a number of other ways. Even if this were not so, this excessive stress on sovereignty may lead us to conclude that God could do anything he wished, and so we would be left with questions concerning the relationship between God and morality. If God is beyond morality, what does it then mean to say that God is good? The force behind this stress on sovereignty is the belief that things which are necessary threaten such power and rule. Such arguments are concerned with maintaining the idea that God cannot be bound by a moral necessity. Without pursuing a full discussion of these points, Kvanvig believes that a traditional Christian position states that God is so good and perfect, in fact necessarily so, that morality does not bind God - rather, he fulfils morality's demands perfectly. Kvanvig therefore concludes that the line which argues for sovereignty at the expense of morality is doomed.[768]

What of the belief that in giving the freedom to choose hell, God's purpose is to glorify himself within the bounds of morality, yet in spite of this God cannot be questioned by human

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[767] Ibid., p.112.

[768] For this discussion see Kvanvig, *The Problem of Hell*, pp.112-119.

standards? Kvanvig attacks this as sounding ego-centric of God! The theologian who takes this view is intending to protect God from criticism. However, Kvanvig believes a better route is to defend God's perfect goodness. Returning to the nature of God, it is recognized that two characteristics of God which are fundamental are those of love and justice. However,

> Is God primarily motivated in terms of love, where this love is constrained in some way by justice, or is God primarily motivated by justice?[769]

Nicolas Malebranche believed justice to be the controlling principle.[770] However, if this be the case, Kvanvig wonders as to the purpose of creation. Does justice provide a reason and motivation for the creation of the world? Kvanvig therefore opts for love, and sees historical Christianity as supporting this claim from the resources of both tradition and Scripture. God's motivations and characteristics are to some extent arranged hierarchically, and the controlling principle is that of love. If this is so, then this picture of the divine must not only be used to inform us about heaven, but also to explain hell. The implication is that to respect a human being's free choices, and to give them the choice to choose hell, is a loving gift. However, thus far we do not seem to be any further in analysing why this freedom is a good thing, and why it can be an expression of God's love.

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[769] Kvanvig, p.117.

[770] See the reference in D.P.Walker, *The Decline of Hell*, p.207

Richard Swinburne's defence of hell plays on his notion of 'supremely worthwhile happiness'. This is happiness which results "when the agent has true beliefs about his condition and gets his happiness from doing what is worthwhile."[771] The possession of freedom allows this happiness to be developed. Only the person seeking such happiness would be suited to the destiny of heaven. Those who do not seek the good, and who are not suffering from false beliefs, would never be happy in heaven. These people are headed for hell like the man who "gradually allows what he does to be determined entirely by the strength of his desires."[772] Such a man has "lost his soul".[773] Swinburne's defence of hell argues that free will is given and operates in such a way so that happiness of a worthwhile quality can be attained. Yet is this happiness not outweighed by the presence of some in hell? Could God not intervene (even temporally) to prevent such unhappiness?

> Free will is a good thing, and for God to override it for whatever cause is to all appearances a bad thing.[774]

Such free will is a good thing because it is "compatible with the goodness of God that he should allow a man to choose the

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[771] Swinburne, "A Theodicy of Heaven and Hell", p.43.

[772] Ibid., p.48.

[773] Ibid., p.49.

[774] Ibid.

sort of person he will be."[775]

Michael Levine has criticised Swinburne's account of heaven and hell at several points. Crucial to his criticism is the belief that Swinburne's analysis of supremely worthwhile happiness is flawed. Levine is not convinced that happiness based on false beliefs would be traded for less happiness based on true beliefs (an argument central to Swinburne's thesis). If one could be happy on the basis of false beliefs, knowing that these false beliefs would never be exposed as such,[776] one might choose this option rather than Swinburne's path of supremely worthwhile happiness (perhaps less happiness but based on true beliefs).

However, Levine's argument does not appear to take seriously enough the happiness that comes from knowing that one has true beliefs. He admits that "the situation is complicated to some extent by the fact that for most of us, having beliefs that are truly based is itself a basis for happiness."[777] Although Levine is right to point out that "this does not suffice to support Swinburne's claim that 'Happiness is surely more to be prized according as the happy man has true beliefs ...'",[778] nevertheless

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[775] Ibid., p.52.

[776] Levine includes this criteria because of the conviction that many people opt for lesser happiness on what they know to be true, rather than for greater happiness based on other beliefs, due to the fear that these other beliefs may turn out to be false and so cause greater amounts of unhappiness.

[777] Levine, "Swinburne's Heaven: One Hell of a Place", p.524.

[778] Ibid.

happiness that comes from true beliefs, plus the happiness that comes from knowing that we have true beliefs, may well be traded for much happiness based on false beliefs. In addition, other defenders of hell have been prepared to admit that those in hell know that their 'happiness' is based on false beliefs. Hence there is no guarantee that false beliefs will never be exposed as such.

Returning to the issue of why God gave such powerful freedom, George Schlesinger provides a free will defence of hell based on the belief that the possession and exercise of such free will is a virtue. He considers that the only people who can enjoy heaven are those who have cultivated their souls such that they can enjoy the heavenly felicity. Those who fail to do this head on the road to hell. However, Schlesinger then asks "why would an omnibenevolent and omnipotent being fai1 to equip any individual with appropriate competence to avoid suffering any kind of loss in the next world?".[779] Schlesinger's answer to this provides a correlation between heavenly and earthly virtue. God's aim is to enhance a person's dignity by giving them free will and power such that they can determine their own destinies. In this life we see freedom treasured for its own sake (for example, political freedom). The theologian extends the value of freedom into the next life, and so each individual possesses "the power

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[779] George N.Schlesinger, "The Scope of Human Autonomy", in K.J.Clark, Ed., *Our Knowledge of God* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1992), p.218.

of self-determination which reaches far beyond the grave."[780] Those who choose hell exercise their choice to express virtue in the life they so choose. If all human beings looked forward to the same state, "then God would have done away with the most superb feature of man's autonomy."[781] Thus, in contrast to someone like Marilyn McCord Adams, who believes that God is irresponsible to give human beings such all-determining freedom, Schlesinger believes that if God does not create humans with such freedom, then the human creature would be diminished.

> It is preferable to be subject to the threat of punishment than to suffer such a reduction in autonomy.[782]

What of people who do not value freedom so highly, and so would gladly give it over to avoid hell? Schlesinger doubts whether these people would be the best to say what is good for them. Even if they were, God's love does not allow this abstention as it would remove these people's most enabling characteristic, that of freedom.

Schlesinger's argument rests on the belief that self-determination (a good thing) is enhanced if it involves the ability to determine ones own eternal destiny as well. This enhancement still carries even if the eternal consequences for

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[780] Ibid., p.220.

[781] Ibid.

[782] Ibid., p.221.

some are hell (a bad thing). These assumptions, common to all free will defence arguments, are strong basic convictions which appear to be difficult to evaluate. The atheologian may choose to respond that the price of freedom is far too high.

One interesting avenue often hinted at, but perhaps not explored specifically, is that such freedom can be justified because those in hell are in fact happy. This is sometimes included in the idea that those in hell get what they want. Milton's Satan prefers to be in hell, and those in hell would not be happy in heaven. If those in hell are happy, then the justification sought for the freedom that leads people to hell may already exist. However, there does appear to be a world of difference between saying people get what they want, and that they are happy. In C.S.Lewis' work, those who stay in hell think that they are better off in hell, but of course the implication is that they are mistaken (and so their greater happiness is not worthwhile as it is based on false beliefs). From the side of heaven, their happiness looks extremely miserable.

Freedom to choose hell may be a good thing if hell itself is in a sense a good thing. Eleonore Stump bases a paper on hell around Aquinas' view of love.[783] As Stump understands it, this view is that to love a person is to will that person good. Good is the promotion of rationality, which leads to right action.

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[783] Eleonore Stump, "Dante's Hell, Aquinas' Moral Theory, and the Love of God", Canadian Journal of Philosophy 16 (1986), pp.181-198.

This good is intricately tied up with Aquinas' notion of being, for to do a good action is to fulfil a rational capacity - to fulfil a rational capacity is to bring into being something which was once only potential.

> In essence ... to behave poorly would be to aim at a decrease of being, and for God to love us is for him to aim at an increase of being.[784]

Hell must therefore be part of God's best way to aim at an increase of our being. Those in hell are kept there so that, even though rebelling against God, the potential that they still possess may be reached. Also, those in heaven are 'protected' from those in hell, and thus may reach their potential of being. If this is the case, annihilation cannot be an option for Aquinas, as the cessation of being would be an evil. Dante takes up these ideas - God demonstrates his love to those in hell by increasing the goodness of the nature that they do have. That is, they are consigned to a place so that they can do the best with what they have got, so to speak. Stump's argument is not that no one can get out of hell, but rather that no one in fact will. Thus the eternity of hell is contingent rather than necessary.

In assessing Stump's position, Jonathan Kvanvig recognises that its strength is that hell issues out of the very nature of God, and thus we can understand why the freedom to choose hell was

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[784] Kvanvig, p.124.

given.[785] Love is the primary force. However, is such a quarantine model sufficient to preserve and enhance the damned, at the same time as protecting the innocent? Those in hell could in fact be harmed - not by divine justice, but perhaps by bullies and tyrants existing amongst them. This could not be excused by saying that the offended damned person deserved such treatment, as it may not be possible to attribute right intention to such bullies, nor to allow that they are legitimate dispensers of justice! If the quarantine is to work as intended, God would also have to protect the damned person from further down-fall, and such an action may involve the infringement of freedom. Kvanvig thus argues that on this model, the best that God could do would be to slow down *degeneration* of being rather than *promotion* of being as much as possible.

Perhaps freedom to choose hell may be more justifiable if it involved the possibility of free persons deciding for self-destruction. If this were so, annihilation could then be justified (and this is the final model of hell which Kvanvig opts for). However, if, as on Stumps' model, being is more fundamental than freedom, such a choice would not be appropriate. If freedom was less important than being, then the defender of hell would not be able to show the falsity of necessary universalism, and so freedom must be at least as important as being if the arguments used thus far are to be

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[785] For this discussion, see Kvanvig, *The Problem of Hell*, pp.123-130.

consistent. Alternatively, freedom could be fundamental, thus implying that well-being had to respect freedom at all times. One problem then with Stump's theory is that disintegration (which Kvanvig concluded could only be slowed by God, not prevented), may then result in a loss of rationality and freedom. If that were so, then universalism may result!

(iv) **FINALITY**

One of the issues that has persistently cropped up is the question of finality. If the choice to be in hell is a free decision made by individuals, what prevents those individuals from later choosing to repent? Theologians who defend hell using free will have had to admit one of two positions. Either that those in hell reach a point when there is no turning back, when the gates are locked by themselves or by God, or that there will eternally be the possibility of repentance for those in hell.

Richard Swinburne's account does not make the possibility of repentance in the after life explicit. However, central to his thesis is the belief that a damned person finds it impossible to choose the good. However, Kvanvig asks whether this is a metaphysical or an accidental impossibility?[786] Swinburne uses the language of becoming - therefore, the impossibility could not be metaphysical, for metaphysical impossibility does not become. On

[786] Kvanvig, *The Problem of Hell*, pp.99-101.

the other hand, accidental impossibilities usually refer to the past and the present, where Swinburne is talking about the future. Even if Swinburne were to substantiate his claim by saying that good actions were impossible *without God's intervention*, universalists would object. If God could intervene, then why would he not do so? Kvanvig believes that Swinburne needs to explain why God still loves, *if* he has actually abandoned those who are in hell. Kvanvig's point is that if good action is impossible, what makes it impossible? And, if talking about this impossibility is in fact incorrect, those in hell may ultimately repent and escape hell.

This discussion is reminiscent of C.S.Lewis' belief that those in hell lock the doors from the inside, and so become "remains" of a human being. Such a concept is hard to understand, yet it appears that if Lewis did not go to the logical conclusion of this line of thought and affirm that the damned choose annihilation, the possibility that they later repent remains. Although we noted that Lewis insists that God knows when enough is enough, for Kvanvig this argument is not sufficient. If God does cut the sinner off at some point, then it appears that God has stopped loving that person. To reply that those in hell continue to sin in hell, and hence the duration of hell is eternal (there is no escape, for those in hell constantly sin) ignores the future possibility of repentance.[787]

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[787] See Davis, "Universalism, Hell, and the Fate of the Ignorant", p.180.

In Eleonore Stump's quarantine model of hell, those in hell are consigned there so that they can do the best with what they can. It is not that no one can get out of hell, but rather that no one in fact will. Thus the eternity of hell is contingent rather than necessary.

Kvanvig's own account of the finality of hell results from the dissatisfactions mentioned above which he has with the cases presented by Swinburne, Lewis and Stump. Kvanvig believes that if a person has a settled rationality, and they choose to abandon God, they ask for something that is logically impossible - that is to exist independently of God. Thus annihilation would be the ultimate result. However, this does not mean that Kvanvig affirms an annihilation doctrine - only that annihilation would be the end result. That someone would see the choice between heaven and nothingness, or that someone will have that choice granted, is another issue. For Kvanvig the teleological character of hell (which will ultimately provide its finality) is annihilation, although the way this may come about is unclear.

> The teleological account of hell just presented does not require that God grant all wishes for eternal separation from himself. Instead, the argument for the annihilation doctrine requires only that persons be given what they choose when their choices are based on settled rational beliefs.[788]

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[788] Kvanvig, p.149.

Annihilation is the limiting case - the issues of whether such a rational choice will be achieved remains. Yet is Kvanvig not dodging the issues? For surely in annihilation God has to actually perform an action, and if such an action is not justified, hell is morally flawed. However, Kvanvig relies on his doctrine of divine conservation. God has to perform an act to bring beings into life. In the example of rational suicide, we may fail to intervene. Likewise, God may fail to intervene in a person choosing hell. The person rationally chooses annihilation, rather than being denied the option of having eternal life given to them. So, if God does not intervene in the choice, annihilation may result.

Considering a second objection, would God not have to know counterfactuals of human freedom to see that a person's choice was a settled rational belief?[789] If God cannot know these, then annihilation may be a limiting case, although it may never be reached. Kvanvig only provides some pointers here to the possibility of God knowing such counterfactuals, whilst admitting that the debate is controversial. Nevertheless, the fact that there are arguments in his favour leaves him optimistic. On this account of the choice to be in hell and the finality of such a decision it is unfortunate that Kvanvig did not provide more material to point towards the possibility of

[789] It is at this point that Adams, amongst others, criticizes Craig's commitment to counterfactuals of freedom - see Adams, "The Problem of Hell", p.318.

God knowing counterfactuals of freedom. For God to know that a person's choice is settled, he must be able to know that in the future they will not change their mind. Nevertheless, Kvanvig's definition of hell as "an afterlife journey toward annihilation"[790] does appear to grapple with the issue of finality. Hell is the individual's choice, rather than God's enforced will, and if people choose to go to hell God's goodness would be impinged if there was no hell. Their choice may in a very real way be final.

(v) **HAPPINESS IN HEAVEN?**

As Thomas Talbott pointed out in his criticisms of William Lane Craig, one of the most difficult areas for any defence of hell to deal with is the blessedness of the redeemed. How can those in heaven be happy if there are others in hell? Even more so, how can people be happy in heaven if there are loved ones in hell? In a similar vein, how can God be 'happy' to know that some of his creatures end up in hell?[791]

Stephen Davis is amongst those defenders of hell who are prepared to admit their ignorance and claim that the answer to

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[790] Kvanvig, p.152.

[791] Jim Packer, believes that "since in heaven Christians will be like God in character, there is no reason to think that their joy will be impaired in this way either." - see "Evangelicals and the Way of Salvation: New Challenges to the Gospel", in K.Kantzer and C.F.Henry, Eds., *Evangelical Affirmations*, p.125.

this issue remains a mystery. He honestly states that "I do not know an adequate answer to this question. ... how God brings it about that the Blessed experience the joy of the presence of God despite the absence of others, I do not know."[792]

In contrast Paul Jensen does not believe that the problem is insurmountable. If a son of his were to become so wicked, were to destroy the image of God in themselves such that they deserved hell, "who is it that I would desire to see both redeemed and happy? The son who once was, or the son who now is?"[793] He uses the example of a parent who loves what their rebellious child used to be, yet hates what they have become. Therefore, if a father was in heaven and the child was in hell, perfect happiness is still possible. However, is it not the case that the father of the wicked son loves what the son used to be, and so regrets (is sad) about the transformation that has occurred? Even more so, it seems that Jensen's example is faulty because he is concerned with corruption in this life alone. When this is extended to eternal life, the problem becomes much more difficult. In this life a father may find loving a wicked son easier and less painful because he has the hope that, in time, the son will return to the fold. In a traditional hell there is no hope of a return, a fact which would surely make the father sad, however much they hated the wicked person which the son had

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[792] "Universalism, Hell, and the Fate of the Ignorant", p.180.

[793] Paul T.Jensen, "Intolerable but Moral? Thinking About Hell", Faith and Philosophy 10 (1993), p.239.

become.

Talbott has made the point that the Christian ethic makes it impossible for even one person to be in hell without marring the happiness of the redeemed, for we are taught to love even our enemies.[794] Jensen replies that the command to love one's enemies is not a command to love their wickedness, but rather a command to love only their souls, the state of which we are ignorant about. God alone knows the state of their souls, and when we share this knowledge, we will think as God does and so hate the sinner's wickedness. Jensen states that "it seems incredible to me that anyone could be supremely happy who did not hate wickedness and earnestly desire its destruction."[795]

However, even if it were possible to hate the wickedness of a person whilst still loving their soul, and even if it were possible to understand why God (and therefore the blessed) would desire the destruction of something he loves (or perhaps, loved in the past), Jensen is still faced with the problem of regret. That is, at the very least the blessed will regret that their loved ones (or even their enemies), chose to destroy in

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[794] Talbott, "The Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment", p.39.

[795] Jensen, "Intolerable but Moral? Thinking About Hell", p.240; Peter Geach in *Providence and Evil*, p.139, takes a similar line, believing that if the blessed were confronted with the damned, we would not wish such evil things to be happy - "At best they could wish that such a thing should no longer be."; Donald Macleod believes that "the redeemed will have no mind but God's" - *Behold Your God* (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 1990), p.107.

themselves the image of God. They will carry this knowledge with them into eternity. It is possible that this will then give way to sadness and anger, marring their eternal happiness.[796]

Anglin briefly explores this notion of regret. God himself regrets the damned's choice, "But God is not unhappy that they now have what they chose to have."[797] In a similar fashion, the redeemed will also accept the sentence of those in hell, "for such is the nature of love - on a libertarian view - that it is freely given or freely withheld, and those who withhold it are to be left to their liberty."[798] The redeemed can be happy, in a sense, because the damned have got what they want. It might be that "hell is unpleasant in a more sophisticated way. Perhaps God gives the damned just the sort of godless life they want."[799] Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that Anglin does not get rid of the notion of regret - the fact that some loss has occurred can never be wiped out.[800]

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[796] Jensen is also faced with Kvanvig's criticism that theologians end up characterising God as having a split personality - when we talk of heaven, we talk of God's love; when we talk of hell, we talk of God's justice and hating the sin. Although such a view is not logically incoherent, it does not appear to provide a picture of God that is consistent as the characteristics are segregated rather than integrated. - Kvanvig, *The Problem of Hell*, p.110; see above, p.356

[797] *Free Will and the Christian Faith*, p.183.

[798] Ibid.

[799] Ibid, p.179.

[800] This ties in with Hoyler's criticism of Talbott for appearing to desire a justice which will undo the evil of the past - see below, f.n.90; in a similar vein, Blocher argues that even universalists have to face the fact that "should all

Walls is himself explicit about the idea of regret. In reply to Hick's criticism that God would be frustrated if hell were to be a possibility, Walls maintains that terms such as 'frustrated' and 'failure' should be changed to terms such as 'regret' an 'disappointment'.[801] Such terms *may* be applicable to finite human beings when in heaven. But what of the infinite God? If God is impassible in such a way that the damnation of the creatures whom he loves does not affect him, is this then a callous God? Or if God suffers, is he then going to end up an emotional wreck? Creel attempts to steer around this path by arguing that God's will is not for our happiness, but for our freedom.[802] If we freely choose, then God's will is done, and happiness remains. Even if we choose to reject him, there is no problem. However, Walls questions whether God really loves us on this model. If Creel is right, then it is not God's will that all accept him and enter his kingdom. And if this is not God's will, then he cannot perfectly love all.

Is the other option then that God's happiness depends on the choices of his creatures? Walls is attracted by this, but chooses to emphasize the term 'regret' rather than sadness. This

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suffering cease, *having suffered* shall never be abolished." - Blocher, "Everlasting Punishment and the Problem of Evil", p.293, italics original.

[801] *The Logic of Damnation*, pp.78-79.

[802] Creel, *Divine Impassibility*, pp.141-143; for Walls' discussion, see *The Logic of Damnation*, pp.106-110.

is not a feeling, but a moral attitude. God is therefore not vulnerable to emotional manipulation, and in the long run it may appear that perfect happiness is a much more complex matter. Perhaps God would have had more regret if he had not created a world of free creatures at all. Such a moral attitude of regret may also apply to the redeemed and their attitude to those friends and family who rejected God and so entered damnation.[803]

Promising as Walls' proposal is, in defining 'regret' as a moral attitude rather than an emotion (thus attempting to preserve God's immutability and transcendence), the question remains as to what is a moral attitude? Common use of 'regret' often indicates a sense of sadness, or loss. If this is so, then Walls has not avoided the problems he foresaw, and God may be vulnerable to emotional manipulation. If regret is simply awareness of a fact, then God does appear to be callous. The middle ground of 'moral attitude' is not clear. As for the redeemed, it may be that their supremely *worthwhile* happiness has to include a certain amount of regret, as this regret is the unfortunate outcome of the gift of freedom. The presence of loved ones in hell, and the regret thus experienced in heaven, is the price paid for freedom. Even if this is the case, the challenge remains as to how any happiness can be present in those who know that loved ones are in hell eternally.

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[803] Yandell admits yet does not explore that God regrets that some choose hell: "... for those who spurn the supererogation of divine atonement, only the duty of respect remains. A divine love worth the name regrets this" - "The Doctrine of Hell and Moral Philosophy", p.90.

Such problems gave rise to Craig's theories concerning the pain-removing power of the beatific vision, or even God removing the memory of loved ones. However, in the last chapter we saw how problematic this might be. Perhaps it is the case that in this question defenders of hell face their hardest obstacle. This may be the case not just because it poses a logical difficulty, but because most people can draw on emotions when imagining the scenario. To be happy forever, whilst those we love are damned forever, is inconceivable to many.[804]

(vi) **PUNISHMENT**

Most of the theologians discussed above wish to defend hell in some traditional manner. However, if hell is a self-inflicted state, what becomes of the notion of hell as punishment? Tradition has usually appealed to divine retribution as the justification for hell. If the emphasis for the justification for hell is now shifted onto the choices of the individual, is there any sense in which hell is still a place or state of

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[804] It is interesting that some theologians who defend hell are prepared to admit that we can never know whether there will in fact be any people in hell. If it is the case that no one ends up in hell, then these problems concerning happiness in heaven do not exist. However, if it is still possible that some end up in hell, then there must be some way in which the happiness of the redeemed and the plans of God will be preserved. Anglin *Free Will and the Christian Faith*, p.178, notes that "Short of divine revelation, we do not know if there is anyone in hell." - see also John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, p.366.

punishment?[805]

Stephen Davis denies that hell is "primarily a place of retribution"[806], yet the damned are still punished in the sense that "hell is the natural consequence of a life of sin".[807] If I knowingly put my hand in a fire, the pain I feel is a natural consequence of that act. Included in the natural event is a punishment. In a similar manner, Davis envisions a state of affairs ordered by God whereby, if I continually break the rules, I place myself on the road to hell. Included in that choice is the resulting punishment. In addition, Davis wishes to retain the concept of God's wrath, for "it teaches us the moral significance of our deeds and shows us how life is to be lived."[808] Nevertheless, he is quick to point out that "this in itself does not justify God in sending people to hell, for it does not justify the divinely-ordained laws of natural necessity that make hell sin's natural consequence."[809] Hence the free will defence.

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[805] This is one of Henri Blocher's criticisms of the free will defence of hell, claiming that "the Biblical picture of the wrathful Lord and Judge of all hardly suggests a mere passive role." - Blocher, "Everlasting Punishment and the Problem of Evil", p.300.

[806] "Universalism, Hell and the fate of the Ignorant", p.178.

[807] Ibid., p.179.

[808] Ibid., p.185.

[809] Ibid., p.179.

Peter Geach employs a similar framework. People choose to go to hell, in the sense that they choose not-God. In addition, the punishment of hell is the natural consequence of breaking God's law.

> The perishing of those who break his law is the natural penalty of their folly and can only resound to the praise of His Eternal Justice.[810]

Geach makes it clear that it is the self-choice of not-God that justifies an eternal hell. Nevertheless, this choice also involves the resulting punishment, a punishment which is natural to the system established by God.

Geach's system at times appears confusing. The natural penalty for breaking God's law is an eternity of suffering (or perishing), and this is to the praise of God's justice. Does this not sound extremely like traditional retributivism? When Geach additionally claims that, "For God a billion rational creatures are as dust in the balance; if a billion perish, God suffers no loss",[811] it seems that retributivism is the order of the day. Yet elsewhere, it is the free choice of hell that leads a person there. How are these two concepts related?

Keith Yandell attempts to clarify the situation. In maintaining an element of punishment, he avoids the notions of retributivism

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[810] *Providence and Evil*, p.128.

[811] Ibid., p.128.

(including punishing finite sins with an infinite sentence) by insisting that the self-choice for hell involves the knowledge that choosing this option is also choosing a punishment. This relationship is explained in Yandell's final definition of hell:

> Hell (as here, and I think classically) construed can be described as follows: a condition of punishment of which the person is aware in which the person is cut off from positive contact with God. I suggest, then, that it is possible that a hell that is a punishment, known to be a punishment, involves no fellowship with God, is bleak on any sensible standards, and contrasts sharply with the better existence involved in being in heaven, might still be the longish end of a life that one could rationally prefer to not existing at all, and be not unjustly condemned to by a being that showed one no lack of respect or of love.[812]

Punishment is just if it fits the crime. God is just in punishing if people cling to their sin. Talbott's claim that even in this case God must exhibit mercy is wrong, for the damned cling to their sins knowing that they are wrong, knowing that punishment will follow.[813]

Kvanvig is adamant that although his free will defence of an 'issuant' concept of hell rejects the retributivist punishment

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[812] "The Doctrine of Hell and Moral Philosophy", p.90.

[813] Note Robert Holyer's criticism of Talbott's methodology which collapses justice and mercy into the same entity. Talbott desires that something more than justice should exist, a principle including justice and reconciliation. However, Holyer points out that what we usually call justice does not include anything extra. "'*Real* justice' in Talbott's sense requires not just restoration and reconciliation; I think it also requires the ability to undo the past. Unless God has the ability to do this (and I know of no convincing argument that he does), I should think that '*real* justice' is even beyond God" - "Justice and Mercy: A Reply to Thomas Talbott", p.291.

model of hell, punishment is still involved. The assumption that punishment is not involved is based on the false belief that punishment is only motivated by retribution. However, in hell punishment can be motivated by God's love. Those in hell end up there because of the nature they have chosen, and once there they are "deprived of the most significant good there is."[814] Although God's primary aim in letting people choose hell is not to punish them but to love them, "in loving the depraved he is forced to act in such a way that persons in hell are punished."[815]

CONCLUSION

The preceding analysis of the free will defence of hell has demonstrated that much thought and attention has been given to the coherence of this particular doctrine. Theologians and philosophers of religion defend a doctrine which they see as central to the Christian faith, not only because of its place in orthodoxy and its relationship to other doctrines,[816] but because the doctrine of hell is the ultimate demonstration and test of one of the unique characteristics of human beings - that is, free will. Nevertheless, important questions remain.

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[814] Kvanvig, p.155.

[815] Ibid., p.155.

[816] See especially the introductions to the works by Walls and Kvanvig, who both believe that hell is a central Christian doctrine because it is, in a sense, the other side of the good news. Without hell there would be no salvation, no Christianity.

If theologians believe that God has foreknowledge such that he knew some would ultimately choose hell, an explanation is needed to explain why God created in the first place. To many the correct response is that of mystery. The 'why' of God's creation is too mysterious to even attempt to comprehend.

If the answer is that out of his love, God created beings with free will such that they could choose to freely love him, then a second question must be faced. Is the possibility of people choosing hell too high a price to pay for such love and such freedom? Basic value judgements, concerning the over-riding importance of freedom, soon enter into the discussion. However, given that God does everything he can to ensure that everyone has a fair chance at making that choice, it does appear that the value of such freedom can be maintained.

As for whether free agents would in fact rationally choose hell, this question parallels similar discussions concerning the fall. The situation of choosing God or not-God resembles that of the traditional image of pre-fallen human beings standing before God. Concerning this John Hick comments:

> The difficulty here is that when we think of a created being thus living face to face with the infinite plenitude of being, limitlessly dynamic life and power, and unfathomable goodness and love, there seems to be an absurdity in the idea of his seeing rebellion as a possibility, and hence in its even constituting a temptation to him.[817]

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[817] Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, p.278.

How can we explain the first human act of evil if we assume a pre-fallen idyllic state? And how can we explain a person rejecting God and choosing hell, even when they have come face to face with God who is the source of all happiness?

In the connected area of theodicy, some have alleged that theologians attempt to rationalize the inexplicability of evil with futility. In Ken Surin's survey of different attempts at theodicy, his conclusion is that only a theodicy which includes the incarnation and the cross can offer any hope. In fact, the intelligibility of evil *per se* may either be irrelevant (to practical theodicies), or unanswerable (to theoretical theodicies).[818]

> Theodicy, it could be said, founders on the 'mystery of iniquity'.[819]

In response then to philosophers such as Talbott, can we make sense of what it means to choose evil, and ultimately to choose against God? In a very real sense, no. But this is not a failure to comprehend what it might mean for persons to choose everlasting destruction rather than everlasting glory. It is part of a larger failure to understand the destructive nature of and force behind evil, and why that evil is manifested in human

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[818] Ken Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp.64ff.

[819] Ibid., p.54.

choices of sin.

Perhaps the largest problem with which any doctrine of hell must tackle is the question of the happiness of those in heaven. How can the redeemed be happy when those in hell are suffering? It seems that any response that will get close to answering this dilemma must be prepared to acknowledge that in heaven there will, at the very least, be some form of regret. The hope is that the beatific vision and the knowledge that those in hell have actually got what they want will go some way in alleviating the pain.

CONCLUSION

The aims of the thesis must now be considered:

(i) A survey of major twentieth century attempts to defend the doctrine of hell.

This thesis has not only demonstrated that theologians have attempted to struggle with the issues involved during the past century, but also that there has been an increased amount of literature dealing with the subject in recent years. Perhaps this is due to the growing discipline of the philosophy of religion, and the increased attention given within that discipline to traditional doctrinal matters. The resurgence of interest is also due to debates within the evangelical wing of the church.

An inescapable fact which has been observed is the increasing emphasis given to the free will defence of hell. With retribution found wanting, the idea that human beings may ultimately refuse God and condemn themselves to hell has proved attractive to most of the theologians considered.

In connection with this, the influence of C.S.Lewis is hard to ignore. Although his thought was less systematic than many others, his imaginative style meant that at the very least his works are referred to in most modern treatments of the doctrine

of hell.

The survey has also demonstrated how different attempts have been made to modify the tradition when trying to restate the doctrine of hell for the modern world. With respect to the four-fold scheme that has been used, the very nature of this investigation into <u>defences</u> of hell means that the *possibility* of hell has never been questioned. However, the other three elements have been challenged from various angles. The evangelical conditionalists altered the *nature* of hell, such that those condemned there would cease to exist. Rahner, Küng, and von Balthasar, together with Lewis and some of the free will theologians, all aired some hesitation concerning the *finality* of hell. Amongst others Walls and Kvanvig have introduced the idea that there may be choices after death, perhaps even in hell itself. Yet most distinctively, almost all those considered have shifted the emphasis when providing a *justification* for hell. The primary justification is the human free decision to reject God, not God's just retribution on the sinner.

(ii) Evaluation of the coherence and strengths of these attempts to defend the doctrine of hell.

Eternal retributive punishment was found wanting due to the missing link in what Kvanvig called the "status principle". Why do sins committed during a finite period against an infinite being deserve an infinite period of punishment?

Although Barth has been defended against the charge of universalism, the argument that he was not a universalist has been found wanting, and so little was discovered within in Barth's theology to help in a defence of hell.

The three Catholic theologians considered make great use of human free will, living in the confident hope that the possible hell will never be a reality. There is much to commend their approaches, yet Rahner in particular confuses the issue with his concept of eternity. More than this, however, it is their strong hope for an universalistic outcome which (although refreshing) urges us to look elsewhere for a stronger defence of hell.

C.S.Lewis attempts to provide this in a very articulate and powerful way. However, even if his apologetic force can be admired, the nature of his material leaves some questions unanswered. Although this may be due more to our forcing of his material, rather than his lack of clarity, it will prove more instructive to examine those theologies which have taken his thought on board and developed it elsewhere.

Side-stepping this train of thought momentarily, the conditional immortality / annihilationist debates illustrate conservative attempts to defend the doctrine of hell. Combined with a free will defence of hell they may answer some difficulties, but to view annihilationism as a defence without addressing the

justification for hell masks the problem. This approach may provide a helpful articulation of the doctrine if attention is paid to why people may ultimately end up in hell.

William Lane Craig attempted to address these issues. Although he mounted a powerful attack against Talbott's universalism, Molinism was found wanting. In addition there were a number of issues regarding the choice of evil, the state of the redeemed, and God's decision to create which remained problematic.

Not surprisingly these also appeared in attempts to defend the doctrine of hell on the basis of human free will. Although recent work has given much thought to these issues, the doctrine of hell as given on these terms must still face up to these problems.

(iii) An Adequate Defence of the Doctrine of Hell.

A doctrine of hell which pays attention to the issues highlighted throughout this thesis, and which bases itself on the overriding importance of human freedom, provides the best defence of hell. However, what of the problems that have been isolated?

Concerning the motive to choose hell, there are two issues involved. One is the initial choice to do evil, and why someone would start the path away from God rather than the path towards

God. Yet this is a problem for theodicies in general, rather than the doctrine of hell in particular. Many have been happy to note such tensions and make appeal to the fact that the ways of God are not the ways of men.[820] The second issue which is more pertinent, is the question as to why someone would wish to choose to be in hell. Our discussion of various defences of hell has illustrated how this question is extremely difficult to resolve. However, the failure to come up with an answer arises because the question itself has been wrongly formed. Christian tradition has never supposed that a person is confronted with making a single decision either for heaven or for hell, much as someone would choose between two different holidays. The discussion between Craig and Talbott was especially guilty of forcing the issues into this warped perspective. Rather, as Lewis (in *The Great Divorce*) and Walls (using Kierkegaard) attempted to illustrate, final destiny is an outcome of a life time of decisions, decisions as to whether to follow the selfish path, or the self-emptying path. The more a person chooses to love and serve God and others, the more they will become a person who would be in heaven. The more a person serves themselves and rejects God, the more they become a person who would be in hell. They become a person who would 'choose' hell. A free will defence of hell must not loose sight of this process, otherwise it is forced to imagine an absurd scenario

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[820] Amongst others see Brunner, *Eternal Hope*, p.183; Blocher, "Eternal Punishment and the Problem of Evil", p.312; Austin Farrer, *Saving Belief: A Discussion of Essentials* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1964), p.154; C.Ryder-Smith, *The Bible Doctrine of the Hereafter* (London: Epworth Press, 1958), p.259.

where a person will choose either heaven or hell in an instant.

A second problem concerns the issue of human free will. Many defenders of hell use this as a foundation stone without which they would fall. However, very few provide an account of why free will is so over-ridingly important. An adequate defence of the doctrine of hell would have to provide this justification. One way of doing this would be to explore the nature of what it means to be a person, and what it may mean to relate to God as a person. Vincent Brümmer has based much careful thought on such an exploration, believing that love is quite impossible without freedom.[821] If we conceive of our relationship to God in personal terms, then there are essentially three ways in which this relationship can manifest itself - either as a manipulative relation, as an agreement of rights and duties, or as mutual fellowship. Love is a relationship of mutual fellowship, and as a God of love this is the relationship God chooses to have with us. God freely gives us his love, and we are able to freely respond. Without such freedom, love is impossible, for it becomes something other than love when forced. As such love is the aim of our creation, human free will is therefore of over-riding importance.

A third major problem is the blessedness of the redeemed. A number of solutions have been examined (for example, Craig's

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[821] See especially, *Speaking of a Personal God* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), pp.61-65 & 139-145.

suggestion that God will enable the blessed to forget the damned, an idea found wanting on grounds of personal identity), yet all have to deal with the fact that once evil has occurred, it can never be undone. Even if the blessed agree with the damnation of some, and the fact that some have got what they have chosen, they will always have to live with the fact that the damned could have chosen otherwise. This regret is one of the prices to be paid for the over-riding importance of freedom.

A final issue is that of punishment. A central element of the tradition which finds its origin in the Biblical material has insisted that hell is in some form a punishment. Yet the modern defences of hell, as based on the free will model, appear to have moved far from this position. A modern defence of hell, which seeks to stand in line with this tradition, must affirm with writers such as Kvanvig and Lewis that the choice to be in hell is the 'flip-side' of God's punishment. The punishment consists of God allowing people to determine their own destiny, to reap the consequences of their evil choices. To end up in hell is a human decision, yet the punishment is divinely ordained. The system which mediates the consequences of actions is set up to be punitive. Nevertheless, Kvanvig's work on rational suicide seems a long way from any idea of punishment - in what way is God involved in this punishment? Perhaps a more helpful model may be the choice to go to the electric chair, rather than the choice to kill oneself. It is conceivable that a desperate criminal would opt to be killed, having recognised

that this is where his actions have lead him, and that such a punishment would be just. Perhaps in the same way the evil person asks to receive their punishment, a punishment in which God has had a hand. There are still problems with this idea, and they would obviously need elaborating and exploring. However, the point is that in order for modern defences of the doctrine of hell to be recognised as standing in line with tradition, not only do they need to adopt the free will defence, but they also need to address the question of punishment.

Although the doctrine of hell is not popular food for thought, many theologians have attempted to defend it to the modern mind. In spite of all the problems associated with the doctrine, I have argued that an adequate defence of the doctrine exists in the free will defence. It is possible that some may ultimately choose a path that leads away from God, a path that leads to hell.

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