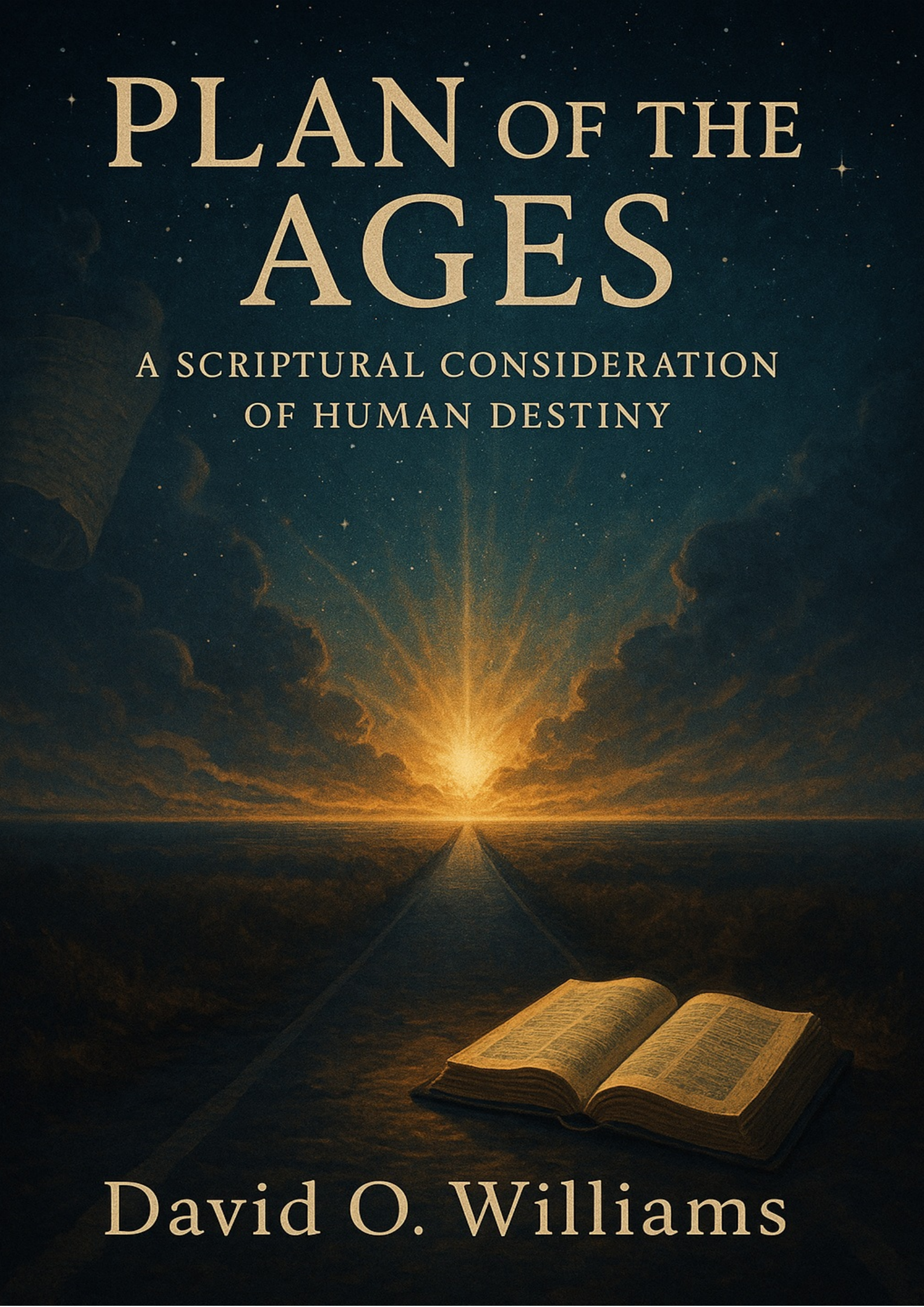
PLAN OF THE AGES

A SCRIPTURAL CONSIDERATION OF HUMAN DESTINY



David O. Williams

Plan of the Ages

A consideration of the scriptural ‘age-times’ in relation to human destiny and the restoration of the Kosmos

- David O. Williams -

Eonian

Plan Of The Ages

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the scholars whose tireless work has largely formed its pages and without which it would never have been written.

Acknowledgements

In the creation of this work I would like to make special thanks to Jo who back in the 1980s first encouraged me to write it; to the two ‘Dave’s,’ who will always be among my most valued friends: David Hood, for patiently assisting my (then) fledgling knowledge of technology and in forming and correcting the early editions; and David Karst, my dear and now departed brother-in-Christ, for his much needed criticism and broad understanding of the scriptures; more latterly, to the scholarly Philip Scranton for his sharp eye and suggestions for the current revision (notwithstanding his considerable contribution to its pages); also, to my new found colleague, Wayne Fair, for his encouragement and engagement in sharing *POTA* with a wider public; lastly, to my late father, David Parry Williams, whose robust faith and generosity inspired its writing.

- In memory of my father (1910-1995) -

PREFACE

All genuine search for truth is controversial. The seeking Christian today should not decry all controversy, for in so doing, he or she may be avoiding new light and growth. The keyword here is 'all,' for it is granted that much controversy *is* beneath the dignity and moral standing of the believer. However, it must be remembered that Christ Himself was a figure of enormous controversy *because* He spoke the truth and gave life; indeed, He was the Truth and the Life. Throughout Christian history, too, there have been many controversial non-conformists. The reformers challenged the 'orthodoxy' of their day and were consequently branded heretics in their fight against religious corruption. The subject of this book has been surrounded by controversy since post-apostolic times. Systematic Christian religion, even to this day, encases it in emphatic doctrines resembling the rigid and irrational dogmas of dark-age theology; doctrines whose strange contradictions still puzzle and alienate not only the unbeliever but many thoughtful believers. Thus, the evidence herein is not presented as dogma; rather, its basis is that of a 'model.' The scientific model (ideally) serves a useful function in matters that remain inconclusive. Such a model, when applied to Christian teaching, allows for the addition or subtraction of any detail as fresh light is received. Unlike dogma, it facilitates action in accord with grace and manifests in the life of the believer a living, growing faith free from the limitations of creed. As J. S. Stewart says, God is alive; therefore, new light may break through at any time. Blindness to this cardinal fact was largely responsible for the fanaticism that nailed Jesus to the cross. And if there is one lesson which today should be engraved upon the Christian conscience, it is this: that "the closed mind in every form, is a thing fundamentally irreligious and heathen" – *A Man in Christ* 119.

David Williams 1988

PREFACE TO THE 5TH REVISED EDITION

The current work has expanded by nearly a factor of four in the same number of decades since its initial release; naturally, such growth demands a new preface, even if only a token. With the advent of the Internet, interest in the book's subject has grown exponentially, though that does not make its theme any less challenging or (sadly) controversial. However, what it *does* mean is that new generations, through changing attitudes and heightened awareness, more openly question inherited opinion on the matter of human destiny. More than ever, people are bypassing the more dubious elements of received tradition, and thinking for themselves.

Over the same number of years, *Plan of the Ages* has undergone significant revision. Several chapters have either been extended or added. The chapters on the *Lake of Fire*, *God All in All* (added in the 2nd edition) and *The Ages in Ecclesiastical History* (added in 2nd ed) have all been expanded; the final chapter, *For the Cause of Christ*, is new to the two most recent editions. Every chapter since the 2nd edition contains new material, while some of the original material has been either withdrawn or replaced. There are also four new appendices (one having been removed), now making a total of seven, along with a completely new *Epilogue* and *Bibliography*. Another recent addition is the inclusion of parenthetical narratives. These are brief or relatively brief commentaries that bear only indirectly on the main text. Their purpose is to round out the subject material. Lastly, it goes without saying that any remaining deficiencies in the grammar, syntax or punctuation of previous editions have been addressed in the current one. That is not to say the text is flawless, far from it; only that every care has been taken to assure a higher degree of quality and accuracy than was evident earlier. Evolving technology has considerably aided this task.

It remains only to reinforce what has already been stated: *Plan of the Ages* is not presented as a dogmatic treatise; it is a 'model' for a faith founded on the well-attested age-based teaching in the scriptures. What is more, most of those who contribute to its pages are, broadly speaking, neither restricted nor dominated by denominationalism or sectarianism. The work is therefore designed to encourage reflection and investigation into a subject over which there has been far too much hostility, ignorance, and intolerance since the 5th century after Christ.

David Williams 2026

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INTRODUCTION

Shortly after the beginning of the 20th century, a book was published by Mary L. Dodds, daughter of the celebrated Scottish minister Horatius Bonar (1808-89). What sets her book apart is its consideration of the "ages" in scripture and how God is using them as the framework for a mighty plan – Dodds' choice of title says it all: *The Ages to Come in the Light of Promise* (1913). While much of Christendom has, at least in part, lost sight of the true significance of the scriptural ages due to poor translations and flawed assumptions, this author strives to restore them to their proper place. In doing so, she reinstates for us a rightful understanding of Divine timing and intention, two prominent goals of the current work.

One of the chapters in Mrs Dodds' book is titled *Jerusalem and Sodom*. On page 156, she refers to the nation of Israel as chosen for special blessing, privileged beyond all other nations, yet rebellious beyond all others and chastised beyond all others. Brought out of her Egyptian bondage, Israel was saved time and again from her enemies. Taught and kept by God Himself, this proud nation was repeatedly brought to the verge of destruction until at last, forgetting the lessons of Egypt and Babylon, Israel commits the sin of sins by bringing upon herself the blood of the Messiah.

If the long, sad story of Israel's fall and rejection has any meaning at all, to what can it refer? As a nation, Israel would not accept Christ as her rightful King and Messiah, so we read in Matthew 23:38: "Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate." In many ways, Israel is a type of the human soul in its relation to God. The New Testament bears out the typical identification of this disobedient people not with the redeemed but with the impenitent. Life and death were before Israel from the beginning: "See (says the Lord), I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil" (Deut 30:15). But the great favours God gave His special people only made them proud and corrupt.

There is, however, a sequel to this story. Suppose it typical of the judgment of the sinner who has rejected light and blessing. Should we not expect deeper destruction and further alienation until every vestige of the Divine image is gone? What other outcome could there be? We examine the long list of woes described in Leviticus 26, verse after verse, with no hint of alleviation until all at once we find an astonishing statement: "But if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers in their treachery against Me" (v40), and "if their uncircumcised heart is humbled and they make amends for their iniquity; then I will remember my covenant with Jacob...and Isaac...and Abraham..." (vv41,42). The Old Testament prophets are full of the story of Israel's fall and rise. Jeremiah, for example, gave continual warnings of destruction and captivity to his people, but the citizens denied them, accusing the prophet of treachery and threatening him with death. Then comes a day when the Lord comforts Jeremiah with a vision of a far-distant time when the curse shall be undone and the exiles restored: "I will restore the fortunes of my people, Israel and Judah...and I will make them dwell securely; and they shall become My people…and I will be their God."

So, where is the counterpart to Israel's age-long banishment from God? If the nation that rejected Christ is reserved for mercy, why should we be without

hope for others who have rejected or indeed never known Christ? If punishment has no purpose except to serve strict justice; if restoration after sin and suffering – even the most intense and prolonged – is not the reality of which all this is the type, what then is the meaning of Israel's history? And why does this history of election and reprobation, love and indignation, span scripture from beginning to end? Why is Israel's wrongdoing and banishment the burden of the prophets, and her restitution their most glorious vision? Furthermore, what is the meaning of the prophecy that the veil that is cast over all nations shall be destroyed "on this mountain" (i.e. Jerusalem)? And why shall it be there that "He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces" (Isa 25:7-8)? And why shall the receiving back of Israel be as life from the dead (Rom 11:15)? Why, but that Israel's history is the history of the human soul drawn to scale.

The reader seeking further evidence will readily find it, for this is not the history of Israel alone. Jeremiah, for instance (48:47; 49:6; 49:39), offers remarkable promises for other nations - promises that lie untouched. But the strangest of all concerns the city that has always personified wickedness; the longest, most compassionate of these prophecies is for evil Sodom! Ezekiel says that God "will restore their fortunes, both the fortunes of Sodom and her daughters...Sodom and her daughters shall return to their former estate, and Samaria and her daughters shall return to their former estate; and you (Jerusalem) and your daughters shall return to your former estate" (Ez 16:53-61). So, who is this Sodom to be restored (see *Appendix I*)? Throughout scripture, Sodom represents the abandoned and carnal sinner, just as Jerusalem is the self-righteous and prideful sinner. Sodom stands for sheer depravity, the pattern of those who go down to the pit and suffer retributive "fire" (Jude 7; 2 Pet 2:6). Yet *both* are to be remembered in mercy.

Some believe that Jerusalem and Sodom stand for the whole human race. There are at least seven verses in the New Testament that tell us that God is not partial; thus, if He intends to restore the fortunes of Israel *and* Sodom, then He must (ultimately) restore everyone! Is there any truly loving Christian, in whose heart the goodness of God has found its home, who would not wish *all* to be ultimately saved (1 Tim 2:4)? In the past, some were taught to pray, "That it may please Thee to have mercy upon *all* men." Do we wish any human being to perish forever, or to be punished endlessly and remain in a state of permanent isolation from infinite Light and Goodness? If we do, then we are surely no disciple of Christ! What of the countless numbers who have lived and died in complete ignorance of this great God, and the Son He has freely given for their sake? Could we desire that they never receive the opportunity to learn of His Love and Goodness in the future? If our answer to these questions is "no" – as it most assuredly should be – then perhaps we need to listen to the arguments of those who think themselves entitled, by scripture, by conscience, and by common sense, to embrace that which many only hope.

Eschatology is the study of ultimate destiny. That opinions on this subject have differed, even in the early Christian era, is made clear by the Latin scholar Jerome. He wrote in the 4th century: "Nor am I ignorant how wide a difference of opinion there is among men...about the promises respecting future things, how they ought to be received." How Christians today receive "promises respecting future things" often depends on the doctrinal traditions they have inherited or the

Church they attend. Such views are usually embraced unquestioningly, without understanding the historical environment that shaped them. This book is to a considerable extent a collective, though far from exhaustive, compilation of the works of theologians, scholars, and churchmen from widely differing periods and backgrounds. In its devotion to eschatology, it attempts a study that is harmonious with the known character of God and His Word, but free (as humanly possible) from competing or corrupting influences. While many have little interest in views other than their own, the writer seeks those who may tentatively, even unconsciously, acknowledge a more hopeful and meaningful end for our race of beings that "God so loves." In the words of the 19th-century Baptist, Samuel Cox, "The main object of this book is to encourage those who 'faintly trust in the larger hope' to commit themselves to it wholly and fearlessly, by showing them that they have ample warrant for it in the scriptures."

In fairness, it must be stated that not all authorities quoted within these pages necessarily share its conclusions, even though their words may lend support to them. The converse is equally true (it may be self-evident): because statements from a particular work are quoted, it should not be assumed that its 'system' of eschatology is endorsed here.

When the barest outline of these views was first presented to the writer many years ago, his attitude, like many, was hesitant and cautious. Even so, the 'spirit man' rejoiced that such evidence even seemed to exist. Then began the long and patient searching that must precede any deeper understanding of the works and purpose of the Almighty. For "it is the glory of God to conceal a thing; but the honor of kings is to search out a matter" (Pro 25:2). This book is the fruit of those years of searching; be it right or wrong, the reader must decide.

The task ahead will entail an in-depth study of words that reflect the destiny of millions; moreover, words that expose the character of God and His purpose with creation. It will involve the reader in learning the importance of grammatical structure and emphasis as they occur in the languages of inspiration. Hopefully, these first two aspects will encourage consultation of that powerful tool, the Concordance. With knowledge thus gained, we will proceed to consider much-debated passages, most of which reflect our topic, eschatology. It is not without deep significance that many of the most puzzling and contradictory statements in our bibles deal with some aspect of this subject. Lastly, a review of Church History, relevant to the issue at hand, is presented in the penultimate chapter.

A variety of bible versions are used. The *R.S.V.* is quoted for its plain wording, and on occasions the *A.V.* (King James), if a particular passage from this version is well known (as above). More literal, independent versions, such as Rotherham's *Emphasised Bible*, Young's *Literal Translation*, *The Concordant Literal New Testament*, and the recently published *The New Testament*: *A Translation* by David Bentley Hart, are also brought into service. These lesser-known versions – certainly less utilised – better reveal the structure, wording, and emphasis of the most reliable extant manuscripts. Moreover, they do not so readily conform to idiomatic preferences, creedal assumptions or traditional bias. Consequently, they may help resolve common anomalies. On occasions, a literal word-for-word translation is presented with a transliteration of the original Greek or Hebrew. Little of this scholarship is the writer's; mostly, it is that of contemporary and bygone scholars. Where available, references with page

numbers, dates, etc., are given for the translation, author, or work quoted. In some cases, these are unknown.

Chapter 1

THE SUPREMACY OF GOD

**I am God, and there is no other; I am God,
and there is none like me, declaring the end from the
beginning and from ancient times things not yet
done, saying 'My counsel shall stand, and I will
accomplish all My purpose.'
- ISAIAH**

One of the most uplifting statements in scripture is the well-known declaration that "God is love." The outward manifestation of that love is shown to us in John's Gospel: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son." But what is the meaning of God so loving the world? Does He genuinely love *all* humanity? Or, as Augustine and Calvin thought, does He only love the world to the extent that He will leave the great mass of humanity to perish? What has made God love us? Is it because all have chosen Him? No, He loves the world because human beings are *His* offspring, created in *His* image and *His* likeness, with *His* Spirit breathed into them, and for other reasons that will become apparent as we proceed.

THE QUALITY AND SCOPE OF DIVINE LOVE

Let us stop to consider what genuine love is. In human experience, its value is often not high; its expression, quite shallow. Indeed, a great deal of *human* love is based on some form of selfishness. Of course, the person who loves does not see it that way. Human love is seldom constant. Like much in our experience, it is inconsistent. Nonetheless, to the extent that we can and do love, we express the divine: "For love is of God and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because *God is love*" (1 John 4:8). The implications of John's words may be greater than we think. He makes no mention of faith; instead, there is a clear and unqualified statement of fact: *anyone* expressing love is born of God and, through that expression (in some way), knows God.

What then is *Divine* love? Within the pages of scripture, God is nowhere presented in conflicting terms. If we talk of the "measureless depths of His eternal love," as the Arminian might with great sincerity, and add that God has made provision for men's salvation, perhaps we should first consider whether God has made provision for His love being eternal based on that same salvation. It is of interest to note that the Reformation's great high priest of limited election, John Calvin – stoic nemesis to Jacob Arminius – in writing his magnum opus, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* passes over what is arguably the most profound statement in scripture, "God is love." He, like many before and since, measured the quality and extent of Divine love by human standards or, even worse, viewed any attempt to establish such love as mere sentimentality…a point of view implying that our attempt to understand or emulate it is of passing importance. One wonders how such a mindset might evaluate the words of 1 Corinthians 13:2, where Paul asserts that *without love one amounts to nothing*! Even those who do

acknowledge God's vast love and strive to express it in worship and praise may still fall short of honouring it in doctrinal expression. This is not to suggest any callousness or insincerity on their part, but such a position nonetheless betrays a certain dissonance. That God's heart expresses the very opposite of selfishness should be obvious from the giving up of His Son. The Son, in turn, proved His depth of love by humbling Himself to a suffering death for a world that did not want Him. While we hear about this 'wonderful' love of God, such descriptions all too frequently become commonplace over time. We fail to realise just how extraordinary, how infinite, and how *enduring* this heavenly expression is. Perfect "Love *never* fails" (1 Cor 13:8)? Is the apostle's depiction in this striking passage of any higher standard than the Divine Love? Can it be that God requires more from us than He gives of Himself? Of course not! This entire narrative is a flawless illustration of the Father's core exemplified and manifested in the life of Christ. For the Son Himself commanded us to love even our enemies. As patristic historian Thomas Allin declares, "Here is the very heart of God disclosed...If God's attitude towards His worst foes is love, that attitude is permanent, is eternal, nay, must be so. Whatever be the sin of His enemies, He must be the same unchanging God of love" – *Christ Triumphant* 48, 49. Indeed, it would seem that "the very heart of God disclosed" has been catastrophically missed by some who, over the years, have unduly influenced Christian thinking.

Of course, Divine Love is *so* great that it lies beyond our understanding (Eph 3:19). The Scottish diplomat and theologian James Young Simpson wrote in 1922, "Nothing more profound or challenging has ever been uttered by human lips than the statement 'God is Love.' It gives a complete philosophy of religion. For if God is Love, and since Love must of necessity express itself in action...it would follow that the age-long process of divine self-communication and impartation that constitute creation began in order to produce a plurality of human souls. It is therefore not one single act of divine Kenosis, or self-emptying and self-limitation, with which we have to deal, for all creation is a process of Kenosis" – *Man and the Attainment of Immortality* 25. The one who therefore insists that God's Love must be limited to the 'elect,' whilst on all the rest He unrelentingly pours out His 'wrath and hatred,' is in jeopardy of making the word of God of no effect. For when the apostle declares alike that "God is Light" (1 Jn 1:5), does this then mean that He has chosen to remain free of any shadow of darkness *only to the elect*? How, too, are we to take that other declaration in the beloved's Gospel, "God is Spirit" (1 Jn 4:24)? Even Calvin conceded the unambiguous nature of this statement: the "*whole essence*" of God is spirit! That being the case, it is indeed baffling how John's assertion, "God is Love," is anything less than Love being God's "*whole essence.*" That Elohim is variously described *as* Love, Light, and Spirit is blessedly assuring *only* if all three are held to be absolute declarations of His Nature and Being…at all times and for all peoples. For as we are repeatedly told, there is no partiality with God.

Further evidence lies in the other well-known Johannine statement: "For God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son..." (Jn 3:16). The standard translation should be sufficient on its own: it was the "world" (Gk. *Kosmos*) – not merely the 'elect' – for which the Father sacrificed His Son. However, the verbs "loved" and "gave" are rendered by John in the Greek aorist, an ancient configuration expressing the indefinite – "The aorist draws no boundaries" (Stagg). While the indefinite is translated into idiomatic English in

the past tense, doing so may obscure the wonderful nuance lying just beneath the surface; the aorist points to a *timeless fact*. When we consider John's text in full aorist expression, a much deeper understanding is derived: "For God so *loves* (did love, does love, continues to love) the world that he *gives* (did give, does give, continues to give) His only begotten Son." Hence, the full beauty and range of the aorist in its unrelatedness to time or space. The conclusion is clear: God's Love for the *kosmos* is endless, timeless and without limitation. It is Transcendent!

Transcendent (or Infinite) Love must necessarily embrace Transcendent (or Infinite) Forgiveness. And this is exactly what Christ leads us to believe in answer to Peter's question, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive...?" Peter's addendum, "up to seven times," would have been generous by the standards of the day. But the Lord's answer reveals a frugality of human grace: "I tell you not seven times, but seventy times seven" (Matt 18:21,22; 'seven times seven' as some bibles have it, is but a further indictment of frugality). As William Barclay proclaims, "There is no recognisable limit to forgiveness." It must therefore be infinite. The most interesting thing about this, which Barclay brings out in his commentary, is that the Jew believed the numerical limit to *human* forgiveness was just three times (probably based on Amos). Therefore, Peter very likely thought he was being generous. But consider this. Israel deemed it improper to be more gracious than God, a view doubtlessly founded on their narrow focus on the 'letter,' rather than the 'spirit.' Indeed, it was little less than legalistic vanity to assume such a thing possible. Douglas White sums this up for us in his book, *Forgiveness and Suffering* (1913). He suggests that the object and mission of the Lord was to reveal "the hidden life of God; to unveil to man's inward eye the face of God; to prove to man that God's heart is a wounded heart, yet a perfectly forgiving heart, because a heart of inextinguishable love" (p 86). Infinite Love and infinite forgiveness must always walk hand in hand.

Christ then goes on to show the consequence of unforgiveness: namely, that we "must forgive in order to be forgiven." So, how does this square with the above? It interlocks perfectly, but the elucidation of *that* we must leave to later chapters.

THE UNITY OF THE DIVINE NATURE

That the God of scripture is Holy goes without saying, yet much of what men have attributed to Him mocks this aspect of His Nature. For how inconceivable to imagine a Good Being calling into existence millions He foreknows will hate Him forever and sin forever, whilst allowing the production of a purposeless evil that will endlessly pollute the sanctity of His once pristine universe! Ironically, God's Holiness is the quality most frequently brought forward to justify this parody; that, and His Justice.

But God's justice must always be viewed within the context of His Love and Goodness, rather than as a separate, forensic element. Indeed, the isolation of any one part of the Divine nature is artificial (as with us). An attribute of God is not something He can modify or isolate in relation to His other attributes. As P. T. Forsyth brings out in *The Work of Christ* (1910), "An attribute of God is God behaving with all His unity in a particular way in a particular situation"

(117). The Divine unity is destroyed, posits Allin, "when we assign to Him conflicting actions, as though his love demanded one course of action, and His justice another; as though God the Saviour were one person, and God the judge a wholly different one" – *C.T.* 208. God's love and justice are inseparable from His goodness and holiness. Therefore, His holiness is loving holiness; His justice, both loving and holy justice. It stands to reason that He can do nothing against His own holy nature; consequently, His judgment on those things unholy is necessary. Let it be clear that this work in no way intends to remove or modify the holy and righteous judgment of God, *as it is revealed in His Word*.

But one marvels at the lack of logic in consigning the 'lost' to *unending* death or misery as if it were in some way necessary to satisfy the Divine sense of justice or holiness, for this can be fairly described as the reality of most eschatological systems. Again, God's concern cannot be everlasting for the few, while ephemeral for the majority. If His Love for the lost is not measureless, then how can we depend on it being measureless for us? When justice is administered through this same Loving Holiness, it must surely operate with the view of ultimate good for everyone. To be otherwise is not only unreasonable but impossible. This in no way suggests that divine justice is without its penal element; scriptures such as Luke 12:47, 48 plainly reveal that it has. Unfortunately, this aspect of Deity has been exaggerated out of all proportion, for these same verses, and many others (as we will see in *Ch4*), place limitations on this side of the Divine purpose. The 4th-5th century theologian Theodore of Mopsuestia wrote, "Neither would He have said, 'he shall be beaten with many stripes,' or 'he shall be beaten with few stripes,' unless it were that the penalties, being measured according to sins, should finally come to an end." It seems that a balanced appraisal of God's judicial dealings was hard-won even in Theodore's day.

SHADDAI, THE ALL-SUFFICIENT ONE

God's highest glory doesn't lie in the sacrifice of His own Son, but in the supreme *consequence* of that sacrifice. If the greater part of the creation for which this sacrifice was made were permanently lost to its source, then the sacrifice to that extent would appear to have fallen short. Just here, we see the magnitude of this illogical thought process. For that which was expressly designed to remedy Adam's failure, Christ's sacrifice, will itself fail. But the purpose declared for the Son's coming into the world to suffer and die was not to 'condemn' it, but "that *the world* might be saved through Him" (Jn 3:17). It was the "world" or *Kosmo*s He was speaking of, not the odd sinner here and there. Do we fully appreciate the consequences of denying God's obtaining this objective? It not only denies Him His greatest glory but also, indirectly, His power and ability to achieve it. This situation impacts Deity even more than humanity because it strikes the greatest blow to the Creator's universal supremacy, as if His wisdom and ability fall short of the mark. Once we establish in our minds the absolute supremacy of God in His universe, we begin to see that with Him all things truly are possible; and that (ultimately) no other power, person or circumstance can overturn His purpose (Job 42:2). This purpose, in Ephesians 1:10, is "to unite *all things* in (Christ), things in heaven and things on earth." The same epistle refers to it, in most

common translations, as His "eternal purpose" (3:11). But more accurately, it is His purpose or "Plan of the Ages," which some of the better versions acknowledge in either their text or footnotes. Here is God's mighty purpose set upon the framework of the age-times: "to unite all things in (Christ)... according to the counsel of Him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of His will." A counsel which is, incidentally, immutable (Heb 6:17).

It is both ironic and enlightening how Calvin (1509-1564) and Arminius (1560-1609) diverged in their perception of God. Thomas Talbott brings this out in his book, *The Inescapable Love of God*. Under the heading, *Three Pictures of God in Western Theology* (p 37), Dr Talbott submits the following supposition: Calvin, on the one hand, claimed God's absolute Supremacy, but at a terrible cost to His Love, which only extended to some; for Calvin saw – as had Augustine 1100 years earlier – *God's will* predestinating the greater mass of His creation to damnation. Contrarily, Arminius claimed back God's absolute Love, but at a sizeable cost to His Sovereignty; for in the end, though God opens His immense heart to all, *man's will* triumphs with the greater number of the race being lost. Had these men freed themselves from their historical bondage to an artificial theistic dualism, they might have come to see that scripture melds both the supremacy of God's Power and the supremacy of His Love into a seamless, harmonious whole. The problem lies squarely with the creed – Calvinist or Arminian – which needs to redress its whole perception of the character and purpose of the Almighty…and (in the case of Arminianism) end its blind subservience to the frail will of humanity. Talbott sums this up in metaphor when he writes of the "Hound of Heaven," who, like the grandmaster in chess, "though exercising no direct causal control over the moves of the novice, is nonetheless able to checkmate the novice in the end" (170).

This idea of 'the grand-master' was first aired over a century ago by the philosopher/psychologist William James (1842-1910). In *The Will to Believe*, James draws a graphic contrast between human insubstantiality and what he calls the Providence of God. James advises against falling back, as many do, on "*fatal* decrees," and to instead "allow (God) possibilities as well as actualities to the universe, and to carry on His own thinking in these two categories just as we do ours." Chance under these circumstances, he suggests, may be uncontrolled even by Him. Accordingly, the course of the universe may be quite ambiguous, "yet the end of all things may be just what He intended from all eternity" (202). Dr James then moves on to the analogy, "Suppose two men before a chessboard, given the one a novice, the other an expert player of the game. The expert intends to win but cannot foresee exactly what any one actual move of his adversary may be. He knows, however, all the possible moves of the latter; and he knows in advance how to meet each of them by a move of his own, which leads in the direction of victory. And the victory infallibly arrives, after no matter how devious a course, in the one predestined form of checkmate to the novice's king" (203). Beyond doubt, the God James describes here is wiser and more majestic by far than the one commonly portrayed.

Sovereign Power and Sovereign Love, *united*, are more than a match for fleeting human will. To paraphrase the Psalmist: What is man that we are mindful of him...or his son that we need pay heed to *him*? The Book of Daniel reveals that even the most illustrious and tenacious royal 'wills' collapse like a pack of cards at the bidding of the *real* power behind the throne. Nebuchadnezzar was a king of kings who obtained an empire indescribably greater than any before; he nonetheless had still to learn that "the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomsoever He will." Pride lifted its haughty head many times before this lesson was fully owned.

It is consoling to see God's patience in this incident. Twelve months after Nebuchadnezzar had received the lesson in a dream, he "walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon and said, 'Is not this great Babylon, that *I* have built for the house of the Kingdom by the might of *my* power, and for the honour of *my* majesty?' While these words were in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, 'O king Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken, the kingdom is departed from you'" – Daniel 4:29-31. Instantly, the decree was executed – seven years among the beasts of the field. His sentence over, the king at last proclaimed, "I lifted up my eyes to heaven, and *my understanding returned to me*, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honoured Him." Note that it was the *restoration* of his "understanding" that catalysed this change of mind and heart, implying that under prior circumstances, the king had been a prisoner of culpable ignorance and foolish *mis*understanding. That God holds the key to all such wilful states is revealed in verse 35: "All the inhabitants of the earth *are counted as nothing*; and *He does according to His will* in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and *none can stay His hand*." These words remind us of those of the Psalmist: "Whatever the Lord pleases He does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deep places" (Ps 135:6).

God's Power In The Presence Of Evil

The introduction of Sin and Evil is one of the most mysterious and debated topics of the Christian faith. Within this apparent enigma, exists an extremity of views ranging from making God the very author of evil (Isa 45:7) to the rejection of any notion of His willingness, or even ability, to so much as look upon it (Hab 1:13). Within this labyrinth, however, one thing remains certain: it is quite wrong to suppose *any* form of evil beyond God's control or, more to the point, *outside His ability to extract from it the good*. Were this not true, it would shake the very foundation of Divine supremacy, implying that evil, as the product of some rival agency, had sufficient power to overturn His intent. Of course, none of this is claiming that any evil issues *directly* out of God – as misguided teachers might infer – rather that He creates those agencies out of whom it can and does; creating them with foreknowledge, seemingly with purpose: "I have created the waster to destroy" (Isa 54:16). Assuredly, chaos and calamity open before us if we imagine any evil overwhelming His wisdom or acting independently of Him.

Instances of God using (or *overruling*) evil to further His plans abound in scripture, such as the well-known case of Joseph. Here the crime committed by the sons of Israel against their younger sibling was over-ruled by God Himself

for the good of all: "Do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life" (Gen 45:5). Joseph is classically seen as a 'type' of the Saviour to come, the Christ towards whom all prophesy points. Its supreme fulfilment, of course, appears in the pages of the New Testament: The sacrifice of Christ is the most perfect example of the Father bringing ultimate blessing out of the most iniquitous evil. Thus, writes A. E. Knoch: "If it was essential that ignorant, ungodly men commit the sin of sins in order that the foundation stone of future bliss be securely laid, can we not see in this a great example of the method by which God will transmute all sin into eventual good?" – *The Problem of Evil* 74.

When faced, then, with the question of where evil and sin come from, we may answer, 'from fallen man, evil spirits, or the evil one.' But in the end, it is God who holds the key. Through His absolute supremacy, evil is *His* prerogative, not ours. Humanity is overcome by evil, whereas God, as the great Divine paradox, overcomes by means of it. The laws He gives to men do not bind Him, for laws are only for those who need them. His law is the conduct of His own perfect nature, which, as we have seen, is Love; and Love, as the perfect ethical standard, fulfils all the requirements of the law. The states we presently call sin and evil are but the first act of a mighty drama within what scripture calls the "age-times"; we must await the final curtain, at the end of the ages, to judge what they mean (This subject is taken up again in *Chapter 10*).

Human Freedom And The Purpose Of God.

Our next topic logically follows on from the last. How do individual choice and freedom impact salvation and our overall theme? Concerning the present order, we might consider the following facts: Firstly, it is not true that human beings are free to choose where they are born, at what time, and under what circumstances; nor do they control events over the vulnerable years of infancy and childhood – events that may colour virtually every aspect of adult life. Secondly, no man or woman exercises power over the highly complex matter of genetics. Hereditary influences also play a significant role (positive and negative) in shaping a person's life and character. Thirdly, the length of individual lives varies. This factor – again beyond our normative control – creates significant disparity in our perception of spiritual matters. Taking all things into account, it is somewhat trite to suggest that any are *wholly* 'free' as to choice.

That human beings have a degree of liberty at all is not despite God's sovereign rule, but *because of it*. God's absolute supremacy allows Him to grant men and women individual expression. One can readily see how such liberty involves far greater wisdom and power than any mere puppet show could. But our freedom is relative; it is relative to the *absolute will of God*, it being the only fully free and independent will in the universe. We might therefore side with the thinking of Robert B. Withers, who formulates the following: "God has delegated to His creatures a considerable measure of control over the future, yet His ultimate purpose cannot, by any means, be deflected one hair's breadth." How this is carried out is, of course, as big a mystery as that of the introduction and purpose of evil, though God provides many illustrations of the process.

The greatest of these is again the crucifixion of Christ. While the perpetrators of the Lord's death are considered deserving of the most severe

retribution, they nonetheless did what God's plan predetermined (Acts 4:28). The Apostle Peter tells us that Christ was "delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God (Acts 2:23). Even so, Peter lays the guilt and sin squarely at the feet of the nation: "You have taken, and with evil hands, have crucified and slain." Stephen further denounces them as "betrayers and murderers of the Just One." Those who murdered Christ had the power of choice; as it happens, their choice was in keeping with that foreordained and predetermined by Divine decree. This supreme example bears out a Divine mystery: "The great glory of God's wisdom is displayed in the way He works out His will by means of the ignorance and opposition of His enemies" – *The Problem of Evil* 70.

We see this process again in the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul, but with opposite results. Acts 23 describes how Paul was brought before the Jewish council in Jerusalem. Afterwards, some present "made a plot and bound themselves by oath neither to eat nor drink till they had killed Paul." Before this, however, the Lord had said to him, "Take courage, for as you have testified in Jerusalem, so you must bear witness also in Rome" (vv11,12). As we see, the Jewish council was free to plot, but circumstances prevented the carrying out of their oath, it being contrary to the plan of God.

These two examples teach us that man may desire and determine as he pleases, and as he does, so is he judged: "Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord...therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way" (Prov 1:29, 30). As a man thinks in his heart, so is he; and so does he reap the reward. But as to whether that same man can carry out the desires of his heart remains subservient to the Divine will. Thus, it is true that men and women have a degree of liberty, but nowhere does scripture hint that God has equipped anyone, great or small, with a power that can overturn His own resolve. It is preposterous, as J. W. Williams declares, that mere "specks of dust should thwart the will of Him who 'hangeth the earth upon nothing,' 'taketh up the isles as a very little thing,' and creates a universe so vast that tiny man must measure its far-flung spaces by light years" – *The Mystery Of Evil* 16. So too, C. L. Saunders, who writes, "It is quite obvious that the Divine Plan to bring the whole creation into harmony with the Divine Will and Divine Mind cannot be frustrated by the foolish will of fallen man" – *The People Stir*. Lastly, Alan Burns writes, "The puny rudder of man's misnamed 'freewill' cannot resist the surging tides of God…Humanity is not a divine speculation but rather one of God's investments…(He) is the God of certainty and not of chance" – *Faith Fellowship*. For too long, religious agendas have, perhaps unconsciously, forced God into a 'might have happened' category; we should utterly recoil from such foolish fancies. Temporarily, humanity's will may oppose Him; nonetheless, His purpose must have its ultimate fulfilment – despite it or even *through it* – for "surely the wrath of man shall praise You" (Ps 76:10). We all too easily forget (or fail to acknowledge in the first place) that God Himself implanted such power as presently exists in man to oppose Him.

WHY WAS MAN CREATED?

The Lutheran book *The Explanation* asks, "Why (or for what purpose) did God create man?" The answer given is, "That he should be eternally blessed and

happy." Augustine never spoke a more profound truth than when he said, "Man has sprung from God and cannot be satisfied before he rests in Him" – Book I, *Confessions*. Indeed, man was made for fellowship with His Maker. Let us never forget the enormity of the biblical promise: "He shall see the fruit of the travail of His soul *and be satisfied*" (Isa 53:11).

Far too much emphasis has been laid on the sacred altar of 'free will' – a tenuous thing at best and subject to all manner of external forces – while nowhere near enough has been placed on the measureless and perfectly free will of the Most High (*Elyon*). Indeed, that human volition could endlessly frustrate the Almighty's plan for him involves, in effect, a denial of virtually every aspect of His Sovereignty. Can we not therefore see that if God placed the vital matter of salvation *solely* in the hands of men, and excluded Himself from the right, at some distant time, to affect change – not by violating individual wills, but by *touching human spirits* – then He laid the foundation for the most far-reaching failure of the universe? The great majority has acted as if such a thing were a foregone conclusion. As with William James, R. Ernest Ludlow throws out a challenge to this very humanised prospect: "The Great Potter who formed man, causing all his organs to function and coordinate, is wonderfully able to regulate and control the creature He has made. He is able to circumscribe all man's experiences in order that the consummation will be gloriously successful. This fact is verified by such scriptures as Ezekiel 36:27, which says, 'I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them.'" – *The Blessing of All the Families of the Earth* 91, 92.

Let us, therefore, give the Great Potter credit for having more wisdom than a mere maker of fine china! We will see in future chapters how God's creative purpose is not complete until the clay is subjected to the "fiery trials" of judgment and discipline. Like the potter, his work is progressive; for the moment, it is incomplete. Regrettably, all too often, when observing the scriptural progression, we view it from the narrow perspective of creed. Consequently, like His special people of old, we "limit the Holy One of Israel." As one has rightly said, "I have great hopes for the human race; not because of what man is, or what he deserves, *but because of what God is*."

The Organic Unity Of Humanity

In Acts 17, the Apostle Paul quotes, in complete accord, the Athenian poets: "For we too are His offspring" (v28). These six words witness to how the act of creation unites the entire race. Early Christian thinking fully adopted this view, and many in the Eastern tradition retain it to this day. Sadly, the teaching began to fade in the West in late antiquity (200-700 CE). Since then, one seldom hears mention of Paul's precious words. And yet, as Wilberforce asks, "For what purpose is the history of our race...unless its fortunes were regarded as a whole, and it must stand or fall together?" In the Gospels, Christ refers to Himself repeatedly as the "Son of Man;" it is, in fact, the only personal title that falls from His lips. Why is this so, and what does it mean? As we will see next, His sacrifice was for *the entire race*. While it is true the individual carries their share of life's trials and accountabilities, there is yet a higher truth: the unity of the race within the Divine perspective. Westcott insists that "Our lives are fragments of some larger life," by which he means that all of us are, by necessity, part of the

substance of God. As Thomas Allin sees it, the *Son of Man* "does not deal with the units of humanity, for humanity itself is the divine unit in Redemption" – *C.T.* 175. If this is true, and it is hard to see it as being otherwise, it must hold a powerful practical bearing on the Divine purpose. As we have seen, humanity is a laughably small thing in the eyes of *El Shaddai*; inferior, even, to the angels…*and yet*, "with glory and honour" is that same race wreathed…and placed over the works of God…all is subjected to man. Without qualification, the writer of these words views the entire race as one solidaric whole, whether in Adam or the *Son of Mankind*. All humanity can therefore be summarised in that understated, poorly understood, universal title. Proleptically, God in Christ makes all everywhere His sons: He "is not only God in humanity, but He is, and shall yet place, all humanity in God" – *Who is Our God*? 92. Presently, most do not share this glorious outlook. As individuals, we are, in the main, either too indifferent, too indoctrinated or too self-obsessed to see the race in its unified, corporate form. But "God in Christ" (or Christ as the "Son of Man") does. Consequently, His interest in the race is without bounds; any view less than this must diminish the greatness of our God.

God's Redemptive Plan

A common fallacy with 'the faithful' is to view God's creative activities as a mighty, cosmic experiment that has somehow gone terribly wrong. One may hear a minister or evangelist speaking of 'God's plan of redemption' as if it were an afterthought, a remedy for some unforeseen or catastrophic contingency. Sir John Seeley cut straight through such dissension: "The atonement was planned before the Fall, and must therefore be something more than merely a remedy" – *The Great Reconciliation*. Very true! The apostles bring attention to God having designed His redemptive plan *before* Eden. Peter makes it plain that Christ, as the "Lamb without blemish," was destined before even the foundation of the world, but was manifest at the end of the times for our sake (1 Pet 1:19,20) Paul makes a similar statement concerning the Body of Christ in Ephesians (1:4). Isaiah, too, reassures us that God in His infinite understanding declares the "end from the beginning." A consequence of our forgetting these great truths is the tendency to view God's salvific purpose as merely "escapist narrative," one that leaves, in N. T. Wright's language, "the whole purpose of God and creation out of focus or out of the picture entirely." It is true, of course, that we all – in some way and at some time – taint God with our own limitations. The natural outcome of such projection is all too easily expressed in our dogmas. But if we are faithful to God and honest with ourselves, we will acknowledge our human frailties and humbly accept that there are certain truths God has chosen to reveal to us, and in these we can rejoice. Conversely, there are things He has not revealed – mysteries that for now belong solely to Him. We cannot yet explain how God accomplishes "all things" according to the plan of His will. But we can rejoice in the profound truth that He does just that. The Apostle Paul did not try to explain such mysteries; rather, he honoured the greatness of His Creator with these words:

> **O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways! For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things (Rom 11:33-36).**

In confessing that we presently possess neither knowledge nor understanding to fathom all of God's ways, yet in simple faith believe that His will shall in due time be done, Paul's words become a source of deep and lasting comfort to us.

Chapter 2

GOD WILL HAVE ALL MEN SAVED

Many delight to press the most rigid and literal meaning of every expression of threatening, while they evaporate at a touch all the promises of infinite mercy.
- F. W. FARRAR

Whether we turn to the Old or New Testament, there is overwhelming evidence in support of those who think God's highest glory is infinite mercy. Some insist on emphasising the texts scattered throughout scripture that, at first glance, seem to reveal a hopeless and endless doom for all sinners at the moment of death. But they must reconcile these with a multitude of others that proclaim a future of unrelenting hope. Consider the following texts from the *R.S.V.*:

He is good; for His steadfast love endures forever! (Ps 106:1)
The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always chide, nor will He keep His anger forever (Ps 103:8, 9).
Turn to me and be saved all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. By Myself I have sworn, from my mouth has gone forth in righteousness a word that shall not return: "To me every knee shall bow; every tongue shall swear" (Is 45:22, 23).
For I will not contend forever, nor will I always be angry (Isa 57:16).
Who is a God like Thee, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of His inheritance? He does not retain His anger forever because He delights in steadfast love (Micah 19:18,19).
For the Lord will not cast off forever, but, though He causes grief, He will have compassion according to the abundance of His steadfast love; for He does not willingly afflict the sons of men. To crush underfoot all the prisoners of the earth...the Lord does not approve (Lam 3:31-34).
The Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgressions and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty (Ex 34:6,7).

The last words are especially precious because they explain how God's judgments are but a form of His compassion and righteousness; that for which the merciful plead is ultimate pardon, not impunity. These passages, a mere sample from the Old Testament, will be of little consequence to the one who sees half of God's

character as mercy and the other half as wrath. The 4th-century theologian Gregory of Nyssa viewed such a dichotomy as madness, 'the madness of babblers' (*de Orat*). It seems that in many ways the ancients had greater clarity than we do today. Three centuries after Gregory, Isaac of Nineveh proclaimed, "Among all of (God's) deeds, there is none that is not entirely dictated by mercy, love, and compassion. This is the beginning and the end of God's attitude toward us" – *Homily* 39:22. For those who take the above O.T. verses to heart, an unwavering trust in the steadfastness of God is their reward; if forced to punish or discipline, it is not merely because of His holiness and justice, but also an overriding desire to place the sinner on the correct path. Our attention will now turn to the New Testament Canon.

THE EFFECT AND SCOPE OF THE 'ATONEMENT'

What, we must ask, is the result of the sacrifice on Calvary? Christ died for humanity. In the face of this, will the majority still be lost, and only the gleanings be the Lord's? Where is the victory in such an outcome? To Eve, the promise was made that her seed would bruise the serpent's head (Gen 3:15). The fulfilment of this came when, on the cross, the Saviour cried, "It is finished!" The Lord's great sacrificial work for humanity was complete. But what precisely was that work, and what did it accomplish?

As witnessed in the previous chapter, it is a poor and unworthy conception of God that sees the sacrifice at Golgotha as merely an event in history, an exception to His ways, rather than a disclosure of what He has planned from the beginning, is now doing, and will continue to do until His purpose is fulfilled. There should be neither doubt nor anxiety over this; Karl Barth assures us that the Gospel is the victory by which the world is overcome. That victory was more than just another blood sacrifice under Old Covenant standards; its glory lay in the power to remove, or "*take away* (Gk. *airon*) the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Can the *sin* (not sins) of the world – that is, the collective sin of the *kosmos* – be taken away and yet remain forever? No! What Christ accomplished extended infinitely beyond 'covering.' It blotted out sin altogether! Its universal nature is made clear all through the New Testament: "He is the propitiation not only for our sins, but also for *the whole world*;" Christ died and rose, "that He might be Lord both of *the dead and the living*;" Christ died for "*the ungodly*" and "*the unjust*;" "God laid on Him the iniquity of us *all*;" "He gave His life a ransom for *all*;" and through Him, "the grace of God has been manifested, which is a source of salvation to *all men*." It should therefore be clear that the Son of Man came to seek and save that which was lost (Luke 19:10). Thomas Allin posits the question so few seem willing to ask: "The lost are His charge, and not (merely) some of the lost, a very different thing. Or are we to read this verse thus: 'He came to save the lost, but those in the fullest sense lost He will never save?" – *C.T.* 227.

The short-sightedness of a 'limited election' – at least, like the one typically expressed – is demonstrated by the following scriptures that point to a complete and perfect drawing, saving, justifying, and alive-making. What follows is not an exhaustive list, by the way – more a provisional study that will be extended as our investigation proceeds. The collective evidence from many scriptures reveals the astonishing breadth of the Divine plan.

THE DRAWING OF ALL

"And I, if I be lifted up out of the earth, will draw all to Myself" (John 12:32, *Rotherham*). Dr C. Ryder Smith comments on this verse, "If the phrase 'draw all men' (*A.V.*) means draw successfully, as is probable, the text means that all men will be saved" – *Doctrine of Salvation.* Canon Westcott is equally emphatic: "The phrase must not be limited in any way. It cannot mean merely... 'the elect,' or 'all who believe.' We must receive it as it stands" – *Commentaries on N.T.* Unfortunately, few seem prepared to do that. One attempt to lessen the power of Christ's words here is the removal from them of any association with salvation. But the very next verse should dispel any such notion: "Now this He said signifying by what death He should die." From these words, G. T. Stevenson draws the obvious conclusion: "He was lifted up to die upon the cross, so believers need have no doubt about the fulfilment of His promise" – *Time & Eternity* 71. Other attempts at diminishing the reach of this verse suggest a mere drawing *towards* Him, signifying the temporary effect the Gospel has upon many of its hearers in this age. But John's word "draw," *helkouo*, is an *assertive* verb. Luke mentions it in Acts 21:30, where Paul was *dragged* out of the temple by the crowd. In other words, there was *zero* chance of his escape!

Such specious arguments as the above all but ignore an obvious reality – over the past 2000 years, the vast majority of humanity have lived and died without ever having the opportunity to be so drawn. Moreover, as A. E. Saxby points out: "It was said by the Lord Himself in the same Gospel that 'No man can come to Me except the Father which hath sent Me draw him.' Here is an effectual drawing which no one would dream of limiting; a drawing that ends in a coming to Him, and yet it is the very same word that is used in both cases. The kind of drawing that the Father puts forth in such an effectual way is exactly that which the Son will exert towards ALL men, if words have any force at all. 'Peter *drew* the net to land full of great fishes;' it is the same word. Are we to understand that the net only trended to the land and slipped back again to the deep? No, the fish were counted, 'a hundred and fifty-three, and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken.' This was the Saviour's haul, which He had drawn to Himself by His wondrous power. Shall He succeed with fishes and not with men?" – *God's Ultimate*.

Dr William Petri lists three propositions from John's Gospel he considers "impossible to refute" (*UVB; The History Scrolls* 50).

1. That God has given all things to Christ (Jn 3:35; Jn 17:2).
2. That all God has given Him shall come to Him (Jn 6:37).
3. That none shall be cast out (Jn 6:37).

There is no mention of *when* this drawing will occur; God leaves it to other scriptures to inform us about that (considered shortly). A remnant out of Israel was being drawn then (Jn 6:40), just as the Body of Christ is being called from among the Gentiles presently (Acts 15:14). However, if we take Christ at His word, then we must conclude that the majority 'drawing' will take place in the future. As E. A. Larsen reminds us, "Whatever interpretation you may lay on this scripture (Jn 12:32) as to time and method, one thing is perfectly clear, it

promises a universal drawing to Christ. Millions have not yet been subjected to being drawn" – *Human Destiny*.

THE SAVING OF ALL

"For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and come unto the knowledge of the truth" – 1 Timothy 2:3,4 (*AV*). What adds fire to the debate over this tantalising statement is the Greek word *thelo*, which some versions translate 'will' (as above), others 'desire' or 'wish,' and still others (such as Hart's *The New Testament*) 'intends.' Those who prefer 'desire/wish' assume, not unnaturally, the case won for the human will against the Divine will. But *thelo* is not so easily restricted. The *Complete Word Study Dictionary*, for example, defines *thelo* as "seeing one's desire *to its execution*" …that is to say, "not only willing something, but also pressing on to action." But surely all this is unnecessary; the context says it all – God is God and in the end He gets His way. Despite its traditional eschatological bias, the *KJV* translates this passage more accurately than most. Effectively, God *wills* that all shall be saved. As Hart suggests, "*thelei* in the case of a powerful figure means practically ordains."

And scripture says as much. Genesis 18:14 asks a very direct question, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" Sarah, to whom the question was put, momentarily thought so…but she was wrong. Jeremiah, in response to the same remark, did not think so...and he was right. (Jer 32:27). God reassured Jeremiah of His might and sovereignty over *all* creation. One recent writer claims the prophet's words here serve "as a reminder that nothing is impossible with God. His unlimited power and wisdom enable Him to accomplish anything regardless of how challenging or insurmountable it may seem to human understanding" – *25 Bible Verses*. To this, we say a heartfelt 'amen' and wish it were proclaimed more...from the rooftops. Of course, this is not quite the same as accepting the literal truth of 1 Tim. 2:4, but the faithful disciple might reflect on the inconsistency of believing one and not the other.

In fairness, since Augustine (4th-5th century CE), this passage has fueled controversy. It certainly confounded him, as we see in his numerous attempts to reconcile his evolving views with the text. In one place he says "all" means many (*c. Julian, iv*:*18*); in another, some "of every kind" (*Enchirid.c.103*); yet again that God makes all merely wish to be saved (*De corrept et grat.c.15*); and once more that no one can be saved except those whom God willed (*Enchirid i.c.*; Gieseler). However, there was little need for the Bishop's confusion (or whatever you wish to call it) for the passage holds within it the likely solution. Paul begins (2:1) with the exhortation to pray and offer supplication for "everyone" (i.e. *all* mankind). He then refers to a particular class, kings and those in authority (2:2), to be recipients of our prayers for the simple reason that we, the Body of Christ, *may live a quiet and peaceable life*. Lastly, the apostle explains why it is fitting to pray for all humanity: because God "intends all human beings to be saved and come to a full knowledge of the truth" (*Hart*). Augustine mistakenly deduced that Paul's reference to a particular ruling class (kings and those in authority) meant he was limiting the preceding and succeeding statements to only some from each class. But Paul states his reason, *that the Church may live in peace.* It has nothing

to do with the salvation or election of those in power and authority, nor is it providing an example of the many classes from which God will extract but a few. It does not take a scholarly genius to follow the apostle's logic, though a commanding faith assists its acceptance.

And, by Augustine's confession, such was the faith of the "vast majority" (*plurimi*) of his fellow brethren! One example was Clement, Bishop of Alexandria, who lived two centuries earlier: "His will must take effect. How can He who is Lord of all ever be hindered by another? He will never neglect His own work. Being the Father's power (Christ) easily prevails in what He wishes; so that his design to save cannot fail. He...by the *will* of the Father directs *the salvation of all*" (emphasis added). Clement's last words provide the key to understanding this passage: the Father's will directs the salvation of all. It is by His *Own* will that God accomplishes all things, not by any other. To those who imagine the Creator's 'will' suffers similar limitations to that of the creation, the Latin scholar Jerome (4th C) provides a surprising answer: "None can hinder His doing as He wills...His will is that all should be saved" – *On Ephesians* 1:11.

As (again) to the timing of all this, Ryder Smith informs us, "There is no hint that every man will be saved as soon as he dies. Salvation of all men is a part of the salvation of the universe, and this does not come till the end of the ages." Verse 5 continues (1 Tim 2), "For there is one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all." If, as this verse states, the ransom was planned to be sufficient to secure the release of all in bondage, then can we doubt their eventual liberation? Rather than being told that all receive the testimony now or in this present age, Paul informs us the "testimony" will be given "in its own fit times" (v6 *Rotherham*; or as the *A.V.* has it, "to be testified in due time"). Now, if salvation depends on this testimony, and all agree that it does, how then can they be saved who have never heard it? Larsen spots the obvious incongruity: "Every believer in Christ is aware that there have been countless millions down through the ages who have not heard the message of the great ransom." Why not, he then asks? Because they failed to receive it! "And because of that failure, these countless numbers will be eternally lost. Even worse (as some believe), they will be eternally tormented. All this continues through eternity while those who failed them enjoy the bliss of heaven!" This is part of the reasoning (or lack thereof) that turns many away from Christ.

We say with Gordon Knight: "To limit the possibility of salvation to the earthly timespan presents us with an image of an arbitrary, fickle deity who saves or damns by the luck of the draw...There is no principled way to justify the claim that a person's eternal fate is determined at death." – *Religious Studies 42* (2006) 215.

But then, some may fall back on Paul's cautionary words to the Corinthians: "Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor 6:2). By this statement, they assume *today* to be the *only day*. In fact, there is no definite article used in this verse. Paul is conveying the idea that today is an acceptable time – we could surmise even 'an especially good (or *wise*) time' – for the gratuitous offer. Hart's version more accurately reads, "Look: Now is a day of salvation;" Rotherham is similar: "...Lo! Now a day of salvation." The insertion of the definite article where there is none, while grammatically helpful, is misleading. Today is certainly "salvation's day" – God is beseeching (imploring) sinners "to be reconciled to Him" in Christ (2 Cor 5:20) – but we

should not on this basis dismiss the possibility of a future day for the balance of humanity to fulfil Paul's assurance: that "God is the Saviour of all mankind, especially of those who believe" (1 Tim 4:10).

This last declaration conveys more than is generally seen or accepted. Here, the Greek *pistōn* (believe) reads to those who *now* believe, while the emphasis in the Greek falls on *malista* (especially). One problem with 'explainers' of this verse is that they quote the first half but leave out the second, which, of course, qualifies the first. Paul seems to be effectively saying, "...*especially* of those who (now) believe." The apostle would hardly employ such terminology if what he meant to say was 'only' or 'exclusively.' The inference, once more, is that God is the Saviour of *all* humanity, but *in a special way*, He is the Saviour of those who accept His favour *now*. To the casual reader, none of this may be readily apparent – to the prejudiced, it is simply wrong – but to the perceptive Clement, Paul's words are resoundingly clear: "How is He the Saviour except He is Lord and Saviour of all? He is certainly the Saviour of those who have believed, and of those who have not believed He is Lord, until by being brought to confess Him (Phil 2:11), they receive the blessings suited and adapted to them... All things are arranged with a view to the salvation of the universe by the Lord of the universe" – *Strom.* Lb.vii.

The word "Saviour" employed here by Paul is, incidentally, the same Greek word translated saviour in other parts of scripture, *soter* (forming, as it does, the root of our word *soteriology*, the study of salvation). Both the word and its context indicate the sense it bears elsewhere in scripture – not merely that of a temporary bodily sustainer as has been suggested. Indeed, Paul's preceding and succeeding comments reinforce its intended purpose. The apostle introduces his assertion with the words, "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance. For to this end, we both labour and suffer reproach." He then concludes (v11): "*These things command and teach*." Could it be that the apostle was anticipating a time when this teaching would be rejected?

THE JUSTIFICATION OF ALL

Many Christian teachers recognise that the death sentence has been removed from mankind through the sacrifice and resurrection of Christ. One eloquent example of this is Dr Lewis Sperry Chafer. In his book, *Salvation*, he writes (concerning 2 Cor 5:14), "The subsequent truth in this passage grows out of the primary statement of verse 14, wherein it is said that the death of Christ was for all, and therefore in a legal sense, all have died in that death. The logic is irresistible. If it be admitted that He died for all, then the value of that death has been secured and provided for all, and since this is an undertaking which began with the councils of God, and was ordained to meet the righteous requirements of His own being, these values have been secured on a plane which answers to the highest demands of the infinite." Indeed, the logic *is* irresistible…so equally its conclusion to which we now turn.

Continuing with Paul's writings, we now move to Romans 5:18-19. For an intelligent grasp of what he writes, it is necessary, as always, to see the text within its overall context. Beginning at the 19th verse of chapter 3 through to the end of chapter 4, Paul presents the doctrine of justification by faith. Then, in

chapter 5, he begins to unfold the truth of reconciliation. In verses 6-11, the apostle makes it quite clear for whom Christ died and that His death was conciliatory: it removed the prior enmity and estrangement between creature and Creator, bringing peace. In verse 12, he begins an exposition on the need for this plan of conciliation and the principles on which it operates. The verse establishes the universal meaning of what follows: "...through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin; and thus, death came through into all mankind, on which all sinned" – *Concordant Literal N.T.* He sums up his synopsis in two well-known verses (18, 19), the first of which follows in the familiar language of the *A.V.*:

> **Therefore, as by the offence of one (Adam) judgment came upon all men to condemnation; *even so* by the righteousness of One (Christ), the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.**

Taken as it stands, this simple summary of the preceding arguments contains God's complete plan of reconciliation through justification. Any modification destroys the universal truth it conveys. To clarify what this verse *does* speak about, it is helpful to note what it does *not* speak about. There is no mention of faith, salvation of the 'elect,' or eternal life. To inject any one of these into the text only creates confusion. Nor does it talk about the method by which men may come to possess the gift, any more than it does the timing of its possession. What then are we told? Simply this: The reason why all human beings became sinners under 'sentence of death' *and its cause*, and the reason why all humanity 'will be justified' once freed from that sentence, *and its cause*. Lastly, this verse speaks of two men as representatives of the human race: The disobedience of one and the result – death for ALL; and the obedience of the other and the result – righteousness for ALL.

William Sanday's (1843-1920) *Commentary* on this passage is especially satisfying. He writes, "The particular phase of (Paul's) subject is the parallelism between Adam and Christ, showing the opposite results of the one's disobedience and the One's obedience. In both cases there is a transmission of the effects, but here the resemblance ends. In all else the false step (or fall, as we call it) of Adam and the free gift of God's bounty are most unlike. The fall of that one representative of man entailed death upon the many members of the race to which he belonged. Can we, then, be surprised that if an act of righteousness – the free, unearned favour of God, and the gift of righteousness bestowed through the kindness of that other representative man, Jesus Messiah – should have not only cancelled the effect of the fall, but also brought further blessings to the whole race? To sum up: On one side we have the cause, a single fall; and the effect, extending to all condemnation. On the other side we have a cause, a single absolving act; and as effect, also extending to all, a like process of absolution, carrying with it life."

It is the "parallelism," as Dr Sanday puts it, that is most illuminating in this passage because it is the comparative parallels indicated by "as" and "so also" that require like apprehension of both parts. If we accept the disobedience of Adam as the sole cause for all men coming under sentence of death (which few deny), then by the "so also" we must equally accept that in the same manner righteousness will come upon all men. If there is no case for limiting those under

condemnation, then there is none for limiting those made righteous. So, asks Andrew Jukes, "Why then not receive the teaching in its plain and obvious sense?" Why not indeed! For "Does not the apostle, by his repeated 'much more' (vv15,17,20), show again and again that redemption and salvation are far greater than the ruin? The language seems chosen to obviate the possibility of misapprehension" – *Restitution of All Things* 143. As if to seal the argument, in the very next verse (v20), the apostle says, "Where sin increased, grace increased *all the more*."

THE MAKING ALIVE OF ALL

In 1 Cor 15:22, the same striking balance exists:

AS	**SO ALSO**
in Adam	**in Christ**
all	**shall *all***
die	**be made alive**

Thomas Allin writes, "To a collective death in Adam is here opposed a collective life in Christ" – *C.T.* 178. The Scottish scholar/translator Alexander Thomson (1889-1966) elaborates, "Language cannot more clearly express the idea that the restoration of life shall be any less comprehensive than the reign of death. Wherever death now reigns in mankind, there as surely will life once again supervene. There will be a correspondence in the manner and method of the propagation of life with that of death. As death spreads to all by way of natural generation and birth, so life also is communicated through the channel of a spiritual regeneration and spiritual birth" – *In The Christ Shall All Be Made Alive* 1.

But even with its astonishing clarity, this verse has been made to say something it doesn't. One explanation is that all *who are in Christ* shall be made alive. Of course, transposing the declaration "in Christ shall all" into "all who are in Christ" or "everyone who belongs to Christ" (*NLT*) makes a radical, even deceitful, change in meaning. The problem is that such futile distortion imposes equal limitations on the scope of Rom 5:12, which everyone agrees is universal. *Both* parts of *both* verses apply to *all* mankind if grammar carries any weight at all! Besides, if God intended to convey the thought that 'as in Adam all humanity is dying, even so in Christ shall all humanity be made to live,' how else could He have said it? How many died in Adam? The whole race. How did it die? Was it by voluntary consent? Not at all. In what is surely one of the most wonderful chapters of scripture, we read, "The creation was subjected to futility, *not of its own will* but of Him who subjects it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom 8:20,21). About this verse, Dr Paul Axton in his 2021 paper *Contrasts Between Romans 7 & 8* writes, "Paul is still working in the universal categories he set out in chapter 5 in contrasting the two Adams, but now the *cosmic implications* are spelled out" (emphasis added). Just as we, who have the "first fruits of the Spirit" (v23), shall be liberated from the slavery of corruption and become the free and glorious children of God – "first fruits" being God's assurance of a greater harvest to come – so also will the creation itself be freed

(v21). The apostle includes "all creation" here…past, present, future (Gk. *ktisis*). In other words, it is the entire creation that was *subjected* (passive voice) – moreover, is *still* being subjected – to vanity or futility, not of its own wish but on account of Him who subjects it expectantly…in view of its ultimate, complete deliverance.

The Two Great Racial Heads

Here stand the two racial heads of mankind: Adam (a living soul) and Christ (a life-giving spirit), who represent and act for the whole race. What Adam did affects all; it brought death. What Christ did affects all; it brought life. Just as nothing is said about the time that may, in relation to the individual, lie between Adam's act and the personal experience of death, nothing is revealed concerning Christ's act and the personal experience of life. God merely speaks here about the results. Most of the patristics, even among the Latins, understood 1 Corinthians 15:22 exactly as it stands. Ambrose of Milan, for example, wrote in 380 CE, "The Son of Man came to save that which was lost, that is to say, *all*, for 'as in Adam *all* die, so, too, in Christ shall *all* be made alive'" – *De fide* 7. No ambiguity here!

"Made Alive"

It has been argued that the general subject of this chapter is resurrection; therefore, the phrase "made alive" means nothing more than physical restoration to life by resurrection. The futility of this argument is apparent in the next verse: for it is self-evident that when Christ is declared the *first-fruit* of those being "made alive" (v23), He must necessarily be the first with whom this process took place. We know that He was not the first to experience resurrection. Many were resurrected before Him, but they died again because they were not "made alive" in the sense of this verse. How could they? Death itself had first to be conquered by Him who alone could conquer it, and by this victory over death Christ became the "first-fruit of them that slept." He was the first to be raised in a *spiritual* body, no longer subject to decay or death.

Additional proof lies in the use of two distinct words for "resurrection" and "alive-making." In John 5:21, "the Father raises up (*egeiro*) the dead, and gives them life (*zoopoieo*)." Resurrection means "upstanding," which is part of the logical sequence of being made alive; that is, to impart life beyond the reach of death: "This mortal must put on immortality" (1 Cor 15.53). After Christ became the first-fruit of them that slept, scripture says He "will never die again; death no longer has dominion over Him" (Rom 6:9). But perhaps the best evidence of all lies within the words "in Christ." Appearing over one hundred times in Paul's epistles, this expression (almost exclusive to him) defines the highest relationship possible: harmony and fellowship with God. It is God's ideal for which He has purposed "in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time to unite all things in Him" (Eph 1:10). The universe was in Him originally; it shall be in Him again.

The Three Categories

The words in verse 22, "all shall be made alive," hold within them the greatest and boldest of implications. As Thomson points out, "they govern all the verses down to the end of verse 26." He then proceeds to show how "three special stages are distinguished by which the great work of vivification (alive-making) will progress. That is to say, the totality of the dead is made alive in three categories or orders, during three well-marked periods. Every one of the dead, without exception, must have a place in one of these three categories, 'But each in his own order' (v23)" – *Ibid*. 1.

Category One: "Christ the first-fruit" (v23). *Christos* (nominative masculine singular), meaning none other than the anointed One Himself. He makes a distinct class, "that in everything He might be pre-eminent" (Col 1:18).

Category Two: "They that are Christ's in His presence." Some believe this group to comprise all saints 'in Christ.' Others feel it will embrace all those who walked with God 'in faith,' and those since Christ who, in faith, have taken on His saving name.

Category Three: "Then, the end." Most popular versions insert the misleading word 'comes' here – 'Then, comes (or *cometh*) the end' – doubtless following the lead of the *King James Bible*, which at least had the good sense to place it in *italics*. There is no Greek word meaning 'comes' anywhere within this text, a fact that the more literal translations honour. This addition makes Paul appear to be suddenly changing his subject to 'the end of time' or the end of this present world – to a period rather than an event. "The mistranslation 'the end cometh,'" insists Thomson, "effectually bars the way to the right understanding of the passage. The verb which needs to be after *to telos* (the end) can only be 'shall be made alive' (*zoOpoiEthEsetai*) in verse 22, because undeniably this is the verb to be supplied both after 'Christ a firstfruit' and after 'They that are Christ's in His presence.' Had Paul intended to connect another verb with 'the end,' he could not but have expressed it. The fact that he did not proves that he intentionally continued the construction in which the last verb of verse 22 has to be supplied. The context makes it clear beyond doubt that 'the end' spoken of is not the end of the world, but the end, the last residue, of those who 'in Christ shall be made alive.' The end (*to telos*) in verse 24 is incontrovertibly correlative to the beginning or first-fruits in verse 23. Accordingly, *'the end' can only mean the rank or category of those who last in order attain life*" – *Ibid*. 2, 3 (emphasis added).

Thomson has support here from some theological heavyweights. For example, Francis Burkitt states in his *Journal of Theological Studies* (Vol. 17) that verses 23-26 are all one long sentence, and that the expression *to telos* does not mean "the end of all things," but is adverbial, meaning "finally," as in 1 Peter 3:8. *Liddell and Scott* agree that the strict sense of *telos* here is not the ending of a past state, but the arrival of a complete and perfect one. Lastly, Henry Alford, in his celebrated *Greek Testament*, explains that there are "three ranks" in this passage and the end mentioned is "the rest of the dead." He adds that *epeita* (then) in verse 24, meaning "next in succession," introduces the third rank. It should be clear, too, that if the apostle meant only two classes, he was very careless in his use of the word "each" (*hekastos*) in verse 23. In over eighty occurrences of this word in the N.T., it is never used for fewer than three objects. Even in English, it

makes little sense to say "each" when referring to fewer than three things; "both" is the preferred idiom for two. The third rank Paul mentions must, therefore, consist of the balance of humanity with whom death will be removed. Continuing down to verse 26:

> **Then, the end, when He shall give up the Kingdom to the God and Father; when He shall have abrogated all government and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has placed all enemies under His feet. Even death, the last enemy will be rendered powerless.**
> ***DIAGLOTT* (vv24-26)**

"Sin and death cannot endlessly last," Thomson concludes, "because they did not originate in the spontaneous will of God. Their ultimate complete removal must demonstrate that God is not their author and that they never had His loving approbation. In God's world, the ultimate issue can only be the end of death...the triumph and everlasting reign of life" – *Ibid 2*.

> **And when He shall have subdued all things to Him then the Son Himself will be subject to Him (the Father) Who subdued all things to Him, that God may be All in All**.
> ***DIAGLOTT* (v28)**

Thus, the glorious outcome of God's all-encompassing "Plan of the Ages," Him, All in all His creation. (Not, incidentally, 'all *over* all' – as some assume – the textual evidence supports Paul's use of *en*, meaning 'in,' not *huper* or any other term that might express 'over'). For many devout believers, subscribing to such a view would be little less than idealistic folly. So entrenched is the opposing paradigm that they are forced to deny the essential substance of the foregoing scriptures. To all such, we must ask, are His attributes (outlined in *Ch 1*) insufficient to restore every member of His human family? Will a perfect God never achieve perfection? Dr William Barclay thinks He must: "God sent forth His Son to redeem the world so in the end God will receive back a world redeemed and then there will be nothing in heaven or on earth outside the love and power of God" – *Letter to the Corinthians*. It has been said that the success or failure of an enterprise must be judged by its outcome. Will God's mighty venture with His universe fail when His work is viewed in its completed form? We think not.

At this point, the reader may query (with provisional justification), "Does not the Bible teach everlasting punishment?" Now, there is no escaping the fact that most common bibles *do*. But is this true of the original Greek and Hebrew Scriptures? There is a difference. A bible version, *any* bible (yes, even the sanctified *King James*), is just that, a version of the ancient Greek and Hebrew manuscripts. It is a translation or 'rendering' – in some instances, an *interpretation*, even – by mortal men; moreover, a rendition that all too frequently aligns with established creedal opinion. In any one detail, it may be correct or incorrect, which is why the true Berean should check multiple, and also *independent*, versions to help establish fact (relatively easy with today's Internet). Down the years, innumerable scholars have pointed to the glaring contradictions

that exist in our bibles on this subject: "And the Church's children," wrote Andrew Jukes in the mid-19th century, "have cut the knot they could not untie, by denying one half of scripture to uphold the other half...choosing that half which spoke of condemnation" – *Rest.* 143. More recently (2019), Classical Scholar Dr David Bentley Hart, penned the following, "...it is surpassingly strange that, down the centuries, most Christians have come to believe that one class of claims – all of which are allegorical, pictorial, vague and metaphorical in form – must be regarded as providing the 'literal' context of the New Testament's teaching regarding the world to come, while another class – all of which are invariably straightforward doctrinal statements – must be regarded as mere hyperbole. It is one of the great mysteries of Christian history" – *That All May Be Saved* 94. Could it be, as Hart suggests, "we have learnt to un-see" them?

ESPECIALLY OF THOSE WHO BELIEVE

If, as this work proposes, today is not the *only* day of salvation and 'all' will be eventually restored to God, what then is the purpose of the Church's calling in this present age? A tentative answer is found in the writings of our very own "apostle to the Gentiles," Paul. We have already discovered that in a special sense, God is our Saviour – He is, in fact, the Saviour of all mankind, but ESPECIALLY of those who (now) believe (1 Tim 4:10). We who currently receive God's grace have reason to rejoice in these words. Our salvation is secured, for there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:1). We were chosen in Him "before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. He destined us in love to be His sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will" (Eph 1:4, 5). Through faith, we are *especially* the objects of God's favour, having received His "gift" of life. About us, it is said that "in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:7). C. L. Saunders writes, "Through the work of our Lord Jesus Christ accomplished in us who are willing to become His disciples, God is preparing a people whom He can use in the ages to come, to display the transcendent riches of His grace" – *The People Stir.* In other words, the "Body of Christ" is to become a display vessel, revealing God's gracious goodness. Further, this "Body" is "the fullness of Him Who fills all in all" (Eph 1:23), which is some indication *of the extent* of our calling. Everything God does is in accord with the counsel of His Own will, through which He works out His "Plan of the ages" (about which more will be said in our next chapter). This must be seen in light of what Paul has just established in the two previous verses (Eph 3:9, 10). Here the apostle speaks of a "mystery, that from the ages had been hidden in God…that through the assembly, the manifold wisdom of God might be known to the Archons and Powers in the heavenly places" – *The New Testament* (Hart). Is it possible that in these few verses, we, the "Body of Christ," are given a glimpse of our future – that we should be the instruments of His grace to convey the message of reconciliation to His universe (Col 1:20)? This being so, it would certainly help fulfil that which Paul writes in the first chapter of this same epistle: "And this is in harmony with God's merciful purpose...when the times are ripe for it – the purpose which He has cherished in His own mind of restoring THE WHOLE CREATION to find its one Head in Christ; yes, things

in heaven and things in earth, to find their one head in Him" (Eph 1:10; Weymouth). Thus, "the out calling of the true Church, the Body of Christ, is shown to be quite a big factor in preparing the machinery for a still greater work 'in the ages to come'" – *Saunders.*

Those who, through faith, are presently being called have reason indeed to praise God for His special salvific favour. It should arouse within each one the desire to live a Christ-filled life, rejoicing with those who respond to God's call, yet gracious towards those who do not, just as our Lord is gracious. His plan embraces *all* creation, but that is not to say all lie within the scope of His present plans, which, we are told further, are that of "taking out a people for His name from among the Gentiles" (Acts 15:14). The 'Church' (*ek-klesia*), by definition, is an 'out-called' company. If it comprised everyone, it could not be so defined; nor could it be rescued *out of* (*ek*) the present evil age (Gal 1:4). Concerning this, the Lord's otherwise puzzling words in John 17 provide fresh insight: "I pray not for the world, but for those that You have given me." Comments A. P. Adams: "Pray not for the world! Why not? Christ died for the world. 'He tasted death for every man;' 'He is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world;' Why should He not therefore pray for the world? In this, again, we see the unmistakable evidence of a plan, a prearranged order…according to which all Christ's actions were regulated...He prays for the unity and perfection in one certain class, 'those whom the Father had given Him,' so that the world might ultimately be blessed through them, 'that the world may believe'... 'that the world may know'" – *The Spirit of the Word* 234. Let us then refresh ourselves once more with the word of God:

> **He is the Saviour of all mankind,**
> **especially of those who believe...**
> ***But each in his own order*.**

Chapter 3

ETERNAL OR AGE-LASTING?

The endless life of the believer does not depend on the meaning or duration of the word eternal, but on the facts that the life given by (God) is immortal and indissoluble; that the resurrection body is incorruptible; that death is to be abolished, and that sin is to be put away.
- F. N. POHORLAK

PART I: ETYMOLOGY, USAGE, HARMONY

One of the most important rules of exegesis is that scripture must be interpreted per the original meaning of the terms it employs. When studying etymology (the origin of words), it soon becomes clear that words change their meanings over time. In some cases, the change is radical. The late Anglican scholar F. W. Farrar (1831-1903) was one of many who recognised this as a problem in studying ancient documents such as scripture. In his book *Mercy & Judgment* (1881), he wrote, "The true meaning of words of scripture has been, to an almost incredible extent, confused by the meaning which those words have gradually acquired." And further, that "the words which are prevalent in Christian eschatology have exercised for centuries an influence which does not belong to them. They have acquired meanings which were not their original meanings, and which now convey impressions entirely alien from their significance" (364).

The word 'eternal' has such a long association with the teachings of Christendom that it is assumed (as a biblical phrase) beyond questioning. Our common versions use the terms 'eternal,' 'everlasting,' and the expression 'forever and ever' in connection with many subjects, such as the life of the believer and the punishment of the unbeliever. But dare we face the fact that, despite how 'biblical' these words and expressions sound, what they represent is quite unscriptural? In the words of D. L. Moody's great friend and associate, G. Campbell Morgan (writing in 1898), "Let me say to bible students that we must be very careful how we use the word 'eternal.' There is no word in the whole book of God corresponding to our word eternal" – *God's Method With Men* 185. Rotherham adds, "…it does not appear certain that the abstract word 'eternity' is required even once in all the Bible; so little does the Bible deal in abstractions, so widely, perhaps we may add without offence, is the modern ever-recurring contrast between 'Time' and 'Eternity' a departure from the wise simplicity of biblical speech" – *Reminiscences* 34. On this one word, more or less, hinges our understanding of human destiny; therefore, the evidence of this chapter is crucial in harmonising the conclusion drawn in these pages with scripture itself.

The words commonly rendered 'eternal' or 'everlasting' are the Hebrew *olam* (Old Testament) and the Greek *aion* (New Testament). Our present focus will lie primarily on the Greek noun *aion*, along with its adjective form *aionios*. From the outset, we must stress (again) that our understanding of God's purpose *with* the entire cosmos is constructed on what these words meant *at the time of their writing*; what they have since come to mean is important only by way of

contrast and correction. While shades of meaning naturally apply in differing contexts, it is nonetheless possible to attain, according to Stevenson, a "common basic significance" for both terms. An ever-increasing number of bibles attest to this fact (see *Part II*). In the main, these versions are consistent – often fully concordant – in their translation of the terms, and make coherent, idiomatic sense once their meaning is comprehended. *Appendix VII* provides an example of one of these bibles and compares it with the kaleidoscopic renderings found in what is probably the worst example, the *KJV*.

DEFINING THE TERMS

Most biblical reference works agree that the Greek *aion* approximates our word "age." In their original editions, Strong's *Exhaustive Concordance* provides "age" as *aion*'s "proper" meaning, while Young's *Analytical Concordance* gives "age" as its "principal" meaning. With sagacity, Rotherham hones the above definitions by bringing us back to a few *scriptural* facts: "…it is most important to remember that 'age' is not the primary meaning of *aion*: rather 'duration indefinitely extended'" (as opposed to *infinitely* extended). He expands this concept to mean "concealed duration," emphasising that "concealed duration is naturally unknown and unbounded." Rotherham is not alone. Ellicott, in his famous *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, concurs: "...it must be admitted that the Greek word (*aion*) does not in itself involve endlessness, but rather duration or flow throughout an age or succession of ages, and that it is therefore applied in the N.T. to periods that have a beginning and ending (Rom 16:25)." Rotherham adds that "duration does not fall into ages until it *acquires character*" – Appendix, *Emphasised Bible*.

Adding to *aion*'s mysterious air and complexity is the fact that time or duration need not necessarily be present in the word at all. Virtually all ancient sources support this idea – Greek classicists such as Homer, Hesiod, Sophocles, and Herodotus lend to *aion* the sense of LIFE. From this arose the concept of life*time*, particularly of a long though undefined duration; thus, the idea of time itself was introduced into the word. Later still, when *aion* was on occasions used in relation to the name of God, this 'time' element acquired the characteristic of infinity or eternity. But eternality bore no connection with the term's original connotation. Indeed, it is unlikely that even when scripturally used in relation to God (which is rare), *aion* requires – let alone demands – the meaning of 'eternal.' Any connection with endlessness is unnecessary once the word's purpose within the scriptural context is fully understood. It is hoped that the above points will become clearer as we proceed.

{The nebulous character of the noun *aion* is seen in its assumed roots and derivations. One source links it to *aemi*, the Greek word meaning 'to breathe' – by implication, 'that which gives life.' This is a possible explanation of the early Greeks' use of it for "life." Another connects it with *Aenon*, mentioned in John 3:23, a place name meaning 'spring' or 'free-*flowing* water' – hence, the concept of flowingness. *Aevum* (about which more will be said in *Part II*) is *aion*'s Latin equivalent and refers to "an age," which features some central figure or marked characteristic (as in Rotherham's last statement above). The European names of rivers are also

thought to be derived from *aion*, such as the Avon in the UK, the Aven in France, and the Avano in Spain – which brings us back to the rather lovely idea of 'that which flows'.}

Common grammar supports the above thesis: ordinarily, derived words do not carry a greater force than their parent word. Hence, *aionios*, being the adjective form of the noun *aion*, cannot express a force or duration greater than that of the *aions* or "ages" of which it speaks. A demonstration may clarify this point. The noun 'America' refers to the country called America. Its adjective form is 'American,' and speaks of that which is from or about America. The noun America, therefore, restricts the meaning of the adjective American and confines its expression in coherent, everyday usage. In an identical fashion, *aionios* must be restricted to the meaning of its noun *aion*, which means an age or something of limited duration. The traditionalist often attempts to circumvent this rule by claiming *context* dictates its meaning, but the grammatical rule stands despite this manoeuvre.

Many, even most, bible versions of more independent scholarship honour the above rule and render the adjective by phrases such as 'age-lasting,' 'age-abiding' or 'age-during.' Because these expressions sound somewhat unusual or even clumsy to English ears and do not altogether convey what is meant in all the various contexts, others have found transliterations such as 'aionion' or 'eonian' more satisfactory. Unless there is some historical or literary precedent, aionion or eonian will be the writer's choice for the adjective throughout this work; in the case of the noun, 'age' or 'eon' will (in the main) be used interchangeably.

Controversy and difficulty have surrounded these terms for centuries. Dr Robert Young (1879), for example, associates *the adjective* with the fashionable terms 'eternal' and 'everlasting' in his *Analytical Concordance* (as does Strong [1890] in his *Exhaustive Concordance*). In doing so, Young is likely paying homage to a tradition going back to the Patristic Era of the 2nd or 3rd centuries (see *Part II* of this chapter; also *Ch 11*). However, in his *Literal Translation of the Bible*, Young renders *aionios* "age-during," never eternal or everlasting. It seems that this scholar could not bring himself to translate the Greek with the Latin-derived 'eternal' and still call his Bible 'Literal.' Liddell and Scott retain no such ambivalence in their *Lexicon*. They define *aion*, without resorting to things eternal, as a lifetime, a generation, a long space of time and an age. How, then, have these odd Greek words come to express the cherished and sanctified idea of eternality? Etymology may have played a role here, but assumptions about context are the more likely culprit:

1. a We know that God is eternal.
   b The scriptures call Him the 'aionion God.'
   Conclusion: The meaning of aionion must then be eternal.
2. a We know that the life of the believer is endless.
   b The scriptures call it life 'aionion life.'
   Conclusion: The meaning of aionion must then be endless.

These deductions would perhaps be of less concern were it not for the words being linked to subjects like punishment and fire. Hence, as the life of the saint is 'eternal' or 'everlasting,' so is assumed the punishment of the unbeliever. That God is eternal in the truest sense – having no beginning and no ending – none

deny. But this in and of itself in no way proves (or disproves) that *aionios* signifies eternal. Indeed, as we will see, most scriptural usage fails to support this view. The key troublesome passage is Romans 16:25, 26, where *aionios* is used for that which is endless (God) and that which is limited (past ages) in the space of only two verses. This, incidentally, is the only verse in the N.T. where the adjective (*aioniou*) is linked with God (*Theou*). But the fact of Yahweh Elohim being the *aionian* God (v26) neither declares nor denies His eternality. As G. T. Stevenson states, "Let it be agreed that God is eternal. To then say that he is God of time, God of this age, God of the days of old, or even God of this very moment, does not in any way conflict with his eternal being. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is not by that title limited to the patriarchs, nor does the 'Lord of the whole earth' (Joshua 3:11,13) confine him to the terrestrial sphere. By associating finite concepts of time or space with the name of God, we do not in any sense question or impugn His infinite transcendence" – *Time & Eternity* 36. As if to reinforce Stevenson's words, *The New Testament for Everyone* (2011) translates 1 Timothy 1:17 (Paul speaking of God), " the King of the ages." This is the correct translation – certainly the right meaning – not 'the King Eternal' as most versions have it. Of course, God being the King of the Ages in no way denies or diminishes His eternality. Creation demands His existence, while faith assumes Him as the Uncreated, the Undying, and the Ever-Living One. We no more need to be repeatedly informed that God is eternal than we need to be reminded that water is wet! But that He is the God and King of "the ages" is a distinct and added revelation referring to His authority and power during these eons…the only time (as far as we know) this is being denied. As A. T. Pierson (1837-1911) sees it, this view "adds immeasurably both to the glory of Christ as the Coming King, and the Father as the former and framer of the ages – *The Bible and Spiritual Life* 448.

The translation 'eternal' or 'everlasting' can, as T. J. Silva shows, be used to expose its errors. He compares statements as they occur in the *A.V.*: "We are told that the 'earth abideth forever' (Ecc 1:4), but elsewhere that it shall 'pass away' (Matt 24:35; Rev 21:1). We are again informed that the covenant at Sinai was to be an 'everlasting covenant' (Lev 24:8), and yet that it must give place to the 'new covenant' (Jer 31:31-33; Heb 8:7, 13). The Aaronic priesthood is called 'everlasting' (Ex 40:15), but that it was subsequently 'changed' is clear from later revelation (Heb 7:11,12). And then we read about the 'everlasting hills' (Gen 49:26) that shall 'melt' and 'depart' and 'be removed' with the dissolution of the earth (Isa 54:10; 2 Pet 3:10-13). Had the words eonian, or age-lasting, etc., been employed in these passages, we would have understood that the duration of each was for an age, or group of ages...and not eternal" – *God's Perfect Plan* 7.

Before continuing, there is one verse where the Greek *aionios* is rendered by the *A.V.* as follows: "For the things that are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are *eternal*" (2 Cor 4:18). A critic may reasonably ask, 'If aionios does not mean eternal, then why is it contrasted with temporal?' Strictly speaking, it isn't. The word rendered "temporal" is the Greek *proskairos*, which, according to Young, means "for a season." The use of "temporal" throws a false light on the context. Thus, that which is presently seen does not endure; it is temporary, for a brief season or a short time. But the unseen things (of God) are eonian; i.e. they will endure for the eons and, of course, beyond (see next paragraph). Stevenson believes "the contrast between 'temporary' (the things

seen) and 'aeonian' (the things unseen) appears to be between trials whose end can be foreseen, and lasting blessings with 'no horizon' envisaged" – *Time & Eternity* 65. Vladimir Gelesnoff views them as "things enduring for a while and those which last through the Ages" – *The Ages in the Scriptures* 29.

Now, when the Hebrew (Old Testament) refers to that which goes *beyond* the age or ages, it does so quite unambiguously and without recourse to any single term denoting infinity. The expression used is *le-olam va-ed*, which Young translates, "to the age and onward"; in other words, "to the age and beyond." Jerome, in his *Latin Vulgate* (4th C), renders this expression "*in aeternum et ultra*" (unto eternity and further). To modern ears, this sounds (or *should* sound) tautological in the extreme. However, as we will see in *Part II*, the Latin *aeternum,* like the Greek *aionios,* was likely at this time in a state of flux as to its precise meaning. Thus, it is possible that Jerome assumed both words meant something akin to 'practically eternal.' As Wayne Fair has recently brought to our attention, some authorities, even today – presumably in recognition of the ambiguities involved – employ this bizarre expression when defining *aionios*. One hopes this is a concession that a few searching minds are at least digesting the evidence, even if they are not yet ready to assimilate it.

{The 3rd-century theologian Origen (*First Principles* 3:3,4) saw in the Hebrew phrase *le-olam va-ed* not merely a time beyond the ages, but a glorious reality beyond anything experienced within them. He writes: "The fact that it says 'further' lets us understand that it means something more than an aeon." For Origen, that which lay beyond the last aeon was the final restoration and perfection of all things.}

ETYMOLOGY

The noun *a[e]ion* comes from a combination of the two Greek words *aei* and *on*. It is agreed that *on* is the present participle of the verb 'to be'; consequently, *on* means BEING or existing. Unfortunately, an understanding of *aei* is not quite so straightforward. Scholarship generally holds it to mean 'always,' and from this, it is assumed *aei-on* means ever being, or always existing; hence the words everlasting, eternal, evermore, forever, etc. However, any careful study of the word in scripture shows that *aion* does not necessarily denote or even imply endlessness; more frequently, it conveys continuity *up to a terminal point*. Even our English word 'ever' can mean without end or *without fail*. To determine the correct sense, we must examine how the sacred writers have used it.

SCRIPTURAL USAGE

Etymology is the weakest link in the chain when it comes to comprehending scriptural terms: "An ounce of usage is worth a pound of it," writes J. W. Hanson, "etymology is theory, usage is fact." R. A. Torrey considers usage "decisive." The word *aei* occurs eight times in the New Testament, more than sufficient to provide insight into its meaning. The reader can test which of the two meanings – unfailingly or unendingly – best fits each context. We begin with Mark 15:8, which states that the multitude "Began asking Pilate to do as he ALWAYS did

for them." There is little question as to what the writer had in mind here, and it had nothing to do with anything 'endless!' The remaining seven follow:

Acts 7:51: "You are ALWAYS resisting the Holy Spirit."
2 Cor. 4:11: "We who live are ALWAYS delivered unto death."
2 Cor. 6:10: "Sorrowful yet ALWAYS rejoicing."
Titus 1:12: "Cretians are ALWAYS liars."
Heb. 3:10: "They ALWAYS go astray in their hearts."
1 Pet. 3:15: "Be ready ALWAYS to give an answer..."
2 Pet. 1:12: "I intend ALWAYS to remind you about these things."

So, which one is correct, 'without fail' or 'without end'? While the distinction in some instances may be subtle, the overall pattern surely favours 'without fail' over 'without end'. Hence, this root concept 'without fail' extends to the word *aion*; that is, 'without *fail* existing' rather than 'without *end* existing.' As Dr Edward Beecher puts it, "In the New Testament *aei* is never used of eternity, but always to denote habitual action or a stated mode of action at all proper times" To illustrate, he provides the following non-biblical example: "An evergreen is not a tree green to all eternity, but a tree continuously green during its life" (i.e. *always* green). – *History of Opinions on the Doctrine of Scriptural Retribution* 128. By implication, the TIME relationship is obscure or indefinite.

Aion In The Plural Form

Hebrews 1:2 tells us that God, through His Son, "made the *ages* (plural) – *Rotherham.* The *Revised Version* has "made the worlds" but gives "ages" as a marginal reference. One wonders why the marginal reference (which is correct) is not incorporated into the main text! Most modern versions predictably follow this pattern, having either 'worlds' (without marginal reference) or 'universe.' A section of mainstream scholarship favours the view that *aion*, in this context, conveys a spatial rather than a time-based relationship, and that the author of Hebrews is describing the creation of the physical world or universe. It is more likely, however, that he is sharing a different truth, one that is lost by imposing an unnecessarily ancillary meaning on the word *aion* (the distinction between *aion* and *kosmos* is outlined in *Part II*). What, then, is the truth buried within this text? Namely, that the *aions* or ages are a special creation of God, made for a distinct purpose. That purpose is mentioned by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 3:11, where he too employs *aion* in the plural. It transliterates as:

prothesin ton aionan
purpose of the ages

Again, the common use of 'eternal' – 'eternal purpose' instead of "purpose of the ages" – distorts the precise information presented here by the apostle. Firstly, rendering the plural *aionan* (ages) by the singular 'eternity' (as in most bibles) can hardly be described as translation; it is closer to construal. Secondly, every purpose, by the meaning of the word, exists for *something to be done*; once done, it is no longer a purpose but an accomplished fact. 'Eternal Purpose' (assuming a time-based sense) implies a purpose that will never be realised. "It is self-

evident," insists Gelesnoff in his work on this subject, "That if the Ages are never to cease, then this purpose is never to be attained" – *Ibid.* 17. The Patristics, too, lend their considerable weight to our case. The Greek-speaking Athanasius, for example, talks about the Lord, "who is before the aeons and *by means of whom the aeons have come to existence*" – *Adv. Ar*. 26 (see *Chapter 11* for more patristic views). In His creation of these "aeons," the Creator has supplied a framework upon which He is currently working out, and will continue to work out, His grand purpose to a glorious and perfect conclusion. Scripture, in other places, refers to this as "the end" (*to telos*). The end of what? The end of THE AGES, of course.

Aion occurs in the plural form over sixty times in the N.T., with at least another twenty-two indicating the plural by context. One of these is found in Matt 12:32: "Neither in this age, nor the one to come." This passage is of special note because it concerns what has come to be known as the eternal or 'unpardonable' sin. Here, the Lord, speaking of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, said that for such a sin, there is no forgiveness, neither in the present age nor in the one to come. Yet when the parallel passage in Mark (3:28,29) is considered, it is usually rendered, "but whosoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit does not have forgiveness into the age (*aion*), but is guilty of an eternal (*aioniou*) sin." In this second passage, *aion* occurs in its two primary forms, the noun followed by the adjective. How we translate the adjective makes all the difference to the overall understanding of the text. For guidance, we have the first instance: "Neither in this age *nor the one to come*." Bibles that align the second case with the first get it right. The sin Christ speaks of is not eternal; it is "lasting" (Young) or "abiding" (Rotherham) for the age or "throughout the age to come" (Hart); that is, the "next" age of which Christ speaks first in Matthew. Unfortunately, the *A.V.*'s mistranslation of verse 29, "has *never* forgiveness," only serves to compound the textual injury. The Greek succinctly reads, "has no forgiveness *for the age*." Once we see that forgiveness is withheld only for the current age and the one to follow, which, as we will discover later, leads up to the *Great White Throne* judgment, we have understanding. While Christ's words most certainly contain a stern warning, there is nothing endless or eternal in them.

In Matthew 12:31 and Luke 12:10, the statement "shall not be pardoned" occurs in isolation, which our critic may be quick to point out. However, the Greek verb form (*aphethesetai*) is the same in both verses, which accordingly links the separate statement to the time of the two ages. From the collective evidence, the Lord appears to be purposefully limiting the period of unforgiveness to the present age and the one to follow. Andrew Jukes agrees: "The text says nothing of those ages to come elsewhere revealed to us; much less does it assert that the punishment of sin not here forgiven is never-ending" – *Rest.* 121.

While some may think that the age to follow *is* the last one – that is to say, the next age leads into 'eternity' (a widespread teaching) – the Apostle Paul assures us of future AGES (plural) to come. For example, in Ephesians 2:7, he writes about "the coming *ages*" (*aiosin*) when the immeasurable riches of God's grace will be shown in His kindness to those in Christ Jesus. The majority of modern bibles get this right, translating the plural *aiosin* as ages; in so doing, they tacitly support the evidence for more than one future age. Even so, the casual reader may assume these "ages" represent eternity. That they are *not* will become clearer as we proceed (see *Stoic Cosmology*, below). By contrast, Paul brings our

attention to the "present evil age (singular)" from which we are delivered (Gal 1:4). In these last two verses, something of the character of the ages or eons can be glimpsed, and how that character is defined by the divine intention being served in that particular age. God's purpose with the current "evil age" is that of calling a people out from among the nations (Acts 15:14) – the Body of Christ – to serve an even greater purpose in the ages ahead.

End Of The Ages

Never once does scripture use the expression "the end of the *world*." This mistranslation has created much confusion regarding things yet to come; a confusion that persists to this day. The majority of biblical reference works confirm the precise translation as "the end of the *age.*" Fortuitously, most modern bibles also get this right. *Kosmos* (not *aion*) is the proper Greek term for 'world' (or 'cosmos' in Anglicised form). The expression "the end of the world" leads one to imagine doomsday, which is certainly not what the inspired writers had in mind.

A wonderful verse that uses the expression "the end of the age," but with *aion* in the plural, is Heb 9:26. In many bibles, the correct word order is altered, obscuring the text. The *Diaglott* restores the proper structure: "...now once for all, at the *completion* of the ages, He has been manifested for a removal of sin by the sacrifice of Himself." The Greek *sunteleia* ('completion') alludes to accomplishment rather than cessation. Hence, "completion of the ages" conveys the idea of a time when God will bring together all the problems and evils of the preceding eons for settlement. This will be achieved by Christ's sacrifice, resulting in the complete expulsion of sin. Herein lies the solution to the perplexing enigma of sin in the universe – its repudiation at the conclusion of the eons.

The Apostle Paul uses a similar phrase when writing to the Corinthians, upon whom "the ends of the ages have come" (1 Cor 10:11 *Diaglott*). The Greek word in this case is *tele* (a plural form of *telos*), meaning "ends." Our key to unlocking this strange statement is, yet again, an understanding of the framework of the ages in scripture. Those "in Christ" have already attained, in spirit, the consummative purpose of the ages; that is to say, what the ends of the ages will bring has already been made known in some measure to the saints, though few, it seems, have grasped its magnitude (*Chapter 10* develops this theme). The main point to note is that every age has a conclusion or completion; unlike the Kingdom that follows, about which scripture unmistakably states, "there shall be no end."

Stoic Cosmology

Naturally, those attached to the idea of 'time and eternity' may find all this discomforting or even disingenuous. In support of convention, such biblical ages that *do* rise through the maze of introduced 'eternal things' may thus be assumed as an 'eternity of (future) ages.' This concept likely has its roots in Stoic Cosmology, which proposed aeons, or 'great years,' that revolved out of necessity in endless succession. More will be said about this in *Part II*. For the moment, it is sufficient to say that such a reading takes considerable liberties with the Greek of the N.T.; moreover, it completely ignores the intentionality of the ages laid out

within the same text. The early Church 'doctors' must have known of these insidious forces even as they were forming their own writings. Caution was in the air. For example, in his address to the Greeks (*Oratio ad Graecos* 6), the Syrian theologian, Tatian (2nd C), criticised the Stoic notion of endless aeons; he set it in contrast against what to his mind was the far superior biblical account of a limited series of ages culminating in resurrection and judgment. A century or so later, Origen confirmed Tatian's insight by holding that the scriptural ages all pointed to the *telos*, which eventuated in the restoration of *everything* to God. Origen was fully aware that *aion* – even a plurality of them – did not express endlessness or eternity.

Indeed, one might question the kind of god that requires a redemptive purpose to drag on through a never-ending eternity of ages! Is such an understanding even credible in the presence of a word like *sunteleia* (Heb 9:26), which, as we have seen, means 'COMPLETION'; or *tele* (1 Cor 10:11), denoting 'ENDS'? Furthermore, the Greek preposition *epi*, when followed by a dative case (as here), signifies 'with a view to' or 'on the basis of.' In other words, "it was *on the basis of* a conclusion of the ages, for repudiation of sin through His sacrifice, that He has been manifested." While this has always been a thorny scripture, much of the difficulty doubtlessly lies with subliminal preconceptions. That virtually all expositors concede the ages in question have ends reinforces that they are indeed limited epochs; they cannot therefore be 'eternity'! One cannot have it both ways. Alexander Thomson offers a very sensible and precise summary of the foregoing facts. He writes, "Christ was manifested with a view to the ages being concluded. The ages are the times in which sin and enemies are present, requiring the sacrifice of God's Son. He was manifested so that sin might be set aside through His sacrifice, having in view a conclusion to the ages. He was certainly not manifested at a conclusion of the ages, but His manifestation demands that the eons terminate" – *The Bible, Its Hell and Ages* 6.

Forever And Ever

Besides the plural form, aion occurs in compound expressions:

tous aiona	***ton aionon***
the ages	**of the ages**

In Revelation 11:15, this expression concerns Christ's reign. The *A.V.* and most modern bibles render it by the familiar "forever and ever," though both the *Revised Version* and the *R.S.V.*, to their credit, provide the marginal reference "unto the ages of the ages." It is nonetheless a great pity that the revisers chose not to conform to scripture by transposing the marginal reference into the main text itself. Their conservative mandate, of course, was to alter the wording of the *King James* as little as possible; thus, familiarity and 'tradition' (along with their attendant errors) were perpetuated. It was a golden opportunity lost, and the majority of subsequent mainstream bibles have merely played 'follow the leader.' Our conviction, on the other hand, remains with less shackled scholars like Rotherham, Young, Hanson, Wilson, Weymouth, Hart, and others. Notably, Hanson wrote in his 1884 translation: "If 'forever' means endlessly, the additional 'and ever' is superfluous; if 'forever' does not carry that meaning, 'and

ever' cannot impart it, 'forever and ever' is a rendering that cannot be defended on philological grounds. It is a theological invention" – *The New Covenant* v. The current degree of scholarship makes it much less excusable to transpose a plural noun (ages) into a non-plural adverb (ever), and a preposition (of) into a conjunction (and) and call it translation! It is patently not translation but *interpretation*...a concession to a long-held tradition going back to the time of Tyndale (see *Part II*). For when it states of Christ that "He must reign UNTIL..." is it not manifestly obvious that He cannot also reign forever and ever? The tragedy of translational history is that these precious words of Paul have not only been widely misrendered but also poorly misunderstood. The entire passage (1 Cor 15:25-28) – undoubtedly the most far-reaching and glorious in scripture – reveals the end of Christ's reign after He has put all enemies under His feet, the last one being death. He reigns, therefore, not forever and ever as many assume, but for "the ages of the ages" (Rev 11:15). Once fully grasped, this scripture transforms our understanding of God's ultimate purpose.

The above compound expression occurs in the N.T. in three different forms, the first two appearing only once:

The AGE of the AGE
The AGE of the AGES
The AGES of (the) AGES

The first expression (Heb 1:8), where *aion* occurs twice in the singular, makes little sense and has rarely been explained or even studiously examined. One of the most reliable ancient manuscripts (*Codex Vaticanus*) omits the last three words, 'of the age,' reading simply, "Your throne, O God, is *for the age*;" thus, textual or copyist error is one possible solution. The remaining two expressions are of *Hebrew* construction, rather than Greek. They are the Hebrew method of expressing the superlative. Writes Thomson, "Thus it is well known that the King of kings is the chiefest king; the Song of songs is the greatest song; the Holy of holies is the innermost place" – *The Bible; Its Hell And Ages* 8. This makes good sense because, from the perspective of the Jewish people, their long-awaited time of possessing the Kingdom has always been regarded since their exile as 'THE AGE OF AGES.'

As we have just seen, the common tautology "forever and ever" was designed to convey, more or less, the Gnostic idea of "ages tumbled upon ages," or "ages succeeded by ages," or "countless ages proceeding out of previous ages," inherent within which was the assumed concept of eternity. But who would suggest that the Song of songs was composed from previous songs? Moreover, is Christ the King of kings or Lord of lords because He proceeded forth from another king or another lord? As for the human expression "the countless ages of eternity," we may well ask (as many have) to what lengths people will go to deceive themselves? If a point is to arrive when time 'shall no longer be,' as the same invariably assert, will not this of necessity conclude the "age-*times*" (Rom 16:25; 2 Tim 1:9; Titus 1:2)? Again, we cannot have it both ways.

The phrase 'forever and ever' is an artificial construction which, having been for centuries repeated ad nauseam, is now broadly accepted without question or thought. Arising at the time of Tyndale (15th C), it denotes what some theologians – possibly misled by the *Latin Vulgate* – earnestly believed to be true, but its inadequacy in conveying the original sense is evident in its inability to

accommodate the plural forms. Can we even begin to imagine, asks Adlai Loudy in *God's Eonian Purpose* (74), "forever and evers" or "forevers and evers"? Any attempt to express eternity or endlessness through these original Greek constructions compromises their intended meaning. Conversely, taken for what they are, these expressions reveal the distinct character of the age or ages to which they point. Just as Christ is King of kings – that is, *the greatest King of all* – so the ages (or age) of the ages are (or is) the greatest of all other ages. G. T. Stevenson concurs, "The future ages in which God's purpose is approaching realisation will be the finest, the most blessed, of all the times covered by the sacred scriptures." Anticipating objections, he further points out that where these expressions occur with the doxologies of praise, glory, and honour (e.g. Rom 11:36; Rev 1:6; 7:12), no difficulties need arise. For "there is no suggestion that worship will cease at the end of the ages mentioned in the N.T., but speculation beyond that point ventures outside the biblical frame" – *Time & Eternity* 60.

When *Aion* Does Not Mean 'Age'

As shown, the probable meaning of *aion* in most contexts is 'time indefinitely extended.' While this naturally embraces protracted ages or epochs, it may also include a much shorter timescale. An obscure phrase, *eis ton aiona*, is usually (and incoherently) translated 'forever,' even though in many instances it refers to a relatively short period. Contextually, even the more plausible "for the age" fails to convey the implied meaning in this case. *Eis ton aiona* is likely an idiomatic phrase peculiar to the era in which it was written, the meaning of which is difficult to pin down in modern English. It occurs numerous times in both the *Septuagint* (Greek O.T.) and New Testament and frequently relates to a human lifetime. For example, in the *Septuagint* at Exodus 21:6, the slave who declined release had to serve *eis ton aiona*, meaning for the 'rest of his life.' In the N.T., a couple of examples are: (1) the Apostle Paul, who in 1 Cor. 8:13 would not eat meat for the "rest of his life," and (2) Peter, who in John 13:8 exclaimed, "not while I live!" In our modern idiom, the latter might mean something like 'over my dead body.' Accordingly, Maurice Lloyd deduces, "…unless the context demands otherwise, *eis ton aiOna* should be understood in the sense of a lifetime. Thus, the duration of the priesthood of Melchizedek was lifelong, in contrast with that of the Aaronic order, which was from 20 to 50 years of age. That was how the Samaritan woman at the well understood the term with respect to never thirsting (John 4:14,15)" – *The Eternal Question* 2. The tedious use of 'forever' in any of these contexts and the many others like them makes no sense at all. It's encouraging to see that more contemporary translators are beginning to understand the true meaning of this expression. The adjective, however, to which attention now turns, is quite a different story.

Eternal Life

We saw earlier how *aionios* occurs twice in the same verse (Rom 16:26) concerning He who is truly eternal and that which is merely fleeting. Here, the apostle refers to "a sacred secret (*musterion*) in *aionian* times kept silent but now made manifest...according to the command of the *aionian* God" (literal). The context is *aionian* times – the times in which the ages are running their course –

and God's control and purpose within this cosmic framework. Naturally, it in no way limits Him to these time spans. Just as there is no conflict with the Ever-living One being the God of the Ages, there is also no conflict with "*aionian* life" – presently God's gift to humanity, and incorrectly rendered 'eternal life' – being immortal and incorruptible.

Paul further speaks of "that favour which was bestowed on us in Christ Jesus, before the aionian times" (2 Tim 1:9 *Diaglott*). The Greek reads:

pro	***chronon***	***aionion***
before	**times**	**age-lasting**

Here, the Greek *pro* is a preposition meaning 'before'; *chronon* is the genitive plural of the noun *chronos*, which simply means 'time'; *aionion* is the genitive plural adjective of the noun *aion.* The only part the *KJV* got right in this phrase was the preposition 'before' (*pro*). The revisors realised this, but sadly compounded the error with their own rendering, "before times eternal." As one commentator observes, "This is not translation; it's nonsense!" In fact, the thought conveyed here is fairly straightforward; the problem lies squarely in our eschatological understanding of *aionion*. In his epistle to Titus, Paul further elaborates on the gift coming through that grace: "In hope of aionion life, which God, who is never false, announced *before aionion times*" (Titus 1:2 *Diaglott*; the second phrase [*italicised*] is identical to the one in 2 Timothy). The *RSV* interprets *pro chronon aionion* in Titus "ages ago," which, while better, still fails to convey the precise sense of the Greek. Moreover, if the second *aionion* is age-related, then to be consistent, the first one should be as well. Rotherham renders this verse: "In hope of life age-abiding; which God, who cannot lie, promised before age-during times." The *Concordant* conveys the same thing (though more idiomatically): "In expectation of life eonian, which God, Who does not lie, promises before times eonian" (*Diaglott* is similar); while Hart's *The New Testament* states, "In hope of the life of the age, which God, who does not lie, promised before the times of the ages." The point is that all four of these independent versions get the message across adequately without resorting to the Latin-inspired 'eternal.' More importantly, in so doing, they help restore to the English Bible the framework of the ages inherent in the Greek.

{James Hastings confirms our intuition on the above verses: "The *chronois aioniois* ('times eonian') moreover, are not to be thought of as stretching backwards everlastingly, as it is proved by the *pro chronon aionion* of 2 Tim. 1:9 & Tit. 1:2." Hastings is surprisingly (and refreshingly) candid over the issue of *aionios* and its correct meaning. He writes, "'eternal' is misleading inasmuch as it has come in the English to connote the idea of 'endlessly existing,' and thus to be practically a synonym for 'everlasting.' But this is not an adequate rendering of *aionios,* which varies in meaning with the variations of the noun *aion* from which it comes – *Dictionary of the New Testament* 370.}

None of the preceding calls into question the endless or infinite nature of post-resurrection existence. *Aionian* life is God's "free gift" (in the coming ages) that makes our present calling "special" – this unique gift belongs to the saints alone. Although the age-times will eventually end, they do so because their Divine purpose is fulfilled, which signifies that our role within them is also complete.

The important point is: while the period of that wonderful "gift" will finish, life itself will continue in all its glory! Ilaria Ramelli puts it rather well: "For 'αἰώνιος (aeonian) life' will be the life in the next aeon, in Christ, but even that aeon will finish and therefore after "life αἰώνιος" there will come the eventual apokatastasis (restoration), in which God (as Father, Son and Holy Spirit) will be 'all in all'" – *Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis* 160. Indeed, if we think about it, scripture adequately conveys 'endlessness' in its two mighty negatives, "immortal" and "incorruptible." Also, as Rotherham points out, we have Christ's correlative promise: 'Because I live you also shall live' (Jn 14:19). But even more than this, life in the next aeon/s ensures freedom from condemnation (Rom 8:1), and promises fellowship with the Lord of Glory during His reign through the "eons of the eons" (Rev 11:15). It is the honour and privilege of those who *now believe* to serve, or perhaps even reign, with Christ right up to the conclusion of these last stupendous epochs.

It is of utmost importance, too, as A. P. Adams shows in his pioneering work *Spirit of the Word* (173), that Christ's definition of "life eonian" is "to know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent" (John 17:3). There is no mention here of any *time* relationship at all. Endlessness is present only by association, a consequence of knowing the only true God in Christ. Dr Erich Haupt describes it as "the life which is in God, and which by God is communicated." Haupt further points to 1 John 3:15: "No murderer has (aeonian) life abiding in him." He comments, "Here it is primarily obvious that aeonian life has in it no thought of time, but is altogether an ethical idea or characteristic" – *Commentary on I John*. This was similar to Søren Kierkegaard's view: For him, eternity was a qualitatively different mode of existence characterised by participation in the Divine reality, within which the 'time element' held no direct relevance. It is therefore easy to see that, based on this "ethical" idea, many, having subscribed to the 'larger hope,' cling to the word 'eternal.' Perhaps for such (who probably constitute the most), it is a term too religiously and spiritually weighted not to be retained. Some embrace it in the sense of the above; eternal, for them, holds the ethical connotation of the realm of the Eternal God, or that which pertains to the Eternal (or atemporal) God. F. D. Maurice and F. W. Farrar are old-school examples of this type of scholar. Others believe *aionios* contains within it the *germ* of things eternal (God Himself) and even things less than eternal, such as the future age-enduring life, which is the believer's "free gift." Many in the early Church held this view, as do perhaps most contemporary scholars. N. T. Wright, for example, while not advocating restorationism (at least not in a universalist sense), describes 'eternal life' in his New Testament translation (*NTFE*) as "the life in the age/s to come" (or similar). Thus, every true disciple should reflect on what the Latin-derived 'eternal' means to them, and in so doing, decide how to incorporate it (or not, as the case may be) into their everyday speech and discussions on things scriptural, spiritual, and religious.

{In the rabbinic tractate, the *Sayings of the Fathers* (*Pirqe Avot* 2:8), it is stated, "He who has acquired the words of the law has acquired for himself *life in the world (or age) to come*. The informed Jew has always been more aware of what *olam*/*aion* actually means than the many who have unwittingly inherited a Latin tradition of the inspired languages.}

THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD

With an understanding of the *aions* fully restored to scripture, we see a new harmony between the character and supremacy of God (*Ch1*) and the universal extent of His redemptive plan (*Ch2*). Having created the *aions* to work out His purpose with the creation "He so loves," we perceive a time in the far distant future when that purpose is at last consummated. Here is the key that unlocks the richest treasures for all who humbly seek Divine Truth, *the ultimate Fatherhood of God to all*. This much-befogged teaching becomes crystal clear through the perception of the scriptural eons; then, most of the major difficulties and contradictions disappear. Throughout the centuries, some scholars have insistently argued that God will only ever be Father to current believers, whilst their opponents rely on a different set of texts to prove the opposite. The reason for this controversy is that the passages which speak about God's fatherhood to believers are seen as referring to the same time as those which speak of Him as Father of all the race. The larger truth is grasped only through the teaching of the eons or ages. In fact, the two classes of scripture do not refer to the same time. Rather, His fatherhood to believers has its place *before* Him becoming "All in all." Remember, "Each in his OWN order;" "The testimony in its OWN fit times."

{Paul's second phrase cited, from 1 Timothy 2:6, is a little obscure, which is witnessed in the plethora of renderings and interpretations found in bibles over the years. The one given above is thought to be as faithful to the original text (Gk. *to martyrion kairois idiois*) as any without undue interpretative input. The context, however, is quite unambiguous: "Who (Christ Jesus) gave himself a ransom *for all persons*," thus, "the testimony in its own fit times (or seasons)." What Paul seems to be saying is that the price the Lord paid for all persons will be testified to those same 'all persons' in its own appropriate time.}

ENDLESSNESS IN SCRIPTURE

At this point, it should be made clear that if God had wished to convey the sense of endlessness in the passages under discussion, there are several Greek words or expressions He could have enlisted instead of *aion*/*aionios*. Their use in the New Testament is limited; we take them in the order they occur:

1. Luke 1:33: "Of His KINGDOM there shall be NO END." This statement is quite unambiguous. The negative *ouk* (no) is used in conjunction with "end." But here is the important point: it concerns only His king*dom*; that the King*ship* (of Christ) shall end, we have seen positively in 1 Cor. 15:25-28. Furthermore, Luke restricts the length of His reign in this very verse: 'He shall reign over the house of Jacob *for the eons*' (*CLNT*), not forever.
2. Romans 1:20: Here, the word *aidios* is used by Paul in respect to God Himself. For some, before and after Aristotle, *aidios* held a similar connotation to our word 'eternal'; others use it in the sense of 'perpetual.' As we will see in *Chapter 11*, this term was also employed by the Greek-speaking patristics to express the 'timeless' nature of God and His realm.

3. 1 Timothy 1:4: “Endless genealogies.” The Greek *aperantos* is used here in a figurative sense, but the literal meaning is such that it could serve the concept of endlessness.
4. Hebrews 7:16: This passage is of particular interest because the Greek word *akatalutos* (indestructible) is seen in contrast with *aion*. Christ’s life is “indestructible,” but His Priesthood, by contrast, is “for the age.”
5. Revelation 18:21-23: The construction here is different: *ou me eti*. No less than six times this expression occurs in these three verses. The subject is the city of Babylon, and the meaning is transparently clear: “(Babylon) shall *be no more*!” (lit. ‘not no still’).

So, the Greek language is quite capable of expressing the thought of endlessness unambiguously. That *aion* is not so used can be ascertained by its origin, usage, and harmony with the plan and purpose of God. To those who free themselves from the grip of convention, the whole matter becomes transparently clear. Many have. A representative selection of comments follows, beginning with an outline of *aion*’s ancient secular usage:

FARRAR – “Homer, Hesiod, Pindar, Sophocles, and Aristotle all use ‘aion’ of ‘human life,’ or a period...The Roman games, which were secular, were held (nominally) once a century. The word ‘secular’ was rendered ‘aionios’ by the Greek writers. Did they mean the ‘endless games?’”

DE QUINCEY – “Meanwhile, all this speculation, first and last, is pure nonsense. Aionios does not mean eternal.”

SCARLETT – “That aionios does not mean endless or eternal may appear from considering that no adjective can have a greater force than the noun from which it is derived. If aion means ‘age’ (which none can or will deny), then aionios must mean ‘age-lasting,’ or duration through the ages to which the thing spoken of relates.”

WEYMOUTH – Etymologically, this adjective, like others similarly formed, (signifies) ‘belonging to the aeon or ages.’”

KINGSLEY – “The word aion is never used in scripture or anywhere else in the sense of endlessness (vulgarly called eternity). It always meant, both in scripture and out, a period of time.”

HANSON – “That Aristotle found it necessary to add *aidios* to *aion* to ascribe eternity to God demonstrates that he found no sense of eternity in the word *aion.*”

CAMPBELL – “Its radical idea is indefinite time.”

THOMSON – “Even today, in modern Greek, hundreds of letters which I have translated for royalty and governments testify to the meaning the word *aion* still bears in all parts of Greece” (i.e. an age, an indefinite period of time).

GRANT – "Scripture is full of the doctrine of the ages…hidden under the stereotyped form 'for ever' and 'for ever and ever.'"

JONES (Stephen) – "…the Greek word which is rendered 'eternal' does not, in itself, involve endlessness, but rather, duration."

HART – "The claim occasionally made by champions of the received view – that (*aion*) means 'eternal' typically rather than defectively – is not merely logically impossible to verify, but simply false."

As to opinions regarding the word 'eternal,' others write:

OLSHAUSEN – "The Bible is deficient in an expression for timelessness...All biblical expressions imply or denote long periods."

CAMPBELL MORGAN – "Men have divided the church, separated from each other, and persecuted one another, upon a thought conveyed by an English word which has no equivalent in the Bible."

CATHOLIC ENCYCLOPEDIA – "The Bible hardly speaks of eternity in the philosophical sense of infinite duration without beginning or end."

POHORLAK – "Before times eternal simply means what the Greek says, before the age times...The word eternal, used in the now popular sense, is a piece of leaven that has leavened the whole lump of theology."

WELCH – "The word (eternal) is from the Latin -*turnus*, 'lasting for an age.'"

HASTINGS DICTIONARY OF THE N.T. – "There is no word either in the O.T. Hebrew or the N.T. Greek to express the abstract idea of eternity."

MYHRE – "Since, in all Greek literature, sacred and profane, (*aionios*) is applied to finite things overwhelmingly more frequently than to things immortal, no fair critic can assert with any degree of probability that when it is qualifying the future punishment it has the stringent meaning of metaphysical endlessness... The idea of eternal torment introduced into these words of the Bible by a theological school that was entirely ignorant of the Greek language would make God a cruel tyrant, compared to whom the most ingenious inventors of torment in modern concentration camps would be mere amateurs" (*The Concept of Olam, Aion and Aionios* 159, 60).

{Compared to *aionios*, the Greek *aidios* is used much more frequently – indeed, almost exclusively – by ancient Greek authors when they call to mind things perpetual, endless, or eternal. *Aionios* first occurs with Plato in 360 BCE. He employs it only twice in *Timaeus* (along with *aion* four times and *aidios* six). Although Plato uses *aionios* in a similar vein to *aidios* – so setting the *aionion* cat among the 'eternal' pigeons – all subsequent writers of note distinguish between the two terms. Homer and Hesiod, centuries before Plato, use the noun (*aion*) primarily of "life," as do most other Greek classicists. However, Aristotle (Plato's student) avoids the adjective (*aionios*) altogether; he employs *aidios* instead (nearly 300 times).

Although he uses *aion*, again, with him it refers to "life," not eternity. We cannot exactly say why Aristotle avoids *aionios* to express eternity any more than why Plato chooses to use it, except perhaps that it suits the latter's philosophical purpose. Quite possibly Aristotle thought *aionios*, being derived from *aion*, too ambiguous a term for eternity. *Aidios*, on the other hand, contains no such ambiguity, and this seems to have set the scene for subsequent Greek authors, including – as we will see in *Chapter 11* – the eastern patristics. Beecher, incidentally, observes that though both men "were great philosophers, they were very poor etymologists."}

That the preceding list is far from exhaustive should lead the thoughtful reader to ask why and how such scholarly divergence has arisen; at the very least, it exposes the fallacy of a truly uniform and united orthodoxy. Many Church historians over the centuries have said as much. Those who object to the contrarian view seem, in the words of the late Bishop George Rust, "to take the meaning of the word *aionios* from (traditional) scholastic definitions rather than from the true and lawful masters of language or the authentic rules of its use." Indeed, Bishop Rust spoke the truth, for every support of the common view or condemnation of its opposition *assumes* 'eternity' in its popular sense to be inherent in the word. The basis for this invariably lies in the assumption that the "scholarship of Christendom...has recognised that they (*aion*/*aionios*) are used to express eternity in the fullest sense." So wrote Sir Robert Anderson in *Human Destiny* (p37) over a century ago. On reflection, one wonders where we would be today had Christ merely submitted to the 'scholarship of the Jewish elite,' who seemed similarly united in their many errors and assumptions. It is one thing to note what an authority – even a group of authorities who represent the majority – expresses; it is quite another to found upon it the *assumption* of truth. Besides, as we have just witnessed, the "scholarship of Christendom" was far from united on this matter in and before Sir Robert's day…perhaps even less so in the present era. Convention being what it is, the recovery of hermeneutical specifics and the advancement of church dogmatics seldom follow hand in hand. We next examine the argument's premises from the standpoint of ecclesiastical history.

***PART II*:** AIONIOS AND ETERNAL: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

If the concept of eternity is not (broadly speaking) within the pages of scripture, how and when, we must ask, did it gain entrance into theology? Alexander Thomson answers this in his informative little work, *Whence Eternity?* (1953). Introducing his subject (p1), he writes, "It may be stated without fear of contradiction that the more one explores into the early centuries of Christendom, the clearer it becomes that a corrupt theology was alone responsible for displacing the primitive truth regarding the eons by a dogma respecting 'eternity'." Thomson's treatise is a rare gem on a subject about which few have written – it helped in forming the current writer's view almost five decades ago – and much of what follows is gratefully borrowed from Thomson's work. As this is a historical investigation, relevant chronological events will need to be studied along with quotes from numerous venerable translators and ancient bibles. This, along with an examination of various time-related words, should help dispel any

remaining doubt over the use of 'eonian' or its equivalents in place of the word 'eternal.'

Time Shall No More Be

In the *Authorised Version*, there is a verse in the book of Revelation that reads, "There should be time no longer" (10:6). This statement, more than any other, has led to erroneous notions regarding our subject. Copied originally from the *Vulgate* of Jerome (380 CE), which reads "*tempus non erit amplius*" (time will not be further), the wording is different from the Greek and has no bearing on the immediate context. While both the *R.S.V.* and the *N.I.V.*, to their credit, have restored the proper meaning ("there shall be no more delay"), there remains a belief within Christendom that time will someday end and 'eternity' begin. With this goes the assumption that eternity is distinct from time, and because God *is* eternal (without beginning or end), He must exist outside of or be removed from time. Of course, it is never adequately explained how this can be; how anyone – God or man – can experience anything removed from the passage of time. Moreover, if God is indeed 'outside' time, it is difficult to view Paul's assertion in Acts 17 (vv27-29) as other than incoherent. That God *transcends* time, as He transcends everything, is in no doubt, but it is futile to speculate beyond this. No! As piously religious as the common reference to 'time and eternity' sounds, the Hebrew and Greek scriptures have nothing to say on the subject. It would be truer to speak in terms of *obscurity*: that is to say, what is 'obscure' will one day come to an end. That the ages or eons – those obscure, purpose-filled periods framing God's great plan – having fulfilled their purpose will eventually end (Heb 9:26). The powerful consequence of this is that death will be destroyed (1 Cor 15:26). Paul's decisiveness here is the key that unlocks the quandary; it is not time that is so much the enemy, but *mortality* – "the **last enemy** to be abolished is *death*" (v26). Nowhere does it state, as commonly taught, that 'time' will someday end and 'eternity' begin. It is religious and philosophical speculation.

{It is regrettable that the *NIV* lacked consistency in correcting other translational errors (as it did with Rev 10:6, above). For example, in *Part I*, we examined 2 Tim. 1:9 & Titus 1:2, both of which the *NIV* renders (last three words): "*before the beginning of time*." Frankly, this is a shocking translation for any Bible claiming accuracy. In fact, the general disarray over this simple phrase is witnessed in the sheer variety and inventiveness of the many translations (the majority, in fact) that struggle with it. A struggle, incidentally, that is the likely product of forcing into scripture the preconceived notions of 'time & eternity.' Paul's brief sentence has nothing to do with 'the beginning of time' (note that 'time' or *chronos*, in both cases, is in the plural); it rather concerns the all-important "age-times." Taking the Titus passage, the Greek reads literally:

hen theos apseudes epengeilato pro chronon aionion
which God truthfully announced before times eonian [i.e. 'age-times']

In addition to the four translations consulted in *Part 1*, several other Bibles correctly translate the apostle's plain meaning. Among them are: *Weymouth*, *Young*, *ESV*, *Net Bible*, *LSV*, *New RSV*, & *Anderson*. Bravo!}

The Purity Of The Scriptural Languages

The Old Testament is written almost entirely in Hebrew; equally, the New Testament contains few words that are not Greek. But our English bibles are different. Numerically, the majority of words employed are English, but many of the doctrinal terms are adopted from Latin. One prominent example Thomson brings to our attention is the word 'salvation.' This was imported into the English language around the 12th century. It is a Latin-derived word unknown in the Anglo-Saxon Bibles (680-900) or even in Wycliffe's first-ever English version (1380); Wycliffe uses the words 'health,' 'make safe,' and 'safe' instead. Tyndale was the first (1526) to employ 'salvation,' using it once in John 4:22: "for salvacion commeth of the Jewes." Wycliffe's earlier wording was "for healthe is of the Jewes." After this, the Old English "health" was displaced by the introduced Latin word salvation.

"Eternal" is one of hundreds of words that gained entry into English during the Renaissance; before this time, it was unknown. No such word appears in any Old English Bible; instead, we find the word *ece* (about which more will be said soon). Even Latin very probably had no word meaning eternal *in its modern sense* before the 1st or 2nd centuries of the Christian era. Had our Old English Bibles been translated directly from the Greek, instead of from Jerome's *Latin Vulgate* ('common tongue'), it is likely the word 'eternal' would never have gained entry into modern bibles or theological terminology at all.

No Greek was taught publicly in England until 1484; for over one thousand years, it remained a forgotten language throughout most of Europe. But in the 1st and 2nd centuries, Greek was very widely used. In Rome, it served as the common medium of speech; for this reason, Paul did not need to write his epistle to the Roman Church in Latin. And this remained the case for almost another one hundred years. Then, when the first Latinate Bible *was* produced, it did not have its origin in Italy but in North Africa. This is of some importance because the Latin of provincial Africa was distinct from that of Rome – *it was free from the influence of Greek*. Just as English carried to America preserved certain words and meanings while losing others, so the migration of Latin to Carthage caused divergence from the Latin of Rome and Italy.

The African Version

The arrival of the North African Bible on Italian shores caused vast commotion among indigenous readers of the time. Old words used in Carthage were unintelligible to the Romans, while new ones coined there were also poorly understood. Attempts to correct or make sense of the fledgling African version only produced confusion. Finally, in 382 CE, the scholarly Jerome managed to bring harmony out of chaos with his famous *Latin Vulgate*. This was to be the Bible that dominated Christendom up until the time of the Reformation. While Jerome corrected obvious errors and set right what seemed like bad Latin, he was otherwise conservative. He does not appear to have revised the two Latin words used to render the Greek *aion*. These were *seculum*, from which comes our word secular, and *aeternus*, from which has descended the fateful 'eternal'; sometimes the Greek *aion* was rendered by one, and sometimes by the other. Where the Greek contains *aion* twice in one clause, as in the expression *tous aiona ton*

aionon (‘the eons of the eons’), Jerome frequently employs both *aeternus* and *seculum*! This alone suggests that the two words, at one time, shared a similar meaning and were more or less interchangeable.

Eternal And Secular

Latin dictionaries define *seculum* as a generation, *an age*, the world, the times, the spirit of the times, and *a period* of one hundred years. Our English word ‘secular’ also refers to the present world, especially to that which is not spiritual. So, there is little doubt that Jerome was referencing the current worldly system. At the very least, whatever *aeternum* may or may not have signified *then*, it certainly had not meant “endless” three hundred years earlier. This fact is of utmost importance. One quite unbiased authority, the German (later British) philologist Max Müller, says that the root of this word originally signified life or time but had given rise to words expressing endlessness. He adds that the Latin *aevum* became the name of time, age, and its derivative *aeviternus* or *aeternus*, “was made to express eternity.” Skeat, in his *Dictionary of English Etymology*, agrees with Müller: “L. aeternus, lit. ‘lasting for an age;’ put for aeui-ternus - L. aeui-, for aevum, an age.” Thomas Allin notes that in Jerome’s other works, he gives “many cases in which *eternus* means in fact temporary” – *C.T.* 89. Allin devotes almost a page to samples taken from Jerome’s writings. As we will see in *Chapter 11*, Jerome lived during a time of enormous flux; things were changing in the religious landscape, and what had stood before would not be standing much longer.

In the famous 15th-century *Etymologicum Magnum*, which provides the derivations of all ancient Greek words, *aion* is defined as “the life of mankind,” much as in the Greek Old Testament. The same work cites “the *seven ages* from the creation of heaven and earth until the general resurrection of humanity.” Its compiler/editor adds, “aion is...the unendable (*ateleutetos*), *as it seems to the theologian*!” Indeed, he spoke a truth, as it is theology and theology alone that has imported into time-words the thought of either endlessness or timelessness. Why did this happen? Why did the Latin *aeternum* come to signify “eternal” in its later sense? There were probably several forces at work.

There have always been those who held harsh views regarding the sinner’s fate. Historically, the belief in an endless doom for the reprobate goes back to Ancient Egypt; it has filtered through to virtually every civilisation since. The Hebrews were a significant exception until the Second Temple era (6th Century BCE), during which the imperious influence of Persia and Greece began making its mark. The Essenes, for example, one of the three major Jewish sects (along with the Sadducees & Pharisees), are said to have believed in conscious, ongoing (*adialeipton*) punishment. There seems to be a macabre and latently pathological fascination with the concept of an endless penalty – always providing it applies to some insignificant other – which is especially evident in those who lack the spiritual dynamic of love.

It is not hard to believe that, with a few exceptions, the teaching of the scriptural *aions* was gradually lost. The void left by the collapse of so great a truth had to be filled by something. As long as the Greek language was understood in Italy, *aionios* would retain its meaning of eonian or age-lasting (i.e. ‘of the age’) and would also hold its Latin equivalent *aeternum* to a similar meaning. However,

an influence was arising in 2nd century North Africa that was to bring about massive change and compel these terms to express something quite foreign to their original sense. Both were coming to mean not only that which has no seen or revealed limit but that which is actually *without limit*. The Latin mind abhorred that which was indefinite or liable to misunderstanding: "Speculation they shunned and banned," writes Thomson, "the Creedal statements issued by the early Roman Church were noted for their brevity. The requisite facts were stated in black and white, so there might be no dubiety (doubt) as to what the people must believe. Roman Law and the Roman military power functioned like machines; authority must be obeyed. In the Roman Church, individuality of thought was not encouraged. As there was much speculation concerning the eons and the future, the position must be stated categorically and dogmatically...it was humbling for the Latin Fathers not to be able to delineate the future. If no one was able to chart the ocean of time, why not simply declare that it was boundless? Would not the church wield far more power if it proclaimed in authoritative terms that eternal destiny was fixed here on earth?" (*Ibid*. 23).

Tertullian (160-220 CE)

We now return to North Africa to consider the influence of a theologian called Tertullian. To him, we are indebted for our knowledge of the previously mentioned *Old Latin Bible*. He was the first of the Latin Fathers, and it is no exaggeration to say that this scholar's choice of words has profoundly affected all succeeding theological thought. It is to Tertullian that we owe such terms as redemption, justification, substance, person, and sacrament; and possibly others such as perdition, perish, destroy, punish, torment, damnation, and predestination – all derived from the Latin tongue and differing in some degree from the corresponding Greek. Trained in the Roman legal tradition, Tertullian looked upon God as the judge who gives 'the law' and must be obeyed much more than as a Heavenly Father full of grace. With Tertullian, relations between God and man assumed the nature of legal transactions (he was a lawyer after all), the fundamental element on man's side being fear. Was this then the individual in whose hands reclined the fate of the word eternal? If so, what meaning did he impart to it, its old sense similar to the Greek *aionios*...or something beyond it?

It is clear from his writings that Tertullian was devoid of any understanding of the scriptural *aions*, just as he was seemingly destitute of perceiving God as Love. Unable to view the Deity other than the stern judge who must somehow be satisfied or placated, how was it possible for him to look on the mass of humanity as being anything but damned? One who has no perception of ages or eons to come must look on the future as a shoreless eternity. Having failed to grasp what scripture revealed about the eons, Tertullian had little alternative but to impart to the Latin *aeternus* the sense it now bears. Moreover, with the steady decline of Greek as the language of theology and the parallel ascendancy of Latin, this special meaning was imposed upon its Greek equivalent *aionios*; inevitably, this curious word progressively took on the meaning of endlessness or timelessness (Further details of this intriguing and pivotal period appear in *Ch 11*).

A broader cultural problem may have been working its mischief at this time as well. Oscar Cullmann, in his 1962 book *Christ and Time*, says that the spectrum of Hellenistic philosophy challenged Christian thought during its vulnerable nascent era. Cullmann points out that up to the time of Irenaeus' death (end of 2nd century) – Tertullian was by then middle-aged – there was resistance to Hellenistic concepts of time and timelessness. Irenaeus fought long and hard to stem the insidious influence of one of these most powerful groups, the Gnostics, in his famous work *Against Heresies* (180 CE). But in the years that followed, Cullmann postulates the battle lost: "Very early the Greek conception of time supplanted the biblical one, so that down through the history of doctrine to the present day there can be traced a great misunderstanding, upon the basis of which that which is claimed as 'Christian' is in reality Greek. The root of the heresy, if we are to designate as heresy what is really apostasy from Primitive Christianity, is the dissolving into metaphysics of the Primitive Christian conception that redemptive history is bound to the progressing timeline" (54). What Cullmann is effectively saying is that the *aions* in scripture, that purposeful sequence of discrete timeframes leading up to a climactic *telos* or end, were supplanted by the Greek idea of an unbroken continuum that culminated in timelessness; what the Church came to call 'eternity.' Thus, we see two latent forces working synergistically from around the 3rd century onwards: one from the Greek-speaking East and one from the Latin West. By the 5th century, these two forces would in the West meld into a fully-fledged Latinised singularity.

The Italian scholar and historian Dr Ilaria Ramelli offers another possible piece of this fascinating puzzle. In her massive work *on Apokatastasis* she shows (p670) how the imprecision of Latin vocabulary hampered the accurate transmission of the Greek adjective *aionios* into the Latin tongue; further, how the early Eastern, Greek-speaking theologians seized upon the term *aidios* when they wished to express the infinite transcendence of God, and in so doing, contrasted the two terms (recall that *aidios* with the Greeks meant something akin to 'without beginning or end'). Ramelli postulates that this distinction was soon lost to the Latin scholars; thus, with the complexities of the switch from Greek to Latin, *aidios* became conflated with *aionios*. By the 5th century, the two words had virtually merged under the Latin umbrella term *aeternus*. While Ramelli concedes this can only "help to explain" the distortion, when combined with the other preceding historical factors, it may well form a plausible part of the overall picture.

AION IN THE ANCIENT BIBLES

The following is a brief review of how ancient bibles render *aion* and *aionios* (source: *Whence Eternity* 22-25).

THE SYRIAC VERSION

It is believed this version was made from the Greek in either the 1st or 2nd centuries. The language is similar to Hebrew, probably not unlike the Aramaic contemporary with the Greek of this time. To translate the Greek *aion* and *aionios*, it uses OLM, exactly the word used in Hebrew meaning "obscure" or "obscurity." It is noteworthy that the Greek word *kosmos*

(world, human society) is also generally rendered by OLM, the significance of which will soon become apparent.

THE GOTHIC VERSION

This Bible preserves the sole relics of a Germanic tongue spoken around 350 CE, similar to the Old German and English of that time. It was translated by Wullfila directly from the Greek, though only fragments have survived (mostly from the N.T.). It is a very literal rendering and quite free from the influence of such Latin terms as eternal and damnation. It translates the noun *aion* by "*aiws*" (or '*aivs*') 20 out of 25 times, once by 'life,' and elsewhere by two other expressions. *Aiws* is the exact equivalent of the Latin *aevum*, which means life, lifetime, age or (even) humankind living at a particular time. For *aionios*, Wullfila employs in every one of its 24 extant occurrences "*aiweinos*" (which is the counterpart to the Greek *aionios*).

THE ARMENIAN VERSION

This Bible is ascribed to Mesrop (354-441) among others. For the Greek *aion*, it generally uses "*yavidyan*," a word meaning age. Sometimes "*ashkharh*" is used, which signifies world. In Ephesians 2:2, the two words appear together, "*yavidyeni ashkarhis*" (age of this world). All the special *aion* expressions are reproduced exactly as they appear in Greek.

THE COPTIC VERSION

First produced probably at the end of the 2nd century, this is the Egyptian version of scripture. It renders *aion* (and the Hebrew *olm*) by "*eneh*," defined in Coptic dictionaries as nothing more than time.

THE OLD ENGLISH VERSIONS

These part-bibles were produced from the *Latin Vulgate* (not the Greek) between 680-995; the four Gospels were most commonly translated. They consistently render the Latin *aeternum* by the once-common *ece*, which disappeared as an adjective around the 13th century. *Ece* is thought to be derived from the Old English verb *ecan*, meaning to prolong, increase, or augment. Thomson believes it was forced out of the biblical frame because of its equivocity, gradually being displaced by 'lasting.' The book *Cursor Mundi* (Course of the World), written in 1320, contains the line, "*Throru Jhesu com to liif lastand*" (Through Jesus come to life lasting). Soon after this time, the word 'everlasting' replaced both *ece* and lasting; unlike these latter two, everlasting was unequivocal.

WYCLIFFE AND BIBLES THAT FOLLOWED

John Wycliffe was the first person to translate the *whole* Bible into the English language, completing the task at Oxford in 1382, two years before his death. In his time, the Greek originals of the New Testament were virtually forgotten in Europe, the Latin tongue having dominated the thousand years, going back to Jerome. So, how did Wycliffe handle the Latin of the *Vulgate*? He never uses the expressions "forever" or "forever and ever." Although he employs "everlasting,"

he doesn't use "eternal." While certain expressions are less than perfect, the decline is greater in the next English version, Tyndale's. This scholar was the first to introduce "forever," "forever and ever," and "evermore" (Wycliffe expressed no such thought). And so, despite the Reformation with its revival in learning, the decline continued down to the time of the '*Authorised Version*' or *King James Bible* of 1611. The following examples, taken from Ephesians 3:21, illustrate the decline:

> **[GREEK: unto all generations of the age of the ages]**
> ***WYCLIFFE* (1328): in to alle the generations of the worldis**
> ***TYNDALE* (1526): thorowout all generations from tyme to tyme**
> ***COVERDALE* (1535): at all times for ever and ever**
> ***A.V.* (1611): throughout all ages, world without end**

'World' – Its Old And New Meaning

What we understand today by "age" or "eon," Wycliffe and his assistants understood to be 'world'; this is the likely reason 'world' persists as a translation for *aion*. But what did Wycliffe in the 14th century understand 'world' to mean? From his translation, he almost certainly viewed it in its primitive sense – something similar to "age" – as it had been understood seven hundred years earlier in the Old English translations. To express the physical earth, Old English used another term, *middangeard* (middleyard), which was the mid-region between heaven and the underworld. In a famous sermon pre-dating the 14th century, we find the words: "*tho thet wonyeth ine thyne house in worldes of worldes*" (those that dwell in your house for worlds of worlds). Obviously, the expression "worlds of worlds" did not mean a succession of new worlds. Trench in his *Synonyms of the New Testament* draws a contrast between the Greek for world (*kosmos*) and age (*aion*), both of which are occasionally rendered 'world' by the *A.V*. and subsequent versions. He regrets that the translators did not show the difference between KOSMOS, the world under the aspect of space, and AION, under the aspect of time. Even Latin has two distinct words here, *mundus* & *seculum*, whereas we have (or have acted as if we have) only one. The old word *weorulde* is composed of two distinct parts, the former consisting of *wer* (as in *wer*ewolf, i.e. man-wolf), the latter consisting of *ald* or *elde*, meaning age or generation. 'World' was therefore defined as the "generation (or age) of men." Hence, the ancient *Gothic Bible* (350 CE) reads "*tho nu ald*" (this now age), which is a true translation of the Greek *ton nun aiona* (the current age).

Wycliffe came very close to restoring the profound truth of the eons. Had he possessed the Greek text, there is little doubt his searching mind and autonomous spirit would have uncovered it. As it was, the *Vulgate* obliged him to be inconsistent, and this may be the reason why versions following his used "world," *but in a quite different sense from Him*. By Tyndale's time, 150 years later, 'world' had come to be a state or place rather than a limited period.

THE AUTHORISED VERSION

In the year 1604, a group of forty-seven scholars was authorised to revise the bibles then in use. *The Bishop's Bible* was to form the basis for this new

version, and it was to be altered as little as possible; most important was that the "traditions" – man's as much as God's – be maintained. *The Bishop's Bible* had descended from the long line of revisions going back to Tyndale, all having the *Latin Vulgate* as their basis. This fact, suggests J. R. Beard, should do something "to abate the excessive, not to say superstitious, reverence with which the *Authorised Version* is by many regarded." When the *A.V.* was produced, there were eight Greek manuscripts available, all of which were composed after the 10th century. From these was formed the famous "Received Text" or *Textus Receptus*, which was used to check the translation. Over the years, the poetic language of the *A.V.* has done much to sustain its popularity with English-speaking Protestants, while its kingly authority has helped venerate it as though it came directly from God. However, the *A.V.*'s choice of words and expressions, especially related to our subject, betray a strongly prejudiced eschatology. On the tendency of subsequent translators to emulate this unfortunate trait, the scholar and translator David Bentley Hart made the following comment in a 2019 interview: "One of the textual obstacles is simply that people read translations that were made in the 16th century when doctrinally the translators were already committed to certain beliefs, so the translations fall right into line." While (mercifully) recent generations of Protestants have moved away from viewing the *A.V.* as the pinnacle of God's revelation, its eschatology remains disproportionately resistant to change. Like so much in human experience, religion moves ahead at an excruciating pace...one generation at a time.

THE MODERN VERSIONS

It is gratifying to see how the teaching of the *aions* is being gradually restored in more and more Bible versions – credit indeed to those scholars who painstakingly formed them. Many of these are the independent so-called 'literal' translations that remain unread or even unknown to the majority of churchgoers. These Bibles lack the elegance of the *King James* and are not (usually) as idiomatic as their more widely acclaimed counterparts. Consequently, they do not pander to popular tastes – in other words, they require some effort to read and understand. They do, however, reflect more fully what God has spoken, and thereby allow the seeking student to form their own opinion on the more contentious biblical topics. Unfortunately, churchgoers may unconsciously find what their church claims a particular Bible says more compelling than what *scripture* actually states; thus, for them, the issue of textual accuracy never arises. Most religious institutions do not, as a rule, encourage the independent study that these scholarly works promote. Historically, established doctrines have tended *not* to be viewed as examinable subjects but rather infallible dogmas. Consequently, the discerning truth-seeker may well, sooner or later, see the need for relative independence from rigid systematics. As the Franciscan Richard Rohr says, "Systems reward you for staying immature." Naturally, one is expected to mature to the point of embracing the system, but not much beyond. Just how, under such circumstances, one becomes a Berean – examining the scriptures daily to seek out the truth – is a mystery. Or, for that matter, how condemnation can fall on the same in light of Luke's assurance that all such are "of more noble character" (Acts 17:11). Man's

institutions have always found difficulty discerning between truth and corporate allegiance or honouring God and honouring man. Moreover, if Church membership is a dogmatic commitment or merely a social determinant, then everything else (such as truth-seeking) will likely be subservient to those priorities. Naturally, a caution is applicable here. By 'independence' is not meant *isolation*. Autonomy of thought and study is one thing, closeted sectarianism quite another. There is, nonetheless, a qualified truth in the words of 20th-century Pastor and author A. W. Tozer: "The saint must walk alone." Perhaps, in relative terms, that is the price one pays for true saintliness.

The following English versions render, in the main, *aion* and *aionios* by their correct etymology and usage; Matt 25:46 is provided as a test case:

> THE NEW TESTAMENT (1798) was produced in London by Nathaniel Scarlett from the original Greek, assisted, we are told, "by men of piety and literature." To their collective credit, this small team of scholars transliterates the noun uniformly as "aeon," while all seventy-one occurrences of the adjective are rendered "aeonian." Scarlett was the first English scholar (so far as known) to use strict concordance in rendering these words. Matthew's controversial passage (25:46) is rendered in Scarlett's Bible as follows: "And these will go away into *aeonian* punishment: but the righteous into *aeonian* life."
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> A LITERAL TRANSLATION OF THE BIBLE by Robert Young (Edinburgh), also known for his *Analytical Concordance*, was published in 1862. Dr Young is consistent with our terms (the Hebrew *Olam*, the Greek *aion* & their derivatives) throughout his translation. He uniformly renders *aion* "age" and its adjective "age-during" in all but three places where he uses "age-duringly" and "times of the ages." Young thus translates Matthew 25:46: "And these shall go away to punishment age-during, but the righteous to life age-during." His rendering can be compared with the contrasting assortment found in the *A.V.*, which Young lists in the Greek Lexicon at the back of his concordance.
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> THE EMPHASISED BIBLE by Joseph Bryant Rotherham, an English Methodist who later became a minister of the Church of Christ, was completed in 1872 (revised 1897). A reviewer acclaimed this version as "one of the most original and successful works on the Bible that has been produced in our time" (or anytime). This version is unique in providing special textual symbols which show the 'emphasis' of the inspired languages. In his 1st edition, Rotherham uses "age" throughout for the Greek noun. In the 2nd edition, the phrase "unto times age-abiding" appears fifteen times, and "age-abidingly" seven times for the expression "unto the age." For the adjective, "age-abiding" appears consistently in both editions. He renders the Matthew passage as, "And, these shall go away into *age-abiding* correction, but the righteous into *age-abiding* life." Rotherham's footnotes on the *aions* are a worthy addition to his valuable work.

The EMPHATIC DIAGLOTT by Benjamin Wilson, another Englishman (originally Baptist), was produced in 1881. This version of the N.T. only offers a useful Greek text (from the 4th-5th century *Codex Vaticanus*) with an interlinear or word-for-word translation. Whatever the strengths or weaknesses of this work – it being both acclaimed and criticised – it is very consistent in its handling of the terms under discussion. The noun appears as "age" in both the version and interlinear; the adjective is usually rendered by the transliteration "aionian" in the main text and "age-lasting" in the interlinear. Hence, Matthew's account reads (1942 reprint), "And these shall go forth to the *aionian* cutting-off; but the righteous to *aionian* life."

THE NEW CONVENANT by John Wesley Hanson, an American independent scholar and historian noted for his numerous books, including *Aion-Aionios,* was released in 1883. Two years later, he released an edited revision of the *English Revised Version*. The former is a translation of the four Gospels in what Hanson calls a "chronological arrangement," which "aims to present in plain, idiomatic English the exact sense of the Greek original." Both works consistently employ the transliterations "aeon" and "aeonian" for our two Greek terms. In the first work, Hanson renders Matthew 25:46 as, "And these shall go away into *aeonian* chastisement and the just into *aeonian* life."

The NEW TESTAMENT IN MODERN SPEECH (1903), produced by the English schoolteacher Richard Francis Weymouth, was one of the first translations of the Greek into contemporary English (without the 'thys' and 'thous' etc.). Dr Weymouth, an astute and objective Baptist, renders the noun *aion* by "age;" for the adjective he employs "of the age/s," translating Matthew 25:46: "And these shall go away into the Punishment of the Ages, but the righteous into the Life of the Ages." Weymouth died in 1902 without ever realising his published work. Unfortunately, Posthumous revisions of Weymouth's work fell back on the safe but impossible 'eternal.' Thus, precise scholarly intent was once again forfeited, which is some indication of the hold religious phraseology has over mainstream thinking.

THE HOLY BIBLE IN MODERN ENGLISH by Ferrar Fenton (completed 1903) showcases one author's lifelong devotion to a passionate cause. Fenton, a London businessman with devout religious leanings, believed the Christian faith was in jeopardy without a modern translation of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures. He addressed this deficit by learning the original languages and, over the next fifty years, translated the oracles into contemporary English. The resulting work offers a discursive blend of literalness and interpretation in modern idiom. Although Fenton at times falls back on the Latin-derived 'eternal,' he is sufficiently perceptive to see it as being out of place in many instances. In such cases, he employs "age-long," "enduring," and "everliving" to assist textual coherence. Fenton offers the following interesting interpretation of the Lord's words in Matthew 25:46: "And these He will dismiss into a long correction, but the well-doers to an enduring life," which seems to fit Christ's likely meaning rather well.

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY NEW TESTAMENT was first published as a "permanent (modern English) edition" in 1904, paralleling the release of Weymouth and Ferrar's versions (Weymouth even served as a consultant to the twenty lay scholars who produced it). This Bible arranges the books in the order modern scholarship believes they were written. For example, Mark precedes Matthew in the gospels, and Paul's two Thessalonian letters precede his Romans epistle. Regarding the time words, on five occasions *aionios* is rendered as "aeonian," including our test case, which aptly reads: "And these last will go away into aeonian punishment, but the righteous into aeonian life." Strangely, the balance of the adjective is expressed by a mishmash of terms, such as "*final* judgement" (*aioniou krimatos*) in Hebrews 6:2, thus conveying the presumption of finality without resorting to 'eternal' or 'everlasting.' The singular noun is broadly translated "age," but the compound expressions revert to Tyndale's tautology "forever and ever."

WORRELL'S NEW TESTAMENT was published in 1904 in the United States by the Greek and Latin scholar, A. S. Worrell. He employs "age-lasting" to express the adjective *aionios*, thus rendering our favoured passage: "And these shall go away into *age-lasting* punishment, but the righteous into *age-lasting* life." In the main, "age" is employed for the noun and "age/s of the ages" for the compound expressions. Although Worrell, another Baptist, falls back on the Latin-derived 'eternal' in his copious notes, to his credit, he is consistent in using age-based terminology throughout the main text.

THE CONCORDANT VERSION of the New Testament was published in 1926 with the ambition of making "a translation that agreed as closely as possible to the original language," while still being "presented in readable English." This goal has been pursued through six revisions, the most recent of which was in 1976. All editions fully honour the noun and adjective, translating them simply "eon" and "eonian" respectively. Our test case from Matthew reads, "And these shall be coming away into chastening *eonian*, yet the just into life *eonian*." A *Concordant Greek Text* and version of the Hebrew Bible (O.T.) is also available.

THE DABHAR TRANSLATION, also known as *The Writ*, is a 2005 German Bible edited and published by F. H. Baader (Schoemburg) in two volumes, and includes both Old and New Testaments. The *Dabhar* accurately renders the time words throughout its pages as *eon* and *eonian*; hence, Matthew 25:46 reads, "And these will come away into *eonian* discipline, but the righteous into *eonian* life." The *Dabhar* is not a particularly idiomatic (easily read) version; indeed, the more faithful a translation is to the Hebrew and Greek, the greater the challenges posed to the idioms of another language.

THE NEW TESTAMENT FOR EVERYONE, first published in 2011, contains an interesting mélange of our time words. Its translator, Anglican scholar N. T. Wright, renders *aionios* almost universally 'the life of the age/s to come' (or similar), but sadly falls back on tradition in the case of Matthew 25, rendering both occurrences of the adjective "everlasting"! For the construction, *tous aiona ton aionon*, he interchanges 'ages of ages' with

'forever and ever.' Although Wright's underlying rationale for this is uncertain, one is tempted to think he feels the Koine Greek insufficiently expressive or august in certain situations. While this makes the *NTFE* inconsistent, one is nonetheless grateful for the extent to which it *is* faithful to the original. Indeed, most of Dr Wright's other works very much reflect the Hebrew concept of 'the ages to come' rather than an abstract, timeless 'eternity,' and on that we are with him 100%.

The UNIVERSAL VERSION BIBLE (2015) is a remarkable technical achievement by New York-based Dr William Petri, collating the Hebrew (O.T.) and Greek (N.T.) texts into a coherent and readable form, assisted by a computer-based translational process. Over the course of two decades, this independently produced Bible has strived to maintain the goals of accuracy, literalness, and freedom from creedal bias. As far as our time words are concerned, we are pleased to report that both noun and adjective are rendered concordantly and consistently by "eon" and "eonian" from Genesis through to Revelation, including our controversial Matthew 25 passage.

THE NEW TESTAMENT: A TRANSLATION was first released in 2017 by Classical scholar David Bentley Hart. Published by Yale, this is one of the most readable of all the independent translations listed here. Hart, like Petri (above), offers fascinating insights into the many textual and theological anomalies (including those of our pivotal words) via footnotes. Most importantly, Dr Hart is consistent in his management of our specific terms and expressions. He renders the noun "age" throughout, while the adjective is deployed with suitably contextual expressions such as "of the age" (Matt 25:46) or "to the age." He is to be commended (as indeed are all the above) because the tendency to produce a translation that conforms to the broadly accepted tradition is overwhelmingly strong.

The English *Revised Version* (1881), the *American Standard Revised Version* (1901), and the *Revised Standard Version* (1952) either translate the noun "age" or provide marginal references (including "ages of the ages" for the compound expressions) in up to 90 of its 123 occurrences. But the adjective remains, in most cases, the safe but impossible "eternal." Virtually all other modern English bibles fall shamefully in line. Noting this, the forthright Bentley Hart regrets that "the great majority of modern translations hold to a conservative agenda that aligns with established views of how scripture should be understood." The problem lies squarely in the insidious fact that while our understanding has changed – or *should have* changed – the broadly accepted agenda has not.

THE 'ETERNAL' OBSTACLE

The Scottish theologian John MacIntyre wrote in 1957: "What we regard as the Biblical view of time and history can only by anachronism be said to be that of the biblical writers themselves, yet that is the anachronism of which so many of our contemporaries are guilty" – *Christian Doctrine of History* 5, 6. By implication, MacIntyre can only be referring to the *aions*. Other scholars have

acknowledged this fact too, though few have put it so succinctly as the American theologian Lewis Sperry Chafer. Writing in 1909, he said: "The ages are often referred to in Scripture, and the study of the exact conditions and purposes of each of them is not fanciful; but it is rather the only adequate foundation for any true knowledge of the Bible" – *Satan* (*The Ages*) 18. It is unknown whether Dr Chafer *fully* realised the sweeping nature of his words. Regardless, he candidly deplored the difficulty the average bible student faced when seeking understanding through the lens of our most commonly read Bible, the *KJV* (1611) – which, regretfully, is a contender for the worst of all Protestant Bibles in relation to our subject (see *Appendix VII*). That said, the Catholics have feared little better. Despite the forthright and honourable words of *The Catholic Encyclopedia* in conceding that there is no real concept of eternity in the original Scriptures, Rome's translators seem 'hell-bent' on retaining it in such modern works as *The Jerusalem Bible* (1966) and *The New American Bible* (1970). Many of the archaic expressions in both versions are similar to those first used over three and a half centuries ago by the *KJV*. One would think that would give sufficient reason to re-examine them!

Thus, the evolution of words and phrases denoting eternity has had far-reaching effects on Christian belief and teaching. It has caused confusion in thought and conflicts in meaning on all manner of subjects and doctrines. As we have seen, the evidence strongly points to the concept having its roots in Hellenistic thought. With Plato, 'eternity' – or what passed for it – was not endlessly extended time beyond a horizon of ages (as with scripture), but the questionable or at least nebulous idea of *timelessness*. It was a philosophical concept of eternity where past, present, and future were theoretically eliminated, leaving only absolute being. While this may or may not be true, it has nothing to do with what Scripture plainly tells us – it is philosophical speculation. Moreover, from this non-biblical framework evolved the *Christian* Hellenisation of 'time and eternity,' implying (as with Plato) that eternity held no meaningful connection with time whatsoever. As to the precise explanation of this notion, even its strongest supporters contradict themselves. For none who speak thus of eternity can adequately explain what they mean. Should we take seriously expressions like "this *side* of eternity"? Eternity has sides! As Gelesnoff bluntly puts it, "the current exegetical phrase, 'eternity past and eternity future,' is as meaningless as it is absurd" – *The Ages* 17. Beecher agrees: "To commonsense minds it is nonsense" – *Hist. Retribution* 140. Such contradictions can only arise from the attempted justification of an essentially nonsensical concept; what is worse, a concept that clouds, even conceals, what *is* discernible and of utmost importance. Our All-Wise Creator has not used terms or expressions that His creatures cannot comprehend; nor (moreover) terms or expressions that limit the reach of His collectively loving purpose with them. For the one whose religious understanding (not to mention spiritual insight) is based firmly on the scriptural "*aions*," the conclusion that Gelesnoff suggests is more satisfying and likely correct (it is impossible to prove wrong): "Like as God is omnipresent and has 'neither beginning of days nor end of life,' eternity is everywhere about us. In that vast, dateless, measureless, ever-flowing stream of continuity, the Ages are a tiny parenthesis appointed for the evolution of a definite plan." From this, we can, with Robert Withers (*Time and Eternity* [1960]), conclude two vital lessons: 1) It is unwise to use words unless we have a clear understanding of their

meaning. 2) It is even less wise to attempt to force ideas into scripture that are not there. The price paid for the latter is high. For if we dare to add to God's Word in any way, we will surely have to adjust the balance by subtracting from it elsewhere.

Chapter 4

PUNISHMENT EVERLASTING OR AGE-LASTING?

Punish a man for his sin, that is just; punish him for ages...that may be just; but make no end of punishing him for that sin, reduce him from a man to a devil, let him become forever vile, that is not just.
- P. T. FORSYTH

The Eastern Church of the first three centuries could not have failed to attach deep significance to a fact, which, owing to the flawed rationale of later Western scholars in their rendering *aionios* by 'everlasting' or 'eternal,' escapes the notice of the modern believer altogether. The fact is that in no scriptural instance is future punishment said to be unmistakably and indisputably endless.

A cogent illustration of the above is found in the autobiography of the 19th-century Presbyterian preacher, Theodore Clapp (1792-1866). He describes how, while preaching an impassioned sermon on 'eternal torments' in New Orleans, a judge in the congregation – who was also an eminent scholar – requested that the preacher provide a list of biblical texts in Hebrew and Greek to support the doctrine he had been so fervently proclaiming. Apparently, the judge had abandoned an original destination for the ministry owing to his inability to find the doctrine in scripture. Dr Clapp proceeds to give a detailed account of his studies in response to the judge's challenge. Carefully reading through the whole of the Old Testament in Hebrew, he was unable to find a single Hebrew word corresponding to "hell" as a place of fiery future punishment. He further discovered that many orthodox critics of the highest standing were well aware of this fact. Confessing this to the judge – Clapp was undoubtedly an open and honest man – he turned with confidence to the Greek of the New Testament. But after a study of eight long years, the preacher was compelled by conscience to admit that he could not find a single text, when fairly interpreted, affirming the endless torment of human souls.

{Clapp's story is both intriguing and salient. His experience of being challenged and then discovering that the challenger was correct all along is not uncommon. Edward Beecher, who published his historical work on Scriptural Retribution in 1878, is in his own way another example. During his research for the book, Beecher explains how and why his purpose for writing it changed when he encountered the prodigious evidence contradicting his original intention. As a result, both these Yale graduates experienced far-reaching and unforeseen consequences for their faith and lives, including the establishment of anti-slavery societies, the rejection of the depraved notion of *unending* punishment, and a much fuller appreciation of God's creative purpose. In 1834, after his decade of painstaking research of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures, Clapp committed himself to the "radical idea that salvation was for everyone."}

Now, there exist numerous adjectives and phrases (some already reviewed) that would render any challenge to this subject impossible to those who accept the authority of scripture. Yet not one of those decisive adjectives, nor any of the indisputable phrases, is once applied to future punishment. Their absence, especially compared with their existence elsewhere in contexts unrelated to judgment and punishment, is highly significant. If, for instance, God's Word told us just once that punishment was *aperantos*, or *akatalutos*, or *adialeiptos*, or *ateleutetos*, or *aidios* – all of which indicate that which is continual, uninterruptible, without ceasing, endless, perpetual, and even (in the last case) 'eternal' – there would be no dispute as to the literal meaning of such words. But scripture has not said even of evil, as it has of good, that it will last through "all the generations of the ages" or to the "ends of the eons." Of course, none of this is suggesting that sin will be free from judgment; that is unquestioned. But to make any consequent punishment *endless* amounts to a dire, even slanderous, misrepresentation of God's character and name if it is not the case. People who freely proclaim the teaching often fail to adequately weigh its covert and insidious elements. Writes John Chaffee: "It is probably true for each of us that at the end of our ropes, there is an understanding of God that we would rather die for than give up. The strange reality is that that view of God is far less than what God actually is, and therefore, we need God's help to 'cleanse our palate' or 'clean the slate' and to help us come to God with as few hindrances as possible." Chaffee goes on to quote Meister Eckhart's (13-14th C) famous paradox, "I pray God, rid me of god!" Many fail to see the impact such "hindrances" may have on individual or even collective spiritual expression, which, as we will see, has played out to murderous effect on occasions historically.

Once our knowledge of the 'eons' is applied to God's judgment and disciplinary action, we will see that just as 'eonian life' is a certain kind of life in and through the coming 'eons,' so 'eonian judgment' elicits a certain kind of penalty during these same time periods. In neither case does the word mean or even imply endlessness; it rather signifies, in Rotherham's words, "time *indefinitely* extended." The thoughtful reader will readily see in this the wise and loving provision of God for all His kin.

THE PURPOSE OF PUNISHMENT

That wrongdoing must be met with some form of reparation is a deeply ingrained human instinct. We witness it in the universal disposition to unite wrong with punishment. However, the truly enlightened soul sees the ultimate object of punishment to be the reformation of the culprit, rather than a mere infliction of suffering in keeping with the offence. Any just guardian discerns the truth about punishment: it is quite justifiable as a means of correction or discipline – even perhaps retribution for a time, especially where Divine honour is at stake – but as an end in itself, cruel and unprofitable to all concerned. To the civilised and enlightened conscience, any thought of punishment without purpose is fiendish. Yet is not so-called 'eternal punishment' – that is, affliction absolutely without end – such that it has no object or purpose whatsoever? The Christian moralist may protest, "But what of the Holiness of God?" And the unwavering Calvinist: "What of the Sovereignty of God?" These objections have either already been

met or will be in this and later chapters. Thomas Allin, in his epic *Christ Triumphant*, is implacable: "Apart from all question of its justice, endless torment is a useless and therefore wanton infliction; it is a mere barbarity, because it is only vindictive, and in no sense remedial" (49). Religious indoctrination aside, the notion of *endless* retributive suffering remains abhorrent to natural moral sense and is diametrically opposed to the *purposeful* character of God. Last (and certainly not least), it is somewhat trite to suggest (as some do) that we cannot use our innate reason or feelings in this matter. The question should therefore be asked: if, even with imperfect men and women, punishment at its highest level seeks the correction of the culprit, how can it be anything less with an all-perfect God? Professor Major's answer is resolute: "It is impossible for one who has learnt that the end of punishment...is not revenge, but reformation, to believe that divine punishment can be conducted on lower principles than those of men" – *Contemporary Review*.

Nor is it merely an issue of justice. As Gordon Knight points out in his 2006 paper, *Universalism for Open Theists*, some problems associated with faith present genuine mysteries and paradoxes, but "any Christian who wishes to defend the doctrine of *everlasting* punishment has a lot of explaining to do if the doctrine is to be understood in a way that is *morally* comprehensible" – *Religious Studies 42*; 214 (emphasis added). Knight rightly observes that many thinking and feeling believers cringe at the picture thus painted of an inescapable (and unending) "weeping and gnashing of teeth."

A Reason-Based Faith

It is folly to claim we cannot use our God-given sense of right and wrong in this matter. Who was it that implanted our deep awareness of justice in the first place? Repression of this inborn trait betrays the reasoning behind our darkest dogmas, which, in essence, is the desire to abscond from acknowledging their moral absurdity! Reason (especially *moral* reason) should form the framework of our faith, just as feeling, in the form of love, should be the foundation of the Gospel. If we claim that God first causes a man to sin and then punishes him *endlessly* for the sin he cannot help, are we not courting incoherence, unreason, and a highly questionable form of love? Or, as Leighton Flowers asks, is not folly the only course for the one believing in a god who both "determines sin and grieves over it?" (paraphrased). Both our moral intuition and common sense should unhesitatingly proclaim 'YES'! What is more, we have plenty in scripture to support us. For example, Christ asks the crowd, "Why don't you judge for yourselves what is right?" (Luke 12:57 *NIV*). Again, "Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone?" (Matt 7:9). And further, "What man of you would not do this?" (Luke 15:4). Citing this last verse, Allin protests: "Observe the immense significance of Christ's teaching. It expressly sanctions the right to argue from those feelings of humanity, shared even by the outcasts and sinful, to the divine feelings...Our own feelings of love and pity (& justice) are a safe guide to God's feelings...Every lost soul is God's loss, who therefore seeks its recovery; and will seek till He find it" – *C.T.* 226, 227.

To argue as did Augustine and later Calvin that God's punishment is the manifestation of pure Magisterial Sovereignty, bereft of mercy and beyond human understanding or questioning – Calvin opined it childish to believe

otherwise – is to indulge in religious folly. Under such an outlook, gone is the Infinite source of Truth and Light that sets us free. Tom Talbott, who grew up with 'limited election,' recounts from the experience, "There are lots of tremendous people who are Calvinists, but their theology is demonic." In *Chapter 11*, we will witness how history records the ghastly prospect of such dark religiosity when circumstance allows – in preview, the Geneva Council of Elders became no strangers to burning dissenters alive. Indeed, they viewed such behaviour as a pious service to God. No doubt Saul of Tarsus thought the same when he assented to the stoning of Stephen. But the reality, as testified in both histories, is as opposite piety as light is to darkness. Human justice and punishment all too often mock the Divine Ideal, and that fatal defect is all too easily reflected onto the Deity, or read into His Word. In today's world of ostensibly 'corrective' incarceration, men and women are seldom improved by human efforts; it is therefore easy to imagine God can do no better. In this, we follow the ancient Jew by limiting the Holy One of Israel. And why subscribe to the misplaced idea that punishment and forgiveness are irreconcilable in the first place? There is great confusion over this issue: the Lord forgave Saul of Tarsus, and the Apostle Paul was the result! A God this great is much less bound to endlessly punish sin than to destroy it altogether.

PUNISHMENT IN SCRIPTURE

At one time, the greater number of people within reach of the established Western Church believed that God would endlessly punish all who did not come under her sanctity. Anselm (1033-1109), Archbishop of Canterbury, taught that because human sin was a sin against an infinite God, it thus demanded infinite punishment. Many have since parroted this unproven and poorly reasoned supposition. Such a view does little more than reveal the darkened speculations of men. As J. R. Beard observes, "Ancient doctors of the church, misled by theoretical conclusions, declared that sin was an infinite transgression, to be atoned for only by an infinite expiation. If sin is infinite, it is, of course, eternal. Eternal sin involves eternal punishment. Hence, the doctrine; it is the child of human reasoning" – *Bible Dictionary*. It could equally and more scripturally be reasoned that the greater the God, the more insignificant the man; hence, a finite sin requires a finite punishment; or, just as no one is capable of absolute purity, equally none are capable of absolute culpability.

Our English word 'punishment' comes from the root *pu* in Sanskrit, which, interestingly enough, means to cleanse or purify. In the Old Testament, approximately ten Hebrew words have been rendered by our English noun 'punishment.' Strictly speaking, only one should be so translated, and even then, with some reservation: it is the Hebrew *phagad*. In the *King James Bible*, *phagad* is rendered by an astonishing array of terms, including 'punish' 31 times, 'number' 119 times, '*visit*' 63 times and about 45 other different English words! The *Oxford Gesenius Hebrew Lexicon* gives the meaning of *phagad* as 'attend to, visit, muster, appoint;' it offers 'punish' only as a subsidiary meaning. In 24 cases, the *A.V.* agrees with the above definition by placing a marginal reference, 'visit upon' (the *RSV* fails to do this). One particularly poignant example is found in Psalm 89: "I will VISIT their transgression with the rod, and their iniquities

with stripes" (v32). It continues, "but I will not withdraw My loving-kindness…nor ever betray My faithfulness" (v33). Yahweh's loving-kindness is *not* dependent on human action, though there is no doubt over His chastening of *intentionally* bad behaviour. The other nine Hebrew words rendered 'punish' or 'punishment' signify to keep back, to discipline, to smite, to fine, to sin, retribution, depravity, evil and correction. None occurs often in scripture; six only once.

Turning now to the Greek of the New Testament, we find only two words that strictly convey the idea of 'punishment'; their use is also restricted. They are *kolasis*, occurring a total of four times (though only once regarding our subject), and *timoria*, which appears once as a noun and twice as a verb (*timoreo*). The term *kolasis* is the milder of the two. The lexicographer Benjamin Hedericus gives its original meaning as "the trimming of the luxuriant branches of a tree or vine to improve it and make it fruitful." James Donnegan, in his *Greek and English Lexicon*, describes how this primal meaning evolved to include the "restriction, restraint, reproof, check, and chastisement" of human behaviour. Hence, the Classical idea expressed by Plato: "No one punishes the wicked looking at his past only, simply for the wrong he has done – that is, no one does this who does not act like a wild beast, desiring only revenge without thought – hence he who seeks to punish with reason...punishes for the purpose of deterring from wickedness." Plato's successor, Aristotle, confirms the teacher's natural moral insight: "chastisement (*kolasis*) aims at correction." He contrasts this with its stronger cousin: "*kolasis* is inflicted in the interest of the sufferer" while *timoria* "is in the interest of him who inflicts it, that he may obtain satisfaction" – *Rhetoric*; Book I, 10:17. This was also the common view of the early church. Clement, for example, wrote, "*Kolasis* is for the good and advantage of him who is being punished, for it is the amendment of the one who resists." More recent scholars like Plumptre and Barclay, also support this view. The former sees *kolasis*, strictly interpreted, as carrying with it "the thought that it was inflicted for the sake of the sufferer" – *The Spirits in Prison* 61.

But, as we have found, scripture is even more important than scholarly opinion or lexical definition. And numerous times the written Word supports the corrective and educational function of discipline: "The lord reproves him whom He loves, as a father the son in whom he delights" (Job 5:17); "He that chastises *the heathen*, shall he not correct?" (Ps 94:10). The words of Jeremiah 2:19 even suggest an in-built corrective element within the act of transgression itself: "Your own wickedness will *correct* you, and your backslidings will rebuke you." If such is the case with the present life, why must we imagine that He, *who changes not*, will modify His dealings with men in the life that follows? For we assume with Samuel Cox, "that the same God rules both here and there and rules by the same laws" – *Salvator Mundi* 165. The patristic Gregory of Nyssa does not distinguish between the two states; rather, he insists that "all punishments are means of cleansing ordained by divine love to purge rational beings from mortal evil, and to restore them to that communion with God which corresponds to their nature." Gregory's words remind us of God's kinship with the *genos* or race (Acts 17) made in HIS image and likeness. As such, holistic humanity, even the willfully evil, must have something of their Creator in them and consequently be of importance to Him. Recall that Christ died for the ungodly and showed His love for us while we were yet sinners (Rom 5:10). It is our whole world of men,

women, and children that "God so loves;" therefore, it should be evident that when God created that divinely imaged seed, He intended it to live.

How Does God Punish Sin?

God presents Himself in scripture – especially in the life of Christ – as one who eagerly desires the salvation of *all* (1 Tim 2:4). This salvation brings the removal of what scripture calls "sin" (*hamartia*; error, transgression, to miss the mark – *Young*). But the willful rejection of this provision means disrespect to our Holy and Perfect God, a serious lack of *honour* shown to Him. This brings us to the method by which God will eventually safeguard or vindicate His honour and name. Our second word, *timoria*, signifies 'honour-guard;' that is, the guardianship of one's honour. Unfortunately, no single English term can adequately define *timoria*, and thus, regrettably, our bibles render it by the unqualified 'punish.'

Human thinking has greatly distorted the religious idea of punishment or reckoning. With good reason, one has written, "'Punishment' is a word I have come to hate, for men have so fearfully misused it of God's operations." The Creator will certainly discipline to safeguard and defend His honour, or that of violated law, but nowhere are we told He will inflict more suffering than is necessary to satisfy this aim. We witness the outworking of *timoria* in Saul's persecution of the saints in Acts 22:5 (*timorethosin*) and 26:11 (*timoron*). Saul believed he was faithfully performing a noble service to the God of Israel because he viewed the new sect as blasphemers; as such, he was determined to have them honour Israel's God. Saul's actions would have seemed severe to the neutral onlooker, but his motive was strictly one of justice, not cruelty. Thus, when reading Hebrews 10:29, we must understand 'punishment' in this light (*timoria* in brackets).

> **How much worse (vindicating of God's honour) do you think will be deserved by the man who has spurned the Son of God, profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and outraged the spirit of grace?**

The important thing here is the satisfaction of the injured party, namely God, whose Son was spurned, purifying blood profaned, and gracious spirit insulted. Discipline is at all times appropriate to the sin and sinner, always within the bounds of God's righteousness and grace, because these things can no more diminish than can His vast love. This passage has been linked with another in the same epistle, Hebrews 6:4-6, said to be among the most dreadful in the Bible. But it loses much of its dread when correctly translated and contextualised. Rotherham's wording is precise:

> **For it is impossible as to those who have been once for all illuminated, who have tasted also the heavenly free gift, and have been made partners in a Holy Spirit, and have tasted God's utterance to be sweet, mighty works also of a coming age, And who have fallen away, Again to**

be remolding them into repentance; seeing they are again crucifying unto themselves the Son of God. And holding Him up as an example.

The studious reader will begin at verse 11 of Chapter 5 and read carefully through to at least verse 9 of Chapter 6: The writer earnestly desires his hearers to become mature and leave behind the "elementary things" (6:1). Repentance from dead works can only take place once (vv2,3), consequently, it is impossible to be renewing to repentance those who have been already enlightened (v4) and have fallen aside (fallen by the way, not apostatised), because that would entail crucifying the Son of God again, putting His saving work to shame (v6). The indication from the Greek is that "falling aside" is not a deliberate action. The word used is *parapito* (lit. besides fall) and is distinct from *apostasia* (lit. from stand ['defection from truth' – *Strong*]). Unfortunately, this is the only occurrence of *parapito*, so it cannot be compared in other contexts; but 'apostatised' is inappropriate and misleading. Concerning this controversial passage, Thomson makes the following salient comments: "The writer of the Hebrews epistle was persuaded better things concerning his lovable brethren (v9) than they would produce thorns and thistles, fit only for burning, and almost coming to a curse (v8). Their repentance had not vanished, but its foundations were not to be laid again, because this could not be done and was needless. If their (repentance) had vanished, why were they exhorted to move on to maturity?"

Chastening Fire Of The Age

We return now to the Greek *kolasis*. Matthew 25:31-46 is *the* seminal passage where this word occurs, owing to the stress placed on it by those who insist on 'everlasting punishment.' Many a fine vessel has been dashed on the rocks of this passage. The Lord's words here have been brought forward to prove a 'general judgment' at 'the end of the world,' and it is easy to see how such ideas came to be from the common phrasing of the text. When, however, the passage is appropriately translated and applied, light displaces the shadow.

Here, the nations (*ethne* - neuter) are gathered in front of the Lord's throne at His "coming in glory" (v31). He then separates them into two classes: those who have unselfishly assisted "these, the least of my brethren" (whom He calls righteous) will obtain "*aionion* life," whereas those who have not done so (the accursed) will be dismissed into the "fire *aionion*, made ready for the adversary and his messengers." The fire mentioned in verse 41 is commonly interpreted in verse 46 as 'everlasting punishment' (*kolasin aionion*). Compare this to Hart's more measured wording, "chastening of that age" – *The New Testament*, or Rotherham's, "age-abiding correction," or the *Concordant* (the most literal of the three), "chastening eonian." According to Ilaria Ramelli, the Patriarch Athanasius would have likely agreed with these translations: "In conformity with scripture," she writes, Athanasius "does not describe that fire as ἀΐδιον" (*aidios* or 'eternal'), but uses αἰώνιον (*aionios*) which he interprets "as '*belonging to the world* (or aeon) *to come*,' not as 'eternal'" – *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis* 232 (parentheses added).

Athanasius's allusion to the fire "in the aeon to come" points to the age that lies ahead, not to some imagined eternity. Were more bibles to acknowledge

kolasin in its lawful sense (as the above three), we might better understand the need to impose semantic limitations on the word *aionion*. Had Christ wished to convey something beyond *kolasin*, he had recourse to our other Greek term *timoria*; the fact that He did not only adds to the case presented here. The most regrettable thing is that typical translations (and commentators) fail to acknowledge these facts. Their reasoning rests not on a legitimate understanding of the words used, but on the dubious Augustinian logic of 'everlasting punishment' (see *Chapter 11* for an appraisal of Augustinian eschatology). As Rotherham wisely suggests, "Upon the 'aionion correction' no arbitrary limit can be laid, unless indeed the essential nature of 'correction' implies it" – *Appendix*, *Emphasised Bible*. A fitting addendum is F. D Edgell's point that since *kolasis* originally meant 'to prune,' then destruction (or something infinitely worse!) is not what is in view, because pruning invariably has reference to the production of good fruit (*Human Destiny* 63). As to the nature of this 'pruning' discipline or chastisement, scripture provides the answer: The rule of righteousness with a "rod of iron" (Ps 2:9; Rev 12:5; 19:15).

Yet another hurdle resides in the conflict between those who hold the narrative as parabolic and those who believe it prophetic. It does, after all, carry on from the uncontested parables of the wise and unwise virgins and the talents. The metaphors "goats," "sheep," and "fire" all convey a parabolic sense, as does the moral atmosphere that follows. As Brad Jersak quips, "If the description here is *literal*, then all we have to worry about are farm animals!" For those who view the passage as prophetic, a heated debate then opens up as to the when, where and how of its application (see *Appendix II* for the writer's view). The one thing that all agree on is the narrative's moral purpose, which continues the same general theme of the two preceding parables: the judicial and spiritual consequences of selfless, compared to selfish actions, *but with an inflection on a global scale*. Note, too, the Lord's employment of the language of omission; that is to say, what the goat class did *not* do for His brethren. Is this, then, suggesting 'salvation' by works alone? In fact, there is no indication of *salvation* or *faith* anywhere in the text (Nor, incidentally, is *resurrection* mentioned or implied, which precludes identifying this scene with John's *Great White Throne* [Rev 20 - aka 'final judgment']). Noting the above, 19th-century American scholar John Hanson observed that if neglect of the poor "constitutes rejection of Christ – as is taught here – and all who are guilty are to suffer endless torment, 'who then can be saved?' The single consideration that works, not faith, is here made the test of discipleship, cuts away the foundation of the popular view of this text" – *Aion, Aionios* 50. Quite so! In light of the foregoing, the common premise for interpreting this text is questionable because the blessing allocated to the sheep nations has little, if any, association with justification through faith, any more than its opposite does for the goat nations. Ferrar Fenton obviously perceived this situation more clearly than most when he interpreted verse 46 in his *Modern English* Bible (1903): "*And these He will dismiss into a long correction, but the well-doers to an enduring life*." What seems likely is that each side receives the blessed or corrective measures appropriate to past behaviour, and *that* is what they carry into the age beyond. Is it not deeply ironic, as Gerry Beauchemin points out in *Hope Beyond Hell* (28), that the one passage most commonly brought forward to prove 'everlasting punishment' not only has nothing to do with it but, when properly understood, presents a powerful argument against it?

The other occurrence of the noun *kolasis* is found in John's first epistle (4:18), offering further insight. After speaking of God's love, John says, "Fear is not in the love, but the perfect love is casting out the fear, for fear has *chastening*." Here, fear is a hindrance or obstacle to love via the inertia of *chastisement*. Whilst 'fear' makes us wise unto God and His salvation (Pro 9:10), its continued *kolasin*, or chastisement, inhibits the very love He desires for us as His children (naturally, one must define what John means by fear). Adding weight to this is Acts 4:21, where, in verbal form (*kolazo*), it again points to disciplinary intervention. Lastly, in 2 Peter 2:9, we find the verb used concerning the *constraint* of the angels that sinned. Thus, all three passages support what *kolasis* meant in the ancient Greek world – pruning, correction, chastisement. The likelihood, therefore, of *kolasin* meaning something different in Matthew 25:46 is virtually zero.

Trench, in his *New Testament Synonyms*, gives *kolasis* the meaning of "punishment as it has reference to the correction and bettering of the offender." But curiously, Trench regards its use in the N.T. to have a severer meaning, though no legitimate justification for this is given. His position is a fairly typical example of what could be called semantic or hermeneutical adaptation, where words are altered or adapted to fit theological assumptions. Are we then to accept such assumptions as true over and above the lawful definition admitted by the same scholar? The current writer, for one, prefers to trust God in this matter and assume His choice of words precise, purposeful, and in keeping with their original meanings. If we alter the known sense of a word here and there to suit our own theology, where do we stop? "To such shifts," writes Andrew Jukes, "are even learned and good men driven by their traditional views." The whole point of this work is to show that God means what He says and says what He means through a consistently intelligible medium. Noting Trench's position, Thomson comments, "Strange it is that orthodoxy of old always had to choose the harshest terms when referring to the punishment and fate of the unsaved and wicked."

In the *Septuagint* (*LXX*), four out of the seven occurrences of *kolasis* are used to translate the Hebrew word *mikshol*, meaning 'stumbling block.' This brings to mind how Christ was a cause of stumbling to the Jews. It may be relevant to reflect on the nation over the past two millennia. For rejecting their Messiah, the Jewish people have suffered greatly; perhaps their experience is an example of the "fire" that awaits the "goat class" at our Lord's coming.

ON THE WRITINGS OF MEN

When isolated, poorly translated texts are applied in contradiction to the known character of God, they distort the Divine purpose. The abuse of such texts has been an ongoing curse throughout Christian history. All too often, the frail writings of men have shown a startling prevalence of ghastly expressions like 'eternal death,' 'everlasting damnation,' 'endless torments,' 'eternal wrath,' 'everlasting vengeance,' and 'eternal fire.' One might suppose scripture full of such expressions; it is not. Any reliable concordance will confirm the following:

'Eternal death' is a phrase quite unknown in the Greek and Hebrew texts. Even when using the expression "second death," four times in the Book of Revelation, scripture avoids any construction like 'aionian death.' Yet it repeatedly mentions "aionian life" (*aionion zoen*).

'Everlasting damnation' is a mistranslation in the *A.V.* of aionian judgment (*aioniou krimatos*). It occurs only once in Hebrews 6:2 (more will be said on 'damnation' shortly). The expression, properly rendered, means *eonian judgment* (i.e. judgment of the age). While many modern bibles restore the judgment part, they (usually) fail to correct the 'everlasting' part.

'Eternal fire' occurs in Matt 18:8, Matt 25:41, and Jude 7. As already shown, it should be rendered 'eonian fire' or 'fire of the age' (i.e. 'fire' having reference to the future eon or age). It is generally agreed that this fire is the same as that which cannot be quenched (Mark 9). But do we reflect on the fact that what *we* may be unable to quench, God may be so able? The "unquenchable fire" of Jer 7:20, 27 (also Ez 20:47, 48) speaks of God's anger and judgment against Israel. But how is this to be construed? Certainly not as with *King James*, 'never be quenched.' 'Never' occurs nowhere in this verse, only "unquenchable" (*asbestos*); that is, unquenchable in the sense that *no one can prevent its execution*. Time bears no relevance within the context. Plutarch referred to the sacred fire of a temple as "unquenchable" (*asbestos*), though the fire no longer burns today. Josephus speaks of Jerusalem's temple fire as being "always unquenchable" (*asbestos aei*); both fire and temple were gone by the time he wrote those words. Lastly, the Christian historian Eusebius describes how Alexandrian martyrs "were burned in unquenchable fire" (*asbestos pur*) even though he says it was extinguished within a single hour!

'Everlasting vengeance,' so far as being an inspired expression, has no scriptural parallel whatsoever. As already shown, God will certainly vindicate His honour, but we must distinguish between vindication and vindictiveness. Ryder Smith believes that the term 'vengeance,' along with 'revenge' or even 'avenge,' should disappear from our bibles altogether since in their modern sense they have no necessary connection with justice. The scriptural terms they render (Heb. *naqam* & Gk. *ekdikesis*) denote the carrying out of justice or reckoning: "'Retribution is Mine, I shall repay' says the Lord."

'Endless torments' is also an expression for which there is not the slightest direct scriptural authority. It is most often applied (erroneously) to so-called 'eternal fire.' Even if one insists that this fire *is* literal, or applies it to the fire with which God destroyed Sodom (Jude 7), there is no justification for making it mean 'endless torments.' For Ezekiel 16:53-55 at once repudiates any such notion: God will "restore their fortunes, both the fortunes of Sodom and her daughters...Sodom and her daughters shall return to their former estate." Should we accept crystallised dogma over what scripture plainly states?

'Eternal Wrath' (new to this writer) was recently encountered on a website promoting Universal Reconciliation by one of its opponents. Obviously, this individual not only believed that the expression (or its concept) occurs in scripture (which it does not) but also that it provides a true description of the Eternal Nature (which, again, it does not). As revealed in the prologue to *Chapter 2*, the Hebrew Scriptures provide more than sufficient evidence that God's wrath is categorically NOT everlasting. Indeed, the only truth in our opponent's assertion lies in its connection with influences that have long-distorted the image of God almost beyond recognition. Insidious influences that he and many others all too naively buy into. Such views stem from unhealthy dogma that has too long shrouded Elohim's love and wisdom, and the grand purpose those divine traits hold for the race created in His image.

PUNISHMENT IN METAPHOR AND PARABLE

The use of 'fire' in scripture is both literal and figurative and is more fully covered in *Chapter 9*. Meanwhile, the view held by some – less so today (mercifully) – that considers fire a literal penal agent is devoid of scriptural authority. Never once is fire used as a means of 'preserving alive' for anguish, agony, or torture. The Lord's description, in Matthew 25:46, of fire representing 'chastening' or 'correction' should be sufficient. If not, then our issue lies with an understanding of the scriptural *figure*. Rigid literalism is as fatal to any accurate understanding of scripture as is the other extreme of excessive allegorising or spiritualising. It is the spirit that pervades the *whole* Word of Truth that reveals God's purpose; literalising that which is metaphorical can lead to great harm – the horrors of the Middle Ages and the persecuting (and very literal) fires of the eformation bear evil testimony to this fact. Not without cause, Farrar writes in *Mercy and Judgment*: "The notion of a material fire, meant to keep men alive in pain without destroying them, is a fiction from the literalising of figures ill understood" (446). The rich metaphorical nature of the Hebrew and Greek languages has led many astray, aided no doubt by fervent indoctrination regarding its imagined literalness. Everyday metaphors are easily recognised and deciphered, but those of scripture have become so coloured by religious preconceptions that objective deciphering (by the unschooled or prejudiced) is, at best, impaired, and at worst, impossible. We see in scripture what we bring to it! A good example is Christ's expression in Matthew 13:42, "furnace of fire;" do we imagine from this a literal iron furnace (*cf* Deut 4:20)? Of course not! Yet many insist the fiery element *is* literal. Consistency demands that the whole be seen as a figure relating to Divine Judgment. In like manner, the figure of "chaff" being burnt up (Matt 3:12) illustrates, as Farrar puts it, "the work of Messiah who will purge the bad from the good" at His coming. So, too, the Lord's language on other occasions. If we heed His explanation of "aionion fire" in Matthew 25, we will correctly interpret other comparable metaphors.

Furthermore, notice the Lord's discriminating words in Matthew 13:41: "All *the* causes of stumbling and *the* doers of lawlessness." The definite article – exceedingly important in Greek – alludes to a specific class that receives the described punishment. Christ was never indiscriminate in His choice of words.

These and other passages, such as the burnt weeds (Matt 13:30), the bad fish thrown away (v48), and the worthless servant cast into outer darkness (Matt 25:30), all point to the Divine Law of "as a man sows that also shall he reap." It is folly to read more into them than this solemn warning. As the scholar Richard Whately says, "The only truth that is essential in a parable is the truth of the moral or doctrine conveyed by it." Literalising the details of parabolic language distorts that truth and leads to misrepresentation of the teaching. The wicked householder from whom the kingdom is taken away (Matt 21:43) represents those who lose the blessings and privileges of the much-desired kingdom. Their fate scarcely proves anything like the darkened fantasies of Dante's *Inferno* (as John Chaffee observes, "Most of us are more influenced by Dante than the actual scriptures, and we don't even know it"). Nor does that of the wedding guest who is cast out of the marriage feast (Matt 22:11-13); even less the unwise virgins about whose fate nothing is said (Matt 25). Most of Christ's parables convey the same vital principle – ever present from Genesis to Revelation – which is the pain of loss for

the unprepared, the willfully sinful, and the faithless. None who violate the prerequisite conditions can enter into the future kingdom. On the other hand, when men learn to accept those conditions, the doors (or *gates*; Rev 21) are wide open as we see from those parables with a quite different emphasis: like that of the Good Shepherd who will not cease from searching until He finds the *last* lost sheep (Luke 15:4); or the loving acceptance of the prodigal even when his repentance came only through misery and shame (Luke 15:11-32); or the incarceration of the unforgiving debtor until *the last penny is paid* (Matt 5:26). And what, we must ask, happens once that last penny is paid? Seventeen centuries ago, the theologian Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428) provided the most likely answer: "He would never have said (this) unless they could be released from punishment, after having suffered adequately for sin…And when, by this means, they shall have been brought to fear God, and to regard Him with goodwill, they shall obtain the enjoyment of His grace."

The First Shall Be Last

Few things have blinded the faithful more than the rigid literalising of scriptural metaphors and descriptive parabolic language. Just as an erroneous view of *aionios* has led men away from understanding the *duration* of punishment, so the literalising of metaphor and parable has obscured truths regarding its quality. Moreover, such punishment has been extended far beyond the class to whom our Lord, in every instance, limits it. In Matthew 23, Christ unfolds a dire catalogue of the evil in which the elite of Israel indulged. No less than seven times, they were the target of His denunciations. The chief priests and elders, who challenged His authority, were another group accused in Matthew 21. While Christ censures their self-proclaimed piety – referring to them and their proselytes on one occasion as "sons of Gehenna" – he falls short of categorically denying them entry into the Kingdom. Instead, He warns them, "I tell you that the tax collectors and prostitutes are going *before you* into the Kingdom of God" (v31).

Damnation, Not Scriptural

The following is an extract from Farrar's earlier book, *Eternal Hope* (xxxvii):

> **The verb "to damn" and its cognates do not occur once in the Old Testament. No word conveying any such meaning occurs in the Greek of the New Testament. The words so rendered mean "to judge," "judgment," and "condemnation;" and if the word "damnation" has come to mean more than these do – as to all but the most educated readers – then the word is a grievous mistranslation, all the more serious because it entirely and terribly perverts and obscures the meaning of our Lord's utterances; and all the more inexcusable, at any rate for us with our present knowledge, because if the word "damnation" were used as the rendering of the very same words in multitudes of other passages (where our translators have rightly translated them), it would make those passages at once impossible and grotesque."**

Most modern bibles no longer use the term 'damnation,' which should be sufficient reason for dropping it from Christian speech. But old traditions (like

old habits) die hard; and so, the word's use persists within sections of the religion of Christ...even though few, if any, are lastingly converted by terror. Indeed, most intelligent hearers are repulsed by such inanities. A *healthy* fear of God is a good thing: "Fear (Heb. *yirah*) of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10). Mark well, this fear is not the same as terror; it is rather a blend of reverence, awe, worship, humility and obedience. Such fear-induced wisdom is essential to our spiritual walk, keeping us on a path pleasing to Him. But the truly wise saint will 'fear' God's displeasure sufficiently not to use terms and expressions (such as damnation) that go beyond what He has said; this is especially true when the implications on God's character are so pronounced.

CHRISTENDOM'S STUMBLING BLOCK

One wonders how many mature, reflective Christians still (or ever did) believe that God will 'forever' punish all who die in a state of sin. Although still taught in zealous evangelical circles – where denying it may be seen as heresy – increasing numbers express doubts concerning its reality; most merely pay lip service to it. Indeed, even those who preach it act out their day-to-day lives as if it weren't true. For what responsible married couple would consider raising children under circumstances where one of their beloved offspring might die and incur a fate of simply unspeakable proportions? The fact that these same folk *do* produce families implies a certain neutrality – even indifference – to the whole subject. At the very least, there seems to be complicity in shelving the topic, like someone stashing a discomforting document in the lowest drawer. At some level, Hart suggests, "(people) do not want to plumb within themselves that they have acquiesced to an irrational and wicked idea. They think themselves bound by faith to defend a picture of reality that could not be true morally or logically in any possible world" (forum on *That All Shall be Saved*).

In bygone years, the teaching was the cause of many an agonised soul over the loss of an 'unsaved' dearly departed family member or friend. Others were so calloused by the dogma that the love of God was completely obscured by visions of Him dispensing endless fiery torture. "I cease to wonder," decried the 19th century's Jacques Saurin, "that the fear of hell has made some mad, others melancholy." Similarly, the American scholar Halsted: "The world would be one vast madhouse if a realising and continued pressure of such a belief were present." And, too, Joseph Butler: "Such a belief would scorch and wither the powers of man." For these very reasons, the notion is rejected by human instinct and is a source of derision towards the faith. No doubt these cynical words of Henry Drummond contain truth: "Many a man would be committing an intellectual sin if he were to believe some of the doctrines supposed to belong to Christianity." Or those of J. S. Mill: "Compared with this, every other objection to Christianity sinks into insignificance." More recently, even noted evangelicals have been "cracking under the strain" of this teaching, to use John Stott's terminology. Stott found the whole notion "intolerable" and failed to see how people could imbibe such darkness without "cauterising their feelings."

Before he died, Stott adopted conditionalism, which holds the unsaved as annihilated. Mainstream Christendom could do with more people like Stott – especially within its influential leadership – who are not prepared to bow before

incoherence merely because a towering elitism claims it true. All earnest believers ought to solemnly reflect on this matter, rather than relegate its dysfunction to a level of unthinking complacency, or worse, become willing dupes in its promotion. For these unnumbered souls – those already or soon to be afflicted in hell – some of whom were once our friends, maybe even family members, will in a billion years still be writhing in agony; indeed, in a certain perverse way, their suffering will merely be starting! Is it any wonder that thinking, feeling folk cringe from such madness? It not only paints a profane picture of God but also lays bare a human psyche complicit with the absurdities of the crowd. Is it not deeply ironic that Plato, who long ago helped set this disturbing ball in motion, was the very same who claimed the 'crowd' to be always wrong?

It comes down to the one factor that has so frequently been lacking in human experience: common sense. The moral and philosophical incoherence created by the teaching is far-reaching, something the intelligent non-believer sees without difficulty. Think about it. How is it possible on any ethical basis to love your neighbour as yourself under the actualised terms of the tradition? One cannot "proleptically accept that someone you love as yourself may go to eternal damnation while you ascend to eternal bliss without your bliss being corrupted by that knowledge" – *Hart*. Under virtually any non-creedal circumstances, most ordinary human beings would agree. Then, of course, there is the incongruity of *endless* evil and sin within the universe of God: "Shall He command us to 'overcome evil with good,' and Himself, the Almighty, be overcome by evil?" asks Andrew Jukes. How is it possible or even plausible for Christ to 'undo' (Gk. *lyse*) the works of the devil (1 John 3:8) when they remain permanently and endlessly intact? Furthermore, if "evil is the myth of hell" (a statement attributed to Charles Péguy), then anyone postulating an eternity of evil risks participating in the very evil they are claiming to denounce; some might call it the worst possible evil.

Neither does a novel reclassification of the words lessen the tension. Rephrasing the dogma of eternal torment to a euphemistic 'eternal separation' or 'eternal death' changes nothing! Is this not, we ask again with Hart, "the mere babbling of babies trying to make sense of something they can't begin to comprehend?" When men struggle with their own reality – even worse, what is perceived as *God's* reality – they all too often fall back on idioms well short of a "pattern of sound words" (2 Tim 1:13). The above expressions have no scriptural equivalents whatsoever; they merely interpose a barrier to clear understanding and moving forward. Then there is the ontological dilemma of just how someone can be 'separated' from the Being on whom their very existence depends (Acts 17:28). Or, indeed, disunited from that one cohesive Power holding all things together (Col 1:17). True, the idea of removal or banishment from that which is prized does occur in scripture (Matt 25:41; 2 Thess 1:9; Rev 22:15); it follows, also, that this implies a wilful separation from the 'experience' of God (just as it does for many today). However, these concepts do not align at all with the idea commonly ascribed to 'eternal' separation. Besides, as we have observed, the scriptural evidence for any form of separation being 'eternal' is, at best, arbitrary; at worst, completely incorrect. Indeed, a case can be made – and *will be* made in the following chapters – for such banishment or separation being as much about 'cure' as consequence. As for the notion of 'eternal death,' it too has been

adequately dealt with – it is a phrase unknown to scripture (and most reliable bibles, too).

Dissonance is a much wider fact of human experience than is commonly acknowledged. The myriad worldwide ideologies holding sway over the minds of millions pay stark tribute to its dysfunction. In truth, none of us is entirely free from it under this current veil of tears and brokenness. The dogmatist imagines himself free, but in so believing, is merely succumbing to his own blindness, doubtless propped up by a comfortable (or *comforting*) conformity to religious – that is to say, ideological – indoctrination. The bottom line is, as Emerson and others have more or less stated, we all believe what we *choose* to believe.

THE WRATH OF GOD

Human weakness – in the form of indoctrination, ignorance, indifference, depravity, hatred, distorted justice…call it what you will – all too often delights in sentencing others to a penalty it would never consider for itself. The desire for vengeance is a major reason why the Ultimate Judge sternly and repeatedly cautions against judging, at least in the sense of *proclaiming* judgment. Equally, its nemesis, in an attempt to align more fully with the Christ of the Gospels, swings as readily in the opposite direction, whereby everything in the Divine economy is reduced to a mere passive resistance of evil.

We are commanded to resist evil and retaliation because of our limited control over outcome, but God manifests no such limitations. Scripture records occasions when Yahweh was obliged to carry out sweeping judgment in the face of persistent, willful wickedness – the antediluvian world, the cities of the plain, the nations of Egypt, Canaan, Assyria, and Babylon were among those so visited in Old Testament times. Although some of our friends allegorise these events as mere 'representations' of Divine Judgment, the writer feels disinclined to follow this Platonic model. Christ and the writers of the epistles refer to these events many times, holding them up as historical examples and using real names (e.g. Lot, Noah, Abraham). To understand these unsettling events within an authentic, historical framework, we must bear in mind something of the terrible nature of the crimes committed. And further, that moral pollution extended throughout the entire populace. In the case of Sodom, God would have spared the city for the sake of only "ten righteous ones" (Gen 18:32). In light of this – and through that light, the clear disclosure of God's abhorrence of persistently wilful sin – we begin to see how the Holy One of Israel had every right to remove such contaminators of the race. At the same time, we must never assume God's indifference to such removal. R. T. Lovelock provides some perspective on this when he says: "There is no pleasure nor exultation in their downfall, but only in the fact that in their removal, wickedness is taken away from the earth" *Job* 91. The prophet Ezekiel declares, "God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked" (18:23). Evidence of unnecessary cruelty or suffering is lacking in the biblical records; the depravity is swiftly removed and the social/moral order restored. There is a reality here that needs to be squarely faced: God's judgment, which scripture sometimes refers to as "wrath" (Heb. *chemah*), must occasionally intervene in the perverse affairs of the "age-times." This situation will continue

until His purpose with creation is fulfilled in the yet future "ages of the ages." Within this lies the paradox referred to by the prophet as God's "strange work."

{Archaeology supports the historicity of the biblical narrative, and the Cities of the Plain are a good example. Unfortunately, controversies over their geographical location have unnecessarily blurred both the biblical account and the archaeological evidence. According to Ezekiel 16:46, these cities were located *south* of Jerusalem (not north, as some postulate). Deuteronomy tells us how the Lord showed Moses "all the land...as far as *Zoar*" (34:1-3), the only one of the five cities to survive according to the biblical account. Zoar was near the southern end of the Salt Sea. Today, very little survives in the hostile environment of what were, according to Genesis 14:1-4, Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Zoar – the notorious "Cities of the Plain." Some four thousand years later, the worked sites of four wasted towns in this region reveal charred bricks, charcoal and ash. All four show the massive destruction one would expect from a catastrophic seismic event. Furthermore, sulphur balls, which still readily burn when ignited, lie in their millions scattered near the shores of the Dead Sea, along with massive deposits of sulphur buried in the ground itself: "Then the Lord rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah" (Gen 19:24). In contrast, the fifth city of Zoar was the only one left untouched – it was to the safety of Zoar that Lot fled before Sodom's impending destruction. It alone continued as a settlement, and even today, its site (known as Safi) lies in one of the few fertile portions of the region; the four other cities were laid waste and never rebuilt – just as Scripture predicted. Although these archaeological sites now have different names, they are obvious candidates for the remains of the ancient biblical Cities of the Plain. Both date to the Early Bronze Age (2000 BCE). Of course, we know that Ezekiel does not leave the story of Sodom and her daughter cities there; he assures us of a promised restoration – yes, even for wicked Sodom (Ez 16:53,55)! For more, watch Joel P. Kramer's *Expedition Bible* YouTube episode: *Sodom Burned*.}

Even if we convince ourselves that the ancient Hebrew depictions are allegorical, what are we to do with those of the New Testament? Christ predicted Jerusalem's fall within the generation in which He lived. Was this not a prophetic judgment over a people so perverse as to crucify their own Messiah? When the sacking of the city occurred in 70 CE, it manifested as one of history's most brutal sieges. Christ's warnings about the "Judgment of Gehenna" had gone largely unheeded; indeed, He was mocked. Neither is there any point in saying, 'Yes, but *Titus and his armies* were responsible for the sacking of Jerusalem, not God.' Titus was as much a servant of the Most High as were the Israelites themselves in purging Canaan or Cyrus in destroying Babylon. Scripture records as much. Distasteful and disturbing as it may be to our sensibilities – ancient or modern – we should not forget the Lord's weeping over that dark, looming event (Luke 19). In this, we see exposed the tender ambivalence within the heart of God. Nor should we fail to recall that "in Him" sin was judged with as great – indeed, greater – brutality than anything found in the Hebrew Scriptures! In the strictest sense, sin was not judged *until it was judged in Christ*, and in this, the Almighty suffered right alongside His creation.

Neither should we deny God's mighty ability – moreover, His *willingness* – to restore those who for the time being He has 'destroyed': "He kills, He makes alive; He wounds, and He heals" (Deut 32:39); or, as with Job: "He wounds, but He also binds up; He injures, but His hands also heal" (5:18). Moreover, just as the empty tomb bore witness to Christ's power over death, so every other tomb will be emptied, that *all* may (eventually) be made alive in Christ (1 Cor 15:22).

It is this heart-stopping, pulsating authenticity that makes the panorama of scripture the astonishing drama it is.

Under the patriarchal age and the Law of Moses, God revealed His power, His righteousness, His wisdom and His justice, but concealed the paternal side of His nature. He was "The Almighty" who principally hid Himself from the sons of men (Isa 45:15). Although His "loving-kindness" is marked throughout, seldom do we see God at this time as "Father" (*Abba*); much more is He "The Judge of the whole earth." But through Christ – the "*Word* made flesh" (*Logos*, variously defined as the revelation, the communication, or the explanation of God) – the Father's heart, in relation to sin-laden humanity, was for the first time laid bare. As William Du Bose (1907) asks, "Where before Christ or where now other than in Christ and in the cross of the Divine – suffering together with and for man – where in all the story of the universe was or is love so love, or God so God?" – *The Gospel in the Gospels* 292. As a race of beings, we are apt to be slaves to what is immediately in view. When the "terrors of the Lord" are before us, we fail to apprehend the higher truth that humility and grace lie buried deep beneath the surface. As one has written, "…an unutterable fountain of tenderness was in Him towards the ungodly." Undue focus on the transient process of judgment or "wrath" can lead to the grievous error of allowing the letter, which kills, to transcend the Spirit, which gives life. May we never forget that it is the "o*nly-begotten* who unfolds the Father; it is His humanity, His flawless humanity, which reveals God" – *Who is Our God* 106?

The 'Wrath of God' can fairly be called Yahweh's reaction to *wilful* sin and evil – we are not talking mere transgressions here. But even in wrath, God's kindness and patience lie just beneath the surface. Never quick to dispense justice, He forewarns and delays in anticipation of repentance; when judgment arrives, it comes swiftly. Neither is "wrath" in this case what many imagine: "Between the wrath of God and most of what this world calls wrath, no parallel exists," insists J. S. Stewart, "God's wrath is God's grace. It is His grace smitten with dreadful sorrow. It is His love in agony" – *A Man in Christ* 219, 221. Likewise, F. D. Maurice says wrath "is not the counteracting force to love, but the attribute of it." The depraved idea that 'God *is* Wrath' – that is to say, wrath *personified* – is utterly without scriptural support; like the 'eternal wrath' mentioned earlier, it is the worst kind of mindless rationalisation. If God is 'personified wrath' – the exact antithesis of John's unqualified "God is Love" – then, dear reader, we are all in trouble. Moreover, it is simply not possible to conceive of God as both 'eternal' love and 'eternal' wrath simultaneously without portraying Him as a sort of schizoid caricature! But then it is equally unnecessary in the first place to see God's wrath against sin as being incompatible with His love for the sinner; any parent can be wrathful or angry with their child, but does that necessitate the dissolution of parental love? Let there be no misunderstanding here, the Divine Love is in no way humanised or sentimental: it is indeed a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. His Love is, as Jacques Ellul asserts, "Demanding, jealous, total and indivisible. Love has a stern face, not a soft one" – *What I Believe* 191, 192. At the same time, we must be wary of conflating righteous yet passing indignation (and consequential judgment) with lasting hatred. God does not, at any time, hate men in the common sense of that word. True, He may hate their ways, as in the case of Esau or Edom (see *Ch 7*), but God's unbroken demeanour towards humanity, His "Kin," has always been that of undeviating

love, though from the shallow human viewpoint it may appear the very opposite. The Psalmist assures us that God's mercy and love will last through the ages (Ps 106); in Lamentations, we read that He will yet have compassion (3:31-34); moreover, as Isaiah exults, He will not always be wrathful, nor contend *through all ages*; for (on this basis) the very spirit would fail before Him, and the souls which He has made (57:16).

While God's judgments are fleeting, their effects may be lasting – a clear warning to others who deliberately violate law. No doubt many will carry shame and loss (for a time, at least) into the Kingdom of God over the poor choices they made in this life. Nonetheless, James informs us that Divine *mercy* rejoices over and above that same judgment (James 2:13), which should be a clear warning against actively participating in what is clearly the Sovereign's sole domain. God's Image, the Lord Jesus Christ, cautioned His disciples and the crowd against harshly judging others (Matt 7:2; Luke 9:55); to love their enemies and pray for their persecutors (Matt 5:44), as indeed did He on the cross; to do good to those who even hate them (Luke 6:27); to be merciful, meek and peacemakers (Matt 5:3-11). How far we fall short of these lofty ideals when we glibly sentence others to 'eternal damnation.' Are we so naive as to imagine we can damn others and be free from judgment ourselves? Christ's greatest evangelist warned against proclaiming judgment before the appointed time (1 Cor 4:5) – Paul refrained even from judging himself (v3). Lastly, he exhorts us to pray for "all men" (1 Tim 2:1). How we can fulfil this command *and* condemn mercilessly is indeed a mystery. By snatching a biblical phrase here and there, regardless of due meaning and application, men have attributed to a righteous God that which would be inconceivable in the vilest of men. Let us honour God and the Cross of Christ rather than blacken His name and the redeeming work of His Son in such a manner.

Chapter 5

THE BIBLE AND ITS HELLS

Is it the great crime of dying
which can quench the love
that our enmity and sin could not?
- PROFESSOR JELLET

In *Chapter 3*, an important rule for scriptural exegesis showed the need for an accurate knowledge of the original meaning of words. We now outline three more rules of correct interpretation:

1. THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE: Often this authority has been misplaced or confused with the mistaken inferences of men and women, or made to conform to a tradition that for centuries has been merely deduced from scripture. Gelesnoff rightly says that some Christian doctrines "have not been viewed as a series of subjects to be studied, but propositions to be proved, and this, of course, tends to secure a one-sided argument in their support."

2. THE GRAMMAR AND CONTEXT OF SCRIPTURE: God's Word can only be correctly interpreted under the known rules of human language. We have discovered the importance of establishing the meaning of a word or phrase when it was written; now, this must be extended to the laws of grammar and context. A passage cannot be taken out of context and made to say what we wish it to say; rather, it must be considered within its contextual setting, along with its proper textual sequence and emphasis.

3. THE HARMONY OF SCRIPTURE: "A text," says one (unknown) writer, "may be made to mean anything or nothing according to the presuppositions with which the interpreter approaches it." The following list is a guide:

a. Scripture must be interpreted consistently with itself.
b. It must be interpreted consistently with God's character.
c. It must be interpreted consistently with reason and moral intuition. (Hill)

The above rules must naturally be applied in conjunction with prayerful guidance – the inner depths of scripture can be understood in the fullest sense only through Spiritual assistance. However, God does not inspire supernatural knowledge of the laws of grammar or provide the historical settings and national idioms that determine the meaning of the sacred writers. As Dr Farrar observes, "the commentaries of many saints show that no amount of spiritual insight could save them from complete misapprehension as to the significance of thousands of words and hundreds of texts" – *M. & J.* 367.

THE STATE OF THE DEAD

The state of the dead has always been a source of speculation and controversy. One reason for this is that scripture itself reveals little about the death state, less than many realise. Far more is said regarding resurrection than about the condition *between* death and resurrection. Of course, this has not prevented passages concerning resurrection being spuriously brought forward to 'prove' a certain condition of the dead. Indeed, it is virtually impossible to avoid controversy in this arena, for where scripture is silent, speculation strives to fill in the gaps by using texts that may have little bearing on the subject. Many such passages, when interpreted within the bounds of the previously outlined principles, reveal nothing more about the death state than what the expositor or student brings to them.

It must be further pointed out that the conclusions drawn in this chapter are in no way essential to the overall thesis. Our primary purpose here is to remove the extreme and unbalanced dread associated with what is a popular theological concept – that of an 'eternal hell' – a concept of which scripture knows absolutely nothing. Nonetheless, whatever the reader's present understanding of hell, and whatever it may remain hereafter, the essential point to grasp is that the states or places referred to in the Greek and Hebrew, commonly labelled 'hell,' are *never* revealed to be permanent.

Our assessment begins with the structure of man. The purpose here is not to philosophise (at least not to any degree), but to observe purely and simply (or as simply as possible) what the word of God tells us. Scripture constitutes a living human being as "spirit, soul, and body." Taken in reverse order, we have the material part, the body (Heb. *gvivah*; Gk. *soma*). In Genesis 2:7, the body is identified with "the dust of the ground," that is to say, it was formed from the physical properties of the earth. In the next chapter, Yahweh assured our primal ancestors, following their vain attempt to hide from Him after eating the forbidden fruit, that *dust they were* and to dust they would return (3.19). The wisest king who lived confirmed this generations later: "*All* came from dust; all return to dust" – Ecc 3:20. What is LIFE, James asks, other than "a vapour that appears for a little while, then vanishes" (Jam 4:14)? The interesting point about these statements is that while they depict the obvious mortality of the physical body, they characterise it as if they were talking of the *person*, the once fully conscious individual who experienced life. "It is an unwarrantable liberty to put 'body' when God has put (or implied) 'man,'" insists E. W. Bullinger. As we will see, many passages speak this way. What then, we must ask next, is the soul?

The term soul (Gk. *psuche*) occurs 102 times in the New Testament, being translated 'life' in about 40 instances. Most of the contexts have one thing in common – they involve death in some way. Noting this, Robert Withers writes, "An examination of the occurrences of 'psuche' will indicate that it does, in fact, overlap with some of the English usages of the word 'life,' and that its primary meaning is the organ of consciousness or 'conscious life;' with this goes active life and sensation" – *Soul & Spirit.* The term 'soul' applies to all life with breath, not just human beings: "To every living thing of the land – and to every bird of the heavens, and to every living thing that moves on the land, *wherein is a living soul*" – Gen 1:30 (*Rotherham*). The great divide that separates man from the lower

animals is, of course, found in the preceding verse (v27), where God is said to have created mankind *in His own image*. This is not stated about any other part of the creation. Nonetheless, the soul distinguishes *all* that is alive and has breath from that which is not, the animate from the inanimate – it is no coincidence that the Latin word for soul is *anima*. This expresses the entire conscious experience of life; indeed, contemporary bibles often render soul as 'being' or 'creature.'

As to the soul's metaphysical and philosophical attributes – such as its inherent immortality (or otherwise), its Cartesian depiction as 'ghost in the machine,' its transmigration to heaven or elsewhere – scripture has little to say. Perhaps this is why French philosopher and author Jacques Ellul prefers the term "self" to soul. He sees the word soul just "too heavily freighted both philosophically and religiously" – *What I Believe* 212. He has a point! We will review these more "freighted" aspects later.

The third element scripture recognises is spirit (*pnuema*), which many wrongly see as just another expression for soul. In the above passage from Genesis (2:7), we read: "God formed man, [of the] dust of the ground, and breathed in his nostrils the *breath* (*ruach*) of life" (*ruach* is the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek *pnuema,* which according to Ilaria Ramelli is given specifically to humanity, "whereas the vital breath, the natural *pnoē*, is given to all creatures" – *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis* 105). Withers continues, "We cannot properly say that any one part of the make-up of a human being is the essential 'person.' It requires the *whole* to constitute the complete human being." Then, turning to the subject of death, he adds, "The death of the body is the death of the human being whose body it is, and the cessation of existence as a human being." Withers provides an interesting addendum, doubtlessly aimed at the nihilist: "...it is entirely wrong to speak of total extinction at death or at all. Scripture knows nothing of any such notion... Actually, we have no knowledge of anything in the universe being annihilated in the strict sense of the word, that is, reduced to nothing." Indirectly, this is borne out by scripture itself: (1) all comes from (or "out of") God, (2) all has its existence in God, and (3) all once more ultimately *returns* to Him. Matthew 10:28 may shed some light on this:

> **And be not afraid of those killing the body,**
> **yet THE SOUL ARE UNABLE TO KILL.**
> **Yet be fearing Him Who is able both the soul**
> **and the body to destroy in Gehenna.**

The point is that men hold the capacity to kill *only* the body; having done this, they can do no more. The emphasis in the Greek lies in their inability to affect in any way the "soul," the essential being or person. In the second sentence, nothing is said about *killing* either soul or body; instead, the Greek term *apolesai* is used. This word (a variation of *apollumi,* which we will review in *Chapter 6*) contains within it the primal meaning of lostness, 'to make lost'; it neither asserts nor denies that the soul is killable. Nor, incidentally, is Christ necessarily stating what God *will* do or *intends* to do, but rather what He is *able* to do. As much as anything, this verse – indeed, the whole passage (which He is sharing, by the way, with His disciples) – is about fearing and revering the Almighty, not men. Nor is His purpose to induce 'fear' per se, for He immediately assures them of the

Father's tender care and exhorts "*not* to be afraid." That the words of verse 28 (and the others like them) have been snatched from their context to promote the idea of the soul's eternal death or endless torment is a tragedy beyond measure.

What then happens to the soul, the conscious being or person, at death? Genesis 37:35 probably comes closest to providing an answer: Jacob, after hearing of the death of his son, refused to be consoled and said, "I will go *down* to *Sheol* (Heb. *SHE OLah*, lit. 'towards *Sheol*') to my son mourning." Sheol occurs 65 times in the Old Testament. The *A.V.* renders it 'grave' 31 times (as above), 'hell' 31 times, and 'pit' 3 times. This array exposes our vague understanding of the Sheolian concept. This is why many modern bibles transliterate the Hebrew: hence the word 'Sheol,' of which 'Hades' is the Greek equivalent. Scholastically, Young, in his *Analytical Concordance*, defines *Sheol* as 'the unseen state' and *Hades* as 'the unseen place.' Naturally, these technical definitions fail to satisfy our curiosity, concerning which Withers bluntly asserts: "It is no use complaining about this vagueness (of meaning), for it is plainly intentional; not necessarily because God wants us to be ignorant but because human language cannot express what is outside the operation of the senses and the mind." Scripture provides no tangible details as to what the "unseen" is; the grave is perhaps the meaning most commonly implied.

{The best way to understand the strange word *Sheol* is to begin in the Old Testament by examining every passage in which it appears, and then continue with an exhaustive study of its Greek equivalent, *Hades*, in the New Testament. As we have seen, this has been done by some very conscientious scholars of the past with transformative outcomes. The problem, more typically, is that most zealots want to begin with the Anglo-Saxon 'hell' – at least their understanding of it – and "attach to it all the wild meanings men have devised and imagined, read all of this into *sheol* and *hades* wherever it is convenient, then insist that this unholy mess of ideas is the true meaning of these words" – *Seed and Bread* 125.}

Further investigation reveals that *Sheol* and *Hades* are never said to be the *final* state of humanity, only that which lies *between* death and resurrection. German theologian Rudolf Stier (*Words of Jesus*) denies their once common designation as "the place and condition of the eternally damned" (p222); he sees them rather as the state before resurrection. Acts 2:27 serves to reinforce Stier's view. According to the *A.V.*, David says (concerning Christ), "...thou wilt not leave my soul in hell." Something is surely wrong here; something that is exposed in the more scholarly way modern bibles handle this verse. The popular *N.I.V.* is typical: "...you will not abandon me to the *realm of the dead*." This is very much better. The old-time substitute of 'hell' for *Hades* (esp. in this verse) was little short of libellous...a mere conformity to 'the traditions.' It was likely a leftover from 16th-century Reformed Theology, which held that Christ, following His death, descended into 'hell' and suffered there for 'a few brief hours' the torments of the lost. Mercifully, this frightful supposition has waned over the centuries. The righteous dead do not go to hell! They go to the Hadean or 'unseen' state, there awaiting resurrection. Thus, "we learn that resurrection is the exit from Hades, as death is the entrance to it" – *All in All* 71. Accordingly, our understanding of *Sheol*/*Hades* serves us in a similar way to our understanding of *aionios*: (1) It offers a consistent and reasonable interpretation of the passages where the terms are found; (2) it restores their simple if somewhat vague

meaning; (3) it removes the unsound ideas often read into these terms; and (4), most important of all, it in no way casts a shadow over the revealed character of God. Because "in Him, there is no darkness."

The 'spirit' (*pneuma*) has been commonly conflated with the soul, yet scripture reveals more than a passing difference between the two. Take, for example, Paul's discourse in 1 Corinthians 15 on the two spheres of existence, earth and heaven. Here, the apostle distinguishes the 'soulish' (common renderings such as 'natural' or 'fleshly' are inexact) from the 'spiritual' in a way that is difficult to ignore. His argument (vv35-50) could be summed up as follows: the "soulish (*psychikon*) body" – fundamentally earthly and hence subject to corruption and death – cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. An all-new "spiritual (*pneumatikon*) body," beyond the power of corruption and death, immortal and imperishable – thus perfectly fitted for the celestial sphere – is required. Exact translation is a prerequisite to understanding what the apostle is describing here. According to Strong, *psychikon* means (properly) "soulish, i.e. what relates to physical (earthly) life alone;" *pneumatikon*, conversely, means "spiritual, i.e. relating to the realm of spirit." Here, the apostle makes a striking contrast between what is of "soul" and what is of "spirit," or that which is of "earth" and that which is of "heaven" – each one incompatible with the other. Withers observes, "…out of the six occurrences of psuchikos (soulish), four are in 1 Corinthians; and that of the twenty-six occurrences of *pneumatikos* (spiritual), fifteen occur in this epistle. Plastered on it, so to speak, is the warning to distinguish most carefully between the two, and to keep each in its place" – *The Soulish and the Spiritual* 2. Throughout this letter, the apostle is beckoning his wayward brethren (the Corinthians) onwards towards the path of spiritual transcendence, away from the carnality of earthly, soulish sensation. When Paul so plainly distinguishes between the 'soul body' and the 'spirit body,' it becomes very apparent that dogmatic imperatives have forced upon us the denial of a difference once universally acknowledged: soul and spirit are *not* synonyms! The apostle also employs the terms in Chapter 2 of the same epistle, this time in plain reference, not to the body, but to the "man." He writes, "But the soulish (*psychikos*) man (not the man 'without the spirit' - *NIV*) does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. But the spiritual (*pneumatikos*) man appraises all things" (vv14,15). If the spirit and the soul are identical, Paul's argument here is meaningless. Hebrews 4:12 delivers the same message when it talks about "piercing to the *division* of soul and spirit." That is to say, the two are not to be aligned, but *divided* or separated as to what each one means. The writer is implying that this can only be achieved through 'sharp' deliberation of scripture, what Paul calls the correct cutting or division of the word of truth.

There is also the not insubstantial fact that "soul" is never used (unless in metaphor) of the heavenly Deity Himself; the devoutly informed would on no account venture to speak of God as the 'Holy Soul.' That the Father is, without the slightest doubt, ubiquitous *Spirit* has powerful connotations for the one who earnestly seeks Divine Sonship. Why? Because just as the first Adam was a living *soul*, so the second Adam became a life-giving *Spirit*; moreover, those "in Christ" (the second Adam) will become co-heirs – thus life-receiving spirits – with Him. At the moment, as air-breathing, earth-bound beings, we are by necessity *both*

soulish and spirited. But what is behind must give way to what is ahead, and for that spirit alone will suffice. Withers aptly sums up: "When one comes down to hard foundational fact, everything depends on the extent to which the word of God fills and dominates a person's (being). Those who have drunk deeply of this living spring reach the point where what is soulish no longer obsesses them. Then, and then alone, they have come to that maturity on earth which will grow into the perfection of the life to come" – *Ibid*. 3.

What happens to the human spirit after death seems more straightforward. Moments before He expired Christ declared, "Father into your hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46). Likewise, the first of Stephen's two utterances as he was dying was, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (Acts 7:59). In neither case is the word "soul" used; furthermore, both the above verses harmonise perfectly with Ecclesiastes 12:7: "the spirit returns to God who gave it." The spirit is associated, in part at least, with the innervating power that enlivens the body; the part that is directly and authentically Divine. Again, Christ affords evidence of this with His words, "It is the Spirit (*pneuma*) that gives life, the flesh provides nothing" (John 6:63). When Christ raised the little girl from the dead (Luke 8:55), her spirit (not her soul) returned, and she immediately arose. The Prophet Ezekiel foretold of a time when this would take place on a larger scale (Ez 37:1-14): "Behold, I will cause breath (*ruach* - 'spirit') to enter you, *and you shall live*" (v5). The common interchange of the word "breath" (or wind) with "spirit" in the O.T. is because, in Hebrew, the two are interrelated. Since breath is an indispensable element to human survival, this relationship bears out the limits of our present definition.

{The tripartite view of man (spirit, soul, and body) was widely embraced in the early patristic era of the church, losing favour with the Latin ascendancy of the 4th-5th centuries. Its decline paralleled the evolution of the Catholic dogma of original sin, later becoming entrenched with the Reformational idea of total depravity. According to J. B. Heard, the consequence of this was that "the Latin Church generally, as guided by Augustine and Jerome, rejected altogether the distinction between *Psyche* and *Pneuma*, for which the Latin tongue was not flexible enough to find equivalents, and so the usual dichotomy of man into body and soul only became the prevailing view throughout the West" – *Tripartite Nature of Man* IX.}

What Then Is Hell?

"This alone is (a) matter of faith," declared the Jesuit, Giovanni Perrone, "that there is a hell." But what did he mean by that word? Farrar believes that "endless confusion has been introduced into the thoughts of Christians by the adoption of the word 'hell' to represent alike Sheol, Hades and Gehenna...and by the fact that the words 'hell' and 'damnation' have come to be used in a sense far darker than those which were originally attached to them" – *M. & J.* 61.

As we discovered in *Chapter 4*, the word 'hell' itself has no real parallel in the Greek or Hebrew Scriptures. This is tacitly acknowledged by the diminishing frequency of the word's deployment in our common bibles. The Catholic *Douay Rheims* takes preeminence here by deploying hell 110 times; the protestant *King James* manages to halve that to 54; the *New King James*, in turn, whittles it down to 32, while later revisions virtually abscond with a mere 13! So, what is this telling us? Surely it is a clear statement that the word 'hell' is inappropriate to render either the Hebrew *Sheol* or the Greek *Hades* in *any* of

their various contexts. Indeed, there is no need to employ the term at all. According to one report, at least 30 modern bibles have expunged hell from their pages altogether. To paraphrase the words of one recent author, 'Hell has quietly gone away…and nobody noticed.' Well, hardly anybody.

As a theological concept, hell very likely had its entry into Christian thought via the medium of pagan belief, such as the Greek myths of Hades and Tartarus, along with Rome's fabled Infernum. Just how these dark legends crept into Christian dogma under the name of 'hell' is a fascinating story (about which more will be said in *Chapter 11*). The word itself is believed to be of Saxon origin (proto-West German 7-11th C), derived from the medieval *helan*, meaning that which is secret or concealed ("that which hides" – *Dictionary of English Etymology*). After the derivative came into English speech, it at first held its sense of *concealment* – to 'hell the head,' for example, meant to put on a hat; a 'Hellier' covered a roof with slate. However, according to James Usher, it later became the name given to the place where a tailor flung his shreds; then, even later, the cell for the confinement of the King's debtors. Here is a classic example of how words change their meaning over time; in this case, a quite innocuous term came to mean something of great dread. In its original sense, hell was an acceptable translation of *Sheol* or *Hades*, as the unseen or concealed. But through the dark intervening centuries, an acquired theological nuance made hell "a term as opposite (to *Sheol*) as light is to darkness" (*Benett*), and is "neither warrantable by scripture nor reason" (*Lightfoot*). One quite unbiased witness to all this is *The Etymology Dictionary*, which describes hell, most appropriately, as "a pagan concept fitted to a Christian idiom." But by far, our most powerful witness lies with the steady march of scholarship itself. An increasing reluctance to use 'hell' to render either phrase suggests a probable demarcation between the biblical scholar and the religious dogmatist. The impartial exegete is well aware of how difficult it is to extract the popularist notions of hell from the *original* scriptural texts. Unfortunately, despite this superior scholarship, there resides a deep attachment to the word itself, along with the horror and fear it imparts. Then there is the relentless misapplication of one particular passage where the word *Hades* occurs.

THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS

Perhaps no other scripture has occasioned more confusion on the subject of the state of the dead than the New Testament narrative of The Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). Few passages have been so completely misunderstood and misapplied; the tradition, in this case, has created an almost stultifying blindness. George Sarris, who recorded the narration of the 1984 *New International Version*, drew attention to the transliteration of the Greek ᾅδης as Hades by the *NIV* scholars in every single case except in this story; here they reverted to the old *interpretation,* the word 'hell.' Why? Sarris, who rejoices in the reconciliation of all, observes, "Because that was their belief and they *had* to do it!" Twenty-seven years later, in the 2011 revision, they established full concordance by using Hades in this passage as well. Again, we ask, why? Had their doctrinal outlook changed? Very unlikely! More likely is an (undisclosed) admission of inconsistency and/or the intervening march of scholarship. For whatever reason, the *N.I.V.* is to be

commended for its revision. And herein lies the lesson: we should never allow (or allow as little as possible) our prejudice or tradition to define the plain words of scripture.

It is accepted that the storyline of the 'rich man' is, to some extent, not well connected (about which more will be said shortly). When the narrative is viewed as literal and historic, it forms a highly dubious and very tenuous basis for interpreting the rest of scripture. Of course, to make *everything* in the passage literal is to make nonsense of the whole thing; consequently, some parts are made literal while others are accepted as figurative. This arbitrary methodology thus enables the accommodation of a doctrine of hell torment. The literalist arguments are invariably built on the time-honoured view; that is to say, if one believes in the traditionalist's hell, one has little choice but to literalise the story. For on this narrative, the doctrine largely stands or falls. The strangest feature is that understanding the story is a matter of common sense once its purpose becomes clear. The problem lies in seeing beyond what is immediately in view – to wit, holding a certain mindset can profoundly mislead (as in the case of the 1st edition *NIV*). As a starting point, consider the narrative structure itself: Our first essential is to appreciate that the entire passage from Luke 15:3 to 16:31 is one continuous speech rather than several distinct parables – it is called "this parable" (15:3) after which the word parable is dropped. Immediately after the first story (The Lost Sheep, 15:4-7), the second begins with "or," and a fresh start is made from a different standpoint. Then "now (*de*) He said" (v11) begins the third story of The Prodigal Son. The fourth, concerning The Unjust Steward, commences with the same phrase: "Now (*de*) He said..." (6:1). After this, in response to their scoffing, the Lord breaks off and turns to the Pharisees, rebuking them for their hypocrisy and pretentious zeal for the law. By way of example, He points to their abuse of the divorce decree, which encouraged adultery. Then, Jesus begins the fifth story of the Rich Man and Lazarus with (once again) the little Greek word *de*, meaning "now." The diminutive '*de*' is our key to understanding continuity. It takes the reader further along – in English, we might say 'furthermore' or 'in addition to.' In light of this, it is evident that these five stories present five aspects of a similar general theme. To describe each one separately might conceal this fact from the hearer. (For reasons undisclosed, many translations fail to include the little word '*de*' [*now*] in some or all of the above texts).

The Contextual Setting

There can be little doubt that this final tale targeted the Pharisees, "who were lovers of money" (v4), as opposed to lovers of their fellow men. From verse 15, the Lord addresses *them*; not until the next chapter does He turn again to His disciples. Now it has been suggested that each of the preceding four stories appeals to one or more of the audience, which was composed of disciples, tribute collectors, sinners, scribes and Pharisees. From verse 14, the spotlight turns on the Pharisees, their scoffing provoking a response from Christ. The Lord was, of course, aware of their facade of righteousness and code of tradition that overrode the Law of Moses. So, He turns their traditions against them to destroy their pretensions, at the same time, confronting them with a powerful moral lesson.

The Lesson

There have been virtually as many interpretations of this story as there have been expositions. But once its object is determined, one can see the potential dangers in trying to explain every detail as if it held some key to Christian doctrine. In fact, not one word is said in favour or disfavour of either man. We are simply told that one was rich and the other poor and ill; their characters are not described. By implication, of course, the Rich Man was selfish, and while he indulged in "sumptuous feasts every day," poor Lazarus sought only "to be fed with what fell from the Rich Man's table." The lesson here, as scholar Thomson points out, was "quite in keeping with (the Lord's) usual teaching – the inculcation of that love...of which the proud Pharisees were so deficient; and the stern warning that as the right use of wealth will help men on their way to eonian glory, so the abuse of wealth will help them on their way to eonian shame and sorrow" – *The Rich Man & Lazarus* 3. The message was intentionally couched in language that would have been familiar to the Pharisees and others within the contemporary culture.

The Unseen World

Thomson continues, "If we accept one part of the parable as a revelation of the secrets of the underworld, we ought in consistency to accept the whole. But this is exactly what none of the (literal) expositors do. It is remarkable indeed that the imagery bears no resemblance to the Sheol of the Old Testament. The image is closer to the description of Hades current among the Greeks, wherein there were two departments: an Elysium for the blest and a Tartarus, or place of fiery punishment, for the wicked. This imagery was current among the Scribes and Pharisees and is very similar to that of the dialogues of the dead found in ancient writers, particularly the Rabbins. The Rabbins claimed that all the circumcised were safe; therefore, they were sons of Abraham" – *Ibid*. 3. Many other notables, such as Lightfoot (1830) in his *Commentaries* (157-168), have brought attention to the Rabbinic language employed here. We also have the testimony of ancient historians such as Josephus (1st C. CE) and Hippolytus (3rd C). Josephus tells us that the Pharisees gave the people many observances not written in the Law of Moses, and there are marked similarities between the expressions used by Christ in this story and those attributed to the Jews by Josephus. In *Jewish Wars II*, Josephus writes, "Every soul is incorruptible, yet there migrates into a different body that of the good only, but that of the evil is being chastened with unseen punishment." Hippolytus, in *Discourse on Hades*, further describes how the just are "conducted by the angels" to the residing place known as "Abraham's Bosom" (a phrase found nowhere else in scripture), where the righteous soul awaits its bliss. These same angels "distribute temporary punishments" per the behaviour of the unrighteous. Lastly, he speaks of a "chaos deep and large, fixed in-between" the virtuous and the derelict. Considering the parallels between the biblical narrative and these well-documented superstitions, it is no surprise that scholarship has increasingly drawn this conclusion. One notable (and unexpected) example from the *UK Evangelical Alliance* suggests that Jesus was probably reworking for His own purpose, "a well-established Near Eastern folktale, of which several versions had been produced in Jewish literature at the

time." Author Charles H. Welch, decades ago, held a similar view: "The whole imagery of this parable is unalloyed Pharisaic doctrine" – *Hell* 28.

The fact that both the Rich Man and Lazarus are represented as still possessing the bodies they possessed on earth should demonstrate that the situation is not real. Those insisting it *is* reality should pause and consider what such literalism implies. Robert Withers exposes the same absurdities that Gregory Nyssen pointed out 1600 years ago in *De Anima Et Resurrectione*: "So we are expected to think of one soul in Abraham's bosom somewhere, and another having eyes which it can lift up, a voice with which to shout and a tongue to cool with water. What use water would be to a non-material entity, such as, on any reckoning, the soul must be, is not stated...And we are left marvelling at the carrying capacity of Abraham's bosom! If we must believe that this passage is a factual story of actual places and people, we must believe all these things as well. Someone will, no doubt, retort that these things...are figurative. Exactly so! The story *is* figurative, the well-known figure of parable of which dozens exist in the Gospels" – *Exposition on Hades*. The scene depicts both parties as visible to one another yet separated by a 'great chasm' ('great gulf fixed' - *AV*), which nonetheless does not prevent communication between them. The Rich Man's plea reaches the long-departed saint, and Abraham receives it without rebuke! The literalising of this parody gave rise to the hideous fables, described in *Summa Theologica*, of those who supposed the joy of the saints would be heightened at the sight of the unutterable calamity of the damned. In response to this depravity, Farrar exclaims, "These wanton excesses of the imagination assume the aspect of a deadly blasphemy against Him whose name is love" – *M. & J.* 106. Professor John Major adds, "It is impossible to believe in the happiness of heaven co-existing with the sin and misery of hell" – *Contemporary Review*.

Some may object that the Lord would not have used such imagery if He knew it to be a caricature of the truth. But as Withers asks, "If it had been our task to condemn the Pharisees, how better could we have set about it than by using their superstitious traditions against them as He did here?" Its effectiveness is shown in Chapter 17 (of Luke), which commences without a single word as to their whereabouts. They had slunk off as in John 8:9 (the woman caught in adultery), completely silenced by the Lord's indicting words.

Grace Or Works?

The conceit of the Pharisees led to the assumption that possessing the good things in life implied God's favour; such a view precipitates pride. The Rich Man's fault did not lie in his merely being rich but in his self-indulgent *indifference* to lesser mortals like Lazarus (v25). This verse neither teaches salvation by poverty nor judgment because of riches – Abraham's wealth never prevented his honouring God. As for the five brothers, their great misdeed lay in a lack of repentance. They had the law and the prophets, after all. Had they taken them seriously instead of replacing them with foolish inventions, they might have found humility. How true are the words attributed to Abraham (v29): "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them." But the Rich Man pleads, "No Father Abraham; if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent." Then comes Abraham's crushing reply: "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead."

The Lord's use of a 'proper name' has been held up as a means of doubting the story's parabolic nature. In truth, it is unlikely this observation would see the light of day were it not for the story's contentiousness. As amply witnessed, the weight of textual evidence supports it being parabolic *to a prodigious degree*, even if it fails to fit the 'normal' parabolic format. Others believe that in using the name "Lazarus," the Lord was bringing attention to the raising of Martha's brother in John 11:43, which only served to alienate the Jews all the more (vv46-50). Young, in his *Analytical Concordance*, considers the name to be 'symbolic' (and the story parabolic). The name Lazarus means 'God is my helper' and, likely as not, is suggestive of Christ's resurrection (v31). Yet even this stupendous event, which the Jewish authorities tried by every means to quash, failed to bring the nation to its senses. The destruction of Jerusalem followed in 70 CE, leading to an ongoing Diaspora of torment and humiliation.

In summary, Withers contends, "This passage is not only different from any other passage in scripture but also, taken literally, is discordant with every other passage...The Lord Jesus was not propounding His own teaching but ironically using the ideas propagated by the Pharisees themselves, in order to confound them. The whole point of the story is that the incidents therein are not only non-factual but also positively contrary to fact. It should be obvious...that (Christ) was not telling the story to His disciples, let alone Christians in general, *but to the bitterly hostile Pharisees, and nobody else*... Nevertheless, despite these facts, the vast majority of readers…have dissipated it into fanciful speculations about 'life after death' and rewards and punishments in the 'hereafter,' dependent not on God's grace or even repentance, but on open, unashamed law works."

One final testimony remains in the unassailable words of Matthew 13:10, 11: In response to the disciples' question, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" Jesus replied: "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given." Verse 34 surely confirms His meaning beyond reasonable doubt: "All this Jesus said to the crowds in parables: indeed, *He said nothing to them without a parable*."

HEAVEN OR HELL AT THE MOMENT OF DEATH

Nowhere does the Hebrew Bible distinguish between saint and sinner when speaking of *Sheol*. About this, the German Theologian Isaak Dorner (1809-84) has little doubt: "As to the Old Testament, it does not teach that all men enter directly after death into blessedness or damnation. They rather pass into Sheol, which is described as an abode of the departed" – *System of Christian Doctrine* 409. This was still a common view – one of several – of the Jews at the time of Christ. According to Thomas Allin, early Christians shared the teaching "that the (souls) of the departed were in one common abode, Sheol/Hades." He adds, "with separate regions for the just and unjust" – *Christ Triumphant* 97. Platonism, in Christianised form, was soon embraced by the Primitive Church. Historian Philip Schaff sees no way around this conclusion: "Many of the early Christians…found peculiar attractions in the doctrines of Plato, and employed them as weapons for the defence and extension of Christianity, or to cast the truths of Christianity in a Platonic mould… That errors and corruptions crept into the Church from this

source cannot be denied" – *Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*. Hosea Ballou broadly assents: "...it had been a common opinion among orthodox Fathers, that at death all souls, both the righteous and the wicked, descended to the Hades of the Greeks or the Infernum of the Latins; which was a subterranean world consisting of two general divisions, the mansions of the just, and the abodes of the guilty." Is it merely a striking coincidence that the late-antique Catholics, with their harsh mythical 'Infernum,' developed the Western concept of hellfire? A dogma not, incidentally, widely embraced in the East (see *Ch11*). Almost certainly, the pagan superstitions of the surrounding Greek and Latin cultures infiltrated church dogma little by little, supplanting the earliest teachings regarding *Sheol*/*Hades*, much as it had with the *aions*. The ambiguities surrounding this subject are well-attested to in the divergent views encountered throughout both the historical and contemporary Christian landscapes.

Concealed In The Unseen

To form the proper ideas about *Sheol*, it is helpful to observe how it is used in the Old Testament. Space prohibits an exhaustive study here, but a few texts will be examined before returning to the New Testament.

The Book of Job, thought to be the oldest of the Hebrew canon, contains some interesting pointers on our subject. In 14:12-15, Job likens death to sleep (v12). The Hebrew word for sleep (*yashen*) means 'alteration'; in sleep, as in death, the human being is changed. Job longed for God to hide him in *Sheol* so he might be concealed from His wrath. But this ancient figure also looked forward to a time when his Maker would remember him (v13). In *Sheol*, he would wait out his service until released; God would eventually call him, and, in what is perhaps scripture's first reference to resurrection, Job would answer. In Chapter 3 (vv17,18), speaking of the grave, he says, "There the wicked are at ease together; they hear not the voice of the taskmaster. The small and the great are there, and the slave is free from his master." Certainly, this primal testimony is in diametric contrast to the fiery literalising of the 'Rich Man's' portion in the parable! What is more, others back up Job's testimony: Solomon proclaims, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might; for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in *Sheol*, to which you are going" (9:10). Verse 5 is especially emphatic: "For the living know that they will die, *but the dead know nothing*"! These testimonies are all too commonly shelved as being merely the human perspective, implying that *the reality* is different. Yet the author of Ecclesiastes assures us, "What was written is uprightness and words of truth" (12:10). The Psalmist, too, confirms that "In the son of man there is no help; his spirit (or breath) departs, he returns to the earth; in that very day his thoughts perish" (146:4). These are *very* uncompromising words and not easily misunderstood. David's opening doxology in verse 2, "I will praise God WHILE I LIVE," leaves little room for supposing he would be praising Him in death! Indeed, he beseeched God to lighten his eyes lest he "*sleep the sleep of death*" (Ps 13:3). Of course, David *did* eventually sleep "with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David" (1 Kings 2:10), but death was not to remain his ultimate fate, for, "many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall *awake*" (Dan 12:2). In Job, David, Solomon and Daniel we see outstanding examples of righteous faith;

yet, as with everyone else, they "sleep the sleep of death" until the time of their awakening.

The Old Testament likens death to sleep on more than forty occasions. This poses an interesting challenge to the traditional view. If *Sheol*, as the Hebrew tongue portrays it, is indeed the abode of the dead – *all* of the dead – and its New Testament equivalent is *Hades*, what then of heaven-going for the redeemed at the moment of death?

TESTIMONY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Sidestepping for the moment the contrarian statements of Acts 2:34 and John 3:13, the traditionalist still asserts with confidence that in the New Testament, death has changed. A literalist interpretation of Luke's infamous story is, of course, one of the most common justifications for this. Other scriptures are brought forward, too, such as the wistful words of Christ in John 8:51: "If anyone keeps my word, he will never see death"; or a tenuous reading of Paul to Timothy: "Christ has abolished death" (2 Tim 1:10). Yet both Christ and Paul – like Job and David – freely use the concept of "sleep" (*koimaomai*) to define death (see 1 Cor 15:6, 18, 20, 51; 1 Th 4:13 & Acts 7:60; the term is thus employed in the N.T. over a dozen times). And, in similar manner to the Hebrew text, the New Testament designation "sleep" refers to the *person*, not the body. Paul would hardly deploy "sleep" for a lifeless, decaying corpse! It follows, therefore, that if the "dust of the earth" requires the "Spirit" (or Breath) of God to energise it (Gen 2:7), thus producing "a living soul" or person, it is the soul or person that is sleeping, not the residual dust. "Lazarus sleeps" (John 11:11), declares Christ. Then, moments later (speaking "plainly"), He describes *Lazarus* – THE MAN, not merely his body – as *dead* (v14). Of the Reformers, Martin Luther and William Tyndale both agreed with this conclusion, and dared to announce it: in a 1542 sermon, the forthright Luther pronounced death in Christ as "nothing more than mere sleep."

Notice again how Paul's (and Christ's) metaphorical use of "sleep" (in death) interlocks seamlessly with his accompanying "awake" (in resurrection). To use "sleep," even in metaphor, to represent its exact opposite is not only contradictory but also confusing and, some might say, misleading. Yet, to this day, controversy remains over something that should be straightforward. For example, when prominent Lutheran theologian Oscar Cullmann first delivered (in 1955) his biblically-based treatise on the incompatibility of the soul's inherent immortality with the scriptural teaching of resurrection, he encountered more "violent protest" than he'd ever experienced before. Later, Cullmann pointedly remarked that no critic had made any attempt to refute his argument by exegesis! A decade before this, the hierarchy of even the Anglican Church (in Britain) had formed much the same conclusion, describing the dogma not as coming from the Bible but from pagan sources. One wonders, for instance, how the soul can already share with "the only Potentate, the King of kings and Lords of lords" an immortality that Paul states is HIS ALONE (1 Tim 6:16); or why the same apostle would boldly assert, "*the dead* shall be raised incorruptible" and "*this mortal* SHALL PUT ON IMMORTALITY" (1 Cor 15:53). Paul never speaks, as Melvin

E. Johnson reminds us, "of unrealised hopes and expectations as if they were existing realities" – *The Image and Likeness of God* 30, 31.

What then does the Lord mean by, "will never see death?" Simply that death has no enduring power over those who believe. Both Christ and Paul are making *proleptical* statements ('prolepsis' refers to something as existing before it actually exists. Romans 4:17 sums it up thus: "God calls those things that be not as though they were"). Or, as J. Armitage Robinson puts it: for Paul, "the present contains implicitly the future." In this case, it refers to the vivifying or life-giving reality of Christ's death and resurrection, which, through resurrection, *leads* to life beyond the power of death. Even though we cannot see it yet, it is as good as done.

Nor are Christ and Paul the only witnesses to the foregoing view; with perfect clarity, the Apostle John offers a third testimony. He writes in Revelation 20:5: "The rest of the dead *lived not* until the thousand years had ended." Can something *live not*, yet still be alive?

The Thief on The Cross

We now move on to those particular passages that at first glance appear to support the tradition. The Lord's answer to the thief on the cross in Luke 23:43 is commonly brought forward to prove the changed status of the saved in the N.T. – their departure to paradise (or heaven) at the moment of death, thus affirming the happy position of Lazarus in the story. But in this verse, a striking and enlightening parallelism is uncovered by bringing the Greek over to English as literally as possible:

"Be reminded of me, Lord, whenever You may be coming into that Kingdom of Yours."	**"Amen, to you I am saying today with Me you shall be in the park."**

Note the parallelism in

1. the appeal and reply
2. the note of time
3. the *future* event to take place

The difficulty in interpreting this verse lies in its *timing*, pivoting on the word "today." One reviewer writes, "The occurrences in which 'today' is sandwiched between two sentences are fourteen in number. In ten of them, 'today' plainly refers back to the first clause. These are Matt. 27:19; Luke 2:11; 12:28; 13:32, 33; 22:34; 24:61; Acts 26:2, 29; Heb. 3:13. One other, Hebrews 13:8, is rather peculiar. It reads, 'Jesus Christ yesterday and today the same and into the eons.' Lastly, today is sandwiched between two sentences and plainly refers to the second of them in three places: Mark 14:30; Luke 4:21: 19:9; and in each of these it is prefixed by 'that' (*hoti*); *which is absent from Luke 23:43*...The fact remains that in constructions such as these three the word 'that' precedes today and forces it to refer to what follows, whereas in Luke 23:43 it does not occur at all. The evidence, therefore, is perfectly plain. Luke 23:43 should be construed as in the ten passages listed above. To attempt to force it to read as the three do is to fly in the face of the facts." The majority of translations merely play follow the leader

here by inserting the comma *before* today. Whereas most of the more independent 'literal' versions, such as *The Emphasised Bible*, *Young's Literal Translation*, the *Emphatic Diaglott*, and the *Concordant Literal NT*, corroborate the above by placing the comma *after* today. It is regrettable that so many translations dutifully align with consensus opinion.

The above is an extract from an article by Dr F. N. Pohorlak, entitled *Can Incorrect Punctuation Falsify Facts?* Pohorlak precedes the above exegesis with some interesting points, two of which are listed below:

1. If the thief went to paradise on the same day he died, and Jesus told Mary three days later that He had not yet ascended to His Father, then the thief and Jesus *did not* go to heaven on the same day. This assumes, too, that "paradise" and 'heaven' are the same, which is unlikely, as the Greek word "paradise" refers to an *earthly* park or garden (such as Eden).
2. If Jesus was asked by the thief to remember him when He came into His Kingdom, does that mean the same as the thief going to 'heaven' on a day when Jesus did not enter into His Kingdom?

The Lord explicitly declared in John 3:13 that "*no one* has ascended into heaven except He Who descends out of heaven." What's more, the thief would have known nothing of the "heaven" that Paul later revealed in his Ephesian epistle – the Hebrew hope had always been *terrestrial* – the thief would have thus understood "Paradise" to be the future, earthly 'Edenic' garden or park that was the promised "Kingdom" of the faithful Jew.

Lastly, according to Anglican scholar E. W. Bullinger, the Lord's assertion "I say unto thee this day" (*AV*) was a well-known Hebrew idiom used to emphasise the solemnity of the occasion and the importance of the words spoken. As such, it marked "the wonderful character of the (thief's) faith, which, under such circumstances, could still believe in and look forward to the coming kingdom, and (thereby) acknowledge that Christ was the King" – *The Rich Man & Lazarus* 16.

{If the above seems a bit *too* analytical, then N. T. Wright offers a simpler solution. He confirms the risen Lord's words to Mary (#1 above) as making it impossible for the thief to have literally gone to "paradise" on the day. Instead, Dr Wright sees 'paradise' in this context as a "holding pattern till the resurrection." In other words, the thief, through his exceptional faith, received the pledge of resurrectional security on that future, distant day. In fact, there is little difference *ultimately* between the two views; only the first is more analytical in its deliberation on the future kingdom.}

All Live Unto Him

Luke 20:38 reveals the relation of the dead to God. It reads very literally (Greek emphasis in capitals):

> **Now GOD He is not of dead ones but of living ones, for all**
> **TO HIM go on living ('are to live' - Rotherham's footnote).**

In Greek, the verb "live" is not emphatic; the emphasis falls rather on the words "to Him." Trollope & Rowlandson explain in their treatise on *Luke*: "God would

scarcely call Himself the God of those who are never to exist again; but He calls Himself the God of the Patriarchs, and truly so; for *all*, dead or alive, live to Him, and for Him. The dead as well as the living are under His control, and He will raise them up in the last day." Similarly, the fine Swiss scholar Frederic Godet (1812-1900) observes, "God still calls Himself their God (though they are long since dead). He cannot be God of a being who does not exist. Therefore, *in Him* they live." Thomson adjoins, "The Dative *auto* ('to Him') implies a contrast with 'to us,' to whom the dead are as though they were not. Their existence and activity are entirely concentrated in their relation to God. *All* live unto Him, not only the three Patriarchs (note the absence of the definite articles). The 'for' bears on the word 'living.' '*For* they live, really dead though they are to us.'" Lastly, Bullinger (again) brings our attention to the fact that "the logical sequence of the whole context is suddenly broken off...There is no conclusion to the Lord's words. He set out to prove the truth of the resurrection" (which the Sadducees denied).

The above is an example of the need to restore the original literary structure because sentence arrangement in Greek determines emphasis. If our interpretation is inconsistent with emphasis, scripture can be distorted. Even so, the most important factor here remains *context*. Christ's response to the Sadducees concerned *resurrection*, not conscious existence in some disembodied Platonic form.

THE HOPE OF RESURRECTION

Other texts appear at first sight to support the reality of the 'Happy Lazarus.' In 2 Corinthians 5:8, the apostle desires "to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord" (*cf.* 1 Thess 4:16, 17). Unconsciously, we may assume Paul is saying that to be absent from the body *is* to be present with the Lord. But that his subject here is also resurrection remains beyond doubt. The 4th verse holds the key: "...not that we wish to be *unclothed*, *but further clothed*, that *mortality might be swallowed up by life*." Here again are the two states Paul mentions most frequently in his epistles – the current "soulish" state and its mortality or death; and the future "spiritual" state and its immortality or life (1 Cor 15:44). Through "humiliation" comes "glory" (Phil 3:21). Moreover, the "life" Paul speaks of here is, as always, resurrection.

{Concerning the opening verses of 2 Cor 5 (vv1-9) – which many assume concerns 'disembodiment' in some intermediate state – the following might be considered: "*The* body (v6) is not simply *a* body, but a particular body, that is, *this body* in which we are at home now. We have two homes. The tabernacle in which we now live and the eonian (*aionion*) house (v1) in the resurrection; the soulish body and the spiritual body. We may be away from one home yet present in the other. Now we are away from home (and) from the Lord. Yet we would much prefer to be away from this home and be at home in our spiritual body, with the Lord. We have no third home, and if we had, the apostle has just made it clear that the naked, unsheltered condition is not at all to be desired. He could hardly reverse that conviction without some further explanation" – *Concordant Commentary of the New Testament* 270. Thus, if we take seriously Paul's wish not to be "unclothed" in verse 4, then we must avoid contradicting it by assuming verse 5 concerns the very thing he did not wish! To be consistent, the "tent" to which Paul refers in the second instance can only align with *resurrection*.}

If Paul's statement in Philippians 1:23, "My desire is to depart and be with Christ," is seen in a similar light, then the solution to his dilemma – living or dying (v21) – was neither, for he would not make his choice known (v22). He longed for another condition: the *resurrection life* with Christ (v23). We must resist reading into Paul's words any thought of personal gain; this should be evident from verses 20-22. His heartfelt desire was certainly to depart and *be* with his Lord, but he does not in any way reference *timing*. As always, interpretation must comply with the overall context, which, as usual, lies within the framework of resurrection; for it is this that makes our future experience in Christ complete.

Throughout Paul's epistles, his expectation was incontestably the resurrection life, surely a more glorious (and tangible) hope than some ethereal Platonic disembodiment. A few reformers returned to this outlook after their break with Catholicism, but regrettably, most of what became institutional Protestantism failed to follow. William Tyndale, who stoically resisted the prevailing trend, asked the following question: "If souls be in heaven, show me what cause should be of the resurrection?" – *Answer to More's Dialogue* 118. Centuries later, Bullinger would relate that his one great regret with his own generation was that "the blessed hope of resurrection and the coming of the Lord have been well nigh blotted out through the (tradition) of the churches."

This conflict may well have been a persistent problem from the beginning. One of the reasons Paul wrote his first epistle to the Corinthians was to correct, in chapter 15, the denial among them of the future resurrection of the dead. While we are not told the direct cause, we do know of the Greeks' ancient affinity with the transmigration of the soul and its realisation of bliss through bodily liberation. The idea of souls migrating at death goes back to ancient Egypt, with virtually all subsequent cultures holding the belief in one form or another. Plato's *Phaedo* (*On The Soul*) was a sophisticated attempt to explain and establish this belief. The Hebrews, conversely, inherited the embryonic teaching of *resurrection*, which was rare in other cultures. Indeed, most pagans viewed any return to the body as repugnant, because they lacked (or rejected) an understanding of the transformed, pneumatised state. It was this corruptive, post-exilic paganism that cast a shadow on the pristine Jewish teaching of rising from the dead. The intertestamental period (approx. 420 BC-30 CE), with its loss of prophetic influence and prominent Hellenism, accelerated the decline. Meanwhile, the superstition among the Greeks hardly wavered, and this may have precipitated the 'Corinthian error.' Regardless, Paul's reference to death being "the last enemy" would be vacuous indeed if, in reality, death were but a post-mortem migration of blissful, heavenly proportions. Again, death with Socrates and Plato was a good thing (for the virtuous), a metaphysical transition that liberated the soul; by contrast, Christ and Paul emphatically viewed death as man's greatest foe! That the conflict between these two incompatible views persisted is testified to in the earliest writings of the church. Barely a century after the Apostle Paul's death, the Greek apologist Justin Martyr (100-165) penned the following: "…do not imagine that they are Christian," those who say "there is no resurrection of the dead, and that their souls, when they die, are taken to heaven" – *Dialogue with Trypho* 80:9. What makes this assertion all the more striking is that in Justin resides more Plato than Paul! Tatian (120-180), a Greek theologian of the next generation, held a similar outlook: "The human soul...could never appear by itself

without the body" – *Oratio* 15:2. It seems that the Corinthian error was still very much alive in Justin's and Tatian's day, sufficiently so for them to caution against it.

{Within this complex narrative lie several conflicting views and paradoxes. Aristotle, Plato's student and successor in 4th-century Athens, utilising his famous empiricism, departed from his teacher's view and concluded that the soul and body were inseparable – broadly speaking, life necessitated their absolute unification, and after death, the soul/body composite did not survive. In other words, for Aristotle, the dead were *really* dead, body *and* soul. The 13th-century Dominican philosopher, Thomas Aquinas, taught the first part of Aristotle's outlook – that the bipartite soul and body were unified *in life* – but curiously (though cleverly) blended it with the Platonic notion (via Augustine) of the soul's persistence *after death* in either heaven, purgatory or hell. It may come as little surprise to learn that Tertullian was the first prominent Latin to postulate the idea of a Christian post-mortem soul migration. However, at this early time, Tertullian's emphasis rested on the Greek idea of Hades. He writes: "We...maintain...that souls are even now susceptible of torment and of blessing *in Hades*, though they are disembodied" – *On the Resurrection* 17:2-3. Tertullian's perspective is therefore quite opposed to that of Justin and Tatian. But perhaps the greatest 'paradox' (cautionary tale, really) must be laid at the feet of Thomas Aquinas, Catholicism's preeminent philosopher. Shortly before his death in 1274, the humble monk announced what has been seen by many as an epiphany: Thomas viewed his entire corpus of over 8 million words as little more than straw!}

While it is true that today resurrection is back on track, it is often paid scant attention compared to the notion of post-mortem heavenly bliss. As Bullinger laments, they substitute "'a happy death' for 'that blessed hope'"; the danger lies in the one making the other redundant. We leave the final word of this rather lengthy essay to J. S. Stewart – thought, by some, the greatest preacher of the 20th-century – who grants that a *disembodied* realm of existence would have been repugnant to Paul: "…witness the earnestness of his desire that he should 'not be found naked' after death, but 'clothed upon with our house which is from heaven'" – *A Man in Christ* 267.

Where O Hades Is Thy Victory?

Affirming the above position, the apostle informs us – prophetically and proleptically – that our being "seated together in the heavenlies in Christ" necessitates God first having "*raised us up together*" (Eph 2:6). Now, dead believers are not yet "raised up" with Christ, for 'rise' refers particularly to the body. The next verse confirms its realisation: "That He might point out in the *oncoming ages* the surpassing riches in graciousness upon us, in Christ Jesus." (Note that our expectation is specified as being *age-based*). In 1 Corinthians 15:55, Paul, speaking of believers, describes how through resurrection, death is swallowed up in victory. He thus concludes, "Where O death is thy sting? Where O Hades is thy victory?" (*Diaglott*). The point is, were it not for resurrection, both death (*thanatos*) and the unseen (*Hades*) would indeed have victory over the believer.

Heaven Contrasted With Hades

But one may ask, "If *Hades* is merely the 'unseen place of the dead' – *all* the dead – why is it contrasted with heaven in Luke 10:15?" Heaven, contrasted with *Hades*, provides little evidence of *Hades* being the hell of tradition. In Romans, Paul contrasts heaven with "the deep" (10:6, 7). Both cases show a contrast between two extremes – that which is deepest and that which is highest, the life of heaven and the death of *Hades* (Note Paul's words in v7: "to bring Christ *up* from the dead"). Nothing more is either implied or necessary to satisfy the contrast.

No Hell, No Heaven!

George MacDonald once asked his congregation the question, "If it were revealed to you in a vision that hell was abolished, where would your Christianity be?" Raised in the stern and in some ways terrifying post-John Knox, Calvinistic environment of Scotland, MacDonald was well qualified to ask that question. The doctrine of post-mortem heaven-going may seem harmless enough, and some may decry the writer for stealing away the comfort of this centuries-old convention. But surely, the scriptural testimony of being secure "in Christ" and joining our loved ones in resurrection glory is a superior and more *tangible* comfort in bereavement. If death is a dreamless sleep – "hid with Christ in God" – then we wake but a moment later. In contrast, if heaven is in some sense built or dependent on the hell proposed by much of Christendom, it follows that heavenly happiness is built on hellish misery. One would hope that even the most immature saint would see such happiness as being lamentably shallow and incompatible with every Christian ideal. In *Christ Triumphant* (304), Thomas Allin describes such a heaven as one of "ineffable selfishness, where love is paralysed, and the spirit of Christ dead; not caring though the wail of the lost ever rise; the husband grown forever deaf to the appeal of the wife; the mother unheeding the eternal agony of the child." At least one recent seer parades such wantonness as if it were a treasured belief. With great aplomb, he paints the picture alluded to earlier – celebrated by Peter Lombard in the 11th century and duly reframed in the writings of Aquinas in the 13th – of the Rich Man's hellish torments providing gleeful distraction for poor Lazarus in his paradise across the gulf. This particular individual imagines a heaven where the saved will "laugh" at the calamity of the damned! Presumably, such psychotic fantasies will be seen as a form of entertainment! All who truly worship God need to leave such horrors in the murky recesses from whence they came. Another individual – with, one must concede, a little more decorum – thinks it possible that God will in some way remove the vulnerability of the saints so that they feel nothing towards the damned or lack even an awareness of them – a sort of divinely sanctioned 'lobotomy' (to use Talbott's phrase). Here, it seems, the beatitudes of the saints necessitate the destruction of their essential humanity. How either view aligns with the moral and ethical continuity of the Gospel is not explained; indeed, both fall pitifully and shamefully in line with Allin's prophetic words (above): "*ineffable selfishness*, *where love is paralysed*." Little wonder the thinking unbeliever – who may instinctively act out the humanity of Christ better than does his Christian counterpart – 'laughs' in return…or walks away in disgust.

The closest scripture comes to the idea of hell is the "lake of fire," which occurs in the Book of Revelation and is the subject of a later chapter. It is unlikely, however, that it bears any resemblance to the God-dishonouring speculations of medieval, revivalist, and some (not all) modern religion. The historical evolution of the 'hell' dogma is set out in *Chapter 11*.

Evidence Of Other Scriptures

The writer is well aware that other scriptures could be brought forward to challenge this thesis; on the other hand, such texts, differently interpreted, might further support our position. For example, the Old Testament cases of Enoch (Gen 5:24) and Elijah (2 Kings 2:11) are used to prove that all saints go to heaven at death. But do these exceptional events really add anything to our understanding? Tom Wright thinks it unlikely they were ever meant as "role models" or templates of 'heaven-going,' and we tend to agree. In the case of Enoch, Genesis states simply that God "took him" because of his faithfulness (Heb 11:5). And Elijah, we are told, went up "by a whirlwind into heaven." The Hebrew *Shamayim*, here rendered "heaven," likely refers to the firmament or sky, as in Genesis. Apart from these facts, we are told virtually nothing, and since they occurred in life, not in death, both events 'prove' (if anything) the exception. In other words, they are genuine mysteries.

Then, in Matthew 17, there is the appearance of Moses and Elijah on the "Mount of Transfiguration." This is best understood as an "apocalyptic *vision*" (v9), much as Daniel (Dan 7-9) and John the Baptist (Matt 3:17) experienced. Here, the collective concern is the revelation of Christ as future Monarch and Universal Saviour. To draw on such "visions" to prove something other scriptures deny is unwise. Moreover, we again have Christ's categorical and widely ignored statement in the Gospel of John: "NO MAN HAS ASCENDED TO HEAVEN but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man" (3:13). By implication, what is referred to here is the *true* heaven, that which is highest.

Sheol and *Hades* (like *aionios*) are often viewed as too vague by the dutiful mind seeking iron-clad certainty; hence, they have come to represent more tangible concepts, such as a place of fiery confinement and torment. Others, who reject this adjunctive, associate them with 'the grave'...and with some justification. Although Hebrew and Greek have specific words for 'grave' (*qeber*, *mnena*), the Hebrew *Sheol*, at least, does appear to 'overlap' with it in about half of its Old Testament usage – and is so rendered in most bibles. Nonetheless, while the idea behind *Sheol* may overlap with the tomb, it is never categorically stated *to be* the tomb; it is simply left unexplained as "the unseen." Beyond this, we are not asked to venture. "The truth is," insists Withers, "the door to any experience of the nature of existence apart from the union of body, soul and spirit is wholly and completely barred to us in our present state of being. So far as we are concerned, after death, the soul is in 'the unseen,' in a state beyond the power of our minds to understand or define." Accepting these limitations, it should be enough to rejoice in the knowledge that Christ has the keys to both Death and Hades (Rev 18) and has assured us that they will be emptied of all their victims (John 5:28,29; Rev 20:13).

GEHENNA

While modern scholarship has (largely) restored the rightful definition to our first two terms, a dark shadow still hovers over the third. With the Greek term *Gehenna*, we come closer to the scriptural idea of punishment, though scarcely to the 'hell' of tradition. After more than 1500 years of theological debate, this term still conjures up a myriad of views and strong feelings, even within circles where it is thought of universally as 'hell.' *Gehenna* appears twelve times in the New Testament, half of which appear in the Gospel of Matthew. Rotherham brings attention to Gehenna's origin: "The word itself seems to have been formed by abbreviation from the Hebrew phrase for 'the valley of the son or sons of Hinnom' (*gey ben* [*b'ne*] *hinnom*); then 'valley of Hinnom,' (*gey hinnom*); and so, at length, simply '*gehenna*.'" Benjamin Davis (*Heb. Lex.*) adds, Hinnom "is probably the proper name masculine of the man to whom the valley on the south side of Jerusalem once belonged, where children were sacrificed to Moloch." Thayer's *Greek Lexicon* describes it as "the valley of lamentation ...so called from the cries of the little children who were thrown into the fiery arms of Moloch." Then Rotherham cautions, "Whether the N.T. use of the word does not point to something beyond the present life must be left to the solemn consideration of the student. It would seem evident, in the N.T. at least, that a marked distinction exists between Hades and Gehenna" – Appendix, *Emphasised Bible*. Indeed, in Rotherham's last statement lies the controversy.

To uncover what Christ meant by *Gehenna*, we must understand its history and usage in the Old Testament. The Valley of Hinnom is mentioned thirteen times in the Hebrew Bible. Five times it is used simply as a geographical location or boundary (twice in Josh 15:8, twice in Josh 18:16 & once in Neh 11:30). On three occasions it is mentioned as having been defiled by the burning alive of human beings in the Moloch worship of Ahaz and Manasseh (2 Kings 23:10; 2 Chron 28:3; 33:6). In five more it occurs in connection with *God's wrath against the abomination of cruelly burning alive the sons and daughters of Israel* (this last one should be speaking to us in no uncertain terms!). Two of the above describe it as a place of carcasses (Jer 7:31, 32; 19:1-15; 32:35). Following Manasseh's death, his son Josiah, in his zeal against idolatry, gave the valley over to pollution and appointed it a repository of the filth of Jerusalem. It became the city's rubbish receptacle, receiving even the carcasses of beasts. To consume the rubbish and prevent pestilence, its fires were kept perpetually burning.

The Judgment Of Gehenna

One of the difficulties with any study on *Gehenna* is seeing it in its original context. It is noteworthy that the term is used *only* in the presence of Jewish hearers (even James, who uses it once figuratively, addresses his epistle to "the twelve tribes in the dispersion"). The writer of Ecclesiastes recorded, "an untimely birth (i.e. death at the moment of birth) is better than to have no burial" (Ecc 6:3). Here, Solomon expresses the deep importance the Hebrew nation attached to burial. To have the body burned posed a special horror to the Jewish mind primarily because, like other nations at the time, they attached immense importance to burial rites (see also Isa 14:19,20; Jer 22:19). Burning was a recognised capital punishment under the law (Lev 20:14). Though probably rarely

carried out, it was an extreme and shameful death inflicted on those who had committed an extreme and shameful offence. In later periods, the Valley was used for the disposal of the executed bodies of particularly vile criminals. Thus, even theological giants such as Johann Schleusner can interpret Matthew's statement, "shall be liable to the Gehenna of fire" (Matt 5:22) as only being "worthy of a disgraceful death." Bluntly and with indignation, Christ asked the Pharisees how they could "flee from the *judgment* (not damnation!) of Gehenna?" (Matt 23:33). Then He solemnly warned that all these things would befall *that* generation (v36). This is an important verse because it links Gehenna with the Jewish nation. Surely, we need no reminding of how the Lord's prophetic words came to pass when Titus sacked Jerusalem in 70 CE. It is recorded that between six hundred thousand and a million (or more) Israelites perished in this siege, many of whom were carried out of the city and thrown into the burning valley. Josephus records that 115,880 human carcasses were taken through just one of the city's gates. Numbers are said to have swelled because the siege took place during the Passover.

Was, then, Gehenna ever intended to extend beyond its Jewish context? It's an interesting question. Certainly, the "Apostle to the Gentiles," Paul, never uses the word, nor does he explore any concept like the one later attached to it. As we have seen, Christ speaks of "The Gehenna" as something that would transpire within the lifetime of His audience. As a metaphor for *judgment*, "fire" has universal application; in this respect, Gehenna is no different from any other judicial fire. But in the Book of Revelation (Ch21), only death and Hades are mentioned as giving up their dead, *all* the dead. Gehenna, it seems, plays *no* role here at all. So, if Gehenna, as commonly touted, is the fiery post-mortem residence of the wicked, why does it not form a trio with the other two? As with Paul, this 'valley of the dead' is never mentioned by John anywhere. Indeed, apart from James' figurative and contextually distinct usage, Gehenna appears in the Gospels alone and *only* in the presence of comprehending Jewish ears (we will examine its prophetic O.T. usage soon).

When defining or contextualising this term, we should always be mindful of Christ's expression, "*judgment* of Gehenna" (*kriseos geennes*). This primal idea of judgment (*krisis*) gradually became, in succeeding religious thought, annexed by the esoteric notion of conscious, ongoing punishment *beyond the grave*. The Hellenistic Jews (those who adopted Greek culture) held varying forms of this belief at the time of Christ, but it was never the prevailing view before the Babylonian exile (6thC BCE). Adding fuel to this diabolical fire is the hideous *King James* expression "damnation of hell," though the *NIV*'s "condemned to hell" and the *ESV*'s "sentenced to hell" are little better. All three of these widely read bibles convey a message that is redundantly hellish and damning – this is *interpretation*, not translation! By contrast, the *Berean Literal New Testament* distinguishes itself with the far more appropriate "sentence of Gehenna." This translation, like other literal or independent versions, merits recognition for its accurate reflection of the original Greek text. To use the words damnation, condemnation, or hell anywhere within this context is to introduce, as William Barclay says, "an overtone which does not in the least exist." The real question Christ asks is 'How can you escape being sentenced to Gehenna?' which in turn means, 'How can you escape the sternest judgments of God?' (*The Apostles' Creed* 210).

Does Gehenna Fit The Traditional Hell?

In an attempt to make the term Gehenna fit the theological concept of hell, some have argued that Christ may not have used such familiar terms in the same sense that the Jews attached to them. But there is a problem here. As the Lord was not in the habit of deceiving, it is certain that had this been the case, He would have made it very clear. To do otherwise, as Farrar points out, "would have been to render His words purposely unintelligible." Farrar then goes on to show that few Jews – even those contemporary with Christ – understood Gehenna to be "a punishment from which none who incurred it would ever escape" – *M. & J.* 183. The above is reinforced by the Gospel writers who preserve *Gehenna*'s meaning by transliterating it from the one language into the other. Why? Because in so doing, any misconception of what the term meant would be averted. It is a great pity that *all* translators, old and new, do not follow Christ's lead.

The Jewish Perspective

> Emanuel Deutsch, in his celebrated essay on the Talmud, asserts: "There is no everlasting damnation according to the Talmud. There is only a temporary punishment even for the worst of sinners" – *Literary Remains* 53.
>
> Chief Rabbi Michel A. Weill writes: "Would there not be a flagrant contradiction between endless torments and the goodness of God so magnificently celebrated in biblical annals? Nothing, therefore, seems more incompatible with the true biblical tradition than an eternity of suffering and chastisement" – *Le Judaisme*.
>
> Also, Rabbi Adler: "With respect to the Rabbis of the present day, I think it would be safe to say that they do not teach endless retributive punishment. They hold that it would be inconceivable that a God of Mercy and Justice would ordain infinite punishment for finite wrongdoing."
>
> Lastly, Rabbi Loewe, speaking about the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek noun *aion*, says that "Olam simply signifies for a long time. The Hebrew Scriptures do not contain any doctrine referring to everlasting punishment."

Among Jewry, the idea of this burning rubbish heap giving rise to the traditional hell is attributed to Rabbi David Kimhi (1200 CE) – he viewed the valley's perpetual fire as a symbol of judgment *after death*. While this claim may be plausible to those so inclined, there is no real evidence for it in Hebrew archaeological or literary sources. Edward Beecher reminds us how Christ always "confined himself in his predictions of coming retribution...to the temporal sphere, as did Moses" – *Hist. Retribution* 9. Indeed, Beecher might just as well have written, 'as did all the prophets,' for it is difficult to demonstrate that any inspired writer speaks of anything other than a temporal, earthly punishment within the Hebrew Canon. But this was certainly not the case (as we have seen) with some within the nation itself; nonetheless, the majority of even the sternest orthodox Jews believed that Gehenna – irrespective of how it was viewed – would disappear in the 'last times.'

Gehenna As A Metaphor

It is widely accepted that Gehenna is used by scripture as a metaphor. It has, of course, been linked with Revelation's "lake of fire" as a place of perpetual punishment *after resurrection*. More typically, Gehenna is associated with *Sheol*/*Hades* as a place of torment *after death*, the 'Rich Man's portion in the parable ostensibly lending support to this view. Naturally, in the latter case, it is the *soul* that is the object of punishment. But in the one passage where "soul" occurs in conjunction with "Gehenna" (Matt 10:28), we are simply told to be "fearing Him who is able both the soul and the body to *destroy* in Gehenna" (which at face value supports annihilation more than endless torment). Luke 12:4,5 is in all probability a commentary on the Matthew passage: the Lord says (literally), "...be not afraid of those killing the body and after these things have nothing left to do...be afraid of Him who, after the killing, has authority to be casting into the Gehenna." All we can safely deduce from this is that the judgment of "The Gehenna" makes an individual 'destroyed,' or 'lost' (*apollumi*), for as long as God deems fit. Evidence for this is found in Matt 18:8, 9, where Gehenna is called "eonian fire." E. J. Ladwig suggests that the expression "Gehenna of fire" is the "figure for destruction and 'eonian' is the duration of this destruction." By way of illustration, he points to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah: "Thus the Lord may use fire to destroy something and that something may stay destroyed for an entire age. The results show that those cities have disappeared and will remain that way until the day of judging" – *Exposition on Hell*. Jude's expression, "experiencing the justice of *aionian* fire" (v7), concerns the fate of these cities, which he uses as an example of this form of judgment. "The fire has long ceased, but its effects will remain to testify to God's judgment until the close of the eon, after which Sodom shall return to her former estate (Eze16:53-56)" – *Concordant Commentary on the N.T*. 376.

All Salted With Fire

The above is further borne out by Mark 9:43-50, a passage frequently quoted by those who teach endless fiery torment for the soul after death. Again, we see only the concept of *judging*, either by one's own actions or, if one fails in this, by God's. The essential teaching is that nothing that offends can enter the Kingdom (vv43,47). In verse 43, Christ refers to "the Gehenna...the unextinguished fire," and so appears to satisfy the hellfire protagonist. But the whole passage must be qualified by the Lord's clear metaphor in verse 49: "For *everyone* shall be salted with fire." Dr Boyd Purcell rightly points to this verse as a blatant contradiction to the argument that all references to "fire" in scripture (relating to judgment) are literal or punitive. He says, "You can burn someone with fire, just as you can salt someone with salt, but you cannot salt someone with fire!" Indeed, Christ's last words (v49), "Have salt in yourselves," reveal His meaning: salt is a preserver, a counteractant to corruption. Thus, says Allin, "If the sacrifice be not made voluntarily, if the eye or the foot be not sacrificed, a sharper sacrifice and a severer penalty will be demanded," which is Gehenna, the inextinguishable or *unfailing* judgment of God. That "fire" in this context is a metaphor is beyond doubt because it is used in conjunction with "salt." No one doubts the salt is metaphorical...nor the "hand," nor the "foot," nor the "eye." In fact, writes Cox,

"if we take any part of the passage literally, we must make it literal throughout" – *Salvator Mundi* 83. To do this, of course, makes nonsense of the whole passage.

In addition to fire, salt was employed during Old Testament times in the altar sacrifice under the Law of Moses. It also figured as part of Israel's covenant relationship; among other things, salt symbolised the qualities of permanence, fidelity and cleansing. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus takes these two elements (fire and salt) – well understood by the Jew – and combines them in a metaphor of unavoidable judgment. If, therefore, "everyone" is to be "salted with fire," the intent behind such salting must equally extend to everyone: i.e. to bring *all*, saint and sinner alike, into line with God's Holiness, even should that salting demand the extreme measure of what Christ calls "the Gehenna of fire."

In Isaiah's 66th Chapter, we find a prophecy of this 'valley of the dead' (*Gehenna*) in the future age. At a time that looks ahead to the new heavens and earth (v22) the Lord says, "And they (who come and worship at Jerusalem) shall go forth and look on the dead *bodies* of men that have rebelled against Me; for there worm shall not die, there fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all *flesh*" (v24). Notice this is a *real* scene – the word "flesh" occurs twice in the space of two verses – and the worshippers in Jerusalem are viewing the "dead bodies" of those rebellious to God. Could language be clearer? No mention of souls in conscious agony! Of course, someone may retort, "what of the 'undying worm' and 'unquenched fire?'" These are also found in Mark 9:48 and are commonly quoted in support of endless torment. But what is the worm other than an agent of corruption, *physical* corruption, and fire, the means of *physical* destruction? "Dead bodies," remember! The expressions "undying" and "unquenchable" are just that – expressions or figures of speech. The "fire" will continue to "burn" (unquenched) until the object of its operation is accomplished. As already noted, there are numerous examples of "unquenchable fire" that have long since ceased to burn. Indeed, Jeremiah looks forward to a time, beyond the abhorrence and ignominy of Isaiah 66, to the eventual restoration of this Valley of Dishonour. Whatever our personal view of Gehenna, Jeremiah's words should convince everyone as to its temporary nature: "Behold the days are coming, says the Lord, when... The whole valley of the dead bodies and the ashes shall be sacred to the Lord" (Jer 31:38-40). There is nothing metaphorical here, just plain, undiluted *fact*. Let all true lovers of God and His creation rejoice in these wonderful words of the prophet.

It is of some interest to note that Origen (2nd-3rd C CE; one of the few patristics said to have studied Hebrew) tells us that he found by inquiry what the Jews meant by *Gehenna* and that many in his day (like many since) talked of it with no knowledge of its real significance. Besides its primary meaning of the Vale of Hinnom outside Jerusalem, *it had come*, he says, *to acquire* the secondary meaning of a purifying punishment (after death). Origen ends his discussion with the comment that he thought it unwise to dwell further on his discoveries – *Orig. Celsus*. Apart from the obvious implications of the phrase 'it had come to acquire' and the word 'secondary,' Origen's qualification of punishment being 'purifying' is informative. Within a few generations, no teacher recognised by the official Western Church would have dreamed of applying any such criterion to *Gehenna*. Indeed, within that same timeframe (more or less), it is improbable that any primary meaning of what, by then, had become known as the '*infernum*' was remembered, let alone spoken of... so total was the displacing influence of Latin.

Hellish Impropriety

One still hears zealous tongues direly warning of the impenitent dying and going 'straight to hell.' According to Farrar, the protestant belief that at the moment of death, all men and women – infants and children too, in its extremity – irrevocably pass to either heaven or hell had its beginnings as church dogma in the 16th century. Farrar thinks it unlikely that it was a widespread belief before then. Although an array of theologians – many or even most mainstream – have lent their considerable weight to this fact (see *Ch 11*), the dogma, though perhaps waning in some quarters, persists as a fundamental tenet to this day.

The otherwise conservative Farrar, in his outspoken criticism of the *Revised Version*'s use of the word 'hell' to render the Greek *Gehenna*, made the following salient comment: "Our revisers, by seeming to sanction the error that the words Gehenna and hell are accurate equivalents, perpetuate misconceptions which are more dangerous than any others to the general acceptance of Christ. If they had rendered 'Gehenna' by Gehenna, they would have been responsible for nothing; they would have followed a divine and unerring example" – *M. & J.* 377. Indeed, the more accurate the terms we use, the greater headway we make in our discovery or recovery of fact. If absolute confinement to the tiniest detail seems unrealistic, we should at least endeavour to make our 'keywords' scriptural. Gehenna is most assuredly one such word.

TARTARUS

The Greek term *Tartarus* occurs only once in the New Testament, at 2 Peter 2:4, although other passages, such as 1 Peter 3:19 and Jude 6, may also refer to it. The term is usually rendered 'hell' in our commonly read bibles (seldom in the more literal or independent versions), with a belief persisting to this day that it is its deepest or lowest level. In Greek mythology, the Titans were confined in Tartarus after their defeat. However, it would be wrong to imagine Peter guilty of giving legitimacy to Greek fables; here, he is most likely adapting the word for *his* purpose. Since there is a certain likeness between that to which God subjects sinning messengers and that to which the Greeks imagined their gods subjected, Peter borrows the name of the Greek underworld.

It is important to note the setting of this verse. In the preceding three verses, the apostle predicts the doom of the false prophets that shall rise among the people. To prove that their sentencing from old has not been idle, Peter instances the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah and the sweeping away of Noah's contemporaries in the flood. From these examples, he shows how the Lord rescues the godly from trial, "yet is keeping the unjust for chastening (*kolazo*) in the day of judging" (v9; *CLNT*). The *R.S.V.* offers a different scenario: "...to keep the unrighteous *under punishment* until the Day of Judgment." But the thought is not that the wicked are punished *until* the Day of Judgment, even less that this is their *final* state; rather, they are being *reserved* for chastening. These judgments are preceded by a reference to the messengers who sinned:

> **For if God spares not sinning messengers, but**
> **thrusting them into the gloomy caverns of Tartarus,**

gives them up to be kept for chastening judging
(2 Pet 2:4 *CLNT*).

From this, only the following can be gleaned:

1. *Tartarus* is a place of confinement for sinning messengers (some link it to the "abyss" mentioned in John's Revelation because of their shared descriptions and references).
2. These messengers are held only until the day of judgment; it is not said to be their final state.
3. There is no suggestion of any torment. The phrase "gloomy" suggests only what would be expected of a place set aside for the confinement of such beings.

The Spirits in Prison

Christ's preaching to the spirits in prison in Peter's first epistle (3:19) has been linked with Tartarus in his second epistle. An interpretation of this verse, and its related passages, depends on one's understanding of what could be termed the 'underworld.' This would include the world of spirit beings associated with messengers/angels, as in Hebrews 1:7, 14, the celestial powers and principalities mentioned by Paul (assuming them different from the angels), and the demoniacal phenomena found in the Gospels and Acts. The earliest known interpretation of verse 19 goes back to Clement of Alexandria (2nd-Century CE), and sets the scene – possibly emerging for the first time in Christian writing – based on the Platonic 'intermediate state' between death and resurrection; the preaching, or more precisely the "proclamation" (*kenlsso*, meaning 'to herald'), was thus assumed to be to the imprisoned spirits (or 'souls') of the departed. Now, within this exegetical framework lie certain problems. First, there is no mention by Peter that these "spirits" were the souls of departed men or women; indeed, human beings are never once referred to in scripture as "spirits" (man undoubtedly *has a spirit*, but is never referenced as *being* one...at least not yet.). Second, it is all too easy to read into verse 18 the idea of *departed* men or souls: "…having been put to death as to flesh, but *made alive as to spirit.*" More recent scholarship meshes Peter's words here with those already discussed in 1 Corinthians 15, concerning the earthly or 'soulish' (*psychikon*) and how it is to be supplanted by the 'spiritual' (*pneumatikon*) in resurrection (v44; recall, too, Paul's use of the expression "made alive," in verse 22, about the ranks of resurrection). Verse 18, therefore, seems a straightforward reference to Christ's *resurrection*. Assuming these points sound, it must then be the *risen* Christ proclaiming to these imprisoned spirits. The beings in question are typically identified as the hostile angelic creatures associated with those termed "Sons of Elohim," or their progeny, the "Nephilim," who appeared in the "days of Noah" (v20, which is a likely reference to Gen 6-8). The precise location of the Lord's proclamation and the content of His message remain unknown, but many connect it with the Tartarus of his second epistle.

Jude's reference (v6) to the angels who "kept not their own estate" likely concerns these same beings. Again, very little information is given: They are to be kept in bonds under gloom, awaiting the judgment of the great day, but there

is no mention of punishment as such. The "bonds" or chains are said to be *aidios*, which Rotherham renders as "perpetual." Other versions use eternal or everlasting, but that is not the probable meaning, as they are to be restrained only *for* (or until) "the judgment of the great day." What happens afterwards, we are not told.

{It is noteworthy that Jude uses the Greek word *aidios* in the above, but in the very next verse (v7), regarding the fire that destroyed Sodom, he employs *aionios*. The distinction between the two, which here clearly points to different outcomes, will not be lost on the perceptive reader.}

Peter's words in Chapter 4:6 (same epistle) are even more perplexing: "Because it was for this that the good tidings were proclaimed to the dead, that though judged in the flesh according to human beings they might live in spirit according to God" (*The New Testament - A Translation*). Hart says that this was the "*locus classicus*" of the early church belief of Christ's so-called "harrowing of Hades," though it is worth noting that there is no mention of Hades within the text. And how this fits in with the notion of the thief (on the cross) being in "paradise" with Christ the same day that he died is an even greater mystery! Others assume Peter is talking about the 'now dead' – that is to say, the 'dead who were once living.' Indeed, some translators have imported this idea into their bibles, though Hart calls such ploys a willful distortion. Some have sought to explain "the dead" (perhaps more plausibly) as a metaphor for those 'spiritually' dead (as in Luke 9:60: "Leave the *dead* to bury the dead"). As is often the case, could the issue be a misunderstanding over what is being said? The *Concordant Literal N.T.* renders the problematic verse thus, "For this an evangel *is brought* to the dead also, that they may be judged, *indeed*, according to men in flesh, yet should be living according to God, in spirit." The verb employed here is aorist, which is indefinite or timeless; the common practice of translating it in the past tense – '*was* preached' or '*were* proclaimed' – conceals this fact. For some undisclosed reason, many translations persist in omitting the interjected "indeed," which offers contingency. Hence, the *Concordant Commentary* proposes: "This judgment, then, is not God's but man's. Men judged them according to their own standards. They are judged 'indeed,' but not in the judgment of the living and the dead just mentioned (v5). The next statement, that they should be living according to God, makes it evident that the evangel was not preached to them after they had died. They are dead now, but the preaching and judging and living were all part of their experience before they fell asleep." Naturally, this will not satisfy everyone, but it does at least harmonise a problematic verse with the overall view of scripture as proposed in this work.

IN SUMMARY

Christian counsellor and author Boyd Purcell, in his book *Spiritual Terrorism from Womb to Tomb*, understands from professional experience that Christians may be more terrified of dying than atheists. Is it any wonder! Our view of God is very life to a healthy and secure relational faith, and the manufactured nightmares commonly thrust upon the naive and vulnerable are profoundly unsettling to the "perfect peace" that faith in Christ is supposed to bring. Here,

then, are four Greek words that may well decide between a faith of peace and a faith of fear; they are four key terms that form the basis of history's terrifying, even terrorising, image we call hell. The first two, *Sheol* and *Hades*, do not imply a place of punishment at all from the collective scriptural evidence. They are the unseen state or place, the grave, or (if one prefers) the realm of the dead…*all the dead*, not merely the deceased wicked. The third, *Gehenna*, if viewed strictly within its textual and contextual boundaries, needs to be interpreted as the type of "judgment" implied rather than one shaped by the imagery of religion or ancient paganism. The fourth, *Tartarus*, is a place of gloomy restraint without any recorded application to ordinary men.

It is impossible, humanly speaking, to eradicate the errors and prejudices of centuries. Therefore, to some, every endeavour to place these four words in their true light will be seen as trying to explain them away. As *Chapter 11* exposes, the belief in the Christian hell as a place of endless fiery torment came into prominence around the 5th century. Yet even then, according to many reliable historians, it never constituted a formal and necessary dogma until about the 16th century. Dr Ernest Petavel, speaking of the horrors of hell that abounded during the Middle Ages, writes, "We have rejected these monstrous fables, but have unfortunately preserved a word which recalls them and which confuses the popular imagination by its constant misuse. It is the word hell, which the sacred writers never use in the sense which is generally given to it" – *The Struggle for Eternal Life* 20.

In a recent forum entitled *Is Hell Biblical?*, one-time Baptist pastor Clyde Pilkington said that (according to the mainstream paradigm), God's "solution to sin is to quarantine it in some dark corner of the universe...forever – an unending period – where he takes His creatures – those He made – and tortures them without end. That's (God's) solution to sin!" Like many youths, Clyde grew up believing that horror story; in hindsight, he thinks it "insanity"!

It may be said without fear of contradiction that when our moral intuition pronounces an ostensibly bible-based belief unworthy of our reason and repulsive to our sense of justice, it is less likely our moral intuition that's at fault than our interpretation of scripture. Along this line of thought, the excellent Dr Jellet writes, "Of all our faculties, the moral intuition of the Middle Ages was blunted and degraded by the callousness to suffering induced by centuries of cruelty...The more it becomes enlightened, the more loving and merciful the heart of man becomes, the more emphatically and indignantly will it pronounce that men have wronged and distorted by perversion, and misinterpretation, and most unwarranted addition, the words and metaphors of Christ."

No less applicable are these thought-provoking words from Madeleine L'Engle: "The church is still pre-Copernican in its attitude toward death. The medieval picture of heaven and hell hasn't been replaced with anything more realistic or more loving. Perhaps for those who are convinced that only Christians of their own way of thinking are saved and will go to heaven, the old ideas are still adequate. But for most of us, who see a God of a much wider and greater love than that of the tribal God who only cares for his own little group, more is needed. And that more is a leap of faith, an assurance that that which has been created with love is not going to be abandoned" – 'Forward' to *A Grief Observed*.

The ability of the teaching to distort or even subvert the religious imagination should also be mentioned. Writes Andrew Fairbairn, "...we may say

the more coarsely and cruelly a religion depicts the pains and miseries of the damned, the less does it feel the infinity of the evil within the sin;" thus is sin so little feared "as when hell most dominates the imagination..." – *The Place of Christ in the Modern World* 455. Indeed, the teaching of an endless penalty is no infallible deterrent to those who freely proclaim it. As later chapters bear witness, this fearful paradox has repeatedly played out throughout ecclesiastical history and continues to this day in well-publicised instances of the abuse of power and privilege within established religious circles.

Our final thought is a ray of hope from a quite unexpected quarter. In a surprisingly candid statement, the late Pope John Paul II declared, "Hell is not a place that exists anywhere in the universe. There is no hell; we made it up, and we are sorry." His remark did not seem intended to undermine or diminish God's righteous judgment; rather, it likely aimed at dispelling the term that fosters a twisted understanding of its purpose and execution. *Chapter 11*, which provides an overview of the evolution of the concept of hell, will support the truth of John Paul's words.

Chapter 6

WILL GOD 'UTTERLY' DESTROY?

The scriptures never once bring before us the idea of such a destruction as is beyond the power of God Almighty to undo. Nor does destruction in the scriptures ever denote a fate or doom enduring longer, or more dire and dreadful, than death.
- ALEXANDER THOMSON

Many sincere believers have accepted annihilation (conditionalism) in place of the doctrines of hell and eternal torment. They correctly argue that this view does not so greatly violate the instinct of justice or common sense. While this may be a commendable attempt to harmonise a doctrinal outlook with the known character of God and the divinely implanted human conscience, it still robs God of His full glory (Phil 2:11). It may also demand reading into Latin-derived words such as 'destruction' and 'perish' more than they actually say within a scriptural context. We must be ever mindful that God has spoken to us in the Hebrew and Greek languages, but there is no revelation from Him in the Latin tongue. Therefore, caution must be exercised in using theological terms that have reached us through this medium. J. S. Henslow's book, *The Vulgate: Source of False Doctrines* (1909), was perhaps the first English work dedicated to exposing this contentious issue. Henslow explains how many of our critical biblical terms have migrated to English through a Latin word quite different from the Greek it was meant to represent. Consequently, the Eastern Church – whose native tongue *was* Greek – never fully adopted the harsh teachings of the Latin West. In this chapter, we hope to demonstrate that the words rendered 'destroy,' 'destruction,' and 'perish' in our bibles have acquired a meaning never intended by God; furthermore, expressions such as 'utter destruction' and 'utterly destroy' – still found in some modern bibles – are nowhere used in the original Greek or Hebrew.

THE LATIN TERMS

Our English word 'destroy' comes from the Latin *de-struere*, meaning originally to pull down, unbuild, or overthrow. Its root is *strues*, which is a pile or building. The word later came to mean ruin, annihilate, and extirpate. Another keyword, 'perish,' from the Latin *perire*, formerly meant to go completely. Now, however, its sense is similar to the later and broader definition of destruction. Still more extreme is 'perdition,' which has become invested with an unwarranted sense of dread. Over time, this has degenerated into such extremities as utter loss, ruin, or devastation, typically in a future state. By contrast, its derivation comes from the Latin *per* meaning to give or put (through or completely), and *dare*, which carries the sense of being lost – the French word *perdu* means 'lost.' Perdition is used eight times by the *A.V.* to translate the Greek word *apoleia*, which, by the way, also contains in its primal sense 'lost-ness.' For example, in the *A.V.* at John 17:12, we read, "None of them is lost but the son of perdition," probably derived from the *Wycliffe Bible* of 1380: "No man of hem perischide, no one but the sone

of perdicioun." This, of course, was copied from Jerome's *Vulgate*, though it is doubtful that Wycliffe understood the Latin *perditio* as we now do. But the best English translation of this verse was Tyndale's (1526), which reads, "None of them is lost but that LOST chylde." He comes closest to the Greek, which Thomson translates as, "Not one of them got *lost* except the son of *lostness*." It seems that Tyndale saw what others failed to see: that in the Greek text, we have one word meaning 'was lost' (*apoleto*), and another word meaning 'lost-ness' (*apoleia*). Needless to say, a wide gulf exists between 'being lost' and the distinctly theological concept of 'perdition.'

Here is further evidence of the decline that followed the Latin displacement of Greek. And, as if that weren't enough, the Latin terms themselves gradually changed – 'devolved,' if you like – to express something far worse than they did originally. Wulfilla's *Gothic Version* (approx 350 CE) is entirely free from changes affected by the Latin. He makes no mention of a 'son of perdition,' but employs the much more benign *sunus fralustais* or 'son of (away) lostness.' Thomson laments over the loss of "the utter simplicity of meaning shown by (Wulfilla) as contrasted with the theological sophistication which has been injected into the terms perdition and destruction. What a contrast to all the translations of the scriptures made within the past five hundred years, in which translators, through misplaced zeal, have sought to emphasise the force of many terms used in revelation as if to 'help out' God in His task. The employment of such terms as hell, damnation, bottomless pit, everlasting punishment throws a lurid light on the mentalities of those who made our English versions. Each of these shows a gross exaggeration of the truth meant to be conveyed" – *What is Destruction?* 2.

'UTTER DESTRUCTION'

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew verb *charam* occurs approximately 50 times, and its noun, cherem, about 40 times. *Charam* is rendered 'utterly destroy' around 40 times in the *A.V.*; though, strangely, only three occurrences of the noun are expressed as 'utter destruction.' It is otherwise rendered consecrate, *devote*, accursed, net, forfeit, flat nose, utterly make away, and utterly slay. According to Robert Young's Concordance, the correct meaning of *charam* is "to devote or doom." The noun *Cherem* means devoted or set apart for death, or a net by which fish are set apart. The same root occurs in the word *harem*, where women are set apart for their male possessors; we could infer from this that they are 'doomed' to such a life. (The name Hiram is derived from this root, meaning one destined or dedicated).

Human beings are death-doomed; none can escape it. During Old Testament times, many were so 'doomed' in warfare, but we have no reason to assume from this that their sentence was one of '*utter* destruction.' Interestingly, the word 'doom' shares its roots with 'deem,' which originally meant to judge – a doomsman was more a judge than a condemner. Thomson sums up the situation thus: "Those who declare that they cannot believe God will reconcile every one of His creatures to Himself have been stumbled by the words 'utter destruction' and 'perdition,' as I once stumbled. I therefore challenge any such person to prove from a concordance of the Hebrew that any term really signifies either eternal

death or eternal destruction...Our old versions contain far too many terms which...we ought without hesitation to discard at once and finally" – *Ibid.* 4.

Destruction In Scripture

In the Psalms, we read, "Is Thy steadfast love declared in the grave, or Thy faithfulness in *Abaddon*" (88:11). Here the *R.S.V.* uses the transliteration of the Hebrew noun commonly rendered 'destruction.' Its verb form is *abad*, usually rendered destroy or perish. These two Hebrew words occur nearly 200 times in the Old Testament, yet not once are they associated with the word thought to indicate 'utter' destruction, *charam*, which, as we have seen, really means 'to devote' (to death). In 146 of its occurrences, the verb *abad* is associated with terms that apply to *physical* existence. In no case is there depicted a condition deeper than death or a state which is beyond the power of the Almighty to undo (as if such a thing were possible). The verb *abad* simply means 'lose' or 'lost,' and its noun *abaddon*, 'lost-ness.' While these meanings make sense in Hebrew, they sound somewhat odd to the English ear; hence the use of the more familiar perish, destroy, and destruction. However, when reading these words in our bibles, we must always keep in mind their original boundaries.

Turning now to the Greek of the New Testament, we read in 1 Corinthians 1:19:

> **I will *destroy* the wisdom of the wise,**
> **and I will BRING TO NOTHING the**
> **understanding of the prudent.**

The above verse is a couplet quoted by Paul from Isaiah 29:14. It contains two parallel members that in Hebrew poetry explain each other. The second expression (in capitals) means literally un-placing or perhaps displacing ('set aside' - Rotherham). It is synonymous with the italicised verb in the first part, and the two may be exchanged without harming the sense. The verb 'destroy' is the Greek *apollumi*, the counterpart of the Hebrew *abad,* initially employed by Isaiah. The intended limitations of *apollumi* are revealed in the following New Testament passages (*apollumi* in capitals):

> **Matt 2:13: "Herod will seek the young child to DESTROY Him." This verse is explained by verse 16, where Herod slew all the children. Nothing more than death is meant.**
>
> **Matt 8:25: The disciples cried, "Save us, Lord, we are PERISHING!" They wanted deliverance from an untimely death, not annihilation.**
>
> **Matt 10:6: The Lord told the Disciples to "go rather to the LOST sheep of the house of Israel." To go to sheep who were already irretrievably lost is obviously not meant. The Greek word here is slightly different, *apololota*, meaning having become lost. It should be remembered that a remnant of those same lost sheep were at that time found and saved.**
>
> **Matthew 12:14 tells us that the Pharisees took counsel on how they might DESTROY the Lord. Then in 27:1, we learn that the chief**

priests and the elders took counsel to "put Him to death," while John 5:18 says the Jews sought all the more "to kill Him." The expressions are synonymous.

James 1:11: "For the sun...withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty PERISHES. So will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits." Here, 'perishing' is the natural process of decay - as with the beautiful flower, so with the wealthy man.

As with the Hebrew *abad*, the Greek *apollumi* pertains to lost-ness; that is, the state of 'being lost.' W. E. Vine states, "The idea is not extinction but ruin, loss, not of being, but of well-being" – *Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*. Its root is *lu*, the equivalent of our words lose, loose, lost, and quite different from the Latin-derived 'destroy' (pull down, unbuild). Furthermore, the words destroy, perish, and destruction in our bibles have acquired through this Latin connection a distinctly theological connotation. We speak rightly of souls or lives that are lost, but if we say they are on the road to destruction, we tend to think of their 'eternal destiny.' But is this the sense in which the Lord was destroyed or "the righteous man perishes" (Isa 57:1)? Cremer in his *Lexicon of the New Testament* says that in most places *apollumi* is "simply a strong synonym for 'apokteinein' (to kill off) or 'apothneskein' (to die off)." Destruction in scripture never goes beyond the power of the Almighty to undo: "The theological nuance which has been imported into the word (*apollumi*) is entirely foreign to revelation" (*Thomson*).

Lost To Man But Not To God.

The 15th Chapter of Luke portrays the Good Shepherd's desire and *ability* to seek and save the lost:

What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has LOST one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is LOST, *until* he finds it?

In verse 7, the finding of the lost sheep is likened to the repentance of one sinner. Cremer, again, makes an important observation here: "This illustration warrants us in regarding the 'apollusthai' (to get lost) as a state which may be reversed." In verse 8, the 'destroyed' coin was only lost; the lamp of the light found it none the worse. The prodigal Son (v11), in desperate need, came to his senses and said, "I *perish* here with hunger!" In other words, he was starving to death. When this 'perishing' son returned home, his father made the enlightening statement: "This my son was *dead*, and is alive again; he was *lost*, and now is found." Thomson explains that in this instance Christ "was replying to the Pharisees and Scribes, who had grumbled because the Lord received tax-gatherers and sinners, and even ate with them (but) the Lord was trying to make them see that a man must be lost before he could be found; he had to be dead in some sense before he could get real life" – *Ibid.* 10. This entire section of Luke is virtually a divine commentary on the meaning of the Greek word *apollumi*.

Destruction Beyond The Ages

When, in scripture, the passage of time is stated in connection with 'destruction,' it is expressly limited to the ages or eons, with only one exception – the overthrow of the future city of Babylon. Six times in Revelation 18:21-23, the unequivocal "nevermore" (Gk. *ou me eti*) occurs in place of the usual expression, "for the age" (*eis ton aiona*). "Thus Babylon, that great city, will be hurled down, and may be found *nevermore*." This expresses absolute and final destruction, unrelieved by any limiting term, and contrasted with the expression "for the age." But notice the destruction concerns "that great *city.*" What is not stated is that any human being will "nevermore" exist or be found. But then, what of the passages in the Bible that seem at first sight to imply absolute destruction? The following are a few examples, beginning with Psalm 49:19 (in the wording of the *A.V.*):

"He will NEVER see light" (*R.S.V.* "never more see the light"). This Psalm is a word of wisdom for those who trust in their wealth and boast in the abundance of their riches (vv3-6). The word rendered "never" is the Hebrew *netsach*. It means a goal (i.e. travelling towards a distant object), hence the thought of 'continually' but not in the sense of endlessness; rather, 'to the most distant point of view' – *Strong*. The *Oxford Gesenius Hebrew Lexicon* renders this verse: "Unto the end (a long duration) they shall not see the light" (Job 20:7 uses the same word: 'He shall perish [for a long time]'). Thomson adds, "It always refers to history, to the events on the earth."

Ezekiel 18:4: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." This statement has nothing to do with the '*utter* destruction' of the sinner. Rotherham more accurately expresses the Hebraic meaning: "The *person* that sinneth, the same shall die;" or the *NIV*: "The one who sins is the one who will die." The remaining chapter confirms this as the correct sense. The Hebrew "soul" (*nephesh*) is dutifully employed, as we have seen, in the sense of 'person' or 'life' (see Lev 5:2,4,15). Moreover, the death here is not natural, but forensic; the sinner is put to death because of an intentionally wicked action.

Obadiah 16: "(the nations) shall be as though they had not been." This sounds dreadfully final. The Hebrew reads as follows:

v - hayu k-lo hayu
and they become as not they become

However, Obadiah was not concerned with destiny here. Just as any man becomes what he was not before he drank, so this speaks of the nations "having drunk upon My Holy Mountain...shall be as they had not been" (or shall become what they were not before).

Next are texts commonly quoted from the New Testament:

Matt. 7:13,14: "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to DESTRUCTION (*apollumi*), and many there be that go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." The 19th-century French abbott, Henri Huvelin, once said that Christ did not redeem the world by the Sermon on the Mount (of which the above passage forms a part), but by His blood, passion, and resurrection. Essentially, the Sermon on the Mount portrays how the Jew could achieve a Godly and meaningful life within the context of the law and the prophets. In other words, it concerned how the law *should have been practised* (in spirit and in truth), as opposed to the letter! It should be equally clear that Christ alone was qualified to take the route that leads to true life. That sole fact is surely sufficient to expose the futility of anyone, based on merit alone, securing safe travel through "the narrow way which leads to life" (assuming the "life" mentioned is the one commonly termed 'eternal'). Christ's words here represents *effort* on the part of the individual, an effort that the Apostle Paul quite categorically informs us is useless: "*No one* does good, not even one... *all are reduced to uselessness*..." (Rom 3:12). Christ was, is and will ever remain *the way* – the *only* way – that leads to true life; all others lead to loss, ruin, and death. The "strait gate" and "narrow way" point to two things: the futility of the law and the victory of the risen Christ.

Matt. 21:44: "Whosoever shall fall on this stone (Christ) shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall it will grind him to powder." The latter part of this verse is a poor translation. The expression *synthlasthēsetai* means 'to part the grain from the chaff, to winnow.' As the word occurs nowhere else in scripture, it cannot be compared. Within its context, the most probable meaning is that those who will not humble themselves shall be humbled or have their proud spirit crushed. This aligns perfectly with other statements from Christ in Matthew, such as 23:12.

Mark 8:36: "Whoever seeks to save his life (or soul) shall lose it, and whoever loses his life (or soul) for my sake and for the sake of the gospel shall save it." The Greek *psuche* can be rendered 'soul' *or* 'life' (the two representing the same thing). The message is clear: we cannot live self-centred lives and selfless lives concurrently. If our focus is living for worldly pleasure, wealth, health, and happiness, then spiritually we will be the losers; only through some level of self-sacrifice do we achieve true life and the lasting blessings it brings. The next verse (37) continues: "*For what doth it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life*?" This principle is similar to that of v. 36: a man may choose a career that brings him wealth, prestige and comfort while turning his back on a life of genuine service. What he fails to see is that in such service, many ruinous mistakes could be avoided. While this passage is put forward to prove a hopeless end for a certain human 'soul,' only one *certain* consequence is stated (v38) – "shame" at the Lord's coming in glory.

John 3:36: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that

believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on Him." The life that the unbeliever will not see is "life eonian," just mentioned. With this, there is no argument. Faith receives eonian life whilst unbelief rejects it; and as long as it does, God's wrath or indignation remains. But to make this wrath irrevocable, as Jukes points out, is to effectively remove hope of deliverance for any unbeliever at any time (*Rest.* 123). We know from many scriptures that God's wrath will remain *only* for the eons or ages. Moreover, as we will see in *Chapter 9*, the prime object of eonian fire will likely be to 'burn out' such stubbornness.

Rom. 2:12: "As many as have sinned without law shall also *perish* without law." This is sometimes quoted, apart from its context, and without any real understanding of the word *apollumi*, to prove the endless destruction of the ignorant dead. But Paul then goes on to mention those "which have not the law" (v14), and are therefore *ignorant*, within the context of *future* judgment. John, too, makes it clear that ALL "*great and small*" will be raised before the Great White Throne!

Phil. 3:19: The Apostle Paul writes about some "whose end (*telos*) is destruction (*apoleia*)." A better translation would be "whose end (or consummation) is *loss*" – *Young's Literal Translation*. While it may be tempting to apply this statement indiscriminately, it should be clear from the preceding verses that the apostle's subject is the Saints! Consequently, it fits well with what is recorded in 1 Cor. 3:12-15 (also relating to the Saints), concerning each man's work. The point is that the ones over whom Paul was weeping – whose God is their belly, who glory in shame, who mind earthly things v18) – will surely suffer loss in the end.

2 Peter 2:12 in the *A.V.* reads, "...shall utterly perish in their own corruption." The *A.V.* badly overstates the case here. All the Greek says is, "In their corruption they shall also be corrupted;" or, as Rotherham words it, "In their spoiling shall also be made a spoil." In other words, they will be thoroughly corrupted (*kataphtheiro*) in their own corruption.

Returning momentarily to the Old Testament, Isaiah 26:13, 14 (& similar passages) has proved a stumbling block to many. It reads in Rotherham's version:

> **"O Yahweh our God! Lords other than Thee have owned us. The dead come not to life again, The Shades (deceased - *A.V.*) do not rise, Therefore Thou hast visited and destroyed, And caused to perish every memorial of them."**

At first reading, this sounds very final, but Rotherham's footnote is worthy of serious consideration. Concerning the last couplet, he suggests that it means "as much as to say: when our enemies die, we have done with them forever; even though, for a time, they had been our Lords." The fact that, for the moment, God has caused every memory of these Lords to perish, and for the time being they are 'destroyed' (*Karath* - cutoff), does not justify our imposing an irreversible doom upon them. Jeremiah 48 provides a catalogue of Moab's punishments for evils committed against Yahweh. Verse 42 says: "Moab shall be destroyed (*abad*)

and no longer be a people because he magnified himself against the Lord." Does not Moab's doom also seem positively final? Yet it is not. Verse 47 declares that in the latter days, the Lord will restore the fortunes of Moab. It is hard to imagine how language could be clearer (see *Appendix I*): the fortunes of a nation once 'destroyed,' to be restored in latter days. In the same manner, God will restore the fortunes of Ammon (49:6), Elam (49:39), Sodom and Samaria (Ez 16:53), Egypt and Assyria (Isa 19:21-24). We could paraphrase Jeremiah's words in 48:42 as saying the inhabitants of these nations will have no further part in history.

No threat of 'destruction' should be used to cast aside God's pledge of a final restoration. Any interpretation that arrays one scripture against another to deny this supreme revelation is no friend of truth. As we have seen, destruction or 'lost-ness' always lies within the bounds of the ages. Even "the perpetual sleep" from which some will not wake (Jer 51:39) is said to be only "age-abiding" (*Rotherham*). The Hebrew word here is *olam*, which, as already noted, means "an age, indefinite time" (*Young*) – its root is 'obscurity' – the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek *aion*. Generally speaking, the problems encountered over the present issue (along with the overall issue within these pages) are resolved through an awareness of the ages or eons in scripture. When destruction and death are viewed correctly within this framework, most of the difficulties disappear.

Olethros

The Apostle Paul never touches on the subject of 'hell,' at least not in the manner frequently touted. Nonetheless, he makes it very plain on more than one occasion that severe judgment is (for some) a future reality, and that it will come to pass swiftly. In 2 Thessalonians 1:9, we find from his pen one of the most dreaded terms in scripture. This passage remains a stronghold with those who insist on 'everlasting destruction.' Speaking of the time when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty Angels, Paul discloses the fate of those who do not know God and fail to obey His Gospel: "They shall suffer the punishment of *everlasting destruction* from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power." Here, *aionion* is used in conjunction with the word *olethron*. We have already dealt with the first term in *Chapter 3* – it means (in most contexts) 'for an age/eon,' i.e. age-lasting as opposed to ever-lasting. Now, *olethros* must undergo similar scrutiny, because upon this word rests the fate of millions.

The difficulty in elucidating *olethros* lies in the obscurity surrounding its root. Of course, this confusion is not helped by the ten or so different New Testament words (fifty in the O.T.) rendered 'destroy' or 'destruction.' From this, one can see that these two English terms have been given the general meaning of many different Greek ideas. While this saves the translator much work in distinguishing precise meanings, it regrettably conceals important interpretational clues.

The dark implications of *olethros* are evident in how it is described by various bibles: 'everlasting destruction,' 'unutterable ruin,' 'irrevocable destruction,' 'eternal exclusion,' 'age-abiding destruction,' 'aeonian perdition,' and 'eonian extermination,' among others. This assemblage alone suggests uncertainty in our understanding of the word. Lexicons commonly define *olethros* as ruin, destruction, and death. Liddell & Scott also provide quotations from Homer showing that with him, the word meant death, usually something gloomy,

bitter, or miserable. Additional associations are 'pernicious' and 'pestilent.' *Olethros* occurs in three other sections of scripture; an examination of these will help obtain its precise meaning:

> **1 Thess. 5:3: "When people say, 'There is peace and security,' then sudden OLETHROS will come upon them as travail comes upon a woman with child, and there will be no escape." Here, *olethros* is the very opposite of "peace and security." The comparison conveys the idea of devastation and disaster to come very suddenly and without foreknowledge. While there is no escape, any more than the travailing woman can escape her pain, nothing here confirms that all involved are necessarily exterminated.**
>
> **1 Cor. 5:5: Paul tells the Corinthians to "deliver this man to Satan for the OLETHRON of the flesh." The action is, in this case, disciplinary with the object of saving the spirit through the '*olethron*' of the flesh. Literal destruction of the flesh is obviously not meant. Hanson says that in this case, "olethros is not annihilation, but desolation" (*Aion-Aionios* 65). In his second letter, Paul tells the Corinthians to "reaffirm" their love for this person, "that he may not be overcome by *excessive sorrow.*" The emphasis in the Greek lies with the last two words!**
>
> **1 Tim. 6:9: "But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and hurtful desires that plunge men into OLETHROS and destruction (*apoleia*)." Here, *olethros* and *apoleia* occur together (both terms contain the root *ol*). Paul is speaking about the temptation and snare of riches. Such extravagant desires plunge or submerge the individual in their wake. Greed causes harm; instead of wealth bringing peace and contentment, it can bring burden and pain. The apostle is referring to those who choose wealth *in place of faith*. Removed from a living faith, men and women can sink to agonising depths and experience a sense of emptiness and loss.**

Returning to 2 Thessalonians 1:9, the context concerns those who will incur eonian *olethros* FROM the Lord's presence, and FROM the glory of His strength ('*away from* the Lord's presence' is an alternative rendering). Why "from?" Does this not suggest removal, banishment, or cutting off? In *Chapter 4*, the spotlight fell on Matthew 25, where the Son of Mankind comes in glory, and the nations are gathered before His Throne. Those who are banished from His presence, the 'goat' class, go away into the "fire of the eon" (v41), which is revealed in verse 46 to be *chastening* during the impending age. This chastening (*kolasin*) is most likely the ongoing discipline that follows the sudden *olethros*, which affects banishment. An analogy might be Matthew's parable of the talents where the worthless servant is cast into "outer darkness" and "men will weep and gnash their teeth" (v30; also, Matt 8:12 & 22:13). Very obviously, annihilation is not synonymous with such language, though how fitting is the expression "outer darkness" for those cut off from the Light of the World.

The *Septuagint* also uses the noun *olethros* eleven times, with over two hundred verb forms. As a noun, it translates the following Hebrew words: *abad* (lose), *aid* (calamity), *kackad* (put out of sight), *mshamah* (desolation), *phachad* (dread, terror), *shaun* (tumult), *shod,* and *shoded* (spoil). These words convey an idea quite distinct from destruction and annihilation, rather one of catastrophe (the verb forms are similar). One example, *ex-olothreuo*, is of particular note: This occurs about 195 times, 80 of which translate the Hebrew *karath,* which, as we have seen, means to cut off or to cut down. We might thus conclude that

olethros is a form of cutting off. If we allow what Matthew says to explain what Paul says, the latter verse implies "banishment into some kind of living death for a period. It consists of a discomfiture, often sudden, and always something serious, but not in every case entailing death" – *What Does Olethros Mean?* 11.

MULTITUDINUS MEANINGS

Robert Young, in his *Analytical Concordance of the Bible*, tells us how to "distinguish things that differ, which are frequently confounded in the English Bible." He adds, "...our translations often render one Greek word by ten or twenty English ones." Just as each human being possesses their own distinct personality, each term God has chosen is unique. No single word can effectively encompass conflicting meanings – such as 'finite' and 'infinite' – without risking incoherence. If all of God's words have been purified seven times, can there still be ambiguity as to their meaning? For example, if to fifty Hebrew verbs we merely attach (as either primary or secondary meanings) our English words 'destroy' and 'destruction,' did God use them all without distinction? Most lexicons and concordances confirm that scriptural terms have but *one primary sense*. However, their pages are often swollen owing to the derived or secondary meanings required to make each term contextually comprehensible. Despite this confusion, we should always remember that no word has changed its meaning over time. Earlier chapters exposed the importance of terms such as *aionios*, *kolasis*, *timoreo*, *Hades*, and *Gehenna*. To these, we must now add *charam*, *apollumi*, and *olethros*, for they too have an important bearing on our subject, human destiny.

ALL FLESH IS GRASS

Passages like Isaiah's 40th Chapter are occasionally brought forward in support of the belief that God will 'utterly destroy' the greater portion of His creation. Yet such scriptures bear little relevance to ultimate destiny. They serve rather a comparative purpose, revealing the "Glory of God" (v5) as compared to the frailty and transient nature of the present natural order: "The grass withers, the flower fades; but the Word of our God will stand for ever." While this reminds us of the absolute steadfastness of our God and His Word, compared to the present temporal state of man and his environment, it in no way diminishes the knowledge-surpassing love of the Creator for His Creation (Eph 3:19). A love that "*continues* being patient, *continues* being kind...*never fails*" (1 Cor 13). A love that demonstrates its infinite extent by caring for the most seemingly trivial aspects of its creation, like the numbering of the hairs on our heads or the falling of a single sparrow (Matt 10:29,30). We misunderstand our God altogether when we think that His great Love will ever fail or end. The logic is irresistible – the love that cannot fail must always succeed because it cannot be defeated. Such love is not conditional, as it is with most frail humans. In the Gospel of John (3:16), Jesus infers that God loves equally every human soul: "For thus God loves the world so that He gives His only begotten Son, that everyone believing into Him should not get lost (*apollumi*), but have eonian life" (literal). We are apt to

forget (or ignore), as Thomas Allin reminds us, that "Each soul is of infinite value, as if it stood alone in the eyes of the Father. And more than this...whose loss is it if any one soul perishes? …It is God's loss: it is the Father who loses His child. The straying sheep of the parable is the shepherd's great loss; the missing coin is the owner's loss. In this very fact lies the pledge that He will seek on till He find it" – *C.T.* 70. After feeding the multitudes, Christ said to His disciples: "Gather up the fragments, that nothing be lost." Is it reasonable to assume that our Lord's care over such trifles overshadows His care for humanity? No! As Gelesnoff says, "There is no waste in God's economy."

Most of the dead and the living are currently in a state of lostness, but does this mean they are lost to God? How can He lose that which is *out of* Himself (1 Cor 8:6; Rom 11:26)? *Ex nihilo* (Latin = 'out of nothing') is a philosophical point of view designed to show that matter was not 'eternal' but a creation of God, which, of course, is true. However, the concept must be qualified: scripture avoids any statement suggesting God creates anything 'out of nothing.' Indeed, Paul emphasises the fact that He creates all from or "out of" (*ek*) Himself (1 Cor 8:6). This makes His creation an intimate part of His Being – a creation that lives, moves, and exists only in Him and because of Him (Acts 17:27,28). Moreover, the same is true even of death: God is not the God of dead ones, for *all* live unto Him (Luke 20:38). Although the Athenians thought Him distant and unknowable (*agnosto*), Paul knew better: He was, in fact, very near to everyone, anywhere, and at all times. Good news indeed!

Chapter 7

THE RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT OF GOD

We are not striving to get rid of judgment.
That would be contrary to scripture and reason alike.
We merely protest against the false theological notion
regarding its character and duration.
- VLADIMIR GELESNOFF

The reader should by now be aware that it is not, and never has been, the writer's intention to nullify or diminish judgment; no believer who conforms to the ruling of scripture doubts that God is Judge. Paradoxically, this is especially true of those who hold to Ultimate Reconciliation. In this scenario, God's rule is not finally and hopelessly frustrated by a sin and evil He never succeeds in extinguishing, or by an exterminating death that triumphs in the end as the last unconquerable enemy. There are, nonetheless, passages in scripture that, owing to misapprehension or prevalent religious trends (perhaps both), confound the all-important issue of God's righteous judgment.

Most of us, on occasion, suffer from the human weakness of jumping to conclusions. We may imagine something is meant in the words we read when it is not. The scriptures have suffered much from this sort of thing over the years, and the following passages have been – indeed, still are – among the most misunderstood in the New Testament. In Romans 9:13, we read the startling statement, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." Taking these words at face value, it is quite possible to imagine a latent *dualism* in the character and purpose of God. Certainly, a handful of religious heavyweights have chosen to see it that way. On this dichotomy was founded the idea of Limited Election, which taught that God extends His Love to only the elect (Jacob), whilst He withholds it from the non-elect (Esau). Then there are the strange words of Luke 14:26 that seem to serve as corroboration: "If anyone comes to Me and does not *hate* his own father and mother and children and brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple." But how can this be true? Are we to *really* "hate" our nearest and dearest, even ourselves, in our effort to obtain meaningful discipleship? Of course not! The Lord Jesus explained what he meant in the sister passage found in Matthew: "He who loves his father or mother *above me* is not worthy of me, and he who loves his son or daughter *above me* is not worthy of me" (10:37). It would be the height of absurdity if the same Lord exhorted His disciples to hate their own families while demanding love for their enemies (Matt 5:44)!

Notwithstanding the above – in the end, it may bear only modest relevance to the discussion – two further points ought to be considered: First, Paul is quoting Malachi 1:2, who, incidentally, was writing hundreds of years after the deaths of his two subjects. It is therefore almost certain that the prophet had in mind not Jacob *as Jacob*, but Jacob as representing the collective *nation* of 'Israel'; and, likewise, Esau as representing the *nation* of the 'Edomites.' Second is the often-overlooked fact of Jacob's poignant reunion with his brother in Genesis. We need to remember that it was the fearful, guilt-ridden Jacob who initiated conciliation, but it was his elder and cheated twin who affected the reconciliation. Surely a powerful lesson for the future resides within this wonderful event, where

estrangement followed by heartfelt reconciliation opens the door to deeper understanding and relational richness: "Seeing your face is like seeing the face of God" (Gen 33:10). It was the "loved" Jacob who said these words to the "hated" Esau, not the other way round! We must bear all this in mind when studying Paul's complex thoughts in his letter to the Romans. Chapters 9-11 deal with the proud, rebellious nation of Israel. Here, the Apostle visualises the greater part of the nation becoming, like Pharaoh, headed for certain disaster by making their hearts as hard as stone; consequently, they risk fitting themselves for destruction or 'lost-ness' (*apoleian*, 9:22). Beginning at verse 15 (Ch9), we read in the *R.S.V.*:

> **I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.**

Now, in the light of verse 13 – "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated" – this seems an explicit condemnation of the likes of Esau. But as in the case of verse 13, is verse 15 saying what we imagine? The true sense of this statement can easily be missed because of the exclusion in most bibles of the tiny but important Greek particle *an*, which inserts contingency into a statement (denoting a supposition, wish, possibility, or uncertainty – *Strong*; not translated by a special word – *Young*). This tiny element bears the force 'in case of,' or 'in a certain case.' James Challis suggests the following wording: "I will have mercy, whosoever I may have mercy upon; and I will have compassion, whosoever I may have compassion upon." Challis adds that the assertion is not "that God will have mercy upon whom He *chooses* to have mercy, but simply that He will have mercy upon whoever *may be the recipients of His mercy*" (emphasis added). Throughout scripture, God is never seen as refusing mercy to those who seek it appropriately. On the other hand, He may withhold mercy from those who decline to seek it correctly or are too proud to acknowledge Him. This is an important underlying scriptural principle.

'Fitted For Destruction'

Moving on, verse 22 seems to suggest that God *makes* or *fits* some vessels for destruction and loss: "What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering vessels of wrath fitted for destruction…"? Here, the middle voice participle (where the actor receives the consequence of his action) delivers its full force: vessels of wrath that "have fitted *themselves* for destruction." Olshausen confirms that "the production of evil itself is here transferred to the side of the creature." It is the Holy Spirit that says, "Today, when you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts..." (Heb 3:7,8). Hardening is the visitation of God's anger on wilful sin. Innumerable men and women today are so hardened and deluded that no 'good news' can presently reach them. Such people have grown to love darkness more than light, so God allows them to have what they choose. And all such – like the Pharisees at the time of Christ – become the slaves of sin and consequently reap its bitter harvest (Gal 6:7).

God would not endure (v22) "with *much long-suffering*" vessels that *He* creates for destruction! Indeed, quite the contrary. With this statement, Paul is revealing the Creator's intimate connection with His creation. He intends that *all mankind* (emphatic in the Greek) be saved, and come to a knowledge of the truth

(1 Tim 2:4). To this end, God has been patient throughout the eons; long-suffering has little value if it suddenly disappears. Only when things get out of hand does He become a "consuming fire" of indignation. In the present eon, He is using grace first, which allows us the opportunity to be *now* reconciled with God through faith in Christ. When this fails, He must use judgment, which in His hands may yet be found but a sterner form of His grace. If grace is successful, then judgment will be equally so, for He will "send forth judgment unto victory" (Matt 12:20). We will consider this again later.

The Potter And The Clay

Since the day the epistle to the Romans was penned, Israel has been spiritually lost, but the parable of the potter gives hope for the nation's future. In verse 21, the apostle calls to mind the Old Testament passages of the Potter and his work (Isa 29, 30, 41, 64; Jer 18):

> **So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel. And the vessel he was making was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as it seemed good to do (Jer 18:3,4).**

When Jeremiah says the vessel "was spoiled in the potter's hand," it was not due to any carelessness or lack of skill on the part of the Potter! Likely as not, the clay itself was resistant and recalcitrant. As with most parables, the analogy is not perfect because, unlike clay, human beings have a will of their own. Jeremiah repeatedly shows that Israel was spoiled in God's hands because *they chose* to go against Him, but as in the parable, the prophet shows that Israel will eventually be remade (Ch31). Despite their sins, God has loved His nation with an age-enduring love and has continued in faithfulness to them (v3). At that future time, He will be Lord to all the families of Israel, and they shall be His people (v1). Furthermore, as He says of *them*, "there is hope for your future" (v7), so there is hope for all of Earth's families. For His promise to Abraham (Gen 22:18), Isaac (26:4), and Jacob (28:14) was, "In your seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

Vessels Of Honour And Dishonour

In Romans 9, verses 20 and 21, we read:

> **What is molded will not protest to the molder, 'Why do you make me thus?' Or has not the potter a right over the clay, out of the same kneading to make one indeed, for honour, yet one for dishonour?**

This is one of those cases where care is required to heed what scripture does *not* say as much as what it does. Thomson observes, "Paul does not say that God makes vessels like clay destitute of free will and for destruction. He asks whether or not the potter has the right to do whatever he pleases with his own clay. He does not so much as even suggest that he makes any vessel for destruction! The subject of this passage is God's sovereignty: the matter of free will and human

liberty Paul leaves until verse 30 (up to 10:21), which must be kept in mind when we study Chapter 9." God then has a right to chastise wrongdoers who reject and ignore His goodness; these He makes "vessels of dishonour." Earlier, Paul laid down the principles upon which God's righteous judgment of such vessels would proceed:

> **But by your hard and impenitent heart, you are storing up for yourself, wrath on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed (Rom 2:5).**

Meanwhile, God bears with these foolish vessels so that He may at the same time be free to call those whom He has made ready for "eonian glory," that glory to be revealed in the ages to come. No doubt God would like to see His times of judgment over, but He waits patiently so that vessels of honour may be multiplied. Hence, His purpose with this "present wicked eon" is gradually accomplished.

The misuse of Romans 9-11 has created a situation in which the meaning of words has been inverted. From the time of Augustine (4th-5th C), the common history has been one of twisting Paul's economy of election into a parody of exclusion, when in reality the apostle is progressing towards *total inclusion*. What is broadly and necessarily overlooked – if one is to hold the common Western viewpoint – is that much of the passage is *conditional* in form. The author is putting forward an argument, beginning with a question in verse 14 of Chapter 9: "What then shall we say...?" And repeating this call to inquire in verse 22: "And what if…?" Furthermore, as Allin points out, "Paul dwells on ruin in order to heighten the idea of redemption, its grandeur and its universality." Throughout the discourse, he is weighing the temporary estrangement of the nation of Israel ("the elect") against the entering in of the full complement of Gentiles. Israel's stumbling (the "vessels of wrath") is how God reveals His mercy to the Gentiles (the "vessels of mercy"). Nonetheless, Paul is adamant that in the end (11:26), "*all* Israel will be saved" ("*all* the *seed* of Israel shall be justified" – Isaiah 45:25; "seed" being symbolic of every member). Finally, Paul affirms in the part of this passage most often neglected, that ultimately there is no difference between the two classes – the vessels of *wrath* and the vessels of *mercy* – with the gratifying words of 11:32: "For God locks up all in disobedience that He may be merciful to all." The Greek *apeitheia* holds a negative connotation, and we should keep that in mind when reading this verse. Although the common renderings 'disobedience' and 'stubbornness' convey the idea of *wilfulness*, ALL are nonetheless implicated or 'locked up' as helpless prisoners of God. As such, Paul assures us that both parties within this historical drama – Jew and Gentile alike – will ultimately be shown mercy.

The Swiss theologian Karl Barth thought this verse was the key to unlocking all of Paul's writings. For Barth, God's universal locking up of *all things* human pointed to one great truth: an equally *all-embracing* mercy; God's 'no' could only be understood in relation to his 'yes.' In *Deliverance of the Captives* (1961), Barth writes, "The arms of his eternal love...are already outstretched when he made us prisoners of disobedience. He does so in order to have mercy on all" (p 90). That the emphasis of so much Western scholasticism lies with predestinating Chapter 9's vessels of wrath to unqualified hopelessness, all but ignores or casts aside this breathtaking conclusion. In addition, the famous

doxology that follows to the end of the chapter (vv33-36) is surely contextually related to, or even inspired by, what has preceded, especially the penultimate line that reads, "For from him and through Him and *for Him* are all things."

THE DIVINE PURPOSE OF JUDGMENT

As already observed, judgment is described by the prophet as Yahweh's "strange work" (Isa 28:21), a thing seemingly at odds with His character and gracious purpose. Yet Isaiah never portrays God's judgment as malevolent. Despite its unamiable nature, it is constructive – its action is to save; its ultimate purpose, to discipline, correct, and restore. In Isaiah, the Lord God is represented as using a plumbline, but for *destruction* more than construction. He carries out the reverse of building with the precision of a builder implementing his meticulous plan. What a comfort it is, therefore, to perceive how, amid the confusion and torment of the ages, "God stands with the measuring line, dealing to every generation judgment, as He assigns to every man duty, according to its capacity and need" – *All in All* 59.

The writer was surprised when he first discovered how ideas in the early church on this subject differed substantially from those he heard in modern assemblies. And further, how those ancient beliefs seemed far more sensible than later ones. It was a firm belief with most ancient scholars (see *Chapter 11*) that judgment, even at its extremity, went hand in hand with mercy. For example, Basil of Caesarea (330-79 CE) wrote the following in 370 CE: "Everywhere scripture connects God's justice with His compassion" – *Ps cxvi* 5. While judgment in a certain sense is opposed to mercy and contrasted with it (as in James 2:13), this cannot be its lasting essence. Similarly, death is contrasted with life, yet through resurrection, is the pathway to it. In other words, we are saved through death and *out of* (*ek*) death, rather than just *from it* as is typically thought. "The force of the original is always 'out of death'" (Heb. 5:7) – *Jukes*. And, "God's way to life is through death: 'That which thou sowest is not quickened except it die'" (*Adams*). Equally, and again as the ancients taught, humanity is saved *through judgment*. Judgment with God, as everything else, must be viewed as part of love's essence because God is Love personified. The Lord rebuked the proud Pharisees for "passing over judgment and the love of God" (Luke 11:42).

John attributes the following remarkable words to the Lord just before His Great sacrifice for humanity: "Now is the *judgment of this world*...And I, if I be lifted up, will draw (in effect, *irresistibly*) all unto Me" (12:32). If we fully understand their implications, there is no contradiction between the Lord's statements in John 3:17 and 9:39. Thus, salvation is Christ's primary object (3:17), but its attainment will, in many cases, come only through judicial blinding or *judgment* (9:39). As Gregory Nyssen extolled, "...by those who are more intelligent (the judgment) is believed to be a medicine, a cure from God, who is bringing the creature, which he has formed, back to that state of grace which first existed" – *Cat. Orat.* By this, Gregory does not mean to deny the consternation of the judgment day: "All creation trembles, who is without fear?" he adds as a cautionary note. As we proceed, it is hoped that this long-overlooked purpose of Divine Judgment will become clearer.

GOD'S CHOSEN ONES

Much controversy has arisen over the matter of human choice and its relation to God's Sovereignty. This confusion has helped create many of the disturbing and widespread dogmas about judgment. Some of this muddle has no doubt come from our tackling a concept that is, to a great extent, beyond our understanding. Insatiable curiosity all too often prevents us from accepting the fact that, until resurrection, many of God's ways remain a mystery. Here, the inspired writers demonstrate their superior wisdom through the testimony of silence. The safest policy (as the wise have said) is to speak where scripture speaks and be silent where scripture is silent. For nowhere in the Word do we find a reasoned treatise dealing with the relationship of Divine Sovereignty to human freedom. The biblical authors could no more explain these things than we can. Paul, for example, avoids any attempt to account for this; rather, he makes the short and decisive statements considered earlier. One thing is certain: God is never arbitrary. As we are bound by our character and nature, so is He. God presently chooses as His those who are *willing* to be chosen. The choice is mutual. To state the obvious, when a person humbly and genuinely desires to know God, he or she becomes choose-able. The Greek word *eklekTOS* does not merely imply the act of being chosen, but the fact of being 'choosABLE' (the Greek suffix *-tos* denotes ability or capability). Dr Ryder Smith clarifies this point: "It will be noticed that all the verbal adjectives here examined imply that God chooses or selects or 'elects' a certain kind of man...God chooses men because they are, for some reason, 'choos-able' – that is, His choice is not arbitrary" – *The Bible Doctrine of Grace* 159.

The foregoing underlines the miraculous and intimate understanding the Creator has of the complexities of His creation. For we were *chosen* IN HIM before the founding of the world (Eph 1:4). As the prophet exults, there is none like Him, "declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done" (Isa 46:10). Its testimony also *properly* reveals the mystery of Divine Election. In this, we see a Transcendence deeply involved in a universal plan meticulously designed since before the world's founding. A plan designed to unfold step-by-step, stage-by-stage, age-by-age: The "election" spoken of is but the first 'roll call' in the dramatic ingathering and ultimate restoration of the entire *Kosmos*. "As I have planned, so shall it be."

THE CHOSEN AT THE JUDGMENT SEAT

The intention of this chapter, so far, has been to confirm the absolute righteousness of God's dealings with His human "kin" in this present life. Now, as a prelude to our next chapter, we will introduce His ways in *resurrection*. There are probably three large-scale resurrections mentioned in scripture, the first being commonly viewed as that of God's "specially" chosen class, the Body of Christ.

> **For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what has been done in the body. (2 Cor 5:10)**

Now, many patristics thought this verse was a template for *all* humanity, not merely the called or the elect. The current writer has little problem with this view because Paul's words, in this case, align with the overall biblical format of judgment. However, there is one major caveat: believers who now walk in Christ are free from condemnation (Rom 8:1). This, as we will see, is certainly not the case with the last class. For current purposes, therefore, the apostle's words above will be limited to the first resurrection, that of 'the just.' Believers now, through faith, have symbolically passed from death into life; in resurrection, this becomes fact. While we must appear before Christ, we are neither judged with unbelievers nor *as* unbelievers (Jn 5:24; see also Rom 6:1-6 & Rom 8:1). Here, judgment is not to determine salvation, which is the "gift of God" through faith in Jesus Christ, but rather that of reward or loss.

> **Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble – each man's work will become manifest; for the day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work which any man has built on survives, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, THOUGH HE HIMSELF WILL BE SAVED, but only as through fire (1 Cor 3:12-15).**

Although many will lose the reward that others receive, they will not forfeit their salvation. All who have died with Christ, which true believers do now through faith, will most assuredly live with Him. But to *reign* with Him is granted only to those who *endure* (endurance having reference to service and sacrifice). If we deny Him, He will also deny us. Nevertheless, even if we are faithless, Paul tells us, He remains faithful for He cannot deny Himself (2 Tim 2:11-13). God does not revoke the believer's salvation, but he can and will deny the reward. The apostle also gives the analogy of an athlete competing for a prize (1 Cor 9:24-27). From his language, it is clear that not everyone receives the prize. Such an award is won through (again) work and sacrifice, but the gracious gift of "life eonian" comes through simple faith in Christ – "not by works, lest any man should boast" (Eph 2:9). The "prize" for which Paul strove was doubtless linked with the "crown of righteousness," which he expected to be the reward of all those "that love His appearing" (2 Tim 4:8).

JUDGMENT OF THE LIVING NATIONS

For the moment, we will ignore the resurrection of Revelation 20:4, which some see as the great rising – the 'first' or 'prior' resurrection (v5) – thought to extend to the O.T. saints and those beheaded resisting the mark of the beast through their testimony during the tribulation. Instead, we digress briefly to reconsider the judgment of the living nations by Christ at His coming in Matthew 25 (also Zech 14), which author J Philip Scranton refers to as the 'Glory Throne Judgment' (v31), so distinguishing it from the *Great White Throne Judgment* of Revelation (the two are often conflated). While Matthew's sequence does not involve resurrection, it is yet future and, in some ways, highly relevant to the final and largest category of resurrection (the GWT). In Matthew 25, the (living Gentile) nations are judged on their treatment of those whom Jesus calls, "the

least of these my brethren" (v40). An intriguing feature of this scene is that Christ, after separating the "sheep" from the "goats," refers to the sheep as righteous. This fact has led (not unnaturally) to the assumption that they must be Christian, yet there is nothing in the narrative to support this assumption. If the sheep class constitutes believers, who then are the "brethren" to whom they show kindness? Of course, in keeping with all parabolic language, it is the underlying *principle* that carries most weight – the narrative celebrates the kindness shown by the "sheep" in their spontaneous acts toward the Lord's "brethren," who, it seems, the majority shun or persecute during the tribulation (see *Appendix II*). After this hour of judging, the sheep nations are rewarded with *zoen aionion* or "life" in the coming era. The most interesting feature about this judgment (for us) is that the sheep class is declared "righteous" without reference to any of the usual markers of redemption. This, as we will see in *Chapter 8*, carries powerful implications for the next and final judgment scene.

JUDGMENT AT THE GREAT WHITE THRONE

In the Book of Revelation, we read of a time following the thousand-year reign of Christ (Rev 20:5), when the dead shall be raised to life again and stand before a righteous throne of judgment.

> **Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it; from His presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne... (Rev 20:11,12).**

John's Gospel also mentions this monumental event: speaking of the authority given Him by the Father to execute judgment, Christ says, "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear His voice and come forth" (Jn 5:28,29). It is before this Great White Throne that all nations and peoples throughout the eons, "great and small" – a scriptural phrase denoting all (or everyone) without exception, as in Job 3:19 – must eventually stand. That *any* soul could be overlooked here is as implausible as God losing part of His *own* being, for all creation comes "out of" Him. Here will stand ancient peoples like those of Sodom and Gomorrah, Tyre and Sidon, and the citizens of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum who will fare worse because the mighty works they witnessed failed to lead them to repentance (Matt 11:21). Before this throne the people of Moab, Ammon and Elam, who were "cut off from being a nation...*will know that I am Lord*" (Ez 25:7). Here "death and Hades" will, at last, give up their victims and all will be judged *according to what they had done* (Rev 20:12,13; 22:12 – according to their works/deeds [Gk. *ergon*).

This final and most significant of all resurrection/judgment scenes likely occurs between the destruction of the current earth (2 Pet 3:10-13) and the creation of the New Earth. John in Revelation 20:11 certainly seems to imply this: "And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, *from whose presence earth and heaven fled away.*" While this has led to speculation about how it will take place, it is *what* takes place that most concerns us here and is the subject of our next chapter. For the moment, what is intriguing is John's use of the word *ergon* (or its plural *erga*) in relation to this vast sequence; he makes no

mention of philosophical belief or religious faith. The focus here seems to rest on *what they did* (i.e. how they lived their lives) rather than what they believed or disbelieved.

Chapter 8

THE GREAT WHITE THRONE

**God has fixed a day on which He will judge the world
in righteousness by a man whom He has appointed,
and of this he has given assurance to all men
by raising Him from the dead
- THE APOSTLE PAUL**

The popular idea of salvation seems to be based largely on opportunity, circumstance, and, in some cases, pure luck. Of course, most whose views logically lead to this conclusion would vehemently deny it (myself included at one time). Nevertheless, the idea is betrayed by the widespread notion that God's saving purpose is typically a matter of chance. The common argument, "This life is the only 'chance' we have to accept God's grace," contains just enough truth to make it seem absolute – the truth lying in the fact that God *is* using pure grace for His present purpose, which is the calling of The Church; the fallacy, in presuming that salvation and reconciliation cannot come through a means other than the grace presently offered (i.e., grace within *this* lifetime). A common justification for this fallacy is the flawed idea that sinners might be receiving a 'second chance' by any post-mortem salvation. This, of course, flies in the face of the fact that millions have never received a 'first chance' in the first place! But as the preceding chapters have borne witness, God's actions are firmly based on His own irresistible will – "For who is able to resist His will?" (Rom 9:19 - *NIV*) – in accord with which He works out His purpose and plan. 'Chance' is very much a human affair, ultimately having no place in the Divine ministrations. With this high thought in mind, we move on to the judicial climax of the ages – the Great White Throne Judgment.

{As a preliminary, I would remind the reader once again not to conflate Revelation's "Great White Throne" with the 'Glory Throne' of Matthew 25. These two events are distinct in several ways: (1) the GWT comes at the end of the millennial age (the eon that follows the current one); the GT, conversely, occurs at the end of *this* age. (2) The GWT involves individual judgment for individual works - "The dead were judged *according to what they had done*" (Rev 20:12); at the GT, there is no mention of "the dead," only "nations," and judgment is said to proceed not just by what they had done but also by what they had *failed to do*. (3) At the GWT, the attendees are not separated into "sheep" and "goats" as they are at the GT, nor are they said to be dispatched into either "eonian life" or "eonian chastisement" (though these may well apply at the GWT). (4) There is no indication of "books" (or "scrolls") being opened at the GT as there is at the GWT. (5) Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, resurrection is predicated at the Great White Throne – it *is* about the judgment of the *dead*, after all – but resurrection seemingly plays no role at the Glory Throne ("The rest of the dead lived not until the 1000 years had ended" – Rev 20:5).}

In the 4th century, there raged a fierce controversy in the church over the single letter 'I.' One party contended that Christ was *homoousios* (of same being) as God, while the other maintained He was *homoiousios* (of like being only). Gregory of Nyssa recorded that this was the great topic of conversation at the

time. It is therefore of more than passing interest to find that in Revelation 20:15 the absence of this same letter 'I' may well concern the fate of vast numbers of human beings, a point in the main either overlooked, ignored, or dismissed.

THE BOOK OF LIFE

> **And scrolls were opened, and another SCROLLET (*biblion*) is opened, which is of the life (v12)**
> **And if anyone is not found having been written of the SCROLL (*biblos*) of the life, he is cast into the lake of fire (v15)**

The above is a very literal translation of Revelation 20:12 & 15. Anyone observing available translations would naturally think that the two scrolls (or books) described here were identical. But the Greek does not lie! In his exposition on *The Great White Throne*, the ever-observant Thomson explains, "In verse 12 there is the neuter form 'to biblion,' while in verse 15 the form is feminine, 'he biblos.' While the gender of the forms here is of no importance to us, the actual words are of utmost importance. Both of the first-class uncials, the Sinaitic (4th C) and the Alexandrian (5th C) manuscripts, read for the latter verse SCROLL *(biblos*)." The reader can confirm Thomson's observation by referring to *Young's Analytical Concordance*, or by checking an available sublinear/interlinear, such as those found in the *Concordant Greek Text*, the *Emphatic Diaglott*, or online, via *Biblehub.com.* The only bible, as far as the writer is aware, that distinguishes between the two terms in its main text is the *Universal Version Bible* (*UVB*), which has "small scroll" for *biblion* and "large scroll" for *biblos*. Its creator, Dr William Petri, is to be commended for his attention to detail.

So, the obvious question is, why should God use two forms of the word for scroll (*biblion* & *biblos*) instead of only one? For many years, the fundamentalist school has insisted that scripture can bear our closest scrutiny, even down to the last "iota." Here, then, is an iota upon which may hinge the fate of millions. How so? Because "every time the diminutive form (*biblion*) is found, it is used in contrast to a fuller or bigger scroll. In no single case are the two forms interchangeable" (Thomson). Essentially, the terms *biblos* and *biblion*, when used together, express size in relative or comparative terms. Below are the definitions of both words taken directly from Strong's Exhaustive Concordance:

βίβλῳ (Rev 20:12 – *before* the GWT judgment)

biblos: (the inner) bark (of a papyrus plant), hence a scroll, spec. a book

Original Word: βίβλος, ου, ἡ
Part of Speech: Noun, Feminine
Transliteration: biblos
Phonetic Spelling: (bib'-los)
Definition: (the inner) bark (of a papyrus plant), a scroll, a book
Usage: a written book, roll, or volume, sometimes with a sacred connotation.

Βιβλίον (Rev 20:15 – *after* the GWT judgment)

biblion: a paper, book

Original Word: βιβλίον, ου, τό
Part of Speech: Noun, Neuter
Transliteration: biblion
Phonetic Spelling: (bib-lee'-on)
Definition: a *paper*, book [A *diminutive* of biblos; a roll – bill, book, scroll, writing]
Usage: a papyrus roll.

This passage was one of the great discoveries of Thomson's career as a New Testament scholar. Concealed for centuries, "That small scroll of life wonderfully grew in bulk as the judgment proceeded." What a contrast to the picture most commonly painted of the Great White Throne judgment, which has not been "white," but almost universally **black** (when, that is, the overriding visions of hell have allowed it to be painted at all!). Virtually any new study taking the student beyond this deplorable state of affairs has been denied. This, even though Revelation 21:8 informs us that the lake of fire, into which those justly *condemned* following judgment are placed, is reserved for only certain classes of extreme and deliberate wrongdoers. Nowhere is the lake of fire said to be the "part" (v8) of all who participate in this judgment. We should therefore tread cautiously lest we doom the bulk of dead humanity to a fate belonging to only a portion. As Ted McDivitt observes in his paper, *Resurrection & Judgment*, John's careful wording in verse 15, "If anyone is not found having been written in the *biblos* of life," scarcely supports his meaning being all and sundry! If anything, the phrasing precludes such a deduction. Indeed, the pronouns employed reveal a seismic shift in emphasis, moving from "they" and "their" (v13) to "if any" and "he" (v15). How have we missed this?

EVERYONE WHO DOES GOOD

In John 5, the Lord Jesus makes the following unqualified statement: "...the hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and will come out; those *who have done good*, to the resurrection of life; and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment" (vv28,29). It is reasonable to assume that the Lord's words here do not concern the 'first' resurrection, because those who participate in the first rise incorruptible or imperishable (1 Cor 15:52). What is more, Christ speaks in John of those *doing good* receiving life and those *doing evil* receiving judgment *within the same resurrection*; this is very clearly a different event to 1 Corinthians 15:52. Paul, in his letter to the Romans, may also have something to say about this. In Chapter 2, verses 6-10, the apostle deliberates on the standing of *every man*:

> **For He will render to *every man* according to his works:**
> **to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory**
> **and honour and immortality He will give eternal (*aionian*)**
> **life. But for those who are factious and do not obey the truth,**
> **but obey wickedness, there will be wrath and fury. There**
> **will be tribulation and distress for every human being**
> **who does evil...but GLORY AND HONOUR AND PEACE**
> **for EVERYONE WHO DOES GOOD, the Jew first and**
> **also the Greek, for God shows no partiality (*RSV*).**

There is little question that these verses (and those that follow) present in the words of Barth a "strangely obscure and provocative piece of information." The first thing to notice is that the apostle's subject at this early stage in the epistle is not the saints, but *the conduct of humanity in general*. "Every man" in this passage likely represents the "all" who are in the tombs of John 5. Perhaps this is why God's impartiality (in contrast to *our partiality*) is declared in verse 10. Paul's subject begins in verse 8 of the 1st Chapter. In his usual meticulous manner, the apostle develops his theme and, in these five verses, speaks about God's rendering good and evil to *every man according to his works.* There is no mention at this stage of justification. And why should there be? Justification relates to sin and righteousness, not good and evil. Indeed, Paul delays introducing the subject of justification until well into the 3rd Chapter. Thus, we have nothing of law keeping or justification here; rather, the concern is of "EVERYONE who does good" or "does evil." This is about individual action and character. In other words, how one lives during this present life on earth. Nor should it be assumed that "everyone who does good" is merely a hypothetical class. The wording is such that if we take the evil class literally, we should also take the good class literally. We have all met people in life who are neither factious nor wicked, those whose lives are broadly ruled by what Paul calls "the law written on their own hearts" (Rom 2:15). For all "who have not the law (but) do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to themselves" (v14). Unfortunately, the expression "a law to themselves" is often taken in everyday speech to mean 'a law of their *own* making' or 'a law designed to suit themselves.' That Paul does not mean this should be clear from the context. Henry Alford deduces from the verse immediately following (v15) that "the Gentiles have had a law given to them in the testimony of their own consciences." He paraphrases verse 14 as follows: the Gentiles "'are to themselves (so far) the law,' not '*a* law,' for *a* law may be just or unjust, God's law or man's law." Withers adds that we should "exclude the idea of a bad or unjust law; for it is perverse to bring it into any of these contexts" (he suggests that "are to themselves law" might be a better rendering). As Alford reminds us, "the Gentiles have had a law given to them in the *testimony of their own consciences*" (v15), on which Cullmann elaborates in *Christ and Time*: "...even though (the Gentiles) do not pass through the stage that the law occupies in redemptive history, their attitude can become the presupposition of faith in the single way of salvation" (181). Cullmann is not here suggesting that their own "attitude" saves them, far from it; rather, it acts as the "presupposition of faith" leading to "the single way of salvation," which, of course, is Christ. His contemporary and fellow Frenchman, Jacques Ellul, describes the kind of person Paul probably has in mind. Such individuals, Ellul says, "build up their lives either on a relation to the Christ whom they do not know but who is implicitly present in their lives (the "sheep" class of Matt 25?), or on a knowledge of God (though there can be no question of constructing a natural theology): 'For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it known to them...His invisible nature, namely, his eternal (*aidios*) power and deity, is clearly perceived in the creation of the world when they see him in his works' (Rom 1:19)'" – *What I Believe* 210. Thus, it is a matter of how the unknowing individual constructs their life *as work*, based on "a certain knowledge of God." American pastor Rick Farwell sums the passage up fittingly in simple language: "God gives everybody (in life) a certain amount of grace. Now that doesn't mean

they are saved. But it does mean that they *can be saved* (later) at the great white throne ...that they can become a believer at that point." How so? Because they "lived up to the light they had" – *Comments on Romans 2*.

Distinction Between Righteous And Good

The late-antique obsession with sin (see *Appendix V*) has helped perpetuate a distorted view of this part of Romans, as it has with the 'infamous' chapters 9-11. Paul, in verse 6 (Ch2), states that God will render (*apodidomi*; 'give back') to each one according to their deeds (again, his focus is not the Church). Those who are patient in well-doing will attain *aionian* life. This "well-doing," or good action, is obviously not *perfect* action, for that would be impossible. Therefore, it must be something akin to 'acceptable' action – in other words, action pleasing to God – though Karl Barth offers a timely caution: "There must be no misunderstanding here! It is not said that they ARE righteous, nor that they HAVE BEEN declared righteous; but that they SHALL BE (v13) accounted righteous" (*Commentary on Romans* 64). Almost certainly, Paul uses the future tense to show that their well-doing leads to God accounting righteousness to them *in judgment*. Peter declares something similar when he says that in every nation, anyone fearing God and *working* righteousness is acceptable to Him (Acts 10:35). The apostle did not say *affecting* righteousness, for it is freely granted that none could do this. Barth places another caveat here, which amounts to a complete renunciation of all personal righteousness; in other words, *humility*.

{The theologian Sergius Bulgakov (1871-1944) possessed insights into pre-Christian, non-Judaic belief that bear relevance to the current discussion. According to this thoughtful and provocative Russian, the knowledge of God has always been available to and, in many cases, *realised by* pagan cultures far removed from the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures (Rom 1:19, 20). Non-Christian culture has all too glibly been labelled paganistic or even demonic, but, as some missionaries have discovered, this is far from being universally the case. In *The Comforter* (p239), Bulgakov provides the example of the Magi in Matthew's Gospel, who paid homage to Him born "king of the Jews." Luther was one of the first to refer to these men as "wise" (*weisan*), because they honoured the God of scripture through their actions and gifts, coming as they did from the distant East to the obscure hamlet of Bethlehem in order to worship the Christ Child. These travellers were Gentile, not Jewish, and are described in Matthew's Gospel as *magoi* (from which we derive our word magician), a term referring to an educated priestly order originating in Persia/Chaldea. The "Magi" were Zoroastrian, meaning they embraced astronomy, astrology, alchemy, and forms of esoteric knowledge! Notwithstanding these counter-intuitive facts, they were guided by "His star" to pay homage to the Son of the Most High. Within the miraculous air of this event resides a profound relevance to the current discussion.}

Scripture provides an outstanding example of the above in Cornelius, who was described as an "upright and God-fearing man" *before* he became a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. Was Cornelius unique in this respect? It is absurd to think that others could not fear God and show the same uprightness that Cornelius possessed in unbelief. Many past and prominent disciples have acknowledged this largely ignored truth: Justin (early-mid 2nd Century), Irenaeus (late 2nd C), John Wesley (18th C), and even, in his late years, Billy Graham (20th-21st C) all

expressed belief in the principle Paul describes. Wesley, for example, said, "A divine conviction of God and the things of God, even in infant state (spiritual immaturity), enables everyone who possesses it to fear God and work righteousness. Whosoever in every nation believes thus far, the apostle declares accepted." Naturally, this does not impinge on evangelising. When Cornelius received Christ, his redemption was complete, and the blessings bestowed upon him and his household through the Holy Spirit were beyond measure. Recall, too, our reference in the last chapter to the sheep and goats. Although they appeared unaware of helping the Lord's brethren in their terrible time of trial, the 'Sheep Class,' whom Christ calls "righteous," were nonetheless doing it for Him. Scholar James Morison proclaims, "The King thus interprets the righteous to themselves. He interprets for them their deeds of beneficence." And the result? The blessing of life in the age to come! As Thomson concludes, "something more profound than modesty is suggested" here. Owing to limited or even toxic soteriology, many have likely misrepresented the words of Matthew in this passage, just as they have John and Paul.

Godet provides a delectable summary of verse 7 (chapter 2) in his exposition on Romans. He writes, "In all human conditions, there are souls which contemplate the ideal here described, and ravished with its beauty, are elevated by it above every earthly ambition and the pursuit of sensual gratifications. These are the men who are represented under the figure of the merchant seeking goodly pearls." Pastor G. L. Rogers adds, "If some who never heard of the Law of Moses carefully and patiently seek righteousness, they will not lose their reward but be acceptable to God (Acts 10:35), and God will sometime get the Gospel to them that they may be saved." Undoubtedly, many throughout the centuries have sought virtue without ever having heard of God's Word or Laws. If, as Romans 1:19 teaches, nature alone, through works of creation, should teach those who had no written revelation, have none ever responded to their inner voice, that "law written in their own hearts?" Strange that the apostle should write such things were that the case.

But someone will ask, 'What of Romans 3:9-18?' Puzzling words in light of what Paul has just said. How can he now write, "No one seeks for God ...no one does good, not even one"? This sounds like a blatant contradiction! However, imperfect comprehension of Romans 3 has likely quashed a fuller understanding of the prior chapter. R. B. Withers certainly thinks this is so: "…it is necessary to show that with or without law the whole world is sub-righteous as to God, that is to say, does not and cannot attain to the standard of righteousness which God requires. Paul sums up in Romans 3:9-18, and the vital part of his statement is concealed in most versions. His words should read, 'Not one *goes on* understanding. Not one *goes on* seeking out God. All deviate – at the same time they are reduced to uselessness – not one *goes on* doing kindness...' It is quite untrue and unfair to say that no one is righteous *at all* or seeks God *at all*. Many people are frequently or even predominantly righteous in their living and kindly in their actions. What is stated here is that not one of them can do these good things *continuously and consistently*. In other words, they cannot of themselves attain to the standard of righteousness required by God" – *Law & The Law* (emphasis added). Paul's subject in Romans 3 has now turned to justification: "For no human being will be justified in His sight by works of law..." (3:20); whereas his subject in Romans 2, remember, is not justification but rendering "to

every man according to *his works*." This distinction must always be borne in mind when studying these two chapters.

THE BOOK OF LIFE OPENED

Returning now to the "Book of Life," American expositor Melvin E Johnson explored this subject (among others) with freshness and originality as far back as 1953. Concerning the fate of those who stand before the Great White Throne, he wrote, "If there were no opportunity for anyone's name to be entered in the book of life as the judgment proceeds and before it adjourns, there would seem to be no occasion then for opening the book of life at the judgment; yet the scriptures say that it will be opened. It need not be opened to disclose the names of the dead who do not appear there, for that is already evident. If the names were then in the book of life, such persons would not appear for judgment. Since some who do appear are afterwards cast into the lake of fire – all whose names are not found written in the book of life – the reason for having the book of life open as the judgment proceeds from the acts which are written in the other books (Rev 20:12) is evidently this, that some will have their names entered in the book of life during the course of that judgment" – *The Image & Likeness Of God* 20.

It is creedal supposition that has indiscriminately 'damned' all those who take part in this judgment, for when scripture speaks of judgment, what frequently comes to mind is *condemnation*. Of course, tedious mistranslation has only compounded this situation, as for example, in Romans 3:19: The whole world is not "guilty before God" as *King James* would have it, but "subject to the judgment of God" (margin). That is, the whole world is "accountable" (*RSV*) or subject to God's "just verdict" (*CLNT*).

{We must distinguish between "accountability," as scripture has it, and 'responsibility,' which is often thrust upon us by the well-meaning religionist. As Paul Young reminds us, "The word 'responsibility' is not in the Bible; not in the Hebrew or in the Greek." Like so much in religion, the concept comes from human reasoning and, while deemed 'spiritual,' is in reality just another form of bondage.}

The scriptural view of judgment consists of *setting things right* (Gen 18:25) and may entail no association with condemnation at all. Revelation 11:18 bears this out; here, the word "judged" concerns both reward and doom. One wonders at the logic of consigning everyone, regardless of circumstance, to an interminable sentence – before this Throne will stand infants, children, the mentally insane, and the ignorant of all nations, some of whose lives and benefactions will doubtless shame many of the saints.

Herein lies another conundrum: Will the mentally insane and emotionally imbalanced be raised in that condition? So many of life's ills are thrust upon us via genetics or circumstances over which we have no control; perfect Justice and Love must surely redress this issue in resurrection. Although scripture may not provide a definitive answer to this question, there are many instances in the gospels that certainly imply one. A good example is the violent demoniac mentioned by the synoptic authors, whom Christ instantly restored to health. After this healing, the man, who must have terrified others with his convulsions,

sat calmly at the feet of the Lord, dressed and in his "right mind" again. Are we to expect the lowly Jesus to meet such needs in His earthly ministry, yet not in his manifest glory at the resurrection?

On the subject of straightforward justice, there is the obvious (though neglected) testimony of Luke 12:47,48, which assures us that the servant who knew the master's will and did not act accordingly will receive a severe beating; whereas he who did not know, though He did what deserved a severe beating, shall receive a lesser one. In light of this teaching, A. P. Adams believes it "arrant nonsense" to preach indiscriminate eternal torment. He has a point! Again in Luke (10:12-15), we learn that Tyre, Sidon, and even Sodom will receive greater leniency than Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, where Christ performed mighty works among many who rejected Him. As Melvin Johnson sees it, neither passage allows for the notion of wholesale damnation: "These distinctions of judgment," he continues, "in respect to the various degrees of responsibility can then take into account such things as the age in which each individual has lived and the enlightenment he was granted or of which he was deprived. It can make due and generous provision for the billions who have never heard of the name of Christ as the only name under heaven by which men may be saved. These distinctions of judgment can make wise and loving provision also for the myriads of others who have died in infancy or the tender years of childhood, before they could receive salvation by faith. It is reasonable, too, that many who have been offended and further alienated from God by false and unscriptural teachings, dishonorable to His name, will hear the first pure gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ as they come before the great white throne. Many of such may well acknowledge Him then and receive Him as their Savior and Lord" (202). Dorner suggested something similar several generations earlier: "Even within the church, there are periods and circles where the Gospel does not really approach men as that which it is. Moreover, those dying in childhood have not been able to decide personally for Christianity. Nor is the former supposition tenable exegetically" – *System of Christian Doctrine* 409. The subject of Dr Dorner's statement we now take up.

CONDEMNATION

Our first imperative is to establish exactly what scripture means by the Greek word *katakrisis* (condemnation). Matthew's Gospel provides the most probable extreme sense: concerning the Lord Jesus, 20:18 attests, "they will *condemn* him *to death*." The word here refers to a judicial pronouncement, in this case resulting in death; however, it may not produce death in every case. For example, Paul, in Romans 2:1, reveals how the individual who offhandedly judges others *condemns* (*katakrino*) himself. Here, the implied recrimination only produces self-induced, not fatal, condemnation. Later in Romans, Paul links the word to the twin entities of "sin and (again) *death*" (5:12). But that is all. He most certainly does not correlate it with any concept beyond death, such as a Dantean hell! Divided into its elements, the Greek word means to 'down-judge' or the act of 'down-judging.' In other words, to *pronounce guilty*. The problem with this term lies in our protracted 1500 years of ineluctable religious pessimism. We can scarcely imagine condemnation – within a religious context – without falling back on the frankly bizarre and dissolute notion of damnation. Even the word from which

condemnation is derived, *krisis* (judgment), has taken on predominantly negative connotations. But *krisis* has to do with the 'crisis' (from which we get the word) of forming a critical decision, administering justice, and allocating *reward* or loss. Karl Barth intuitively extends to it the sense of hope amid 'crisis.'

{The *primary* reason for Christ's coming into the world is never said to be judgment. The Gospel of John makes this plain: 3:17 states that "God did not send his Son into the world to judge (*krine*) the world, but *to save the world through Him*." In part, Christ is clarifying here what His purpose is *not*. It is not judgment (let alone damnation); it is DELIVERANCE for the entire world or kosmos! William Petri asks the question, "How can we reconcile this verse with John 9:39, where Jesus said that He came into the world for judgment?" His answer: "Judgment was a secondary duty involved in delivering, which was Jesus' primary purpose" – *UVB*; *History Scrolls* 25. Christ came into a world already cursed by death and suffering; His purpose was not to cause more by saving a few and damning the rest. The judgment He speaks of in the second instance is a necessary corollary to ultimate deliverance. It is essential, too, not to read eternality into the Lord's next statement (v18); it is only by grace (through faith) that we avoid ancillary judgment. For all who fail in this, whether by ignorance or denial, judgment becomes necessary. All such will stand before the great white throne on that future day to give an account.}

It should not be assumed that the condemnation of all mankind through Adam's offence (Rom 5:13) has any connection with judgment at the Great White Throne; it is *their* acts and works (Rom 2:6), not Adam's, which are to be judged. At the same time, the 'whiteness' of this throne incontestably establishes the righteousness of the judgment taking place. If ignorant humanity is foredoomed, then it becomes difficult – indeed, impossible – to evaluate this scene with God's righteousness. Further, as evidenced, such a view makes nonsense of the scriptural terminology regarding both this judgment and judgment in general. Neither can we expect to understand any of this with background thoughts of "he that believeth not is 'condemned' already" (John 3:18). The word used here by John, incidentally, is not 'condemned' but "judged" (*krino*); furthermore, in the following verses (19-20) the Lord stipulates just who are to be the recipients of this judgment. He is not indiscriminate.

The word 'condemn' and its cognates are used sparingly in the New Testament, though one might not get that impression from reading the *A.V.* – it renders the Greek word for *judgment* by 'condemnation' or 'damnation' about a dozen times; half as often it changes *judge* to 'condemn' or 'damn,' and *judging* to 'condemnation' or 'damnation.' All of which, one imagines, is some indication of the thinking of the day. Many translators, old and new, assume that Christ means (in John) something beyond what he says. Consequently, their bibles persist in inserting 'condemn' where the Greek has "judge." (One must at least be grateful for the lower incidence of the decidedly offensive 'damn' or 'damnation').

The word "condemned" (*katakrino*) does occur in Mark 16:9-20 concerning what is commonly called the 'great commission.' However, in recent times, the lineage of this passage – primarily the last 12 verses – has been questioned, it being omitted from two of the most reliable manuscripts, the *Vaticanus* and the *Sinaiticus*. On this evidence, the *RSV* removed it altogether

from the main section of Mark's Gospel. Based on available data, Conybeare even suggests we may well "shrink from resting on it any dogmatic fabric at all." However, assuming it valid, as many still do, the commission laid out is said to be for the "whole creation" (v15, footnote). Consequently, if the common interpretation as to the how and when of this commission (and that of Matt 28) is correct, how and when has this ever been carried out effectively and consistently? Despite the gallant efforts of the worldwide church, vast numbers – 'billions' to use Johnson's word – down through the centuries "have never heard of the name of Jesus Christ as the only name under heaven by which men may be saved." Even today, in our modern world of sophisticated communications, can we be certain that the "whole" of contemporary creation has been reached? Does God care so little for the creation that He will 'condemn' indiscriminately?

Rounding this out, we have the puzzling statement of Paul in his epistle to the Colossians (1:23). 'Puzzling,' that is, because most Bibles render the indefinite verb used here in the past tense. The dilemma should be obvious to anyone with a modicum of common sense: the preaching alluded to was not an accomplished fact; indeed, *it had only begun*! Wycliffe reads the key phrase not as '*was* preached' but "…*is* preached" (using modern English). Tyndale, too, allows the aorist its timeless sense: "…that it *is* preached." The *Concordant Literal N.T.* is one of the few modern versions that gets it right: "...the evangel which you hear *is being* heralded to the entire creation which is under heaven, of which I, Paul, became the dispenser." In other words, Paul was referring to past, present, and future; it was true in his day and will continue to apply until the present age draws to an end. Concerning the fate of those who do not respond, the apostle is silent, just as he is silent over the fate of those who never receive it.

Disregarding, for the moment, these finer points of interpretation – for they are not necessary to prove the argument – one thing should be obvious: the fact that the "whole creation" – that is, all people, at all times – has not by any stretch of the religious imagination been reached. Once more, we must ask, does God care so little for His creation that He will "condemn" (whatever *scripture* means by that) indiscriminately? Dorner points out that "the absoluteness of Christianity demands that no one be judged (let alone condemned) before Christianity has been made accessible and brought home to him. But this is not the case in this life with millions of human beings" – *Ibid*. 409. Regardless of their due application and timing, both John 3:18 and Mark 16:16 imply, at the very most, that only those who hear such a Gospel can be so judged or condemned at the Great White Throne. This does not begin to consider all those who may have 'heard' but failed to understand for any number of reasons. The above assumes, too, that such judgment or condemnation refers only to the time of the Great White Throne. It should not be overlooked that many wicked and sinful people have already suffered, at least in part, for their evil ways. Romans 1:18 is another verse that has coloured our views of God's righteous judgment. It reads in Rotherham's *Emphasised Bible*:

> **For there is *being revealed* an anger of God from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who the truth do hold down.**

The verb *apokalupto* is correctly rendered above as "being revealed" *now* or in the present era. In connection with this, J. S. Stewart writes, "What Paul means

by the wrath of God – in its present, non-eschatological sense – is the totality of the divine reaction to sin. Everything that man's rebellion against the moral order brings upon him – suffering for his body, hardening for his heart, blinding for his faculty of inward vision – is included in that reaction. Is this punishment? Yes, certainly, but it is not God's outraged dignity retaliating by a direct penal act. Rather, it is the sinner who punishes himself" – *A Man in Christ* 219. Rogers puts it this way: "The indignant condemnation of sin is continuously being revealed from heaven in awful consequences to sinning humanity." He further asserts that the condemnation incurred through Adam (Rom 5) is also not related to future judgment. The wages of sin is death, and according to scripture, that amounts to the total condemnation of Adam's disobedience…nothing more, nothing less. Here is where the misleading words 'eternal' and 'everlasting' have done so much harm. As shown repeatedly in these pages, there is no such concept, nor any such expression, as *eternal* death (or eternal anything, pretty much) in scripture. This does not, of course, deny the idea of spiritual death or figurative death. While no such precise expression is found in scripture, the thought is implied in statements like Paul's description of living men being "dead in trespasses and sins;" and, indeed, the words of Christ Himself in passages like Matthew 8:22 and Luke 15:24. What is wrong is to equate 'spiritual death' with 'eternal death' as many see fit.

If, in denying this, we look on the judgment as simply a trial to assess the amount of each one's guilt and punishment, then we nullify the basic principle of God's justice. Observe Solomon's words in Ecclesiastes: "For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil" (12:14). Notice how "good" precedes "evil" here. Love is always quicker to repay good than it is to repay evil. Ask any loving parent. 'But what of 1 Cor 11:32?' someone may ask:

> **But if we judge ourselves truly, we should not be judged (v31).**
> **But when we are judged by the Lord, we are chastened so that we may not be condemned along with the rest of the world.**

The context here is *discipline*, not salvation. Paul leads us to understand that we must be chastened by the Lord ('when we are judged we are being chastened' - *RSV* footnote). Had he said, 'We are *saved* (by the Lord) that we may not be condemned along with the rest of the world,' it would be quite a different matter.

Throughout the Christian era, especially in the West and from the 5th century on, misplaced texts have exerted a powerful negative influence on the subject of judgment. Few can study things biblical without the preconception of complete condemnation for all who take part in the second resurrection ('all who die unsaved,' in the vernacular). The generation with whom the Lord Jesus lived on earth will indeed be condemned or pronounced guilty, but by whom? The Lord does not say *He* will condemn them. Rather, they will be condemned by the Queen of the South, who will be raised in that same judgment; and by the men of Nineveh who will be standing up in that judgment (Matt 12:41,42). As the perceptive Thomson asks, if these two parties are to condemn that evil generation, will God accept and act on it other than on the basis that He must first reckon this Queen and these Ninevites "righteous"?

SALVATION OF THE UNBELIEVER

Assuming the judgment of unbelieving humanity takes place between the passing of this present earth and the creation of the new (to which the evidence seems to point), then those bonds tying men and women to this present world are broken. Moreover, they are the subjects of the most astounding miracle imaginable, the raising of the dead. In this, the reality and power of the Almighty are no longer conjecture. As Thomas Burnet says, "There will be no room for unbelief when Christ has been seen" (*De Statu Mort*), or as Philip Scranton more latterly puts it: "There will be no atheists after resurrection!" The flawless ability of the "Judge of the whole earth" to communicate the loving goodness, tender mercy, and, where applicable, the stern justice of the Divine is absolute – indeed, according to the Psalmist, justice is the *habitation* of God's throne, along with mercy and truth (Ps 89:14). All barriers to understanding that presently exist – what Maximus (7th C) refers to as the flawed 'gnomic will' (doubt, deliberation, & uncertainty [see next chapter]) – are broken, so that at last the veil that hid God from humanity is gone. Now, for the first time, the "hidden things" of every life are laid bare when Christ Jesus judges each one in accord with what Paul authenticates as "my evangel" (Rom 2:16). So much human justice is mockery because of prejudice or failure – even unwillingness – to uncover the truth. But here, the books are open as each one stands before the Throne. Everyone is judged exactly according to what is found written in them, according to their "deeds" (*erga*). Now, it is not suggested that any deeds, no matter how noble or fine, will constitute anyone *righteous* before God. What *is* suggested is that many whose thoughts and deeds on earth were broadly governed by the "law written on their own hearts" – their God-given conscience – will freely submit to Christ when offered the pure Gospel message for the first time.

{The Great White Throne will allow for many what life could not. When Paul says (1 Tim 2:4) that God will have "all men" (*pantas anthropous*) saved, he adds the vital words, "and come into a realisation of the truth" (*CLNT*). Even today, many believers possess knowledge but lack the true 'realisation' (*epignosin* - full recognition or discernment) necessary for their completion and maturity. That will only be fully affected at the judgment seat (2 Cor 5:10) when everything false is consumed by the fire; "the truth" will be what remains. For the unbeliever, resurrection at the GWT is the portal leading to the knowledge and full realisation of that truth. Here, humanity en masse will come to grasp that God is not against them, and that His judgment, though arduous in extreme cases, is inexorably leading them towards completion. Paul gives no indication of how long this process will take.}

The Christian today must receive God (in Christ) through faith alone; hence, he receives a *special* salvation (1 Tim 4:10). Jesus said to Thomas, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed" (Jn 20:29), but Thomas was not rejected because he believed *only after seeing* (v25). Any hope of the unbeliever's salvation has been denied through rejection, misunderstanding, or ignorance of this scriptural principle. Yet Saul of Tarsus, Christ's bitter enemy *and foremost of sinners*, was converted in this very way. He was guilty of the greatest of sins: the rejection of Christ and persecution of God's Saints – consenting to the murder of one – his guilt all the greater for his knowledge of revelation (Phil 3:4-6). Saul

is introduced, as C. R. Stam suggests, not as a devout follower of Christ, but as "the Lord's most vicious and relentless enemy...not to crush him, but to save him and make him the supreme demonstration of His boundless grace." Saul thus received this Divine Grace and with it a changed life, becoming Paul the Apostle, *the* peerless follower and proclaimer of Christ Jesus, his Lord. No sanctimonious superiority on our part, therefore, justifies our saying that God does not care for those who have died in ignorance of his saving grace. In the words of F. B. Edgell (1945): "Let us be ever grateful for the favours we have had, but let us refrain from judging others who have not had them. Jesus Christ gave Himself a ransom for all to be testified in due time, and God has provided a day in which He will judge the world...in righteousness. This judging is not the mere passing of a sentence of condemnation upon those who were already condemned in Adam and have paid the penalty in death, but the judging must be a delivering just as Israel's judges were raised up, not to condemn, but to deliver them from their enemies" – *Human Destiny* 52.

Chapter 9

THE LAKE OF FIRE

To those Christians whose faith has been crystallised and frozen down in artificial systems of theology...every new truth drawn fresh from the scriptures is an unwelcome guest, or even a suspected enemy
- PROFESSOR BIRKS

The Apostle Paul makes it plain to the Galatians (5:19-21) what the works of the flesh are, and warns them that those who indulge in such things – immorality, impurity, dissolution, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife...and such like – will not inherit the kingdom of God. As we have seen, it is Christ's task to judge the hidden things of humanity and expose the secret motives of the heart. To those thirsting after righteousness, He will give "water without price from the fountain of the water of life...But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, as for the murderers, fornicators, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their lot shall be in the lake of fire that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death" (Rev 21:6-8).

Now it should be obvious to all but the hopelessly prejudiced that a great many non-believers have not and do not come under these extreme categories. These are the *wilful* sinners of mankind, those who delight and *persist* in depravity and evildoing: "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still" (Rev 22:11). It is essential to discriminate between human weakness, which involves momentary lapses of sinfulness, and persistently wilful wickedness. Thomson makes an important distinction here: "God had replied to Moses, 'Him who sins against Me, I shall blot from My book.' But surely this cannot mean that God will blot every sinner out of His book? Do we not all sin even though we are saved? It was a great sin which demanded the blotting out of names...Thus, I come to suggest what others have claimed, that only the very worst and deepest sinners before the Great White Throne will be put into the Lake of Fire" – *The Great White Throne.* The 69th Psalm (v28) supports this view, anticipating as it does the terrible crime against God committed by the sons of men, the crucifixion of Christ. Farrar concurs: "The one sin which (God) says is alone 'aeonian' – that is, of which alone the effects must cling to a man in the future aeon – is like that alluded to in Heb. x. 29 – the deliberate rejection of divine grace, and the willing substitution of evil for good" – *M. & J.* 464.

THE SECOND DEATH

John, in his Revelation, neither states nor implies that once a person becomes "cowardly," "faithless," "polluted," etc., they are doomed to be so forever. No doubt the prodigal was many of these things during his time of "living prodigiously," but he woke up eventually and was welcomed back with open arms by his merciful father. Furthermore, the uncompromising words of Him sitting on the throne (Rev 21:5), "Behold! I am making all things new," hold little sense if nothing ever changes within the lake of fire.

It seems that only after death and Hades are consigned to the lake does scripture associate with it the term "second death": "And death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. *This is the second death*" (Rev 20:14). The second death should not therefore be assumed a mere repetition of the 'first' death, which is the annihilationist view; nor need it be a Dantean inferno from which none will escape, which is the infernalist or Augustinian view. At no time is anyone cast into the lake of fire said to be put to death, let alone tortured 'forever and ever,' only – by implication, not direct statement – that they may be "injured" (or hurt) by its infliction (Rev 2:11). John's use of the definite article, in all four occurrences, is equally salient – "THE second death" – distinguishing it from usage without the article. John appears to be alluding to something unique here; had he not employed the article, 'normal' death would have been predicated. We know, too, that scriptural 'seconds' invariably compensate for all the deficiencies of scriptural 'firsts.' In 1 Corinthians 15:47, the "second man" (Christ) is greatly different and superior in every way to the "first man" (Adam); the "second covenant" of Hebrews 8:7 is distinctly unlike and more effective by far than "the first covenant" (note that the article is used in both these cases, too). Furthermore, in the event of the second death, it is the 'first' – the one we suffer now – that is cast into the lake along with Hades, the unseen abode of the dead (Rev 20:14). Hence, the first death must in some way be replaced or displaced by the second. Lastly, and most importantly, we are told that *thanatos* or death in any form cannot survive permanently because its ultimate destiny is abolition (1 Cor 15:26). The Apostle Paul is most insistent, and the 4th-century scholar Eusebius, in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, fully comprehends his words: *thanatos* not only means physical death here, but death in *any form whatsoever*. The Lord of all will so engulf death as to remove it entirely. "Death, which once swallowed all," insists Eusebius, "will be swallowed in turn."

Dying To Sin

Melvin Johnson writes, "The nature and character of the second death is more apparent by considering the present experience of believers who pass from death to life in advance of others as they die unto sin…the scriptures show that dying unto sin means, in effect, to die away from sin or abandon sin and cease to live in sin" – *Ibid.* 194, 195. In an earlier paper on *The Second Death*, E. A. Larsen presented a similar view: "Death tore down the ability to resist sin and built up the desire to serve unrighteousness. But in the saints, this has been reversed. In them, God uses death to counteract the tendency to sin and develop an ability to live Godly and righteously in this evil age." Both Johnson and Larsen illustrate their points by showing how, in this present age, God is using a second form of death to compensate for the deficiencies caused by physical death itself. It is the process of "Dying unto (or away from) sin." This proposition affirms the intuition of other scholars who see that, in a certain way, the Body of Christ is experiencing its 'lake of fire' or second death *now*, assuming a disposition aligned with Christ.

Now, if it is true that the second death is to compensate for all the ill effects Adam's condemnation brought upon mankind, it must bring the individual to an awareness of the need for repentance. It is not claimed that this is the only effect of the second death, but for present purposes, it will be our focus. While the 'first' death has been thoroughly destructive in its impact, the "second death" must

prove (if our hypothesis is correct) quite the opposite. Larsen further suggests, "What marks off the second death and puts it in a class by itself, primarily, is its character...The first death degraded man, morally and physically. The second death will improve man in every way." Earlier, Jukes drew a similar conclusion: "The 'second death'...so far from being, as some think, the hopeless shutting up of man forever in the curse of disobedience, will...be God's way to free those who in no other way than by such a death can be delivered."

Excepting doctrinal bias – probably the greatest hindrance – objections to such a view may arise from attempts to grasp the magnitude of the task. And, of course, such objections are understandable if the task were to depend on frail humanity. Here, we must fall back on faith in God's *infinite* resources rather than the limitations of our intellectualism and dogma. Let all who contend for the genuineness of miracles ask again, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Gen 18:14). Jeremiah certainly didn't think so: "There is nothing too hard for You!" According to Christ, that which is impossible with men is quite possible with God (Matt 19:26). Lest we miss Matthew's point, the context here is *salvation*. The disciples' question, "Who then can be saved?" arose in response to Christ's observation concerning the rich young man. This person's attachment to his possessions was such that he could not renounce them in order to follow the Lord. But it was not *that* which "greatly astonished" the disciples; it was instead the Master's subsequent declaration about the relative ease with which a camel could pass through the eye of a needle compared to a rich man entering the Kingdom (no doubt it has astonished many since). Yet Christ makes it clear that their question, "Who then can be saved?" betrays a narrow line of human reasoning. Indeed, the Lord's words are a salient and much-needed spur to faith. It is, after all, *we* who speak of the incorrigibly wicked or the interminably lost, not God.

When, for example, the Apostle Paul uses the expression "unrepentant" concerning those with a stiff and hardened heart (Rom 2:5), he employs the word *ametanoeton*, which conveys the thought of being 'unable to repent.' The implication here may fail to satisfy the sense of intractability that many assume; it may instead be pointing to a state of temporary rebellious delusion. Indeed, was this not true at one time of the apostle himself? Had he not seethed in his persecution of the Assembly of God? Was he not at that point, *by his own free will*, quite unable to repent? Nonetheless, that hatred was transformed into the most tender and abiding love through the blinding appearance of none other than the One He persecuted. Does not Paul later talk about how "the god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers so they cannot see..." (2 Cor 4:4)? Recall, too, the plea of the Saviour as He hung dying, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." Here is an entire group 'unable to repent'…unable even to understand! Who would be so foolish as to deny the realisation of that holy request?

It may be true (Jer 17:9 *AV*) that the heart is "deceitful above all things" ('deep beyond all' – *Septuagint*). It may even, on occasions, be "desperately wicked," though the Hebrew *anash* more correctly means 'sickly, mortal, incurable' [relatively speaking] – *Young*. Nonetheless, the Lord can search that same heart (v10), change its direction (Prov 21:1), and, as the Great Physician, establish the cure (Ez 36:26). Denying this extends to sin a power greater than God Himself! Thus, Ernest Ludlow writes, "That God is able to circumscribe the experiences of His creatures so as to effectively bring about their reconciliation

is shown by Hosea 5:15 – 'I will go and return to my place till they acknowledge their offence and seek My face: in their affliction they will seek Me early'." He continues, "We confess that the great God of the universe is perfect in His boundless love, His unerring wisdom, His unswerving justice, and His unlimited power. These make it possible for Him to put into action all His wise and benevolent designs for the blessings of 'all the families of the earth.' Yet we continue to accept the creedal teachings handed down from the past and fail to 'search the scriptures daily as to whether these things be so'" – *The Blessing of All the Families of the Earth* 14.

Man's Will vs God's Wisdom

The topic of free will and God's Supremacy has already been discussed in *Chapters 1* and *7*; we must now revisit it in the light of our current subject. Arminian eschatology appears to be based on the notion that God is unable to influence the determined will of unrepentant humanity. No doubt, the common interpretation of *olam*, *aion, and aionios* contributes to this view because it restricts God to our fleeting life on earth. If these terms were properly understood, they might more fully reflect the perfect wisdom and timing of the Almighty. Proponents of this school may cite canonical examples to support their viewpoint – the hardening of Pharaoh (Ex 7-14) is a common one; or, on a larger scale, the persistent iniquity of Sodom (Gen 19). The punitive end of both cases is seen as conclusive evidence of final destiny. However, fatal wilfulness, even at the hands of God, does not automatically equate to ultimate doom; this interpretation is more likely a result of creedal assumptions. Moreover, in the case of the wicked city, we have Ezekiel's assurance that "Sodom...will be restored to her former estate" (16:53). Here is direct *scriptural* evidence entirely free of metaphor, hyperbole, parable, figure, or creed (see *Appendix I*).

Scripture just as readily provides proof of the opposite through this same principle working in reverse. In such examples, we need to recognise God's omnipotence in affecting the will of the impenitent when time and circumstance are germane. In *Chapter 1*, we looked to Daniel for a witness. The Book of Daniel contains one of the finest accounts on record: the humbling of Babylon's mighty king. Christ, in Luke, laid down the law that "everyone exalting himself shall be humbled" (14:11), but the haughty Nebuchadnezzar still had this to learn despite God's miraculous demonstration earlier in Daniel 3. As ruler of Earth's greatest empire, he attained fame and power unparalleled by any other mortal; his reputation was literally world-renowned. During a moment of self-conceit, the king was humbled…indeed, ruinously reduced. With the verdict pronounced, he found himself among the creatures of the field. The fodder of beasts replaced the luxuries of his table. His hair grew unkempt, and his nails long as claws. The sentence was a form of insanity called lycanthropy, where a man lives and acts like a wild animal (Dan 4:28-33). After a time, Nebuchadnezzar's madness ended, and herein lies the lesson: like all Divine afflictions, once its object is accomplished, it comes to an end because there is no further purpose in its continuance. Nebuchadnezzar's experience is an example of the severity yet beneficence of judgment, and buried within it lies the assurance that God is not dealing blindly with His handiwork but moving them towards eventual blessings. One might imagine this once-proud king would harbour deep resentment over

such humiliation, but the effect was just the opposite. Truly, "Nebuchadnezzar shows us how judgment does for man what goodness cannot" – *Rest*. 104.

Are we to assume God incapable of recreating the conditions that restored this mighty monarch, though on a vaster scale, to affect the hearts of lesser men? The Ancient city of Nineveh is a testimony to whole populations being touched in this way. The Assyrians were a nation known for their cruelty: Assyria's capital was pejoratively termed 'The Robber City.' Because of its evil, God marked this metropolis – the greatest in the (then) ancient world – for judgment and destruction. The reluctant prophet Jonah warned the citizens of Nineveh that in forty days they would be overthrown unless they repented. The limitations of human faith and mercy are well portrayed in what happened next. Jonah's predictions – inspired, of course, by God – were reinforced by his personal (and understandable) hatred of these terrible people. In short, he neither wanted nor believed it possible for the city to be saved. Nonetheless, despite Jonah's antipathy, the unthinkable happened. Scripture records that the evilest city on earth repented and believed Yahweh "from the greatest of them, even to the least!" One wonders if this incident taught the reluctant prophet, or indeed, any of the many since who have pondered the narrative, a moral lesson.

{Many consider Maximus (6-7th C) one of the greatest, if not *the* greatest, of the Eastern mystics. Maximus viewed human will (originally created) as fully functional. As such, he referred to it as the "natural will" – the pristine state properly aligned with God. He thus believed that correctly responding to God *uncoerced* was the natural order of things. What occurred in the Garden was an act of self-will (from immaturity), damaging this natural state and producing what Maximus contrarily calls the "gnomic will" – a will *misaligned* with God, vacillating between the positive and the negative, producing both good and bad choices with a consequential fatal outcome. Hence, it is something of a misnomer to refer to the current condition of the race as being entirely "free." The gnomic or deliberative will enforces an enslaved condition upon its victim – a bondage to sin – *until* the Divine Light shines forth, as it did for Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus Road. Saul's will was not in any way violated by this event, yet his response to Christ was as 'natural' as it was immediate, and his life thereafter transformed. This is how Maximus and other Eastern Patristics (not to mention Paul himself) could hold, without conflict, to a fully-fledged redemptive process alongside the human right to choose.}

Consider for a moment the words of Isaiah when describing the conditions that will exist in the coming eon: "The inhabitants of the earth will *learn* righteousness" (26:9). David's Messianic 22nd Psalm is an expansion of Isaiah's words: "All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to Yahweh. Yea, all the families of the nations will bow themselves down before Him...all the *great ones* of the earth shall eat and bow down. Before Him shall kneel all that go down to the dust, even he who had not kept alive his own soul" (vv27-29). Isaiah and David's words provide powerful testimony of God's ability to create the conditions needed to educate the human heart when the time is right. Even the (at times) pessimistic Thomas Aquinas granted that God can make an individual *freely* will the good. He is God after all.

We should also never forget that, though humankind may presently persist in evil, the tie of creation indissolubly links every soul to its Creator. Even the most debased and corrupt have an intrinsic God-given nature, and none can

destroy that which is the Creator's sole and sovereign production. Based on this, and of course, the infinitude of the Divine resources, we need not doubt His ability to "accomplish all His purpose," even with sin-hardened men and women, through the power of the second death. Compared to endless torment in a fiery hell – admittedly, the extreme view – the liberated mind should have little trouble deciding which of these two scenarios best fits the revealed character and purpose of the Almighty. The rational and philosophical difficulties with the latter present insurmountable obstacles in reconciling them with every Divine attribute. We ask with Allin, is it possible for a God so great to do good for His enemies in the few years they spend on earth, and then proceed to do them all possible harm in hell...forever? "The powers of the imagination, if taxed to the utmost, could hardly conceive any more ludicrous parody of justice" – *C.T.* 46, 48.

Torture, Death, Or Banishment?

Revelation 21:8 describes the persistently wilful sinners as having "their lot in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." In Chapter 22 (v15), they are said to be "outside" and, on the authority of the prior verse, have no right to the tree of life nor are allowed entry to the city by its gates. The term "outside" suggests a state of banishment, certainly not annihilation. Australian commentator D. W. Osgood writes, "Just as Adam and Eve were banished from the place of blessing, so the wilful sinners of mankind in this life, though resurrected and living, will be banished from a place of future blessing. God frequently banishes or excludes: e.g. Num. 12:15; Deut. 23:1-4; Matt. 8:12, 22:13; Luke 13:28. Man punishes by confining criminals in jail but God does the very reverse, He lets them see just what they are missing and then excludes them from partaking" – *Comments on the Second Death*. In earlier chapters we touched on banishment or "exclusion from the presence of the Lord" regarding those in 2 Thessalonians 1:9 who "do not obey the gospel"; also, Matthew 25:46 where the "goats" experience "eonian chastening" (*kolasin aionion*), WHICH IS THE SAME "age-abiding fire which hath been prepared for the adversary and his messengers" (v41). 'Eonian fire' (i.e. fire of the age) is the lot of:

(a) the "goat" nations (Matt 25)
(b) the beast and the false prophet (Rev 19:20)
(c) the adversary and his angels (Matt 25:41; Rev 20:10)
(d) those whose names are not found in the book of life (Rev 20:15)

From the above, *Eonian fire* and the *Lake of fire* very likely describe the same thing. "Thus, in combining Matthew 25:41 with these verses in Revelation," writes Ted McDivitt, "we learn that the fire eonian and the lake of fire are but two titles for the same thing" – *The Lake of Fire*: *Its Definition & Purpose* 3. Since this is almost certainly the case – that the eonian fire is a figure referring to the chastisement of the offending nations – it follows that the lake of fire must also be figurative and have the same chastising purpose, much like the "furnace of fire" that was Israel's affliction in Egypt. Phil Scranton thinks it is a mistake to assume that scripture has little to say regarding the lake of fire and the second death. In his consideration, "It stands to reason that the expressions, 'cut asunder,' 'cast into outer darkness,' 'wailing and gnashing of teeth,' and other expressions

used by Christ in the parables, are all descriptive of the conditions many will enter into after the great white throne judgment. One would expect, then, that such phrases are synonymous with 'the second death.'" This being so, Scranton reasons, "the scriptures actually have a great deal to say about the second death" – *Journey To And Through The Second Death* 113. We believe he is correct.

What Is The Lake Of Fire?

The phrase "Lake of Fire" is used only by John, occurring first in the Book of Revelation 19:20. The expression is possibly a throwback to the days following the judgment of Sodom. There is a tradition, alluded to by historians, that acts as a grim reminder of the destruction of these invidious cities of the plain. The volatile nature of the Dead Sea region in which they dwelt may further explain the various descriptions of what occurred following their catastrophic judgment. A sulphurous, smoking lake – the probable combined product of volcanic eruption and seismic shift – formed in the region, the geologic product of which is today the Dead Sea. The fuming legacy of this ancient cataclysm was witnessed for centuries after, becoming a symbol of God's inexorable (or 'inextinguishable') judgment to succeeding generations. Are we then to take this ancient tradition as a representation of what John's symbolic vision means by the Lake of Fire? Inasmuch as it concerns God's inexorable *judgment*, yes. On that, at least, most scholars agree. Beyond this, there seems to be little accord.

For students of the conventional school – referred to increasingly as 'infernalist' (from paganism's hellish *Infernum*) – the expression "lake of fire" remains the final, and (commonly) very literal, residing place for all those disobedient to God; a mere extension, one assumes, of the 'hell' in which they have been suffering since death. Indeed, the Augustinian perspective on the second death is the torture of soul and body in eternal flame, which raises the whole question of the purpose of a judgment in the first place! For this reason, perhaps, such thinking makes little of the Great White Throne; even less, it seems, of the second death, which is the assumed ending for millions (if not billions) of bewildered souls. In fact, when scripture is accurately translated, there is no word or expression stating or even inferring finality in any context dealing with this subject; nor are the two Greek words most associated with end (*telos*) and completion (*sunteleia*) anywhere to be found. There is certainly no expression (*in the Greek*) meaning 'forever and ever.' Last, and most certainly not least, it remains to be demonstrated how *abstract* concepts like Death and Hades can be physically cast into a literal lake of burning fire!

For students of that other school, annihilationism (towards which this writer once leaned), the "second death" remains the final and literal death state for all those disobedient to God. Annihilationism seems a natural progression for those who, through conscience and common sense, have departed from the infernalist camp. However, problems reside here, too. From a philosophical point of view, Andrew Fairbairn calls annihilation the "expulsion of sin by destruction of the sinner." He thinks it a ruthless remedy, "somewhat in the manner of a rude physician, who, in order to stay a disease, killed his patient. And if this were the method of cure, who would be the victor, God or sin? Would not the victory remain with the evil which compelled God to uncreate His own creation?" – *Christ in Modern Theology* 446. Nor does Love create, as Madeleine L'Engle

observes, merely to annihilate. It also seems absurd, not to mention cruel, to raise the dead for no other reason than to inflict upon them further agony, only to return them once more to oblivion. Then there is the understated (and under-rated) detail of our Saviour having "abolished death" (2 Tim 1:10). Can the last enemy be finally eradicated yet remain forever in the form of the second death? No! Annihilation may be an understandable attempt to allay an impossible tradition, but it can hardly be viewed as victory over death. It is, in fact, death triumphant over life! It may also necessitate interpreting "fire" as God's radical means of consuming not merely the dross, but the entire being made in His image. Lastly, the annihilationist – like his infernalist brother – must necessarily sweep the selfsame verses from the closing chapters of Revelation under the eschatological carpet.

{The last two chapters of the Book of Revelation provide many neglected insights into God's ultimate purpose. These insights, as we are about to see, confirm the zenith of God's *Plan of the Ages*, whereas tradition falls back on a much darker, fragmented solution. Presumption has led some scholars to view the closing chapters of Revelation as dubious accretions. But the need to relegate God's victorious finale to the realm of doubt is more an indictment of eschatological inheritance than any dubious pedigree attributed to the writings of John. No, chapters 21 and 22 of the Book of Revelation harmonise well with the restorationist passages of scripture. The *Apocalypse* (lit. unveiling) is a radical book, virtually from its alpha to omega; soon after it first appeared, it became a source of controversy. Caius of Rome (3rd C) was the first to reject its canonicity because it challenged his anti-chiliast theology. Modern writers, in questioning its closing chapters, are likely repeating the same error and for the same reason.}

There is yet another category that must be considered: that of the reconciliationist who views the second death as *literal*. For this category, the second deathly condemnation, though temporary, is nonetheless but a repetition of the one we presently experience. However, within this view lie several unresolved paradoxes. Firstly, we have scripture's assurance that "death will be no more" (Rev 21:4). If death and Hades are cast into the lake of fire, how can they continue to hold sway over its inmates? (Hades is associated only with the present death, never the second). Secondly, *physical* death, coupled as it is to corruption (Acts 2:27), necessitates *resurrection;* if the second death is merely a duplicate of the first, then Hades still exists, and resurrection must therefore be predicated. The dilemma, of course, is that scripture is silent about any such resurrection. The last resurrection mentioned precedes the Great White Throne, and the lake of fire is God's resounding emblem of that judgment. Lastly, there is no evidence in scripture of a restorative process for these temporarily 'destroyed' individuals who, on any realistic reckoning, must constitute a number of considerable magnitude. In contrast, the closing chapters of Revelation provide several clues regarding this last problem, most of which contradict the literal second death hypothesis. Again, no! We agree with Johnson, Osgood, Thomson, and many others who view the expression "second death" as wholly in line with the other symbols of Apocalyptic language.

Divine Fire

Outside the Book of Revelation, the word 'fire' is used over 430 times. Of these, only about half can be considered natural fire. Approximately 115 times in the Old Testament, fire is used as a figure of divine indignation, and about 80 times as a figure of affliction. In most of these cases, it is associated with Divine wrath against sin and ungodliness. "Repeatedly it is seen," Larsen reminds us, "as a counteractant against wickedness and everything contrary to the express will of God" – symbolically, the Greek word for fire, *pur*, is linked with our English word '*pur*ity.' At least 80 times, God manifested Himself as fire or by fire; the burning bush that communicated with Moses is a well-known example. It was the Divine Glory visibly manifesting through that element most dreadful to the human sense. "We can no more believe," adds Larsen, "that these manifestations were natural and physical fire than we can believe that it speaks of physical fire when it says that 'God is a consuming fire' (Deut 4:24). Or, when it says that 'He makes His messengers a flame of fire' (Heb 1:7)." As if by way of poetic confirmation, Solomon in Song of Songs (8:6), likens *love* to flashes of fire, describing it as "the very flame of God."

It is nonetheless perfectly true that fire (from heaven) can kill. The inferno that rained down on the cities of the plain is one obvious example (Gen 19:24); the terrifying judgment that consumed the servants of Baal in Elijah's day is another (2 Kings 1). Note how these events scripturally unfold without any resort to the embellishments of well-meaning preachers and teachers, past and present. They are scriptural depictions of swift and absolute judgment occasioning *death*. Nothing else is said or inferred. More often, though, 'fire' is employed as a figure, most frequently in the chastisement of God's covenant people. Yet, as Johnson reminds us, "it is always remedial; always salutary; never vindictive; it is fashioned to destroy the power of sin, yet ultimately save the sinner." All of which is aptly captured in Deuteronomy 4:20: "The Lord brought you forth out of the *iron furnace*, *even Egypt*." This 'furnace' experience was "to do you good at your latter end." Johnson then refers to Isaiah 4:4: "When 'the Lord shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of judgment and the spirit of burning.' We are reminded likewise that 'He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; and He shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering of righteousness' (Mal 3:3)" – *Destiny of the Unsaved Dead*.

But it is in the New Testament that extremism has literalised so much concerning "fire," which, to both moral and common sense, should be seen as figurative. As with its prophetic use in the O.T., the apostle employs "fire" in the epistles for the testing of each man's work (1 Cor 3:13,14). Here, "works" are associated with a foundation of "gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble" upon which they are built (v12). Now, no sane person would imagine these materials to be literal, any more than they were for Israel. What better way could Paul represent the quality of one's foundation than in the symbols of gold, silver, wood, etc., and how fire tests them? If the foundation materials are not literal, then neither is the fire, for both aspects complete the figure. Even so, some have tried to make these clear figures literal. While this is an obvious fear tactic – no doubt well-intentioned – it is nonetheless deception. Much superior is Paul's analogous use of 'fire,' which informs us about something very useful concerning

our future: the fire consumes that which is useless and bad, fit only for burning, while retaining that which is valuable and well-fitted for God's purpose. Thus, its essence is JUDGMENT – unstoppable, unquenchable, unavoidable, and absolute, yet equally wise, loving, guiding, and purposeful. This is the judgmental fire that *everyone* must ultimately be salted with, be it described as fire that tests (as above), fire of the age, fire from heaven, furnace of fire, fire of Gehenna, or lake of fire. "Even in judgment, dear ones, God is love" – *J. Preston Eby*.

{No less than three times, Jeremiah (7:31; 19:5; 32:35) informs us of Yahweh's abhorrence at Manasseh's burning alive his own kin in the odious worship of Moloch: it was an "abomination," not merely lacking God's approval, but a thing "that never entered (His) heart." Perhaps those who sanction a very literal representation of the Bible's use of 'retributive' fire should stop and ponder how such a view aligns with Jeremiah's words. Charles Welch, comparing such literalism with Manasseh's "abomination," says, we might "realise that the teaching concerning the *eternal conscious torment* of human beings necessarily places in the heart of God something infinitely worse" – *Hell* 9.}

Some have seen John's use of *brimstone* as conclusive evidence for the lake being a literal place of fire and torture; the opposite camp swings just as readily toward the early religious idea of sulphur symbolising purification. Clearly, both cannot be correct! The concept of cleansing through fire and sulphur was popular in the ancient Greek world, and this very likely influenced thinking in the Primitive Church – it was widely held that a purifying fire (literal or otherwise) would purge sin from the sinner after either death or resurrection (The Latin idea of purgatory may have emerged from this teaching). Consider, too, the etymology of the Greek word *theion* (sulphur), of which there are two expressions: The first contains the idea of the "divine," linked as it is with the word "fire." It could even be pressed to infer the prospect of 'Divine fire.' What is equally engaging is that the verb derived from *theion*, *theioo*, means 'to hallow.' Combining these ideas, some have surmised a 'lake of divine refining.' The second expression of *theion* is quite distinct and unexpected. The scholar Wharton, in his *Etyma Graeca*, draws attention to its relatedness to the verb *thuo*, meaning 'sacrifice.' Surely we need no reminding that sacrifice, as found in scripture, when heartfelt, leads to sanctification, redemption, and reconciliation.

Returning now to the fate of the wicked in Revelation 22:15, Johnson continues: "It is most regrettable that the lake of fire has been traditionally represented as if sentient bodies like those of present human flesh were to be tortured with fire; a thought quite foreign to what scripture either says or implies…If we were only willing to grant that we at present know as little about the lake of fire as we know about the cosmic state which must intervene between this present earth and the new earth beyond, then perhaps we could better realise why a 'resurrection of judging' for some...may have no resemblance to the traditional concept of 'torment'" – *The Image and Likeness of God*. At all times, we must be conscious of the symbolic character of the Book of Revelation. We see it in the figurative descriptions of Christ having eyes as a "flame of fire," out of whose mouth issues "a sharp sword" with which He smites the nations, shepherding them with a "rod of iron." These are clear word pictures or figures of the realities – fearful and divinely uncompromising – in store for God's enemies. The "lake of fire" fits

equally well into this same figurative category. Of course, this in no way denies that the "lake" is a real place, or perhaps more to the point, a real *condition*; any more than the "second death" might be described as a real *process* that takes place within it. Christ used 'death' as a figure on occasions during his ministry, as did later the apostles: all must "die" before they can "live" in Him. 1 John 3:14 is also suggestive: "He who is not loving is abiding in death." What kind of death? Certainly not the *physical* kind! In this respect, the second death could be regarded as a 'destructive' process, in the sense of destroying selfishness and wickedness within the individual. In much the same way, Paul ordered a certain young man to be delivered to Satan for the "destruction" (*olethros*) of the flesh, so that his spirit might be saved (1 Cor 5:5).

So, based on our present hypothesis – and that is all it is, indeed all it *can be,* within the limits of our current knowledge – the "lake of fire" could be described as a condition of banishment, with varying degrees of affliction, outside the glorious Holy City where the wanton sinners are confined, for the greater part, to 'die' to sin. Again, the word "outside" ('without' *AV*) is used for the simple reason that this is what Revelation 22:15 states. The Greek *exo* seems a strange word to use if those it refers to are (literally) dead! More likely, these sinners remain under the power of the second death until they, too, "are washing their robes." For nothing unclean, abominable, or false shall enter the Holy City (21:27): "Happy, they who are washing their robes, that their right may be unto the tree of life and, by the gates, they may enter into the city" – Revelation 22:14 (*Rotherham*). As Tom Talbott posits, something must transpire "to enable the kings of the earth and others to enter the city from the only possible position outside its gates, and that something is surely repentance and a thorough cleansing of the kind that implies, according to the Christian faith, a proper relationship with Jesus Christ" – *The Inescapable Love of God* 187. Evidence for this being an ongoing situation is well supported by John's otherwise meaningless statement: "Its gates will never be closed" (21:25), which will be discussed shortly.

Torment

Over the centuries, the word "torment" (*basanos*) has frequently been used in preaching and writings dealing with ultimate destiny; by contrast, its *scriptural* use in the same context is rare. The Greek *basanos* originally meant 'touchstone,' a dark stone used to test the purity of precious metals (Mal 3:2-3 gives a description). This 'testing' element later came to embrace pain and suffering of a personal nature…hence the concept of torment. From this was derived the thought of examination – to test whether something or someone is true or false – which in turn brought forth the notion of torture. Hence, the flagrant and heinous practice of torture arose within the medieval and early Reformed Churches.

As always, scriptural usage remains our single most essential ally in ascertaining the correct, contextual meaning of a word, which the bible student can achieve via a dedicated word search with the help of a concordance. By far and away, the most obvious unified meaning of *basanos* in its 33 occurrences is that of 'ordeal.' For example, Job 36:15 links torment with affliction and adds, significantly, that God "instructs" through torment. Lamentations 1:20 ties it to distress of a deep emotional kind felt in the pit of the stomach *by those who have*

rebelled. 2 Corinthians 12:7 is of particular note because it concerns the personal confession of the Apostle Paul: "…a messenger of Satan was given to me, to torment me so I would not exalt myself." Here, torment is yet again of a mental or emotional nature, possibly through physical affliction – Paul's "thorn in the flesh" (note, too, its purpose was to humble). By far the majority of texts containing *basanos* speak of it as a deeply felt anguish or emotional ordeal, even though such anguish may come about through physical affliction. However, it is in John's Apocalypse that *basanos* undergoes its most comprehensive 'test' of meaning.

In the Book of Revelation, the word occurs seven times. One of the most favoured texts of the hellfire advocate is 14:10,11, where *basanos* occurs twice: "...and he shall be *tormented* with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels...and the smoke of their *torment* ascends 'forever and ever'." This passage, intentionally presented above in its traditional garb, alludes to those who toe the line with the beast and his image (v9), thereby receiving his mark. The context alludes to a *specific class*, not all and sundry as some would have us believe. One must presume, too, that all such will have rejected the "Eternal (*aionion*) Gospel" ("good tidings of the age" - *Hart*) announced under arduous and pressing circumstances by the messenger of verse 6. The torment is likely, once again, that of acute anguish through direct Divine retribution, pointing as it does to a category of desperately hardened humanity. In a timely fashion, Chapter 19 then informs us as to the ultimate fate of this group: "And, the rest, were *slain* with the sword of him that was sitting upon the horse, which went forth out of his mouth, and all the birds were filled with their *flesh*" (v21). Assuming literality, this scene describes a sudden, miraculous event, as might be expected from the outcome of a terrible Judgment. Little more can be concluded without reading it into the text.

Basanos then occurs thrice in Chapter 18 (vv7,10,15) concerning the destruction of the dire city known as the harlot, Babylon the Great. In this instance, torment describes the profound loss of something once deemed great and the intense "sorrow" (v7) over the loss of a thing deeply treasured.

Lastly, we find *basanos* in the 20th Chapter of Revelation referring expressly to the Adversary, the beast, and false prophet (v10): "And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where are also the beast and the false prophet; and *they* shall be tormented day and night *forever and ever*." Here is the *only* verse that links a time element to the torment of specific entities. The earlier phrase, "the smoke of their torment" (Rev 14:10, repeated in 19:3 concerning the now destroyed city of Babylon), is a figure of speech similar to that used in Jude 7 of Sodom, or in Isaiah 34 where "smoke" is defined as the lasting symbol of Edom's destruction; a smoke that shall ascend "from generation to generation," and a smoke further defined as the land "made waste." Jeremiah 49:18 also likens Edom's fate to Sodom's overthrowing. He then goes on to prophesy about Elam in a similar way, culminating in Divine judgment by the sword: "*until I have made an end to them* (v37)." This dialogue contains that not uncommon echo of a terrible finality... until we come to the last verse of the chapter: "But it shall come to pass in the latter days, that I will bring back (effectively *restore* or *reverse*) the captivity of Elam."

{Dr Ilaria Ramelli brings our attention to John's words in Revelation, "tormented day and *night*…" In *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis* (p46), she suggests that this torment or "testing" can endure only as long as the succession of day and night remains. But we are informed that before the *telos* or end, there will be "no more night" (Rev 22:5). Why? Because night represents darkness, and (ultimately) God's Light will be the *only* light – Light All-Sufficient – not just in the New Jerusalem but throughout the entire cosmos. John also makes it plain that night, along with the moon, sun, and death, will all pass away when God makes "all things new." Under these circumstances, torment cannot continue day and *night* indefinitely!}

It has not been our intention to present a finely-tuned definition of *basanos* – especially in its current context – no one can do this, and it is not necessary. What should be plain from the accompanying verses is that the declarations are swift and uncompromising, as they were for Sodom, Edom, and Elam. Just as the prophet speaks of flesh, the sword, death, smoke, the land, and other earthly things, so John uses similar language and imagery. Stevenson muses, "It would be naive in the extreme to hold with the medieval fantasy of a sulphurous pit of subterranean flames." He adds that "the 'smoke' may be the warning recollections and evidences of the fires of suffering consequent upon sin and enmity against God" – *Time and Eternity* 62. The only Dantean horror in the Book of Revelation is one imposed by us! Moreover, as we have just seen – indeed, have witnessed time and again throughout scripture – such apocalyptic visitation often leads to affirmations of ultimate hope in which Yahweh states His intention to "bring back," "restore," or "reverse" the fortunes of those so visited. It is no less the case with those mentioned in the Book of Revelation. Our problem lies not in what scripture states in *one particular place* but in what it states *throughout*. It is the undue emphasis on those portions that represent the *course* of punishment or reckoning that imposes itself on final destiny. All the while, such an imbalance ignores or trivialises the concise, though nonetheless unmistakable, statements of restoration elsewhere declared. The reader whose indoctrination so conflates or confuses 'course' (i.e. process) with 'final destiny' all too easily misses the restorative message.

The Duration of Torment

Most involved in this debate have little problem with the idea of torment in and of itself. God has every right to afflict and discipline those who spurn His Goodness, persecute His people, and blacken His Holy Name through persistently vile, hateful acts. For many, this will involve a degree of torment. It is more a question of the finer details of the torment, such as (1) exactly *who* are the recipients of the torment, (2) the ultimate *purpose* of the torment, (3) the *nature* of the torment (Jeremiah makes clear the very idea of burning alive is abhorrent to God), and (4) the *duration* of the torment.

The use of the popular English idiom (above) was designed to provide a contrast with the authentic, grounded Greek. Scripture's answer (Rev 20:10) as to the duration of the sentence of some (not all) cast into the lake of fire is, that "they shall be tormented day and night for *the eons of the eons*" (*CLNT*, *UVB*, *exeGesis*), or for "*the ages of the ages*" (*Scarlett*, *Rotherham*, *Young*, *Weymouth*, *Diaglott*, *Hanson, Godbey*, *Darby*, *Berean*, *Hart*). For those of an academic bent,

the transliterated Greek reads, "*tous aiona ton aionon*" (more fully treated in *Chapter 3*). It is patently clear that those versions employing the interpretational, and frankly scholastically naive, phrase 'forever and ever' slavishly follow centuries of copyist tradition arising in the 15th century. Had they followed the lead of the *Revised Version* (1881) or the *RSV* (1952) – both of which conceded the marginal reference "the ages of the ages" – the more thoughtful reader might have been prompted to explore the matter further. For it should be self-evident that when this same expression is used of the reign of Christ (Rev 11:15), it clearly cannot mean forever and ever! Professor of Sacred Literature at Andover, Moses Stuart, as far back as 1854, cut straight through this common fallacy: "The priesthood of Christ will doubtless continue no longer than His mediatorial reign; for when His reign as mediator ceases, His whole work both as mediator and as priest will have been accomplished" – *Commentary on Heb*. 361. Indeed, the desire to endorse the synthetic 'forever and ever' has led to a flat denial of the end of Christ's Priesthood and reign, so plainly stated in 1 Corinthians 15:28.

Gates Never Shut

In Revelation 21:25, we read:

> **v 24. And the NATIONS shall walk through her light,**
> **and the KINGS OF THE EARTH do bring their glory into it**
> **25. And the gates thereof *shall in nowise be shut*, by day**
> **– night, in fact, shall not be there**
> **And THEY SHALL BRING THE GLORY AND HONOUR**
> **OF THE NATIONS INTO IT**
> **27. And in nowise shall there enter into it anything common,**
> **or he that doeth abomination and falsehood – but only those**
> **who are written in the Lamb's book of life.**
> ***ROTHERHAM***

About this verse, Vernard Eller writes, "Now, honestly, aren't (kings of the earth) the very last people you ever expected to see here, and the wealth and splendor of the nations the last merchandise you would have thought could be allowed in? After all, the last we saw of those kings, they were a feast for buzzards (and leading candidates for the lake of fire); and the wealth and splendor of the nations went down with Babylon!

"Both of these – 'the kings of the earth' and 'the glory and honor of the nations' – are terms John has used often enough, consistently enough, and with enough pointed overtone, that it simply is inconceivable that he could have written them this time offhandedly…In fact, that he did know what he was doing is indicated by verse 27, where he turns quickly to assure us that 'nothing unclean shall be entering' (this, by the way, is a more exact translation than 'will enter;' the Greek verb definitely suggests *continuing* traffic into the city.) In other words, …in that lake of fire something has happened to these kings that makes them entirely different people, giving them an entirely different significance than they had before. If the kings of the earth are here…it can be only because their names now are to be found 'in the Lamb's roll of the living.'

"When John deliberately puts 'the kings of the earth' and 'the wealth and splendor of the nations' right onto the streets of the New Jerusalem there would

seem no alternative that he also is talking of a continued possibility of repentance and redemption…And if that is a possibility for the kings of the earth – whom John, clearly, has considered as the worst of all people (Rev 17:2 is a sample) – then it is a possibility for anyone.

"There is another detail that reinforces our interpretation. In verse 25, John makes it emphatic that the New Jerusalem is an *open-gated* city; its gates are never closed. John plainly has something in mind with his symbol; what could it be? Walled cities were, of course, as common to his experience as they are uncommon to ours. The walls (more particularly, the gates) are for one purpose only: to let wanted people in and keep unwanted people out. They normally are kept open during the day when those entering can be watched; at night, when bad people are intent on wickedness, they are closed. Because there is no night in the New Jerusalem...the gates are always and forever open" – *The Most Revealing Book in the Bible* 200, 201. Eller reminds us that 'open gates' have little point unless there are those who use them.

Lewis On The Lake of Fire

C. S Lewis's view on our current subject is interesting. Although he could not distance himself altogether from the tradition, he was enough of a thinker to explore a more measured consideration…a teaching that better matched his understanding of the character of God. An Arminian by choice, Lewis nonetheless shunned the popular notion of a *time limit* (the moment of death) on God's love. Lewis allegorised 'hell' as having a door which, though resolutely locked, contained a "key" that any of its inmates could at any time turn to affect their release. Here, Lewis postulates a metaphor very much in line with what this chapter has attempted to reveal in a broader, less figurative manner. It is possible he borrowed this idea from George MacDonald, whom Lewis considered "his master." In *The Consuming Fire*, MacDonald writes, "...with no breathing of joy, with nothing – including the faintest experience of love – to make life good, then he (the inmate) will listen in agony for the faintest sound of life from the closed door…" Then again, Lewis' influence might have been a simple reflection on the timelessness of Matthew 7:7: "…knock and the door shall be opened" (to knock [present imperative] and keep on knocking indefinitely). Knocking here denotes the seeking of entrance or fellowship devoid of any relationship to time. While as far as we know Lewis remained committed to a 'freewill theodicy of hell' (as opposed to 'limited election'), he also seemed bound to question his own philosophy. He once wrote, "The words, 'compel them to come in' (Luke 14:23) have been so abused by wicked men that we should shudder at them; but, *properly understood*, they plumb the depth of the Divine mercy...His compulsion is our liberation" – *Surprised by Joy* 228 (emphasis added). Lewis here is recounting the paradox facing all who honestly confront the issue of man's feeble will against the transcendently compelling Love of God. Lewis refers to this paradox as a *compulsion* to submit to God *freely*. Alas, we will never know everything this fine and sensitive man held in his heart of hearts. In his writings, he was pessimistic, but who could imagine those so incarcerated (in his keyed hell) would or even could, sooner or later, ignore what lay beyond, so to speak, a tantalising twist of the key? Indeed, as Lewis himself once quipped, "Nonsense is nonsense even when we speak it of God!"

No one can answer every question concerning what scripture refers to as the Lake of Fire and the Second Death. But what *can* be stated with certainty is that from Genesis to Revelation, the Word proclaims mercy and forgiveness to all who genuinely humble themselves before God. Further, as many fine theologians and exegetes have decreed, a timetable placed on this is wholly artificial. Dying to sin and selfishness is how every individual becomes open to the cleansing blood of Christ – the "Blood of the Lamb" – although the 'fire' of intense affliction and mortification (torment!) may be a necessary prelude to that state of being. Obviously, some will require a longer term than others; again, scripture fails to provide any time limit. As Canon Farrar wrote in another, though related, context: "Retribution will continue as long as the soul continues to live in guilty selfishness: i.e. to hate good and love evil" – *M. & J.* 118. We might reflect again on the case of the illustrious Nebuchadnezzar – it took only seven years to bring this stubborn monarch to his senses (Dan 4:32). As no one knows man as well as does his Creator, it is postulated that the provision made in the Lake of Fire will be sufficient to match the resistance of any of His creatures. As Tom Talbott observes (echoing George MacDonald), when "God allows a sinner to live without even an implicit experience of the divine nature, the resulting horror will at last shatter any illusion that some good is achievable apart from God" – *The Inescapable Love of God* 189. The embodiment of what MacDonald and Talbott suggest might best be summed up in Christ's expression "outer darkness" (see *Appendix VI* for more on this expression). Even the exclusivist Augustine once remarked that "man has sprung from God and cannot be satisfied before he rests in God." Indeed, man was made for fellowship with his benevolent, all-wise Creator, and sooner or later, *all* must rejoice in this blessed fact. For Christ "must reign until He shall put *all* (emphatic) His enemies under His feet" (1 Cor 15:25).

Chapter 10

GOD ALL IN ALL

**As sin and death were not brought in at first,
so it is certain that they will not be the end;
for grace is the beginning of all,
and the end must be grace also.
- JEREMIAH WHITE**

In his book *The Spirits In Prison* (1885), E. H. Plumptre writes, "Those who contend most for the letter of scripture as the one authoritative rule of faith, close their eyes to its clearest and most direct statements" (p4). This is resoundingly true. As evidenced, those passages that speak of judgment and punishment are often shrouded in the cryptic language of metaphor, figure, and hyperbole. Conversely, those that tell of restoration contain no such abstractions. They are the plainly worded, direct statements to which Dr Plumptre refers, and of which several examples were given in *Chapter 2*. They are foundational to the 'Wider Hope' found in his book, and the Reconciliation of All described in this one. Even disregarding the controversy over the word *aionios*, they represent a considerable challenge to the most widely promoted views of eschatology. If these passages were to be examined in any exogenous setting, or were their message carefully or even casually read concerning any other subject, they would be understood immediately and categorically. We say with Andrew Jukes that their language seems especially chosen to avert any possibility of misapprehension. Yet misapprehended they are! That this situation persists in the light of today's scholarship – even in the light of contemporary attitudes – is surely one of the great anomalies of the Christian faith. Indeed, one would expect their profound truth to be something all enlightened souls would rejoice in, their consummation the unceasing prayer of the faithful. In the end, perhaps the key to this mystery does in fact lie in the word 'faith.' For seemingly, where rejection exists, it is not because of lack of evidence, nor lack of intelligence, but *lack of faith*: "It is not a question of understanding but of believing" (*Knoch*).

EVERY CREATED THING

In the 5th Chapter of Revelation, we have a scene that in Rotherham's *Emphasised Bible* reads as follows (Greek emphasis in capitals):

> **v 12. WORTHY is the Lamb that has been slain,
> To receive power and riches and wisdom and might
> and honour and glory and blessing.
> 13. And EVERY created thing which was in heaven
> and upon the earth and under the earth and upon the
> sea, and all the things in them I heard saying –
> Unto Him that sitteth upon the throne
> And unto the Lamb Be the blessing and the honour
> and the glory and the dominion
> Unto the ages of the ages
> *ROTHERHAM***

Concerning this passage, the scholar Kalamos writes, “The last two verses of Rev. v. convey a meaning which seems to be but little understood and appreciated by readers generally. Understood in the fullest sense, the words clearly teach the doctrine – so dear to the heart of Saint Paul – that a time is coming when the entire universe and all things therein existing at that time shall be fully reconciled (Col 1:20) to God, that those theologians whose prejudices are opposed to such a doctrine must of necessity try to minimise the meaning. Let the reader carefully study the opening words of verse thirteen, and ask his own conscience and common sense if it is honestly possible to read into these words any meaning less than that of universality...The inspired writer exhausts all the ideas of universality known to the age in which he lived, in order to express the vastness of the meaning” – *Prophetical Suggestions.*

Now, it is freely acknowledged that verse 13 does not speak of salvation or reconciliation; this is clear from the context. So, how are we to understand this strange doxology of the universal creation? The ancient *Syriac Version*, the earliest of all N.T. translations, gives a different reading of this passage and may provide a provisional answer: “(v12) ...Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to get power and riches and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and blessing (v13) and every creature which is under heaven and on the earth and under the earth and in the sea and all that are in these [full stop]. And I hear Him that is sitting upon the throne saying, ‘To the Lamb let there be given blessing and honour and glory and power for the eons of the eons’.”

This offers a more plausible reading of an otherwise odd passage. The textual evidence supports the view that the last sentence of verse 13 was confused by later copyists, and the *Syriac Version* is very likely correct in linking verse 13 with verse 12. Therefore, those speaking the hymn of praise in verse 13 would be the angels of verse 11 who surround the throne, the living creatures, and the elders. The word “saying” (*legontas*) would then agree with “angels,” both of which are masculine, while “every” (*panta*), relating to “creature,” is neuter. In *The Unveiling of Jesus Christ,* we read, “If this explanation is true, the messengers in verse twelve say the Lamb is worthy to get certain honors, while in verse thirteen they ascribe these honors to Him directly. Not only is the Lamb worthy to receive power, riches, wisdom, strength, honor, glory, and bliss, but He is justly entitled to claim as His own every creature in the universe.” And this is so, for He has bought the whole creation with His blood. The price Christ paid on Golgotha was sufficient not merely to redeem His own, but to buy the whole creation. “By His blood...He has paid in full for every creature in God’s realms... It is too severe a tax on one’s credulity to assert that the Lamb will receive honour and glory and might, etc., just because He is worthy, yet to disbelieve that He will get ‘every creature,’ of which He is equally worthy. We cannot imagine anything being withheld from the Son of God which the Word of God says He is ‘worthy’ to receive” (205-210). The relevance and implications of all this are greatly reinforced in the scripture we are about to consider next.

THE CREATION AND RECONCILIATION OF ALL THINGS

Colossians 1:15-20 presents the most powerful passage in scripture concerning the creation and reconciliation of "all things" (Greek emphasis in capitals):

> **v 15. WHO (Christ) is the image of the unseen God,**
> **firstborn of ALL creation,**
> **16. Because IN HIM were created all things in the**
> **heavens and upon the earth. The things seen and**
> **the things unseen, Whether thrones or Lordships**
> **or principalities or authorities, THEY ALL**
> **THROUGH HIM AND FOR HIM have been created,**
> **17. And He is before all, and THEY ALL IN HIM hold**
> **together;**
> **18. And He is the head of the body, the assembly,**
> **Who is the beginning, Firstborn from among the**
> **dead. In order that He might become IN ALL**
> **THINGS HIMSELF pre-eminent;**
> **19. Because IN HIM was ALL the fulness well pleased**
> **to dwell,**
> **20. And THROUGH HIM fully to reconcile all things**
> **unto Him, Making peace through the blood of His**
> **cross, (THROUGH HIM) – Whether the things upon**
> **the earth or the things in the heavens.**
> ***ROTHERHAM***

Verse 15 confirms Christ as the visible image of the invisible God. In Him, we see the fullness of Deity dwelling (v17). Next, verse 16 informs us that "all things" (*ta panta*, lit. 'the all') in heaven and on earth were created IN HIM, THROUGH HIM AND FOR HIM. "For there is one God, the Father, (out of) whom are all things (*ta panta*)... and one Lord, Jesus Christ, THROUGH WHOM are all things (*ta panta*)" (1 Cor 8:6). God deals with His creation THROUGH His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ; equally, all was created FOR HIM. With this in mind, we may view the present estrangement of most of the creation as temporary, to last only until the eons have run their course. For if all things were created "out of" God, "through" His Son, then the same all things must eventually be restored to Him for whom they were first created. We see this, too (if we are thoughtful), in the words of the Lord Jesus: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the BEGINNING and the END" (Rev 22:13).

Cullmann draws attention to something else that might by now be obvious to the reader: that the creation and the reconciliation go hand in hand. In his book *The Christology of the N. T.*, Dr Cullmann explains how, based on the Lord's human work, creation and redemption cannot be separated. "Christ's atoning death has cosmic results (Col 1:20, and the present *Kyrios Christos* reveals himself not only as Lord of the Church (v18) but also as Lord of the cosmos (v18)" (p 326).

Man As The Image And Glory Of God

In 1 Cor 11:7, we read that man is "the image and glory of God." Now God "calls those things which be not as though they were" – thus the full manifestation of that glory is yet future. For a little while, humanity is lower than the angels, just

as Jesus was, but through suffering and death He has now been crowned with glory and honour (Heb 2:5-9). Hence, we read in Colossians 1:18 that Christ is "the beginning, firstborn from among the dead." It is through the headship of Christ as firstborn that this process had its inception, and through Him that "the body" is presently being called. Cullmann observes that the "body (of Christ)," the assembly, is named in close connection precisely in passages like this one where Christ's Lordship is over the entire visible and invisible Cosmos. It is therefore no coincidence that Paul interjects the Body of Christ "precisely" here. Cullmann further reminds us of the apostle's words in the next chapter: "(Christ) is the head of all principality and power" (Col 2:10). He then asks the question, "How can Christ be designated at the same time as head only of the small church and as head of all things?" – *Christ and Time* 186. Good question!

God's Purpose With The Body

In Ephesians, the church is said to be "the fulness (*pleroma*) of Him Who fills all in all (1:23; considered next). The Greek word *pleroma* is derived from *pleroo*, meaning that "which is put in to fill up" – *Strong*. The "Church which is His body" is that which completes or fills up Christ, who, through that completeness, fills all in all. Now, according to the Old Testament prophets, the future sovereignty over the earth during the next great eon (aka the 'millennium') will be given to the restored nation of Israel. By contrast, the Apostle Paul informs us that the future abode of the "Body of Christ" is not the earth but the "heavenlies" (Gk *epouraniois* - Eph 2:6; 3:10). Between the two, the all (*ta panta*) on earth and in the heavens are brought under the headship of Christ (Eph 1:10). Thus, His "body" is the fullness or completeness that fills the void which earth's deliverance would leave in the heavenly realms. We will enlarge upon this toward the end of the chapter. For our present purposes it is sufficient to grasp that according to the gift of God's grace, the Apostle Paul was given the Gospel of "the body" to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; further, to reveal the plan of the secret *hidden for ages in God* Who created all things, "that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places" (Eph 3:7-10). It seems this began at the resurrection of Christ and will continue into the future…a future in which "the body" will play a momentous role. Even to the worldly Corinthians, Paul revealed future participation in the judging of angelic beings (1 Cor 6:3); this was designed to bring the Corinthians (as part of the Body of Christ) to a sober maturity fit for the realisation of the mighty task ahead.

The All Things

Returning to Colossians 1, we see that just as "the all" was created through Him as the image of God, so "the all" will be reconciled through Him as the fullness of God. Here Cullmann shows that "in the creation of the world its Redeemer already takes part" (*Ibid*. 71). He illustrates this through a simple timeline in his book *Christ and Time*, where Christ's resplendence in creation takes us back to the very beginning, and His even greater glories of reconciliation take us forward to the consummation or completion, about which we will speak soon.

Now, it is agreed that the Greek *ta panta* must be interpreted in strict accordance with its context – meaning, its *universality* is dependent on context. Some claim Paul's words between verses 16 and 20 alter this contextual continuity. One wonders how! What Paul is doing in verses 17, 18 and 19 is leading the whole creation of verse 16 logically forward to its full reconciliation in verse 20; he does this by inserting those elements necessary for reconciliation. They are: the fact of ALL creation's cohesion in Christ (v17), the fact of The Church, or Body, over which He is head (and by implication its part in the reconciliation); the fact of Christ's preeminence over ALL by His being firstborn, thus His position as "first-fruits" in the reconciliation (v18), lastly, the fact of the Magisterial fullness (*pleroma*) indwelling Him, again, making reconciliation possible (v19). Paul employs *panta* ('all') no less than four times in these intervening verses. If we compare the wording of the two verses (16 and 20), we can hardly fail to see their continuity and symmetry. The *Concordant Commentary* (303) clearly shows this relationship:

	The Firstborn of all Creation:
Image	**The Universe**
of	**Celestial, Terrestrial**
God	**Created in Him**
	The Firstborn from the dead:
Complement	**The Universe**
of	**Celestial, Terrestrial**
God	**Reconciled through Him**

The Greek verb Rotherham renders "fully to reconcile" (v20) is *apokatallasso*. Cyrus Scofield explains the scriptural use of this term as "that effect of the death of Christ upon the believing sinner which through divine power works in him a 'thorough change' toward God from enmity and aversion to love and trust" – *Reference Bible*. This thought is precisely conveyed by the next two verses (21, 22): "And YOU who at one time were estranged and enemies in your mind in your wicked works, yet NOW hath He *fully reconciled*...to present you holy and blameless and unaccusable before Him" – *Rotherham* (Greek emphasis falls on YOU & NOW). If those now "fully reconciled" (same word as v20) are holy and blameless, then so will be the "all things" mentioned in the prior verse. At present, reconciliation includes only those who have grasped this wonderful truth, but verse 20 assures that in the distant future, all will grasp it and be fully reconciled. Author Joseph Kirk (1903-74) sees God's design with the present calling laid bare in these verses: "The purpose of the Son in reconciling those who now believe is to present them holy and without blemish and unreprovable before God...They will then be used in the eons to come to make known the transcendent riches of God's grace to the sovereignties and the authorities in the celestials to the end that all in the heavens may be headed up in the Christ (see Eph 1:3-12; 2:7; 3:8-21). Then, with all in the heavens and all on the earth headed up in the Christ, the purpose of God in saving some before the others will be understood. Then God's purpose in creating and God's purpose with the eons will have been fully accomplished. Then at last the whole 'creation shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God' (Rom 8:18-22)" – *The Reconciliation of All to God*.

All manner of explanations have been manufactured to make this passage (Col 1:16-20) conform to the tradition of an 'eternal hell.' Fortunately, some fine scholars have upheld its breathtaking truth. Weymouth, in his translation, assents to verse 20 holding the same sweep as verse 16. Indeed, he employs "*universe*" to render *ta panta* as follows: "And God purposed through Him to reconcile the universe to Himself..." – *The N.T. in Modern Speech.* As Ryder Smith sees it, "Here are the two universal postulates of scripture: that there is something wrong with the universe as we know it, and that man and the universe go together. Paul claims that it ensues that when man is altogether reconciled to God, so will the universe be. Their perfecting is ultimately one perfecting, for Christ, being Head of a new mankind, is thereby Head of a new universe" – *Bible Doctrine of Salvation.* Dr Lightfoot, too, makes Paul's reconciliation boundless: "*All things* must find their meeting point, their reconciliation at length in Him from Whom they took their rise...The Father willed through Christ to reconcile the universe once more unto Himself...and so to restore all things whatsoever and wheresoever they be" – on *Col 1:19,20*. Lightfoot's friend and fellow Bishop of Durham, Brook Westcott, follows the same line of thought in his *Commentary on Colossians*. And why not? For, as Thomson posits, this is a task that "the risen, ascended, all-glorious Christ, can easily accomplish in the irresistible fullness (v19) of His might. Peace has been made by the blood of His cross while He was in weakness and humiliation. But what can His mighty power, as One no longer self-emptied (Phil 2:7), but possessing the entire fullness or completeness of the Deity (Col 2:9), not accomplish?" – *Who Is Our God?* Indeed, it is this majestic fullness of Christ that will reconcile – quite literally, "change-throughout-backwards" (*apo-kat-allasso*) – all that need reconciling.

The Work of Christ

Forsyth in *The Work of Christ* (1910) writes with great conviction that, "To reduce the reconciliation merely to the aggregate of individual conversions would be a total misrepresentation of New Testament reconciliation…" He then makes several points, three of which are: (1) that reconciliation rests firmly upon atonement (Christ's sacrifice) and the redemption – the making righteous – that stems from it; (2) that it includes "the world as a cosmic whole, not a person here and another there, snatched as brands from the burning; not a group here and a group there; but the reconciliation of the whole world;" and (3) that it has finality in as much as being "done once for all; really effected in the spiritual world in such a way that in history the great victory is not still to be won; it has been won in reality, and has only to be followed up and secured in actuality. In the spiritual place, in Christ Jesus, in the divine nature, the victory has been won. That is what I mean by using the word 'Final'" (p77). Later Forsyth extends this to include Paul's celebrated statement in 2 Cor 5:19: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself," about which he states, "Observe, first, 'the world' is the unity which corresponds to the reconciled unity of 'Himself;' and second, that He was not trying, not taking steps to provide means of reconciliation, not opening doors of reconciliation if we would only walk (toward) them, not labouring toward reconciliation, not (according to the unhappy phrase) waiting to be gracious, but 'God was in Christ reconciling,' actually reconciling, finishing the work. It was not a tentative, preliminary affair. Reconciliation was finished in Christ's death.

Paul did not preach a gradual reconciliation. He preached what the old divines used to call the finished work. He did not preach a gradual reconciliation which was to become the reconciliation of the world only piecemeal, as men were induced to accept it, or were affected by the gospel. He preached something done once for all – a reconciliation which is the base of every soul's reconcilement, not an invitation only. What the church has to do is to appropriate the thing that has been finally and universally done. We have to enter upon the reconciled position, on the new creation" (87, 88).

The scope of Forsyth's argument embraces earth-based humanity, but Colossians 1 extends into the heavens as well. Here, we must differentiate between reconciliation and salvation. Salvation likely applies to only that which is mortal. Man needs saving because he is subject to sin and *death*; that is to say, he is a dying creature. Reconciliation, on the other hand, is about enmity with God; it therefore applies to both human beings and spirit beings (which do not die), at least where the latter are at enmity with Him (see *Appendix II*).

THE HEADSHIP OF ALL THINGS IN CHRIST

Paul's reconciliation passage in Colossians has many times been linked with his 'recapitulation' narrative in Ephesians 1 (Greek emphasis in capitals):

> **v 7. In whom we have the redemption through**
> **his blood, the remission of our offences, according to**
> **the riches of his favour,**
> **8. Which he made to superabound towards us;**
> **IN ALL WISDOM AND PRUDENCE,**
> **9. Making known to us the sacred secret of his will,**
> **according to his good pleasure which he purposed in him, –**
> **10. FOR AN ADMINISTRATION OF THE FULNESS**
> **OF THE SEASONS, to reunite for himself (under one head)**
> **the all things in the Christ, The things upon the heavens,**
> **and the things upon the earth, in him.**
>
> **22. And did put, ALL THINGS, in subjection beneath his**
> **feet. And gave him to be head over all things unto**
> **the assembly,**
> **23. Which, indeed, is his body, the fulness**
> **of him who, THE ALL THINGS IN ALL, is for himself**
> **filling up.**
> ***ROTHERHAM***

In this glorious passage we have, literally, the uniting of the all in the Christ, both that in the heavens and that on the earth, which Paul concludes as God's plan for the fullness of the seasons (v10). We have touched on this passage – specifically, verse 10 – many times throughout this work, but it merits further investigation owing to its pointing a second time to the "all things (*ta panta*) in the heavens and on the earth."

The Greek term, *anakephalaiosis* (used in conjunction with *ta panta*), was studied early by Irenaeus in the 2nd century (see *Chapter 11*) and then by Hippolytus in the 3rd century, both testifying that "*the all*" of Ephesians must, in soteriological and eschatological terms, be headed up in Christ. True to the historical pattern, this teaching weakened as the influence of later Western theology strengthened until the will to restore its message was lost. But how, in the light of *current* scholarship, can such a situation continue to be excused, especially over so great a truth? Cullmann is one modern scholar who sees it as the ancients did: "According to Eph.1:10, God determined that in Christ he would bring under one head everything that is in the heavens and on earth, and according to verse 22 (same chapter) he put everything under Christ's feet and gave Him to the Church as head over all things." Thus is recognised in both Colossians and Ephesians "the relation *Christ - Church - World* (or *Cosmos*) expressed by the concepts head and body. In that connection, we should note that Christ is designated as head of everything" in addition to the Church (*Ibid*. 186, 187). The universality of Paul's words in Ephesians therefore dovetails with the universality of those in Colossians, restating that Christ has become "head" not only of the Body of Christ but of the *entire creation*.

Commenting on the Ephesian content, Jacques Ellul extrapolates: "Christ became man, not just to regather all humanity in himself, but to recapitulate *all things*, *all creation*, whether things in heaven or things on earth, for human beings do not constitute the whole universe, and it is in this sense that we have to join hands with orthodox theology in calling Christ Pantocrator (all powerful). Christ came not merely to bring human beings to immortality but to bring back the original harmony and unity of things, heeding at last the groaning of a crushed creation. Human beings are saved by Christ, but all that was thrust into disorder and rupture, and incoherence is also saved" – *What I believe* 213 (emphasis added).

Philip Scranton sees in all this (he is not alone) the stupendous role that the Body of Christ plays in the future "uniting of all things" – the decisive bringing together of heaven and earth during the dispensation of the fullness of times (about which more will be said later). After all, according to Paul, the Body of Christ is the fullness or completion (*pleroma*) of Him Who fills all in all (Eph 1:23). J. Armitage Robinson, in his exegetical work, *St Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*, considers verse 23 (ch1) to be the most remarkable expression in the whole epistle, which he takes as Paul meaning, "the Church is that without which the Christ is not complete, but with which He is or will be complete. That is to say, he looks upon the Christ as in a sense waiting for completeness, and destined in the purpose of God to find completeness in the Church" (p43). It's an astonishing thought, and Robinson takes it much further: "Thus, St. Paul looks forward to the ultimate issue of the Divine purpose for the universe. The present stage is a stage of imperfection: the final stage will be perfection. All is now incomplete: in the issue all will be complete. And this completeness, this fulfilment, this attainment of purpose and realisation of ideal, is found and is to be found (for to St. Paul the present contains implicitly the future) in Christ—in Christ 'by way of a body'; that is to say, in Christ as a whole, in which the head and the body are inseparably one. Even beyond this the Apostle dares to look. This fulfilled and completed universe is in truth the return of all things to their

creative source, through Christ to God, 'of whom and through whom and unto whom are all things,'—'that God may be all in all'" (88,89).

Dr Robinson considers the Ephesian epistle to be the "crown of St Paul's writings," which is a more important statement than we may at first realise. For if we employ this lofty epistle as a template or lens through which to view the rest of Scripture, we will not depart too far from fully comprehending God's ultimate purpose with His Universe. So much else in Scripture, leading up to Paul's vision here in Ephesians, is but a prelude to the end, or *telos*, God has in mind.

THE EXALTED SAVIOUR

Turning now to Philippians 2:9-11, we find the apostle restating the prophet's celebrated words in Isaiah 45:23 (Greek emphasis in capitals):

> **v 9. Wherefore also God uplifted Him far on high,**
> **And favoured Him with the name which is above EVERY name, –**
> **10. In order that IN THE NAME OF JESUS EVERY knee might bow –**
> **Of beings in heaven and on earth and underground, –**
> **11. And EVERY TONGUE MIGHT OPENLY CONFESS –**
> **That Jesus Christ is LORD, unto the glory of God the Father.**
> ***ROTHERHAM***

Now, if glory resides within these words (and those Romans 14:9-11), it most assuredly does not come through any *forced* utterance or bowing. Such an interpretation – tragically, the common one – is necessary only if we deny the fundamental facts and profound truth this passage imparts. Consider the evidence:

Firstly, it is IN THE NAME OF JESUS that EVERY knee bows. The name Jesus means 'Yahweh Saviour.' The Lord received this name as the One who "shall be saving His people from their sins" (Matt 1:21). The name Jesus is *never* associated with judgment, only with salvation. To bow *in* (not *at*) this name can indicate one thing only – the acceptance of Him as Saviour. Furthermore, the word "bow" (*kampto*) means "bow to worship," and implies bowing in homage, love, and worship as Paul uses it of himself in Eph 3:14.

Secondly, it is EVERY tongue that *openly* (gladly - *Hart*) confesses Jesus, LORD. The Greek word Rotherham renders "openly confess" is *exomologeo*, meaning "to speak out the same" (*Young*); "to acknowledge, or (by implication of assent) agree fully" (*Strong*). In scripture, it is always used of *voluntary* confession without the least suggestion of force. An obvious and relevant example is in the apostle's assurance that when anyone confesses Jesus as Lord, salvation ensues (Rom 10:9). Nowhere in scripture does confessing the Lordship of Jesus represent any value unless it is done in voluntary and loving singleness of heart. God hates hypocrisy! In addition, the word 'confess' is (as usual) in the Greek Middle Voice. This wonderful fact ensures that the confession is in no way forced or artificial, but is spontaneous and with fulness of heart. That is the strength of the Middle Voice in Greek. The Lord Himself uses the same word in Matthew 11:25 to express His gladness: "I *openly give praise* unto thee Father, Lord of heaven and earth, – In that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and discerning, and hast revealed them unto babes" – *Rotherham*. On the confession

of Christ's Lordship, Cullmann writes, "This is what it must mean when it says that God has given Him a name that is 'above every name' (v9) – *Ibid.* 168. That is to say, there is now no being or place throughout the entire creation over which He is not Lord.

Thirdly, this passage makes no distinction between believer and (imagined) unbeliever. It is EVERY (emphatic) knee that bows, and EVERY (emphatic) tongue that will openly confess Jesus Christ is Lord – of beings in heaven and on earth and underground. No part of the universe is excluded from these realms. All things, insists Lightfoot, "whatsoever and wheresoever they be. The whole universe...bends the knee in homage and raises its voice in praise." Loyal Hurley sums up the passage thus: "If our Saviour's work is to go on till every tongue confesses that He is Lord, then it is obvious that before that glad state can be reached all sin and its attendant suffering must be entirely wiped out of the universe by His mighty sin-cleansing power," for, "according to Paul, every being in Heaven and on earth and in the underworld, is to bow the knee in the same wonderful humility that characterised Paul himself; and every tongue is to thank, praise and acclaim Christ as Lord in the glad spirit that characterised our Lord Himself. The loving attitude of the whole universe is to be complete and perfect."

Lastly, it is to the glory of the FATHER that every knee bows and every tongue confesses Jesus Christ, Lord. It hardly needs to be said that God as "Father" bears no relation to judgment, retribution, or wrath. How is the Divine Fatherhood revealed or glory manifested by *forcing* enemies into subjection? God here is no longer King, or Judge, or Lawgiver; He is *Father*! Thus, Barclay rejoices: "The only triumph a father can know is to have all his family back home. The only victory (fatherly) love can enjoy is the day when its offer of love is answered by the return of love" – *A Spiritual Autobiography* 61.

As if to later confirm his meaning, the great Apostle of Reconciliation writes in the next chapter: Christ "shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of His glory, according to the working whereby He is able to subdue all things (*ta panta*) unto Himself" (Phil 3:21). Thomas Allin comments, "No one can doubt that Christ is destined to subdue all things, but this passage shows decisively that Christ's subduing all things is making them like unto Himself" – *C.T.* 244. It is somewhat ironic that advocates of 'free will' – the notion that God will never violate the will of man – have little problem postulating God, in this scene, forcing men and women *against their will* to bow the knee and confess Christ, Lord!

GOD ALL IN ALL: HIS PURPOSE CONSUMMATED

From the earliest time of God-given authority, the sole purpose of that authority has been to keep order and control, whether opposition was out of ignorance or malice. Where there is no such opposition to God's standards, there is no enmity; therefore, no ruling powers or authorities are required. Whether in the home or the nation, the same self-evident condition necessitates a guiding or ruling authority. This is the purpose of the righteous and benevolent rule of Christ throughout the future eons of the eons. As we have seen, scripture never says that

Christ will reign 'eternally' or 'forever and ever' as King of kings, and Lord of lords. Rather, He must reign *until* He has placed all His enemies under His feet (1 Cor 15:25). Thus, we are projected forward to a far distant time when the need for His beneficent rule ends, having accomplished its eonian purpose:

> **v 24 AFTERWARDS the end –**
> **Whenever he delivereth up the kingdom unto his Father,**
> **Whensoever he shall**
> **bring to nought ALL rule and ALL authority and power;**
> **25 For he must needs reign until he shall put ALL his**
> **enemies under his feet:**
> **26 AS THE LAST ENEMY DEATH is to be destroyed**
> **27 For – He put ALL THINGS in subjection under his feet**
> **But whensoever it shall be said ALL THINGS**
> **are in subjection! It is evident that it means,**
> **Except him who did put into subjection unto Him**
> **THE ALL THINGS**
> **28 But whensoever have been put into subjection THE**
> **ALL THINGS THEN THE SON HIMSELF (also) shall be**
> **put unto him who put in subjection unto him THE**
> **ALL THINGS, that God may be ALL THINGS IN ALL**
> ***ROTHERHAM* (1 Cor 15)**

It is generally assumed that the Great White Throne judgment is the last act of God within (so it goes) the boundary of our conception of time. This seems to be a prerequisite to the common view. Consequently, it is believed that all that is described in the last two chapters of Revelation must belong to what is habitually termed 'eternity.' But in Revelation 21:24, we read of "kings of the earth" who bring their glory into the New Jerusalem. How is the presence of kings to be reconciled with the abrogation of all rule, authority, and power? Further, 22:2 describes a means for the "*healing* of the *nations*." The thought of either "healing" or "nations" is surely incompatible with 1 Cor. 15:28 – God is scarcely All in all if healing is required or nationhood exists! Nor (to state the obvious) is healing a requirement for those already immortal! These last two chapters of Revelation must therefore precede the time of which Paul speaks here. While it is true that Revelation 21 & 22 describe a magnificently elevated condition on the new earth – God dwelling with men – this scene still falls short of that which Paul speaks of in 1 Corinthians 15. Some might point to Revelation 21:4, "and death shall be no more," as fitting Paul's "death is to be destroyed" (v26). While it is true that death *as we now know it* "shall be no more," death still exists in another form within the lake of fire (Rev 21:8). Therefore, until death *in every form* has been "destroyed" (*katargeo*), it cannot be said that Christ has put *all* enemies under His feet.

This last phrase – "put all enemies under His feet" – may sound somewhat ambiguous, along with that of verse 27, "put in subjection under him" (*RSV*). Lest we assume that Paul here (also the Ephesians passage) means *forced* subjection, as some conclude, we should consider these words from Ryder Smith: "The term for 'put in subjection' is *hypotassein*, which has a derivative noun *hypotage* (subjection). These words are used twenty-five times of the 'subjection' of men, and in every case, the idea is of voluntary subjection. Indeed, 'submit' and 'submission' might be better renderings. It may be claimed, therefore, that in 1 Corinthians 15:24-28 Paul teaches that ALL mankind will be saved because every

man will, before the Parousia, submit willingly to Christ" – *Doctrine of Salvation.* Additionally, observes Allin, "the same word is used of Christ's own subjection to the Father, and the subjection of Christ's own enemies to Him... Obviously, Christ's own subjection can only be love and harmony – hence the subjection of Christ's enemies cannot mean their endless incarceration in evil and pain" *C.T.* 241. It should be remembered, too, that such "willing submission" fits perfectly with our prior exegesis of Philippians 2.

The Triumphant Reign Of Christ

It seems conclusive from the apostle's discourse that so long as the Son continues to reign, the consummation of God's purpose remains future. Hence, 1 Corinthians 15 takes us through to that time when the Son at last relinquishes His throne and becomes Himself subject (*hypotasso*) to the Father (v28). At first sight, this may seem like a humiliation for Him. But in reality, it is His greatest triumph. As Gelesnoff proclaims, "He shall publicly deliver the scepter and the crown, relinquishing the functions of Monarch because the very perfection He has introduced renders them unnecessary" – *The Ages* 16. Here at last is Christ's work complete. The universal nature of this could hardly be expressed more clearly than in verse 27, where we find, to use Thomson's words, "the only exemption from it is the self-evident one of the sovereign God Himself."

God All in All

Eighteen centuries ago, Origen first asked the question, "What is this 'all' that God will be 'in all'?" He answered, "God will be 'all' even in every individual creature. And God will be 'all' in these creatures in the sense that whatever the rational intellect, freed from any pollution of sin and cleansed from any taint of evil, will be able to perceive, grasp and think, all this will be God. (The) one who is always in the Good and for whom God is all, will no longer wish to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil...After removing every sense of evil, only He who is the sole good God will become all for the creature returned to a state of soundness and purity" Moreover, not merely in the few or many, "but in *all* God will be all, when at last there will be no more death, nor death's sting, nor evil, most definitely: then God will truly be 'all in all'" – *First Principles* 3,6:2-3. Ilaria Ramelli adds that (in Origen's view) this final state will by no means be identical to the beginning; it will be infinitely better because it will involve voluntary and loving devotion to the Good following the completion of each one's spiritual maturity (*Apokatastasis* 168).

Over the years, this particular passage has confounded many robust supporters of the dualistic tradition. Dr Edward Pusey (1800-82) is perhaps most famous (or infamous) for having tried to undermine its reality, or 'explain' it, in his book *What Is Of Faith As To Everlasting Punishment*. His equally stoic nemesis, F. W. Farrar, called Pusey's reasoning (outlined in *Chapter 11*) the most "singular (or strange) piece of exegesis" he had ever read (*M & J* 479). Nor does it stop there. Recently, one bible translation has chosen to modify or '*interpret*' the text in an attempt to make it sound more 'creed-friendly.' Surely these unworthy efforts to undermine scripture's most glorious declaration only serve

to reinforce its truth! What is required here is not brainpower or rationalisation, but *faith*!

Some, too, have viewed the first part of the verse as denying Christ's Divinity, which it most certainly does not. What must be kept in mind is that the goal of the Lord's reign in the coming eons is aligned with *judgment*, which amounts to *putting things right with God*. Once fully affected, this judgment will elevate the creation to that level described by Paul in Romans as the "glorious freedom of the children of God" (8:22). The "subjection" that the apostle later speaks of in verse 28 (1 Cor 15) can therefore be no loss or denigration to Christ, even less deny His divinity. Quite the opposite. He returns to that position relative to the Father he had held before the world's founding. Fully restored is that state He left to fill the role of Messianic Sovereign, for the mighty reason that when God finally "dwells with humanity" (Rev 21:3) – in the fullest and most complete sense – the Son ceases to be the necessary Mediator of the Divine Sovereignty. As Hebrews 1:2 states, (at the end of these days) God manifested Himself to the world "in (His) Son" (*en huio*), so that at the consummation He can *directly* reveal Himself to a glorified humanity and "dwell WITH (*meta*) them" (Rev 21:3). All having reached the perfect stature and maturity of the fulness of the Christ (Eph 4:13), God will be all in them just as He was in His Son. Note that Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:28 does not write, as some perhaps unconsciously assume, 'that the *Father* may be all in all.' Indeed, the apostle appears to avoid any such conclusion. His emphatic use of "God" (*ho Theos*) in this instance powerfully implies, "all the fulness of His being and power; as Father, the source of all, as Son, revealing Him, and as Spirit, communicating Him. When that glorious stage is reached, it will be with that Divine fullness that He will dwell in the whole tree of humanity" – *Who is Our God* 166.

This then is *the* passage that provides our most distant view into the Divine future (more even than the prior four); what St Stephen's University Principal, Bradley Jersak, calls our "strongest telescope" reaching to the furthest extremity of the Divine plan. How do we know this? Verse 24 states categorically, "Afterwards *THE END*." This is the only passage currently under discussion in which the Greek *to telos* (the end) occurs. For the alert patristics (as many since), 1 Corinthians 15:22-28 was the pinnacle of Revelation. It became their portal or gateway into scripture, and as such, the premise for interpreting all the rest. Paul here provides the very apex and perfection of God's purpose with the *aions*. If scripture is not read in the light of this ultimate end goal, we run a very great risk of understating the Divine Plan, because everything else is merely (in Jersak's language) "waypoints on the way to *the telos,*" or "the means by which we get to (*the telos*)." Until that distant, glorious goal arrives – to which many scriptures testify – some are "coming to Christ," even more are for the time being "perishing," and *everyone* is being "judged." But here is the vital point: all such expressions or "waypoints" are never extolled as "the end;" they are but the progression that leads to the end, so that God may, *in the end*, be All in all.

THE AGES OF THE AGES

As we will see in the next chapter, the scriptural age-times became historically obscured as Latin supplanted Greek and the organised Church of the late-

antique/medieval period grew ever more concerned with order and control. The *most* obscure of these age-times – also the most glorious – is the one the apostle Paul alludes to in Ephesians. Notwithstanding its obscurity (mostly self-imposed), several memorable works have drawn attention to it over the last century or so. One of the most interesting of these, written by Irish-born George F. Trench, is A*fter the Thousand Years*, first published in 1895. In his work, Trench considers Paul's statement, "the dispensation of the fullness of times" (Eph 1:10, *AV*) – which he deems a reference to the final great age in God's plan – of paramount importance. Through his particular eschatological lens, Trench pays homage to the great affirmative passages we have just examined in Colossians, Ephesians, Philippians, and 1 Corinthians, pointing to their necessary universal fulfilment at the climax of this "age of ages." While Trench agrees that Christ's reign over the earth begins with the next age (commonly called the Millennium), he ably demonstrates the futility of viewing it as the end point or consummation of the divine scheme, precipitating the so-called 'eternal state,' of which (strictly speaking) scripture says little, unless we fall back on the Hebrew expression, *le olam va ed*, meaning "to the age and beyond."

The Millennial Kingdom

The use of differing appellations such as '*millennial* kingdom' or '*heavenly* kingdom or '*earthly* kingdom,' etc., does not in any way imply fragmentation; rather, it points to differing aspects of the *One* Kingdom united cosmically in Christ. The Apostle Peter indirectly refers to this kingdom in the book of Acts when he speaks of "times of refreshing" in connection with "Christ Jesus, whom heaven must indeed receive until the times of restoration (*apokatastasis*) of all which God speaks through the mouths of the holy prophets who are from the eon" (Acts 3:21 *CLNT*). The view presented here requires several events to occur before the inception of these "times of restoration": they include the deliverance of the Body of Christ (1 Thess 4:17), the manifestation of the Lord from heaven (Matt 24:30), and the sealing of Satan in the abyss (Rev 20:3). Thus is marked the beginning of a reversal of all the evil of prior eras. A time when, according to the Prophet Isaiah, "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Isa 11:9; *cf*. Hab 2:14), and "the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness" (Isa 26:9). Isaiah is referring to the first of these two age-times, the thousand years that mark Israel's long-anticipated renewal. This future epoch is so unique scripture alludes to its collective span as the "*ages* (plural) of the ages" (*tous aiona ton aionon),* marking it out from all other age-times in scripture. Notably, this important Hebraism occurs most frequently in the Book of Revelation, "the very pivot on which this phrase turns" (*Knoch*). Most of these occurrences concern the power and glory of God, along with the glory, authority, and consummative purpose of His Son's mediatorial reign as the two great periods or eons unfold. Along with the serving and reigning of the saints, these are their primary and distinctive characteristics.

This first eon (the Millennium) centres on Christ as King and Priest over a restored Israel. This is the era over which the early Church had many debates and formed conflicting views – it remains to this day a thorny subject – here we assume the apostle means precisely what he writes. During the Millennium, the "Lion of the Tribe of Judah" (Rev 5:5) reigns with a firm hand, conducting the

nations with “a rod of iron” (Rev 2:27; 12:5; 19:15). It seems that this is a time of relative but not yet perfect peace, though more peaceful than anything experienced during this current “evil age.” Hebrew prophecy (notably in the Psalms, e.g. 18:44; 66:3; 81:15) speaks of the worldwide conditions. The rebellious nations are described by expressions such as ‘veiled rebellion’ and ‘feigned obedience.’ Sin still exists, but it is contained by the iron hand of a righteous, moreover divine, administration. Isaiah 66 contains one of the prophetic passages describing the execution of its justice. Ongoing disorder and crime will not be tolerated; as incidents occur, offenders are dealt with promptly. Trench emphasises this in *After the Thousand Years*, using the rebellion of the deceived among the nations following the loosing of Satan (Rev 20:7-9) to reinforce his point. This may seem a strange phenomenon – rebellion and destruction ending the longest period of peace and blessing (relatively speaking) the earth has ever known. In fact, with one exception, all scriptural eons end in disaster, and seemingly in escalating measure. The patriarchal age ended with the flood; the present eon terminates in apocalyptic reprisals, and then the Millennium closes in a vast rebellion bringing down swift intervention at the hands of God. We suggest that those who rebel and die are the remaining unrepentant on the millennial earth, who, after the resurrection immediately following, are later barred entry into the New Jerusalem and incur the “severity” of God’s judgment (Rom 11:22). It seems that merely living in the presence of righteousness is not enough. Individual spiritual regeneration through suffering and self-reflection – no doubt, prolonged in many cases – is needful for those persistently wicked and resentful. This last great revolt forcefully demonstrates the utmost limits of determined resistance to God, and, within the divine response, comes its final crushing blow. What remains for this helpless, pathetic rabble other than their acceptance of Sovereign Grace through heartfelt spiritual renewal? And how perfect the timing. For the Great White Throne follows at the passing of the old and the creation of the new heaven and earth.

The Post-Millennial Kingdom

Thus begins the glorious epoch referred to earlier, which Paul describes as the “dispensation of the *fulness* of time” (Eph 1:10 *AV*). On many occasions have Paul’s words here been equated with ‘eternity.’ Yet, as Trench repeatedly demonstrates in his excellent work, that assumption is likely wrong. Again, the mere mention of kings, nations, and healing (Rev 21) offers powerful testimony to this “dispensation” neither qualifying as the “eternity” of the evangelist nor the “beyond” (*...va’ed*) of the Hebrew prophet. Indeed, the Greek *oikonomian* in and of itself surely implies something transitory: a dispensation, an administration, an economy that (in this case) is working towards perfection. Also, the word *kairon* (here rendered “time”), refers equally well (perhaps better) to a ‘season’ – a season is a period, not eternity! For part of the function of this economy will be the “putting down of all all rule, authority, and power” (1 Cor 15:24). Writes Henry Alford: “Christ being manifested as universal King, every power, co-ordinate with His, must come under the category of hostile; all kings must submit to Him, the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdoms of the Lord and of His Christ—and see the similar expressions (Eph 1:21), where, speaking proleptically, the apostle clearly indicates that legitimate authorities, all the

powers that be, are included" – *Commentary on the Greek Testament* [1 Cor 15:24]. John offers a prelude to this in the 4th chapter of his Revelation when the twenty-four elders cast their crowns before the throne of Him who lives for the "ages of the ages" (v 10). Yet perhaps the strongest testimony of all is the fact of Christ still reigning in order to achieve the above subjection. As has been noted many times, Paul assures us (in 1 Cor 15:28) that the King must relinquish the crown of His mediatorial reign before "the end" comes.

Some scholarship links this poorly understood subject to the "eighth day" of the Hebrew Bible, and there is merit in so doing. Among other things, with Israel, the eighth day was always associated with offerings, festivals, and consecration. It represented the transition from a completed seven-day cycle into the realm of new beginnings and the perfected glories beyond. In scripture, the number seven symbolises completion. The eighth day therefore signifies a break from the familiar cycle of life, decay, sin, and death into the new and enduringly sacred. Although many scholars are quite familiar with the biblical concept of the eighth day, they may be less inclined to acknowledge its perfected completion as implied by Paul in his epistle to the Ephesians or John in the closing chapters of the Book of Revelation.

The noun rendered "fulness" in Ephesians 1:10 is *pleromatos*, from *pleroo*, meaning 'that which fills.' The suggestion is one of a complement that fills full or fills up that which would otherwise be incomplete (a "complement of eras" as the *CLNT* has it). Concerning this final age, the apostle makes known the "mystery of His will" (v9), that under one head (Christ) all things will be reunited in Him, those in the heavens as well as those upon the earth. Christ's headship over the earth had been revealed through the Old Testament prophets; its heavenly aspect remained hidden with God (Eph 3:9) until it was made known through His Holy Apostles (v5). This grand era, which Paul later calls "the *eon* of the eons" (Eph 3:21), John also describes in the closing chapters of Revelation, though (as already stated) he employs the double plural "*eons* of the eons," referencing *both* future ages. The seer speaks of the dissolution of the former and creation of the new heaven and earth (Rev 21:1). Hence Philip Scranton's unified paraphrase of the Apostle John's words: the "eon of the new heaven and earth." For Trench and Scranton (and others besides), this cosmic event – the destruction of the old and the creation of the new heaven and earth – is the demarcation between these two epochs. The first things are gone, and He who sits on the throne – described now as the *Lamb of God* (see below) – says, "Behold I make all things *new*" (v5). The Greek word *kainos* (new) takes in 'kind' and 'quality,' not merely 'time' – for there will be "no more curse," therefore no more sin, suffering, or sorrow. This is so because God now dwells with men (v3), an essential prerequisite to the fulfilment of this eon's purpose. And they (mankind) shall be His People, and God Himself shall be with them, wiping away every tear (v4). Mr Scranton reminds us that John's description of God *dwelling with mankind* (v3) posits a condition beyond anything experienced before in human history: Not just Him dwelling with Israel, or with His Saints or Body, or even the Overcomers (of whom John speaks), but with *all the generations* of the eon of the eons (Eph 3:21)! This unique phrase must surely encompass every generation entering this era, which means *every member* of surviving and risen humanity.

{The title "Lamb of God" obviously conveys a different meaning than that of "Lion of the Tribe of Judah." John uses both phrases in the Book of Revelation: the latter only once, the former multiple times, especially in his closing chapters. What do these two distinct titles convey? The "Lion of the tribe of Judah" most suitably fits Christ's Millennial reign in the next eon – the first of the "EONS of the eons" – when "*Lo*! *He conquers*!" (Rev 5:5), shepherding the nations with an "*iron rod*" (Rev 12:5). Although Satan is bound in the abyss during these 1000 years, the unruly among the nations still require a firm, even stern, hand to guide them in righteousness; "Lion" fits this purpose very well. The designation "Lamb of God," by contrast, implies no such coerciveness; after all, under this title the Lord Jesus Christ "takes away the sin of the world." Therefore, John's use of "Lamb of God" – especially in the last two chapters of Revelation – magnifies the dramatically transformed atmosphere of peace and reconciliation in that final, most glorious era. If we imagine the lake of fire/second death to be nothing more than Augustine's barbaric, pointless inferno, then John's magnificent imagery of this unique, climactic eon is lost.}

The *Eon* of the Eons

Hidden as it is behind the veil of the popular tautology 'forever and ever,' few have seen the breadth of Paul's expression, "the EON (singular) of the eons" – the only time it occurs in scripture – in a passage concerning "the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge" (Eph 3:19). According to the intimate words of the apostle, it is a time when every family (*patria*) in heaven and on earth derives its name from the Father (*Pater*; v14). That is to say, every sentient being on the new earth and in the new heaven shares a single, divine genealogy. Here is a glimpse of the character of this, the last and greatest of all the eons – Clarence Larkin calls it the "perfect age" in his 1920s chart of the scriptural ages – and of its indwelling "Father" who can do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine (v20). Too few, it seems, meditate on the implications of this astonishing declaration. Surely it is *the* factor that leads to the breathtaking terminus (*to telos*) disclosed in 1 Corinthians 15: God, in all His fulness (*ho Theos*), being All in all His creation. Now is His ultimate purpose realised, His "Plan of the Ages" complete.

{The expression *tou aionos ton aionon* (Eph 3:21), literally "the age of the ages," has lost its meaning under the common demands of hermeneutical tradition. The translation (or interpretation!), 'forever and ever,' takes liberties with the Greek wording and structure that radically mask their original sense and intent. The singular *tou aionos* (of the age) becomes 'forever,' the preposition *ton* (of the) is replaced by 'and,' which is not in the text. The second *aion*, in the plural (*aionon*), properly means "ages," but is rendered as 'ever.' Essentially, 'forever and ever' is a fantastical expression that more properly belongs in the storybook than the word of truth. As to the duration of this "age of the ages," we are left ignorant. For inspiration, Trench looks to the covenantal promise of "a thousand generations," mentioned in Deuteronomy, Exodus & 1 Chronicles; he thereby imagines a length that could conceivably span all former ages combined. Given the vastness and glory of its work, he may well be right. The simple fact is we do not know. For the thoughtful saint, this anticipates a profoundly latent truth: such is the importance of its work & ending that the God of heaven in no way limits the duration of this future eon of eons.}

(In addition to Trench, I would like to extend my appreciation to the late A. E. Knoch, who contributed to the overall scheme of the above synopsis in *The Judgments of God*. Special thanks also to J. Phillip Scranton for input from his

2025 book, *Solving the Secrets of Ephesians* 92, 93. *Appendix III* provides a more comprehensive treatment of this subject.)

THE RIVER OF THE WATER OF LIFE

The water of life is mentioned in the closing chapters of Revelation concerning Israel and the nations. Beginning in verse 6 of Chapter 21, the Lord says to John: "I am…the beginning and the end. To the one who thirsts, I will give freely from the **spring of the water of life**." Philip Scranton reminds us that here we see a return to the same Living Water Christ offered the Samaritan woman at the well in the 4th chapter of John's Gospel; at this time, it was a trickle, a mere spring. Christ's promise, nonetheless, was that it would quench her thirst "throughout the age" (v14), implying (in what follows) that this Water is the Spirit that leads all who imbibe it into truth and *life*. The ones John is speaking of in both passages are those that are "conquering;" the ones who are already in the "Lamb's Book of Life" at his return, many of whom will seal their allegiance with blood (Rev 5:9,10). These are part of the House of Israel who, in honouring the Lambkin during the tribulation, serve and reign with Him on earth in the future eon.

Back in Revelation (ch22), the same Living Water is revealed flowing through the New Jerusalem, but now it forms a *river*: "And he showed me a **river of the water of life**, bright as crystal, coming forth from the throne of God and the Lambkin." (v1). On either side of this river stands a tree or log (*xylon*, wood) of life – doubtless, a reference to the cross – with leaves for the healing *of the nations* (v2). Verse 17 continues to express this far-off vision where the Spirit and the Bride say, "…let the one who thirsts come; let the one who wishes take freely of the water of life."

Ezekiel 47 describes a vista that may well hold prophetic overtones for the passages above. In this scene, water miraculously trickles from the threshold of the temple, which is God's House, through to the outer gate facing east. When the prophet walks out 1000 cubits to the east, the water reaches only to his ankles; another 1000 cubits brings the level to his knees; at a further measure, it is waist-high, and by the fourth, the river forms a "mighty torrent" which cannot be traversed. As with all rivers, this mighty torrent ends its journey in the sea; in this case, the Dead Sea. However, as it flows into the Dead Sea, its water becomes fresh and what was once "dead" becomes full of life. Ezekiel's symbolism here is a type of the "River of Life" in the New Jerusalem, where ever-greater numbers swell its size until what began as a mere spring becomes a mighty waterway. "For they shall be healed and *everything shall live wherever the river comes*" (v9). Even the trees that stand on either side of the river in the New Jerusalem line the sides of the river in Ezekiel's vision (v7).

Recall that this river "comes forth from the Throne of God and the Lambkin," the source of all life ("the fountainhead from which we flow" - Hart). Scranton says, "The water of the river of life is not magic water; it is God's Spirit and the life He gives." As it passes through the Holy City, it flows by those already safely dwelling within its walls, the ones who have believed and overcome and are now one with Christ. "As it goes, it increases and gets bigger. And that is what this last eon is really all about. It is the Spirit of God going through a re-born Israel; it is the Spirit of God also in the heavenly realms, going

through the Body of Christ, going out to all. And whenever it goes through one of His servants, it is increasing and enlarging. It supports the tree of life that grows along its banks, the tree for the healing of the nations" – *The Second Death* Part 6.

SIN AND EVIL WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE AGES

Writers have grappled for centuries with the so-called 'problem' of evil. Yet nowhere in scripture is there a reference to any such problem. Rather, it speaks of its entry into the creation, its effects on the creation during the age-times, and its ultimate expulsion from the creation at the end of the ages. "It makes a great difference in all our theology," Ludlow writes, "as to whether we consider all of God's creative work as completed in Eden, and then upset by an opposing devil; or whether we see the creative work begun in Eden, carried on by the effects of the fall of man, and finally brought to completion by the Redemption."

Of course, it would be a presumption to suggest God *intended* sin and evil to enter and spoil His "very good" creation; yet, an even greater presumption might be to leave Him out of the picture altogether. For it has been argued that a being, however lofty, who is so created that he can 'fall' is to that extent an imperfect or incomplete work. Therefore, if God created something with, shall we say, inherent 'incompleteness,' it is hard to imagine how He can be other than in some sense involved in the result ('involved in' is deliberate; to say 'responsible for' may be taken as 'to blame for' and no question of blame arises). It is apparent, too, that God could have stopped the multiplication of our fallen race at any time and therefore prevented the hideous, oft-proclaimed consequences for the majority of His creation; yet He ordained the very opposite! As the 18th-century slave trader-turned-abolitionist, John Newton, declared in the *Final State of Man*: Nothing contradicts the Divine nature more than "to bestow existence on any beings whose destiny He foreknows must terminate in wretchedness without recovery." Of all people, Newton understood this.

From passages such as 1 Pet 1:20 & Eph 1:4, we have seen God's foreknowledge and purpose conceived in His Son. Such foreseen grace should be sufficient proof that sin was well known to Him long before the effects of Eden. With such a God, surely it is inconsistent with both Revelation and reason to believe that evil is not intimately connected with His purpose. The ancient scholar Lactantius has provided the following proposition:

> **"Either God wants to prevent evil, and He cannot do it; or He can do it and does not want to...If He has the desire without the power, He is impotent; if He can, but has not the desire, He has a malice which we cannot attribute to Him; if He has neither the power nor the desire, He is both impotent and evil, and consequently not God; if He has the desire and the power, whence came this evil, or why does He not prevent it?" (Cir. about 320)**

Why indeed! Can it be that evil serves some necessary function in God's present scheme? Professor F. S. Ferre, in his book *Evil and the Christian Faith*, has some

interesting thoughts on this subject. He writes, "Evil is never a mere fact. Nothing in history, even, is a mere fact. Evil is always a part of or an aspect of some becoming. It is always directly or indirectly a thwarting of some becoming. It is ever a misdirection of function causing traffic snarls for more than itself because of the relatedness within process. Evil is ever an aspect of becoming more than of being.

"All the evil that we know is within process and is therefore to be seen as false function. Positive function is basic. Creative becoming is the drive of process. False function (i.e. evil) in a world of constant becoming is never a final fact. The fact is never mere fact, but is ever to be judged for its worth and meaning in terms of that which truly functions and the way the function is truly heading. That is no denial of the presence of evil in process. Its being in process, however, is no final indication of the worth and truth of the purpose of process. That must be judged by the result and whether the end is better because of its having been there, or at least because of the kind of conditions which produced it having been there.

"Thus, evil can never be judged from the perspective of facts as they merely are. Evil is never a mere fact. There is no totally evil fact. There is no single unrelated, permanently satanic fact. *We know of no static structure, permanently contradicting the good. The evil we know is adjectival*. It is a minor, never a major, premise; a subordinate, never a coordinate, clause. For every evil that we know, there is a greater good of which it is the evil.

"We do not know a person who is totally evil and permanently frozen so. Such a description is a denial of the nature of positive process. What goes on goes on because of being, not non-being; power, not lack of it. What goes on goes on often in contradiction to itself, negating itself, but we know of no permanent or final negation..." (p8; emphasis added). Professor Ferre's thoughts, though complex, are worthy of reflection; they are also reminiscent of the patristic view of evil being ontologically non-subsistent.

Another evaluation of this subject takes us back, appropriately, to the second and third chapters of Genesis. Aldoph Knoch, in his *Unveiling of Jesus Christ*, asks, "Why did God not plant two trees, one for the knowledge of good, and the other for the knowledge of evil? Was it not because the two are inseparable? Can good be known apart from evil, or evil apart from good? Are they not like light and darkness, which we know only by contrast? Never let us doubt God's wisdom in planting one tree for the knowledge of *both* good and evil. Rather let us rejoice that the knowledge of evil will always constitute the prime ingredient in our appreciation of good when evil itself is no more" (167).

Fairbairn extrapolates further when he says that through the experience of sin and evil, the "attributes of God have become known that could not otherwise have been manifested, and the beatific vision will be all the richer and the more ecstatic (because) the Father it sees is one who loved too deeply to surrender the lost…The reverence of the moral universe will be in proportion to its knowledge of God; and its stability will be in the measure of its reverence and its love. Only through the possibility of sin could God have sons, and it may be that only through the actuality of sin could the sons know God" – *Christ in Modern Theology* 457, 458.

J. W. Williams calls evil a necessity for divine self-revelation: "(God) gave Israel law that they could not keep, and which therefore produced their sins,

as He foretold it would (Deut 31:24-30)." The effect of this was to produce condemnation that "leads to grace by silencing all self-righteous boast of possible obedience to law (Rom 3:19,20) and thus reveals God as 'the Father of mercies'" – *The Mystery Of Evil* 4, 5 (Consider the Lord's words in John 9:3).

According to Thomas Allin, there are only two possible views of evil: "It is endless as God Himself, which is in fact dualism; or it is temporary, and in God's mysterious plan permitted *only to serve a higher end*. Paradoxically, this view of moral evil seems to be inferred even in the writings of medieval philosopher Thomas Aquinas: 'He makes the elevation of the creature above the original capabilities of his nature to depend on the introduction of sin' – *August Neander, Ch. Hist.viii.216."* And so, "assuredly, the Bible is not the story of sin, deepening into eternal ruin; of God's Son, worsted in His utmost effort. It is from the opening to the close the story of grace stronger than sin, of life victorious over every form of death, of God triumphing over evil" – *C.T.* 294.

Ferre's former description of evil being 'adjectival' (that which is additional and dependent) is illuminating. What is adjectival is temporary during the eons: sin is to be "put away" (*athetesis*; cancel, annul) by means of Christ's sacrifice at the conclusion of the eons – Hebrews 9:26. The last enemy and greatest evil, death, is to be "destroyed" (*katargeo*; abolish, cease) – 1 Corinthians 15:26. Let us, therefore, rejoice in asserting with Pohorlak that "a universe in which there is no sin and death will be a world in which there is no evil." Then all will acknowledge evil as having been 'adjectival.'

The Final Triumph Of God Over Evil

In Lewis Sperry Chafer's massive work, *Systematic Theology*, sin and evil are dealt with in Chapter 24 (volume 2), 'The Final Triumph Over All Sin.' The first paragraph reads, "Revelation and reason unite in one testimony that evil is a temporary thing in the universe of God. Reason declares that since God is infinitely holy and the Designer and Creator of the Universe, evil must have begun its manifestations subsequent to creation by His permission and is to serve a purpose compatible with His righteousness. Reason also anticipates that, when that purpose is accomplished, *evil will be dismissed from the universe of God*, and that God, having undertaken to deal with evil, will complete His task to that degree of perfection which characterizes all His works" (365, emphasis added). One wonders how such a splendid view can be reconciled with the implied ongoing dualism of a partial salvation!

Only in the light of God's triumph over all evil do we have anything approaching an answer as to why sin entered the universe, "with its injury to creation and its measureless imposition of the sacrifice upon the Son of God..." (*Ibid*. 371). The implications of Dr Chafer's statement are well summed up in the words of Gregory of Nyssa (4th century): "God would not have permitted the existence of evil unless He had foreseen that by redemption all rational beings would, in the end, according to their destination, attain to the same blessed fellowship with Himself." All systems of partial salvation necessarily involve a compromise with evil on God's part.

Of course, words like 'permitted' reflect little more than our own limited reasoning. The early Greek Bishop Irenaeus (2nd century) simply viewed Adam's act in the Garden as an expression of "infantile immaturity." For him, salvation

was less a return to Eden than growth from human infancy to the spiritual realisation of the "children of God." Such growth could not occur under conditions of ease any more than it could under compulsion, but only via instruction through trial and suffering and the temporal contrast between good and evil, "so that maturing in them they may bear as fruit immortality." In his work *Against Heresies* (4, frags 23-25), Irenaeus provides his reasoning why God did not grant perfection to humans from the start: it was not because only some of them deserved it, but rather because humanity at its beginning was not yet sufficiently mature to receive it. Such a view makes Eden as much (or more) about *growth* as it is about rescue. Moving toward maturity is a common scriptural theme for those already "in Christ," which leads to their completion "in Him." Moreover, as "firstfruits of the spirit," the "sons of God" become the template for all creation (Rom 8). It is only at "the end" (*to telos*) of this process, when 'soulish' humanity is spiritually (and collectively) transformed, that Christ will deliver a perfected, that is to say, *fully mature*, cosmos over to the Father.

Chapter 11

THE AGES IN ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY

God is the One Almighty Good
God from age to age, saving by His Son.
All things are arranged with a view to the salvation
of the universe by the Lord of the universe
- CLEMENT, BISHOP OF ALEXANDRIA

The writer believes that the only certain way to determine the mind of God and His purpose with creation is through deep, prayerful study of His written word. And further, that such a study must be contained as much as possible within the bounds of the correct laws of grammar and interpretation. As this final chapter is a historical outline of views and opinions within Christendom, it should be considered less important – an appendage only, perhaps – to that which has preceded. The authority of church leaders in matters of scriptural interpretation has been greatly exaggerated, considering their many contradictions and errors. This, of course, is hardly surprising; such has been the case in all fields of human endeavour. It therefore serves to remind us that opinions change with enlightenment – what is 'heresy' today may be viewed as 'orthodox' tomorrow. It should be further pointed out that this is a representative history only and far from exhaustive; further, it is of course a *contextual* history, as must be all histories that strive to establish a particular viewpoint.

***PART I*:** THE FIRST FIVE CENTURIES

Andrew Fairbairn, in his turn-of-the-century work, *The Place of Christ in Modern Theology,* draws attention on page 27 to the "primitive Church being anything but a united Church; within it were many minds and many differences of doctrine and custom, and of it no living Church was (or is) an exact reproduction or reflection." Owing to the "historical forgetfulness and cultural alienation" (Hart; *Ath. Del*. xii) that separates us from that era, some fall prey to what amounts to a flat denial of Fairbairn's words (Hart's, too, for that matter). Yet, that is precisely the picture most reliable church historians paint of the period leading up to and following the earth-shaking changes after Constantine's bid to make the Empire Christian.

{The dividing line between the periods before and after Constantine is an important ecclesiastical demarcation. This self-proclaimed 'bishop of bishops' – the so-called '13th apostle' – and most who followed him were more concerned with politics and power than with truth and spiritual growth. During this transition to an 'empire-wide faith' – a process that took decades – much of the Bible (esp. prophecy) was reinterpreted with this new orientation in mind; what was best for the Empire became the necessary interpretation of Scripture. Roman imperial religion, with its dazzling aesthetics and convoluted rituals, began to supplant simple Christian practice. What had been a tightly knit, persecuted, community-based faith morphed into 'the institution,' wielding hitherto unprecedented power. Ecumenical councils were

introduced to thrash out and enforce those troublesome doctrines and practices that had once been a matter of individual conscience. A unified church/empire was the end goal, though Constantine had little interest in exactly *what* that unity was; he only knew that within unification resided order and power. As the following pages testify, the religio-political engine that emerged following this event was radically different to anything preceding it – it was a machine that involved intolerance, persecution, exclusion, and death, only now at the hands of the Apostolic See rather than a pagan tyrant. Furthermore, the rise of Constantinian Christianity left little room for identifying the state or the emperor as minions of "the prince of *this world*" as they most assuredly had been before. John H. Yoder, in *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace and Revolution*, therefore draws the obvious conclusion that the eschatology of the New Testament was, as a consequence of this monumental event, turned completely upside down.}

In the second part of *Chapter 3*, it was shown how two distinct schools developed in the post-apostolic era (100-600 CE): the Eastern or Greek, which was the major school in the early period, and the Western or Latin, which became dominant during the latter era. Few historical documents from the 1st century following the apostles have survived. Of the earliest – those of Clement (Romanus), Ignatius, Polycarp, Hermas, Justin, Tatian, and Theophilus – it is difficult to form an accurate and detailed understanding of their eschatology from surviving documents. This is owing to several factors, not the least of which is their general vagueness of language on the subject, when it is discussed at all. For example, the earliest of all Christian authors, Clement of Rome, recorded an epistle as long as the Gospel of Mark. Although devoting three chapters to resurrection, he makes no significant mention of eschatological matters. The scholarly few were understandably more focused on the survival of their fledgling and very vulnerable community than on the future position of the cosmos at large. Indeed, considering the intermittent though often violent persecutions of this inaugural era, it is rather surprising how little (if anything) is recorded confirming the vindictive concept of 'eternal torment.' While many early descriptions are interpreted as 'conditionism' or annihilationism, their language must be stretched to breaking point in order to accommodate the idea of conscious, ongoing suffering after death. If and when *thanatos* is defined by the above authors, it is commonly along the lines of the now largely ignored term which the Hebrew Canon calls "sleep."

There may be other reasons why eschatology was not much discussed in the Primitive Church. For one thing, they did not yet have the *full* 'New Testament.' According to Westcott in his *Introduction to the Gospels*, any knowledge of the last judgment in this nascent era was derived as much from tradition as from apostolic writings. Even more significant is that eschatology was not yet a subject of any real debate – teaching about punishment is mentioned in passing, as (interestingly enough) is that of a full restoration, but neither is developed in any meaningful way. For example, Ignatius of Antioch (d 108 CE) makes an allusion to the fire "that cannot be quenched" in relation to false teachers and their followers, but this should not be taken as indisputable proof of endless punishment. Later authors also mention 'unquenchable fire' (along with the 'undying worm'), even Origen and Gregory, whose allegiance to a full restoration cannot be questioned. As shown in earlier sections of this work, 'unquenchable' refers to the qualitative element of chastisement, not its duration. Moreover, the same Ignatius makes two fairly unambiguious statements

concerning *apokatastasis* that read as follows: (1) "The Word, when His flesh was lifted up after the manner of the brazen serpent in the wilderness, drew *all men* to Himself for their eternal salvation" – *Epi Smyr* 2; and, (2) "What was established by God has begun: since then *all beings* have been set in motion for the providential destruction of death" – *Ep. and Eph.* 20. Owing to arguments over declensions (not to mention later controversies of the subject itself), what Ignatius conveys here has been challenged. Nonetheless, his words anticipate themes that will resonate through future generations, extending to and even beyond the 5th century.

Adding to the complexity and controversy (especially for the West) were the catastrophic changes that occurred in later centuries when the empire divided and Latin terminology progressively imposed itself on the Greek. No small number of scholars have pointed to this event (about which much more will be said soon), which resulted in few, if any, of the earliest scripts being known in anything like their authentic form. According to one source: "The letters of Ignatius were known, but in a form that had been distorted by interpolation and addition. That distortion seems to have taken place in the latter part of the fourth century and had the effect of clothing the early-second-century martyr in the dress of a protagonist in the theological debates of the fourth century" – *The Apostolic Fathers* (Stainforth & Louth) [no page reference available].

Naturally, this involved our pivotal word, *aionios*. In the first of the two quotes above from Ignatius, the word 'eternal' is the translator's choice, but in the 2nd century, Ignatius may not have recognised that meaning. Unfortunately, the modest number of writings from this period that link *aionios* with eschatological themes – i.e. 'redemption,' 'judgment,' 'fire,' and 'punishment' – leave the word undefined and consequently open to translator bias. However, a few isolated instances do appear to qualify its meaning. For example, the *Epistle of Diognetus* (150 CE) describes "*aionion* fire" as chastising not "without end" but "up to an end" (*mechri telous*). Whether this implies restoration or annihilation cannot be certain, but it in no way supports punishment or torment *without* end!

{Much has been made of the chronicled martyrdom (155 CE) of Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, in support of endless punishment and eternal fire. The spotlight falls on a single sentence (*Mart.* 11:4), attributed to the saint, targeting his executioners. In one of several surviving fragments, it reads: "Are you ignorant of the *everlasting* fire that is prepared for the wicked?" But then another fragment reads: "Are you ignorant of the fire of the *coming judgment* reserved for the ungodly?" Even apart from interpretational bias, who can say for certain which of the two statements is historically valid? Nor may the issue be one of semantics only. The *Martyrdom of Polycarp* is an idealised piece of literature that includes miraculous signs and wonders, which are believed to have been interpolated. It also describes a Roman execution scene that is factually inaccurate. The question is, therefore, how much of the narrative is reliably historical, and how much is modified or even invented for theological drama?}

Another, less-known author, Athenagoras (177), speaks of resurrection as a change for the better, apparently in every case. While he mentions future judgment, he nowhere alludes to endless penalty. A few subsequent writings referring back to this time provide provisional evidence only. For example, two anonymous writers (*Rel. Sac.* iii. 498) bear witness to early testimonials on the

subject of the restoration of the universe at the end of the *aions*. Domitianius, a Galatian bishop, writing in the 6th century, is very positive indeed: "He seems to assert the universality of such teaching *before* and after Origen's day" – *Allin.*

It should be noted, too, that prayer for the dead – by the saved on behalf of the unsaved deceased – was a common practice in the early church, continuing a Jewish tradition that likely began around the time of the Maccabean revolt. At the very least, this indicates that human destiny was sealed at death for early Christian generations.

The Prominent Greeks

Westcott, in his elaborate work on the *Canon of the New Testament*, suggests that most of the biblical writings had been gathered together and authenticated (though not yet bound into the book we call 'The Bible') by 170 CE. Coincidentally, a decade later, we read the following from the pen of Irenaeus: "Christ will come at the end of the times in order to annul everything evil and to reconcile again all things, that there may be an end to all impurities" – *Against Heresies*, frag. iv. With this scholar, we enter the golden era of the Eastern theologian.

Irenaeus of Lyons (130-202 CE)

Of all the pre-third-century patristics, Irenaeus is the one of greatest interest; he is the first to write on things eschatological with confidence and fluency. Irenaeus was born and raised in Greece, where, in his youth, he was influenced by Ignatius and Polycarp. It is thus unlikely that two prominent post-apostolic scholars would have been at odds with the views held by their disciple. Later in life, Irenaeus moved west to what is now Southern France, becoming a Bishop there in 170 CE following the Aurelian persecutions. He is therefore hailed as a 2nd-century 'doctor' of the Eastern Church who migrated his knowledge and wisdom to the West.

For centuries, the Lyonian bishop was believed to be an annihilationist, alongside Justin Martyr; however, recent scholarship has begun to question this view. Best known for his treatise *Against Heresies* (180 CE), he describes and then argues against certain views of the Gnostics, which, as will become increasingly apparent, is quite important to the overall evidence. But what makes his contribution unique is that his reasoning is free from the philosophical influences that would mark future hermeneutics. Cullmann says that Irenaeus understood the Greek world intimately and "undertook no such violent reductions and reinterpretations of the New Testament message as were practised…by the Alexandrian scholars" – *Christ and Time* 57. His full treatise survives only in Latin (*Adversus Haereses*), but a few fragments in Greek remain. In these, he speaks freely of God eliminating "the kingdom of death," scarcely an expression supportive of *eternal* death! On the subject of Christ's sacrifice, he is quite candid: "Thanks to the obedience of one single human being all are justified and receive salvation" – *A.H.* 3:27. Then, on Ephesians 1:10, he writes: "God recapitulated in Himself the original totality of humanity in order to kill sin, to deprive death of its power and to vivify

humanity." He continues, after death and Hades release their prisoners, this mass of humanity "will be educated with a view to incorruptibility. It will flourish in the reign (of Christ), in order to receive the glory of the Father. Then, when 'all things are made new,' it will truly dwell in the city of God (the New Jerusalem)" – *A.H.* 5:35-36. These are not words one would expect from modern-day pulpits, though they mesh well with our treatment of this subject in *Chapter 9*. The contradictions that seemingly exist, for example, in his phrasing "everlasting fire" (concerning the reprobate), can be resolved by recognising his understanding of the temporary nature of the scriptural time words.

As one close to the apostles (and influenced, let us not forget, by his immediate predecessors), Irenaeus' handling of these words is of special interest. When this Greek scholar wishes to speak of endlessness, he falls back on *aidios* rather than *aionios*. Even before Aristotle, *aidios* was commonly used by Greek classicists to refer to the One who alone is eternal. Hence, it is *aidios* Irenaeus chiefly employs when expressing, *in his own voice*, the infinite nature of God. Most notably, he never applies *aidios* to punishment, only *aionios* (as with scripture); nor does he use it when thrashing out sin or death (as, again, with scripture). We are about to see how these points persist with virtually all of Irenaeus' *Greek-speaking* successors. (For more details on Irenaeus, see Ramelli's *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis* 100-106).

Clement of Alexandria (150-215)

The first prominent teacher at the catechetical school in Alexandria, Titus Flavius Clemens, is considered the founder of Christian philosophy. It is reassuring to note, through Eric Osborn's extensive research, that Clement's first avenue for his Christianised philosophy was scripture – it was, in his view, the source "of true philosophy." Thomas Allin contends the following points should be noted about Clement's famous school: (a) how early it was founded, (b) how widespread its influence was on Christian thought, existing as it did without rival for about 150 years, and (c) how that influence was exercised in favour of the doctrine of Universal Reconciliation. Allin adjoins, "As to Clement, I may say that his nearness to the apostolic age (he speaks of having learned from a disciple of the apostles - *Strom.lib.ii*), his wide and various learning, and his sympathetic spirit combine to give special weight to his teaching"…few others from this period "so uniformly dwell on God's mercy, even in His punishments, as does Clement" – *C.T.* 107. Dalleus wrote of him: "It is manifest that (he) thought all punishments God inflicts upon men are salutary, and executed only for their reformation" – *De usu Pat. Origen.* As a man, Clement has been described as "richly human, sane and moderate – *Ferguson*. As one whose "prodigious erudition was unsurpassed even by that of Origen" – *Cayre*. F. D. Maurice wrote of him: "I do not know where we shall look for a purer or a truer man than this Clemens of Alexandria; he seems to me one of the old fathers whom we should all have reverenced most as a teacher, and loved best as a friend."

In his teaching, Clement held firmly to the humanity of Christ; he saw the "Word made flesh" as the archetype of what was possible for everyone. Christ, in essence, bridged the gap between God and man that had before been

impassable. By offering the entire race the prospect of becoming Sons of God, Clement claimed *all* humanity's historical consecration and ultimate blessing. He understood that Deity dwelling with humanity (Rev 21:3) meant a *permanent* and *universal* theophany (divine manifestation), but that this could not occur until the *telos* (end), when the long-hoped-for *apokatastasis* (restoration) was manifest (*Strom*. 2,22,134,4).

Clement's use of *aidios* and *aionios* (NB. In the *original Greek*, not necessarily subsequent translations into English) aligns with that of Irenaeus (20 years his senior). Whenever he wishes to describe the future life as endless or eternal, he falls back on *aidios*. Again, as with Irenaeus, Clement is sufficiently wise to limit this term – rarely used in scripture – to moments when stating *his own* opinion; he falls back on the more common *aionios* when quoting the word itself. However, he exclusively employs *aionios* – which he defines as "the aeon to come" – in association with God's judgments, never *aidios*. Thus, death, sin, evil, fire, and punishment are not deemed endless or 'eternal' within the Divine purpose. *Aidios* occurs only twice in the N.T., in Rom 1:20 concerning God Himself, and in Jude 6 regarding the chains of sinning angels; it is usually rendered by eternal, everlasting, or, as with Rotherham in Jude, *perpetual*.

Here we should state an important fact about this early, unambiguous proclaimer of *apokatastasis*: Clement was revered both by his contemporaries and later patristics: "The piety and learning of Clement, his power as a teacher and philosopher, are spoken of in the highest terms by succeeding fathers" – *Clement of Alexandria*: *Miscellanies* Bk VII; Ilx. Alexander, first Bishop of Cappadocia and pupil of Clement, celebrates his benefactor's life as "blessed," a man "illustrious and approved." Eusebius, Jerome, Theodoret, Cyril and Maximus all view him in a similar light.

{The Alexandrian school was a mystical blend of Jewish theology and Greek philosophy. Clement travelled to Alexandria in 180, where he met Pantaenus, who taught at the Christian school there. Clement studied under Pantaenus and was ordained in 189, but little is known for certain about his influence over the school from that point on. However, under Origen, Clement's successor, its fame spread rapidly throughout the Christian world. During his watch, Alexandria focused on interpretation of scripture, becoming what is known as catechetical. Much of the Hebrew Bible was deciphered to uncover its spiritual, moral and ethical lessons. It introduced a Hellenistic mixture of typology and allegory, especially in regard to the prophetic elements of scripture. By contrast, the teachings of the New Testament involving the *telos*, such as 1 Cor. 15:22-28 & Col. 1:20, were taken very literally. The great irony here is that the bulk of subsequent Fundamentalist teaching has effectively literalised what Alexandria allegorised and allegorised what it literalised!}

Origen of Alexandria (185-253)

Without doubt, the most esteemed and, paradoxically, contentious of the early Greeks is Origen. He is certainly widely venerated in the writings of notable historians: "Unquestioningly the greatest man the Ancient Church had" – *Schrockh*; possessing "every excellence that can adorn the Christian faith" – *Mosheim*; "One of the rarest geniuses in the Primitive Church" – *Bayle*; his whole life was "one unbroken prayer" – Westcott. Even his critics speak

highly of this humble Greek teacher: Doucin in his *Hist. de L'Origenism* refers to him as "the oracle of Asia and Greece" and "master of the churches." The saintliness of the man is seldom questioned; from his youth, Origen's self-discipline and devotion to the faith came at great personal cost, so much so that he was named "Adamantius" (man of steel). His commitment to Christ was beyond question. During his lifetime, he traversed the empire from his native North Africa to Palestine, Arabia, Syria, Greece, and Rome, proclaiming and teaching the Gospel to patrician and commoner alike. By all accounts, his teaching was well-received. Indeed, Origen's reputation and admiration permeated the culture of his time so deeply that it ultimately sealed his fate. His death was the likely result of torture and maltreatment under the repressive tyranny of the pagan emperor Decius. Yet, even with all these accolades, Adamantius would become, within just 120 years of his death, the most slandered man in Christendom!

The fact is – for those who place importance on such facts – no Christian ecumenical council ever *formally* condemned Origen, only a local one, and even then by the arbitrary whim of a tyrant. Nor did he, in the strictest sense, suffer any official expulsion from the Church. This has not prevented anathema from being hurled at him and/or many erroneous theories ascribed to him. Perhaps one of the most exaggerated of these is Origen's supposed maniacal commitment to allegory. The widespread view that he allegorised virtually everything (especially the historicity of Genesis) has taken on absurd proportions. True, he allegorised much of Biblical prophecy (which, to this writer, is bad enough), but in other respects he remained relatively conservative. For example, in *Commentary on Philemon*, he writes: "He who believes in God and accepts that His teachings are true also believes that Adam was formed as the first man...that Enoch was translated because he had pleased God...that Noah received an oracle to build an ark, and that he alone, together with those who entered with him into the ark, was saved from the flood." Alexandria's allegorical style of interpretation sought spiritual lessons hidden in the biblical text, especially those pointing to Christ. It did not seek to undermine the fidelity of Biblical history. Another exaggeration is that he permeated scripture with esoteric and Greek philosophy. In fact, Origen could be as much a critic of the suppositions of Ancient Greece as he was of Gnosticism. True, he viewed philosophy as a tool through which one could attain truth and wisdom, but its purpose was to strengthen faith, not displace it. Indeed, notwithstanding his speculative 'pre-existence of souls' (which, it must be said, he presents as hypothesis, *not doctrine*), Origen was probably no more Platonic than his Hellenist peers; or, indeed, much of later Western and Eastern Christendom. Moreover, his teaching on *apokatastasis* (which, by the way, never became an issue until long after his death) derives from a very literal reading of 1 Corinthians 15:22-28, not Plato!

While the diversity and size of Origen's writings – around 2000 works according to Eusebius – doubtless included allegory, controversy, and speculation, the authenticity of certain specifics that have come down to us is debated. Unfortunately, most of his original works *in Greek* were destroyed after the 5th Ecumenical Council; therefore, the extant Latin translations of Rufinus, Hilary, and a few others (Jerome's are lost) form the basis of Origen's works in English. But this is not the most pressing issue. Patristic scholar John

Behr believes that creative assumptions and interpolation are far from unknown in one widely read 1930s translation of *First Principles* (Butterworth). Behr concludes that, in some instances, fabrications were stitched together from works of earlier scholars antagonistic to the Latin translation; as John C. Cavadini puts it, "predicated on a hermeneutic of thoroughgoing suspicion" – *University of Notre Dame* [2013].

Regardless of the likes and dislikes, the rights and wrongs of Origen – for he is sure to provoke strong opinion – the one factor, for which he is by many considered heretical, is his unflinching commitment to *apokatastasis* and its logical ally, the *telos*. On this, in the minds of many of his critics, his fame or infamy rests. Yet Origen's much-admired successor, Gregory of Nyssa, proclaimed the self-same doctrine with even greater avidity, but was never so condemned! If nothing else, the prejudiced mind is strangely inconsistent. There is no doubt, however, that some of the confusion (or exaggeration) lies in conflating Origen, 'the man,' with 'Origenism,' the posthumous mutilation of his writings by well-meaning admirers. It is therefore imperative to understand what the man actually believed. A summary of Origen's eschatology, which Farrar describes as "only part of one comprehensive philosophy," is as follows: God's purpose in creation was good, and His will is to restore His universe to its original pristine order. Because of sin's introduction, all must suffer on one side of the grave or the other. But our sufferings are the means to win us back; hence, they are not *aidios*, they are *aionian*. In contrast to the claims of certain opponents, the Alexandrian consistently emphasises the consequences of *Adam's sin* along with *the need for correction and repentance*.

{In *On First Principles* (220-30 CE), Origen presents for the first time a systematised treatise on Christian doctrine. This work framed most of the doctrinal debates that raged during the succeeding centuries. In complete or relatively complete form, *Principles* survives only in Latin; however, the Cappadocians Basil and Gregory (Nazianus) included sizeable fragments from the Greek original in their co-authored *Philokalia*, which has survived. While *Principles* naturally generated debate from its inception, the vicious fallout between Jerome and Rufinus – both of whom, after translating Origen's treatise into Latin in the 4th century, were critical of each other's efforts – added fire to the controversy. Personality conflicts, doctrinal agendas, power struggles, and jealousy all played a role in this event, which occurred amid one of Christendom's most volatile periods. *First Principles* begins with an essay on the nature of theology. Book One examines the heavenly realm and the oneness of God within the concept of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as well as the nature of spirit, reason, and angels. Book Two describes the world of man, including the incarnation of the Logos, the soul, free will, and eschatology. Book Three looks at cosmology, sin, and redemption, while Book Four covers teleology and the interpretation of Scripture.}

Of particular interest to us is Origen's understanding of *aion* and its derivative *aionios*. First of all, unlike the Valentinian Gnostics, who believed the aeons preceded the Logos, Origen hailed the Logos as their sole Creator, based on Hebrews 1:2. He also dismissed the Stoic idea of the aeons, which postulated endlessly recycling periods of long years. By contrast, Origen viewed the *aions* as holding intentionality where everything moved towards the final goal, the *telos*. Furthermore, *aion* had nothing to do with the Divine life per

se; for Origen, its meaning was always temporal: a period, an age, or a single lifetime. Thus, in Romans 16, Paul was not describing the 'eternal God' at all, but rather the "God of the Ages." Through this lens, Origen brilliantly viewed the Divine transcendence over all things 'aeonian' or age-related. Even the Greek construction *tous aiona ton aionon* never expressed eternity or infinity. He writes: "When the 'aeons of the aeons' are mentioned, a certain limit is again posited, perhaps unknown to us, but surely established by God" (*Hom. in Ex* 6:13). For the Lord, "will reign through the aeons until he has put all his enemies under his feet" – *Sel*. in Ps. 9. Like Irenaeus and Clement, he preferred *aidios* as the technical term for referencing the Almighty, or, on occasions, when positing the endlessness of God's glorious gift of life *beyond the aeons*. Consistently, Origen never links *aidios* with death, fire, punishment, sin, or evil.

In *First Principles*, Origen speaks of "the *so-called* apokatastasis," suggesting its precedence within the bounds of the most primitive church era. We know, of course, it was not the only teaching at this time; some, like Justin, held to annihilationism. But the theory that either teaching derived from Gnosticism is quite fallacious, even misleading. Irenaeus, Clement, and Origen all staunchly opposed Gnostic teachings to the point of refuting their terminology. It follows, too, that all three were well acquainted with the Gnostic texts describing *apokatastasis*. Origen, in particular, delineates their ideas as incompatible with scripture. In his writings, he held 1 Corinthians 15:22-28 as central to the highest Christian ideal, as would Gregory two hundred years later. Furthermore, all four, as native Greek scholars, were fully conversant with Acts 3:21, the single verse in which the noun occurs concerning "the *restoration* of all things spoken from the mouth of God's Holy prophets." Origen went so far as to express *why* the Gnostic view must be rejected: Because (he writes) "that only was to be believed as truth which is in no way out of harmony with the ecclesiastical and apostolic tradition." This alone provides prodigious evidence that the doctrine was not at all out of step with such traditions. And this situation persisted for many years to come, as not a single word was uttered against the teaching at the first four Ecumenical Councils held at Nicaea (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431), and Chalcedon (451). It would have been strange if that were the case, because at the Council of Nicaea, a prominent role was played by Origin's apologist, Eusebius, who was himself, almost certainly, sympathetic to restorationism (see next heading). Moreover, at the Council of Constantinople sat the two Cappadocians, Gregory Nazianzus and Nyssen, who on the subject of eschatology leaned – the one somewhat indirectly, the other quite openly – towards the doctrine.

Eusebius of Caesarea (260-339)

Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea, is considered the most learned of the late-antique church historians. He earned the title 'Father of Church History' for his most imposing work, *Ecclesiastical History*; his other works include *Apology for Origen* and *Life of Constantine*. Eusebius collaborated with Pamphilus, his friend and teacher, in their mutual defence of Origen's character and writings during the squabbles that followed the Alexandrians'

death. However, perhaps out of a sense of circumspection, the historian avoids directly discussing restorationism in most of his writings. By this time, controversy surrounding the subject was on the rise. But that his sympathies lay with the teaching is hardly ever in doubt. We witness this not only in his open support of the chain of theologians who freely proclaimed it, but also in his judicious use of the related terms. Like his worthy predecessors, he never once attaches *aidios* (meaning or implying eternal/without end) to death, punishment or fire; *aionios* is always his choice in defining these conditions. For Eusebius, it seems, the two propositions, "life is eternal (*aidios*)" and "death is eternal (*aidios*)," were two logical contradictions (*Theophania* frag. 3,113).

Athanasius of Alexandria (296-373)

When, a generation or two later, the acclaimed Athanasius evaluated Origen and his teaching in a positive, even glowing, light – to the point of *defending* his name against would-be denouncers – we should suspect something amiss with the broadly received view. Because this saint fought long and hard for what was 'orthodox,' he became known as a 'pillar' of the faith. Yet he proclaimed little in his writings that was discordant with restorational teachings, least of all those of Origen. For example, he writes, "Flesh was taken up by the Logos to liberate all humans and resurrect all of them from the dead and ransom all of them from sin" …to lead (even) "the cosmos to the Father and to pacify the all (*ta panta*) in himself, in heaven and on earth" – *Ad Adelphium* (section 7). Athanasius further substantiates the Universalist stance by referencing Phil 2:10: that "every knee will bow…" As a Greek-speaking native, he would have understood *kampto* or "bow" to mean the *spontaneous* worship and love of those mentioned. There is also his testimony on death and sin, in which he submits that "death might be destroyed once and for all, and humanity might be renewed according to the image of God" – *De Incarnatione* 13.

In his mêlée against Arianism, Athanasius comes armed to do battle with our contentious time-words. Bearing in mind that these terms, particularly *aionios*, were by now in some disarray, he nonetheless abides by the distinction between the 'eternal' (*aidios*) and the merely transitory (*aionion*). The term *aidios* appears frequently in his writings on the Sovereign God, while *aionios* is used less often and usually within a scriptural context. Like his predecessors, *aidios* is never associated with sin, death, or punishment, only *aionios*.

Diodore of Tarsus (330-90)

The Emperor Theodosius I, who was the first (after Constantine) to finally consolidate an empire-wide Nicene Christianity following Julian the Apostate's attempted regression to paganism, described Diodore as no less than a "champion of the faith" (bear this in mind in what follows). Diodore received his education in Athens, after which this humble Cilician sought refuge and reflection in the monastic life; however, a passion for teaching overcame his ascetic diffidence, leading him to found a school of theology

near Antioch. This academy was destined to become one of the most renowned seats of learning in late antiquity, with many of its teachings salient to our current argument. Significantly, Diodore's school did *not* follow the allegorical template set by Clement and Origen in Alexandria, yet it too openly and resolutely proclaimed the doctrine of *apokatastasis*. This fact is a formidable strike against those who claim that restorationism can only be held through an 'abandonment of the Word of Truth.' In a fragment communicated by Solomon, for example, Diodore expresses his conviction that the resurrection will be an ultimate grace for *all humanity*, not just the few. Another fragment (*On Providence* 5-6), exemplified by Isaac of Nineveh, records Diodore's conviction that "not even the immense evilness of demons can overcome the measure of God's goodness." Needless to say, such a view falls perfectly in line with Paul's in Colossians 1:20 concerning the reconciliation of the heavenly or celestial realm. Diodore's wording suggests that this is less about Divine kindness than about God as the 'Absolute Good,' which is an interesting observation. From this perspective, evil amounts to little more than an ontological non-entity. Indeed, Diodore is utilising the same metaphysical 'monism' that earlier patristics had used against the Stoics. Paradoxically, a few years hence, Augustine would draw on it again in his rhetoric against the Manichaeans.

Yet another fragment exposes Diodore's "profound linguistic understanding of the meaning that ʿôlām and l-ʿôlām, αἰών (*aion*) and αἰώνιος (*aionios*) have in the Bible." With Diodore, "they do not indicate eternity" – Ramelli (*Apokatastasis* 525); in this particular passage, he emphasises that *aionios* never means endless when connected with 'fire' and 'punishment.'

{Diodore's school taught that three essential elements were necessary for correctly interpreting Scripture. (1) *Theoria*, the spiritual insight the text might contain, which was only legitimate when anchored in the (2) *Historia*, the concrete historical sense of the narrative. Between these two stood (3) *Lexus*, the careful analysis of textual language (the chosen words) and grammar. For Diodore, any exegete who ignored these three rules was less interpreting the Word than inventing a new one. The literal meaning of scripture was not inferior to the spiritual; it was the foundation without which interpretation risked subjectivity or even fantasy. Theodore became the most famous advocate for the Antiochian School, and through him, following the widespread persecution of his followers after his death in 428 CE, it migrated to Edessa, where it formed the School of the East.}

Gregory of Nyssa (335-94)

Gregory Nyssen is regarded by many, past and present, as the greatest-ever proponent of Universal Reconciliation. He was born into a spiritual, Christ-centred home. While his temperament was contemplative, quiet and meek, he nonetheless became identified as one of the famous Cappadocians (our third school proclaiming *apokatastasis*) along with Basil, his brother, Macrina, his sister, and the other Gregory (of Nazianzus). Even in his youth, he imbibed the doctrine of restorationism, describing it in *De Beatitudinibus* as the absolute apex or summit of the Christian hope. In the words of Hart, "he gives us a picture of Paul's teachings that is thoroughly coherent, in which nothing is explained away, (and) is radiant with the highest imaginable hope and joy."

Compared to Gregory's glorious outlook, the dark musings of his North African contemporary, Augustine, would (as we are about to see) prove much less full of hope and joy. Although their lives overlapped, there is no evidence that the two ever met; Gregory died some 25 years before Augustine unleashed his apocalyptic vision of heaven and hell in *The City of God*.

The late publication of Gregory's writings reveals his profound understanding of *apokatastasis*. No doubt this has proved something of an embarrassment to those who oppose the teaching; for them, the great quandary lies not just with the doctrine itself, but with Gregory's esteemed position within the orthodoxy of the era. The Council of Ephesus (431 CE), for example, referred to his writings – crammed as they are with restorationalism – as the great bulwark of the Church against heresy! Later, at the 7th Ecumenical Council (787), Gregory was honoured by everyone as "father of fathers," outstripping all others, according to von Balthasar, in the profundity of his thought. (For more on Gregory, see Hart's 'Fourth Meditation' in *That All Shall Be Saved*; also Ramelli in her *Apokatastasis* and Behr in *The Human Image of God*).

In his theological essays, Gregory employs our contested terms in the time-honoured fashion: the much less common, indeed, scripturally rare, *aidios* is, as usual, used technically to express endlessness or eternity, while *aion* and *aionios* voice temporality. Furthermore, Gregory speaks of *aionios diastema*, meaning "an eonian *interval*." To call an interval endless is beyond folly! Nonetheless, by this time, change was in the air, and following Gregory's demise in 394 CE, even his namesake (Nazianzus) had less reticence "attaching to αἰών (*aion*) the meaning of 'eternity'" – Ramelli (*Ibid*. 166). Since Nazianzen (as one of the Cappadocians) would have been privy to the word's true meaning, why the change of heart? Although the Gnostics as a sect were no longer a threat, catastrophic political events were expediting the faith towards a new agenda, one much less at ease with obscurity and indefiniteness; moreover, one that paradoxically re-aligned itself with the earlier, contested Gnosticism. These forces were advancing a more categorical role for the biblical time words, one without equivocation, where the bounds of a human lifespan could weigh 'eternal' fate.

{The Cappadocian School became most famous for establishing Nicene Christological and Trinitarian theology in the 4th and 5th centuries. Its influence laid the foundation for Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic and (much) Protestant doctrine. One of the most interesting aspects of Cappadocia was its hermeneutics, which blended Alexandrian allegory with the grammatical historicism of Antioch and Alexandrian philosophic reasoning. The Cappadocian School sought to balance the more extreme allegorical style with a commonsense literalism (as seen in Basil's account of the *Six days of Creation*). The fact is, even Origen did this. And here (to use the modern idiom) is the 'kicker': All three of these Eastern schools – Alexandria, Antioch, Cappadocia – taught a fully fledged *apokatastasis*; that is, the restoration of all things to God in Christ at the end of the eons. Moreover, all three taught *free will*. There was no conflict, as far as all three were concerned, with humanity having choice and God's ultimate design for the race being fulfilled.}

The early Christian historian Socrates Scholasticus reminds us that up to his own day (4th-5th century), Origen's fame had spread throughout the Christian world.

And the historian Gieseler informs us that well into the 5th century, the restorational view "as to the duration of future punishments was so general, even in the West and *among the opponents of Origen*...that it had become entirely independent of his system" (emphasis added). Regarding this time, Allin observes that it is "crowded more than any other with names illustrious in the annals of the Church. And it is noteworthy that within this period Universalism finds some of its ablest and most outspoken advocates" – *C.T.* 112.

Notable among its less well-known adherents were Methodius (who was highly critical of Origen), Cassian, Pamphilus, Marcellus, Titus of Bostra, Magnes, Anthony, Ephrem, Evagrius, John of Jerusalem, Theodorus, and Didymus, whom Jerome claimed "surpassed all in his day in knowledge of the scriptures." These words from the pen of the illustrious Jerome highlight the important point that all of the above "grounded their Christian doctrine of apokatastasis first of all in the Bible" (Ramelli; *Ibid.* 11). All too frequently, Universal Reconciliation is dismissed as having roots in some imagined paganism. (We will take up this issue again in *Chapter 12*). It is also likely, as Ballou suggests, that many "had probably no definite opinion at all upon a subject which had never undergone the ordeal of controversy" – *Anc. Hist. Univ.* 166. This point, too, is significant, as the church at the time faced intense controversies as to what constituted orthodoxy. There is no substantive evidence that anyone from this era (or certainly the era leading up to it) viewed the doctrine of universal reconciliation as heretical or even mildly controversial.

Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428)

Critics like Lardner and Mosheim argue that among ancient theologians, Theodore of Mopsuestia – "the Expositor" – deserves the greatest respect for his common sense and sound judgment. Tillemont further suggests that his memory embraces the entirety of scripture, perhaps reflected in the appellation bestowed on him by his contemporaries, *polyhistor* (a polymath or person of vast knowledge). This much is certain: he neither followed nor admired Origen; on the contrary, belonging to Diodore's school, he opposed Origen's allegorical system of interpretation. Antioch's methodology was historical rather than mystical; unlike Alexandria, it was based on a factual reading of scripture rather than an idealised one. Theodore saw with astonishing clarity that *anastasis* (resurrection) forms the crown and climax of redemption in God's great plan. "Who is such a fool," he asks, "as to think so great a boon can be to *any man* the source of endless pain?" Sin, disease and death are, in Theodore's eyes, no more than God's engines for educating the race. The Edenic 'fall' was to him but a step in the Divine scheme for ultimate elevation; consequently, redemption was no mere afterthought in the Divine mind.

In Book V of *De Creatura*, concerning sin's entry and ultimate benefit, Theodore's words are reminiscent of Irenaeus's two centuries earlier. He writes, "God knew that men would sin in all ways, but permitted this result to come to pass, knowing that it would ultimately be for their advantage. For since God created man...and made him ruler of so extended a system, and offered so great blessings for his enjoyment, it was impossible that he should not have prevented the entrance of sin, if he had not known that it would be ultimately for his advantage." He then asks what this advantage is and

provides an answer: “It was not possible that in any other way we should have a full knowledge of the nature and consequences of sin, and the evils of our sinful passions, and know our weakness...unless God had so ordained from the beginning, that by experiment and comparison we might know the magnitude of those infinite benefits that are to be conferred upon us. On this account, knowing that it would, on the whole, be for our advantage, he permitted sin to enter.” He then concludes: “It is the prerogative of a rational creature to distinguish between good and evil things. If, therefore, there were no opposite qualities, it would not be possible for him to discern the differences. Therefore, at the outset, he introduced these great contrarieties (conflicts) into his creation.”

In his own day, Theodore was regarded as mainstream, even though he vigorously taught, unopposed, the finitude of God’s punishment and the ultimate redemption of “all His creatures.” The “final state” (as he calls it) of every sentient being – human, angelic and spirit – was to be immutable communion with God; in other words, Him all in all His creation. Theodore’s faith in the Divine pledge of a final restoration was such that he integrated the teaching (using the words of scripture) into liturgical observance, where it became part of the Nestorian or Church of the East liturgy.

Following his death, the native Syrian gained widespread support amid a campaign to destroy his reputation. Theodore’s standing with the people was such that many loyal to him willingly faced persecution and exile rather than relinquish their faith and trust in him. It was a time of raging controversies – individual against individual, council fighting council, school denouncing school. Eventually, the emperor became involved, and the Byzantine council issued a wholesale condemnation. The outcome was that Theodore’s prodigious works – the most respected exegetical corpus of the Christian East – were lost, and his name virtually disappeared in the West after the 6th century; it was not until the 1800s that this noble Antiochene was restored to his rightful place as a theologian and teacher of merit. Edward Beecher, in his *Hist. Retribution* (219-224) asserts that Theodore’s conviction in the finite nature of hell was neither based on an allegorical interpretation of scripture nor derived from Origen (this would be equally applicable to many others mentioned here).

{The Church of the East (aka Nestorians, though Nestorius is not widely honoured by the C of the E) was formed out of necessity due to the persecutions led by Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria, following Theodore’s death (428), and, a century later (533), the political exigency of a power-hungry Byzantine emperor. It began over a dispute about the two natures of Christ and ended with the exile of Theodore’s followers eastward beyond the emperor’s ignoble grasp. This event marked the absolute end of the ‘unity in diversity’ policy – one of Primitive Christianity’s most practical and unifying factors – leading to its delusional sense of infallibility. What happened to the two factions after this catastrophe is informative. As the Empire began its inexorable slide into superstition and intrigue, the Nestorians (so-called), spreading from Edessa into Central and Eastern Asia, became the largest body of Christian humanity on earth. Well does Beecher ask, “Were those who held the doctrine of eternal punishment elevated thereby above the followers of Theodore...Were they less imbued with the spirit of active, self-denying missionary Christianity?” – *Hist. Retribution* 233. Account for it as we may, the Church of the East expressed the most distinguished missionary spirit of any age. They also

became the unlikely "providential channel through which Europe was aroused from the ignorance and torpor of the Dark Ages" (*Ibid.* 233). The historian Gieseler informs us that a mere 85 years after its enforced exile, the Church of the East established itself in Asia, widely disseminating the Gospel message and founding schools and hospitals throughout the region.}

Theodoret of Cyrus (393-458)

Theodoret (meaning 'Gift of God') was born in Antioch to a prosperous Syrian family, which provided the advantage of an education in the classics and religion. After embracing the Christian faith at a young age, he relinquished his inheritance, giving it to the poor and needy; from that moment onward, he devoted his life to asceticism. According to Allin, learned, moderate, and fair-minded, Theodoret succeeded Theodore as the most influential teacher in the Antiochene school until 423, when he became Bishop of the North Syrian capital of Cyrus. Allin informs us that Theodoret, no less than his Syrian forerunner, John Chrysostom, "takes up an attitude of marked opposition to anything like the Augustinian doctrine of original sin" – *The Augustinian Revolution in Theology* 77. Quoting Athanasius, he proclaims, "The whole race of man is so permeated by the Resurrection as to become like a single living creature." It is difficult to see in this statement anything less than a Universal Redemption! Commenting on Psalm 8:4 (also 21:5), Theodoret proclaims that "all creation, visible and invisible, shall share in the unspeakable union which He has come to make, and that some will share in His Resurrection willingly, others unwillingly, some from love, and some from fear" (*Ibid*. 81). The tenor of Theodoret's writings cover themes typical of the other Hellenistic teachers of the era.

Although neither Theodoret nor his master Theodore wrote scholastic essays on our specified time words – at least, none that have survived – Hanson, in *Aion Aionios*, quotes Theodoret (*Migne* Vol 4, 400) as holding that, "Aion is not any existing thing but an interval denoting time...sometimes proportioned to the duration of the creation and sometimes to the life of man." Like his Eastern forebears, he distinguishes *aidios* when referring to the infinite nature of Deity.

***PART II*:** THE LATIN ASCENDANCY

It is of interest to note that the term 'Origenist' originally had no connection with eschatology at all, but referred, according to Sozomen, to those who held the great biblical truth that "God is Spirit." To the spiritually minded, this idea is not so difficult to grasp; to a certain type of legalist, it may present problems.

The Fierce Tertullian (155-220)

Florens Tertullianus was a Roman North African – probably of Berber descent – who was contemporary with Clement and Origen. Recall from *Chapter 3* that Tertullian was the earliest of the Latin scholars and likely the first to translate the scriptures into Old Latin. We must now re-examine the impact

this formidable theologian had on Western Christendom's troubled history. Born in Carthage, Tertullian was a well-read lawyer whose gifts extended to writing and oratory. What Clement and Origen were to Greek or Eastern Christianity, Tertullian was to the Latin West. He was the first to provide a systematic explanation of scripture *in Latin* and to create Latin terminology for Western Christianity. "It is no exaggeration to say," notes Thomson, "that the choice of terms of this scholar has profoundly affected all succeeding theological thought" – *Whence Eternity* 24.

Tertullian set in motion the ascending power of the Roman Catholic Church. Until his time, Latin Christianity had been essentially Greek in form, but when Tertullian embraced the faith, new terms and ideas were introduced that gradually changed its character, paving the way for the Latin system of dogma. Adolf Harnack says of him: "What influenced the history of dogma was not his Christianity, but his masterly power of framing formulas." Neander explains that his mind was often at a loss for suitable phrases as he had more within him than he could express; for this purpose, he found it necessary to create a new language out of the common Punic Latin. "It has been said that Tertullian makes use of words not found in general use outside of the very early writers, and that he often imparts to words a new or unusual force" – *W.E.* 26.

Like many of his Latin successors, this legalist never seemed to grasp the elemental fact (mentioned above) that "God is spirit," which was central to Greek theology. Tertullian's anthropomorphism led him to view God as the stern judge who gives the law and must be obeyed; his legal mind regarded the Creator/created relationship as little more than transactions – a good act by man evoking a similar response from God; the fundamental aspect was never in doubt, however – *fear* on the part of men. In contrast, the Greek view embraced God's measureless love and grace, in Christ, ever being at the disposal of humanity. It began with a loving God carrying out all His works in accordance with His divine purpose over the course of ages for the ultimate benefit of the race. A God consistently seeking to draw people closer to Himself, guiding and instructing them for their well-being and growth in grace. Tertullian, conversely, saw the race as on probation to a magisterial deity. Instead of ever-advancing in His ways and truth, man, woman, and child must subscribe without question or discussion to 'The Creed' – the rigid and crystallised expression of what eventually became Latin Dogma.

Johanne Doderlein notes that "in Christian antiquity, the more eminent and learned a man was, in that proportion did he cherish and defend the hope that punishment would at some time end." This statement becomes truly heroic when we learn of Basil's sweeping declaration (370 CE): "The *mass of men* say that there is to be an end of punishment to those who are punished" – *De Fut. Judic.* (on Luke 12:47,48). Or that of Jerome (390): "I know that *most persons* understand by the story of Nineveh and its king, the ultimate salvation of the devil and all rational creatures" – *Jonah iii*. And lastly, even the antagonistic Augustine (400), who concedes that in his day "*very many*" – indeed, the 'vast majority' (*quam plurimi*) – "compassionated the eternal punishment of the damned, while not denying the Holy Scripture" – *Ench. Ad Laur.* 29. We should not miss the significance of these unqualified facts from the pens of Basil, representing the

East, Augustine, the West, and Jerome, due to his peculiar position, perhaps both. They state explicitly that for "the mass of men," "most persons," and "very many," restorationism was the prevailing belief up to around the 5th century!

The most eminent and learned of the Asiatics belong to what is called 'the age of doctors.' Eastern theology was couched in the language of the Gospels and Epistles, though the Roman Church also remained a Greek-speaking body until at least the start of the 3rd century. Excluding North Africa, this influence is marked in the writings of Latin scholars of the time, the majority of whom shared the wider view of salvation. Victorinus (360 CE) is one such example. He writes on Ephesians 1:9,10: "Thus the mystery was completed by the Saviour so that, perfection having been completed throughout all things and in all things by Christ, all universally should be made one through Christ and in Christ."

Ambrose of Milan (339-97)

Aurelius Ambrosius, one of the most beloved of the Latin Patristics, also appears to have favoured *apokatastasis*. Indeed, as a late 4th-century Roman of unimpeachable reputation, he provides a powerful testimony to the teaching's acceptance and dissemination in the West. Ambrose was of almost legendary reputation on both sides of the empire, doubtless aided by a Roman upbringing via Greek descent. Because of this, he retained a grasp of the Greek language, which was by this time beginning to diminish in the West. Rising to the bishopric of Milan in 374 CE, by sheer popularity as much as anything, he identified with the common people and laboured in the service of the poor. Eventually, he met and became confidant to a young Augustine who venerated the older man for the eloquence of his sermons. But it is through his scholarship and pen that Ambrose is celebrated here. He viewed Christ as the great physician who binds the wounds of Adam, thereby healing the sins of the race. In this respect, as in many others, he closely identifies with his contemporary, Gregory of Nyssa. Indeed, his affinity with the Cappadocian, *and* the preceding Alexandrian (Origen), is laid bare when he discusses Christ's subjection of everything to the Father: "...the subjection of Christ consists not of a few, but in all...when all, then, shall have believed and done the will of God...God will be All in all" – *De fid. Lib.*v.7. And, "When Christ shall have delivered His kingdom over to God, then shall *all things* be subject to Him, who has subjected *the universe* to Himself...when, therefore, all shall have believed in the Lord, then shall the universe serve God...At present, He is over all by His power, but it is necessary that He be in all *by their own free choice*" – *Ps.lxii.l* (emphasis added). These last words show the importance that Ambrose, Gregory, and Origen all place on *voluntary* submission. Indeed, all three embody the sterling morality and evangelical spirit that goes with true discipleship, completely unhindered by the glorious teaching.

Other westerners who held this view at the time included Hilary, Rufinus, and Isidorus. However, inconsistency was by now creeping into the writings and sermons of those who had earlier endorsed the teaching. This contradiction can be explained by the ambiguous nature of terminology, though it more likely owes allegiance to the notorious advocacy of deceit (aka *Accommodation* or *Reserve*). "What is more profitable," asks Chrysostom, "than the fear of punishment?" It

was not uncommon at this time or even earlier to employ fabricated threats to terrify weak or obstinate sinners into conformity. Andrew Juke's conviction after studying the writings from this period is that "the doctrine of Universal Restitution was held by many who in their public teaching distinctly asserted endless punishment" – *Rest.* 187. According to various sources, even the likes of Origen was not altogether opposed to its use with the obstinate or immature. Be that as it may, at the core of this practice is a moral dilemma: a lie remains a lie regardless of how it is presented, and scripture never condones lying even for the most noble of reasons. Deceit invariably leads to the distortion or collapse of the truth; no less so in this case. Inexorably, the language of the Greek fathers was fading in the West; few obstacles therefore remained "to stem the fast-rising tide...naturally triumphant in an age cruel, corrupt, and superstitious" – *C.T.* 129.

Vacillating Jerome (342-420)

Jerome, well-known for his *Latin Vulgate*, was taught by the famous Cappadocian Gregory of Nazianzus. He was the last in a line of Latins drawing their inspiration from Eastern sources. As noted earlier, Jerome spoke of many in his time who held that someday all punishment would end, but added, "which ought now to be hidden from those to whom fear is useful." Jerome's ambivalence over this tactic (alluded to above) is exposed in what he says next: "Who knows, whom, how, and how long (God) ought to judge?" – *Atque Impiorum*. While Jerome by nature seems to have been a chameleon-like creature, he was nonetheless influenced by his moderate teacher and the surrounding Greek world. Nearly one hundred passages taken from his writings reveal an identity with restorational views, the tenor of which can be summed up in one unambiguous statement: "With God, no rational creature perishes endlessly." This deeply embedded sympathy is reinforced by his answer to one Pelagius, a British monk whose teaching (in this instance, at least) may be compared with that of some later protestants: "As to your saying that 'in the day of judgment sinners must not be spared, but must be burned up with eternal fires,' who can tolerate it? And that you should preclude the mercy of God, and before the day of judgment judge about the sentence of the judge; so that if He may have wished to spare the wicked and sinners, He cannot do so because of your prescriptions?" – *Pelagius* i. (For more on this event, see *Appendix V* [sub-heading: *The Pelagian Controversy*]).

Jerome's doctrinal position conformed (not unnaturally one must say) to the changing position of the Church. Ballou describes his now professed belief to be "that the devil and his angels, obstinate infidels and open blasphemers, shall suffer endless torments, while such as have embraced Christianity yet led vicious lives shall be consigned only to a long, but temporary, purgatory after death." There are times, nonetheless, that he concedes, "those severely punished in this life, such as the antediluvians, the Sodomites and Pharaoh's host, will be pardoned in the next" – *A.H.U.* 247. Elizabeth A. Clark is one of many who claim as much. She insists that the passages brought forward to 'prove' Jerome's disapproval of *apokatastasis* "come from after the onset of the Origenist controversy, when Jerome was bent on denying any asscosiation with Origenism, they prove nothing about Jerome's view's in the 380s" – *Vigiliage Chistianae* 167 [footnote]. Thus, Jerome's later Western loyalties

> accommodated his earlier Eastern schooling in a strangely disingenuous way, though many suspect Jerome remained, in secret, a Universalist throughout his life.

It is disturbing to observe the shift in views on punishment in the prior event history. As Ballou notes, "(in early writings) it is either wholly omitted or else expressed in the most indefinite manner. Afterwards, we find it introduced as a peculiar motive of terror; and as such, it became more and more employed, even by those who expressly assigned it limited duration" – *A.H.U.* 67, 68.

The tempo of change accelerated as the close of the 4th century drew near, prompting certain political events that led to the first tentative censure of restorational views. A simple-minded Cypriot Bishop, Epiphanius, whom Schaff terms "the patriarch of heresy-hunters," writing to John of Jerusalem in 394, catalogued the alleged errors of Origen. However, Ballou writes that even here "the censure falls...not on the doctrine of the salvation of all mankind, but on that of the salvation of the devil" – *A.H.U.* 215. Further attacks came less than a decade later from the pen of the prelate, Theophilus, whom Bishop Rust calls "proud, revengeful, covetous, crafty and turbulent; Gibbon & Gieseler describe him similarly. Farrar portrays him as "one of the most disgraceful characters of ecclesiastical history...He was first an avowed Origenist and argued against the Anthropomorphites from the works of Origen. (But) from motives of policy, he turned around and persecuted the Origenists" – *M. & J.* 314. It is easy to see how such defamation (and more was to follow) creates the illusion that restorationism was the invention of Origen. But this is little less than propaganda, borne, according to Jerome (before he himself turned), of little more than envy. In a letter to Paula (384 CE), he insists that Origen was blamed "not on account of the novelty of his doctrines, nor on account of heresy, as now mad dogs pretend," but from jealousy (*Letter 33*:3,4).

The undue clamour between Theophilus & Origenism quickly abated (though a deadly seed had by now been planted in the minds of many). Contemporaries felt the hostility was chiefly personal, "that it had been marked with unwarrantable violence, and pursued too far" (*Ballou*). Indeed, Theophilus later outraged many who recalled his former savagery by the leisurely perusal of Origen's works. He justified this hypocrisy by conceding that among the thorns he found many beautiful and precious flowers!

By the mid-to-late 5th century, a more confident and powerful Western school began openly attacking restorative views. The adherents of this new establishment were, in the words of Westcott, not only actuated by personal antipathy to a teaching that was "too large, too humanitarian, and too profound for their limited understanding, but were also advocates of hierarchical supremacy, and devotees of rigid formula" – *Contemporary Review.* Farrar adds, "They could not but look with suspicion amounting to hatred upon a teaching that compelled men to face the whole question of the position and destiny of mankind, and whose searching views rendered it impossible for them to be content with the passive acceptance of crystallised dogmas" – *M.& J.* 329.

Tertullian, then, two hundred years earlier, laid the foundation for this new school; Felix and Cyprian, both influenced by Tertullian; the latter claiming him 'master', sustained its footing throughout the 3rd and into the 4th century. Then Augustine, the greatest of the Latins, in authoritative terms, outdid them all in the

later 4th and early 5th centuries. Coincidentally, all four were Roman North Africans. On the surface, this may seem a trivial point, but the fact remains that the region never knew peace from the time of Tertullian. All four were also secularists who became ecclesiastics and emphasised polity as part of their religious outlook. Tertullian, Felix, and Cyprian had legal backgrounds, while Augustine exemplified the scholastic mind under the governance of political or legal ideas. Law was consequently the distinctive constituent of this new Latin ethos, as philosophy had been of the Greek. In turn, the uppermost quest of the law was order; with philosophy, it was truth. The very sternness of this Nuevo Christianised Roman legalism was to become its central attraction. Here was an institution, utterly changed from just 150 years earlier, fiercely clamouring for the suppression of all heresy; longing for the religious superman to lead it into order and accord.

Augustine of Hippo (354-430)

In Aurelius Augustinus, we find a new mind; one filled, according to Fairbairn, with "irreconcilable antitheses," reflecting "at once his intellect and his history; the dualism that was native to his soul is inherent in his system. He never transcended it in experience, and it always dominated his thought" – *Christ in the Modern World* 115. After a youthful jaunt with Manichaeism, Neoplatonism, and Rhetoric in Carthage, Augustine followed his beloved mother, Monica, into the Christian faith. The question is: how much did these primal influences, especially Manichaeism with its emphasis on *cosmic dualism*, remain part of the fabric of his thinking and impact the eventual outworking of that faith? As to his earliest Christian leanings, we know he was influenced by Ambrose, who (as we have seen) became both mentor and friend. So, it seems, Augustine began his walk in some sympathy with the many known to him as "the merciful" (*misericordes*). At times, he even voiced Alexandrian sentiments – knowingly or unknowingly, we cannot be certain because by now Origen was established within the liturgical landscape. What we *can* be certain of is that both Origen and Gregory had influenced Ambrose. Even Eriugena cites this fact centuries later, stating that Ambrose, being "of the highest authority," followed "the greatest Greek theologians, especially Gregory" – *Periphyseon* 4:816, 817. Regretably, this situation was not to last; the attachments of his earlier (Christian) days were overwhelmed by new agendas and efforts to refute Pelagius. In so doing, writes Axton, he falls "into the very dualism he had found so repulsive in his former belief system" – *The Augustinian Displacement of Origen* (2022). Exactly *when* this changeover (or change back) took place is a matter of debate, as are the collective influences that catalysed it. After analysing the entire corpus of the bishop's works, sermons, and letters, Dr Kenneth Wilson believes the shift occurred in 412 CE, eighteen years before Augustine's death. Wilson holds that this radical transition (or likely reversion) was due to Augustine's prior Stoic, Neoplatonic, and Manichaean influences, all of which taught unconditional (deterministic) election, which is why the early Church Fathers staunchly refuted them. (*Augustine's Conversion to Non-Free Will - A Comprehensive Methodology*). Both Westcott and Farrar compare Augustine's later eschatology with his departed nemesis in similar terms: The centre of Origen's

system was God and hope; the centre of Augustine's was punishment and sin. Origen yearns for a final unity; Augustine almost exultingly acquiesces in a frightful and abiding dualism. Origen can scarcely bear the thought that even the devil should remain unreconciled; Augustine, like many writers since, is undisturbed in contemplating the wide sentence of an endless doom (see *M.& J.* 321).

Here then is the man who, more than any other, settled conviction in an endless hell. He achieved this as much by his authority as by his arguments, which many have since seen as superficial and sophistical. Augustine's favourite text (predictably) was Matthew 25:46. His interpretation was based on the implicit rationale that *aionios* corresponded to the emerging idea of eternity. Augustine's reasoning on this matter drew these further comments from Farrar: "To call it an argument is an extravagant compliment, for it is a mere untenable and self-refuted assertion. *Aion*, he says, does often mean a limited period, but *aionios* always means 'endless.' This is a specimen of that asserting style of which Augustine is a master" – *M. & J.* 293, 294. No effort was made to embrace the wisdom of the past by distinguishing *aidios* from *aionios*; was it possible, as Ramelli suggests, that the Latin tongue had always struggled with the distinction between the two? Had Augustine understood the subtleties of Greek, moreover, as an ageing scholar, was he even interested? Allin comments, "It is a striking fact that the weight of opposition to universalism in primitive times is found in the Latin Church...where, as in Augustine's case, the Greek language was never really mastered" (82). "…it is strongest in the church's greatest era and declines as knowledge and purity decline. On the other hand, endless penalty is most strongly taught precisely in those quarters where the N.T. was less read in the original, and also in the most corrupt ages of the Church" – *C.T.* 148. Hart goes even further in the postscript of his 2017 New Testament. On page 548, he points to Augustine's selectiveness in the way he used scripture, his dependence on poor translations, and his sizeable expenditure of energy "on qualifying, rephrasing, and explaining away a host of passages that did not really conform well to the theological system he imagined he found in Paul's writings." As Scranton quips, "Augustine failed to do his homework!" But more than this, his arguments align with ingrained religious presuppositions, the roots of which Rowan Greer suggests emerge from a "deep sense of his own inability to find perfect spiritual healing, deeply ingrained sensibilities of North African Christianity, (and) the issue of the Pelagian controversy (see *Appendix V*) – *The Fear of Freedom* 176. Doubtless, much of what he writes in his Magnum Opus, *The City of God*, was influenced by a specific teaching from his early exposure to Gnostic Manichaeism, a credence that likely tormented him throughout his life: that good and evil were co-eternal.

{*The City of God* was Augustine's last major work, describing his vision of two 'eternal' entities: the metropolis of man and the City of God. In Book 21 (composed around 426 CE), Augustine imaginatively lays out in 27 chapters the dogma that would influence the greater part of Western Systematic Theology. Mercifully, the East largely ignored his rhetoric, as did (up to a point) parts of the later Western tradition, including Anglicanism and Methodism (also Adventism). Ronald S. Dart speaks of Augustine labouring "again and again and again in exegeting the N.T. in a way that legitimates the position of eternal punishment." The Canadian

Professor of Theology lays bare the "line and lineage" disseminating from 5th-century Carthage, through Catholicism, the Reformation (via Luther and Calvin), and into contemporary evangelicalism. In Chapters 3 & 4 of Book 21, Augustine debates the finer points of the Lake of Fire, and how its victims can endure what he sees as a literal fire perpetually burning material bodies. He speculates that the resurrected body can withstand infinite burning owing to its immortalised state (Tertullian, as we will see, had surmised similarly 200 years earlier). To validate his point, Augustine draws on a variety of pagan sources, none of which have any direct bearing on Christian eschatology. In Chapter 9, he moves on to what, in his assessment, is the "merciful" nature of this form of punishment, and here, it must be said, he reveals his dark mastery of sophistry. One could say, paraphrasing C. S. Lewis, 'nonsense is nonsense, *especially* when we speak it of God!' In Chapter 17, the dismantling of Origen's views on *apokatastasis* becomes Augustine's obsession. Even at this late date, the intercession of the saints on behalf of the unsaved dead was widespread. Chapter 18 deals a blow to this practice, destroying any vestige of post-mortem redemption. Thus, the dogma of death as the dividing line between eternal life and everlasting damnation is finally set forth as a part of the religious system. Indeed, Dart posits that virtually each of the twenty-seven chapters of Book 21 is "an ongoing refusal to accept any position post-mortem other than eternal punishment." Naturally, Augustine employs scripture to support his thesis, but his selection is fine-tuned to serve his purpose. "Chapter after chapter," stresses Dart, "he rebuts any other position that could seemingly offer post-mortem transformation, purification, or any notion of Universal Salvation." *The City of God* henceforth became the "Sanhedrin position for Roman Catholicism and significant elements of the protestant theological tradition" (Quotes from podcast *Augustine On Eternal Punishment*).}

> The great and tragic cost of the African Bishop's influence necessitated explaining away those passages of universal hope in which so many of his Eastern and indeed Western predecessors and contemporaries rejoiced. Augustine achieved this astonishing feat in a highly sophistical and beguiling way – the earlier romance of his mother's tears, the sheer magnetism of his words, the poetry of his bared soul, and the exceptional honesty of his heart produced a heady blend of sentimental conviction that softened the brutal reality of later revelations. In his writing, Augustine exudes an unsettling blend of confessor, theologian and gladiator, through which he introduces a disturbing cluster of 'firsts' to the Christian faith: He was first to deny God's love for the entire race; first to refuse Christ's death as extending to all men; first to reject the idea of free will, first to forge a theology so "cruel and shocking" that he stood "aghast, but nonetheless unmoved, as he surveyed its completed fabric" – *Augustinian Revolution in Theology* 128. Of course, it was natural that he would waver from time to time. Take, for example, his interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:4 (recorded by Gieseler and outlined in *Chapter 2*). Augustine's struggle with this verse was real; it taunted him mightily, for he was forced to either deny God's will to save all or return to what had been part of the fabric of his early life. The man was no fool. He knew only too well that a redemption of the world that failed to save the world was a contradiction in terms. Therefore, universal redemption must either be true or false; there were no half-measures. Augustine's discomfiture – which he frequently shows – lays bare his unwillingness to accept the plain words of Paul to Timothy. Thus, his struggle to evade the obvious takes on ludicrous proportions in his multiple efforts to explain away the text (see *Chapter 2*; *THE SAVING OF*

ALL). While Clement, two hundred years earlier, had no problem accepting – nay, *embracing* – Paul's statement as a pledge of Divine Fidelity to the race, Augustine could not follow. Indeed, he seems intent on making the text mean anything except what it *does* mean. In the end, circumstance thrust upon him what his tormented soul demanded: that "no one can be saved except those *whom God wills.*" Hence, the notorious doctrine with which he is identified – predestination.

But herein lies the rub: before Augustine, no honoured saint, Western or Eastern, besmirched scripture with such darkness. Those most worthy, from the apostles on, would have baulked at the merest hint of a 'limited election' along Augustinian lines. Even the severest among Latin antiquity never hesitated to proclaim God's *desire* to save all men. Nor was such deterministic innovation popular with contemporary or later authors; many saw it for what it was – pagan fatalism that undermined freedom of choice. Indeed, Augustine's deterministic fatalism finds a much more compliant pedigree among the ancient cultures of Mesopotamia and Persia. Centuries on, the Russian theologian Sergius Bulgakov elaborates: "To the question, 'What explains this election of some and reprobation of others?' Augustine responded that he did not know, referring to the unfathomability of the ways of God. The inevitable conclusion that follows and was drawn later is that Christ brought redemption and came into the world only for the elect" – *The Bride and the Lamb* 214. Words like "unfathomability" serve as a tidy hook on which to hang incongruity. Never in a million years could Augustine harmonise his notion with the character of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. He merely reduced the whole hypothesis to the level of divine fiat, something Bulgakov likens to a cosmic "mechanical force." Nonetheless, Augustine could disingenuously own his earlier universalism, since *all* would indeed be saved according to God's will…*all the elect*, that is! His thought process on this desolate issue has rightly been described as pathological: the disease of sin "interests him more than the remedy for the plain reason that he believes no remedy to exist for the lapse of the world. Nor does he seem to care. It is not redemption of man; it is sin and its penalty – it is occult Divine justice, a subject of which he never wearies" – Allin (*Ibid*. 129).

Consequently, the late great Bishop of Hippo came to believe that the whole human race was *conspersis damnata massa perditionis* (one damned batch and mass of perdition) out of which a few are elected to salvation, the remainder, lost forever. Christian theology, ever since, has suffered from elements of this forbidding dogma. Even today, people who would ordinarily cringe before such a teaching may unthinkingly voice aspects of it, so complete is its saturation within the religious psyche. Yet Augustine was not without his softer moments, and in these he felt obliged to repudiate his own dogmatism: "I would not," he admits, "close the door to a more careful consideration as to the punishments of the lost, and the sense in which they are in scripture called eternal" – *City of God*, Bk. 21, ch. 26. As Farrar notes, had he always spoken in such a moderate tone, the Christian world might have been saved from many of its later perils (for more, see *Appendix V*; [sub-heading] *The Dark Side of Augustine*).

It is certain that a belief in the "restoration of all things at the end of the aeons" flourished during this early period in both East and West up to and including part of the 5th century. Its decline was most sharply evident in the West during the revolutionary changes of the 5th century, by which time ecclesiastical Latin had mostly supplanted Greek. The historian Neander informs us that the doctrine of the final restoration, taken alone, was never regarded as heretical or untenable within the limits of the Christian faith until the furious attacks on Origen, two centuries after his death, led to mixing up this opinion with others that *were* viewed as such. To summarise: (1) the eschatological views expressed in scripture, along with the writings of, for example, Clement, Origen and Gregory, were held by multitudes in both the East and West; (2) they were defended by prominent church authorities without injury to their character or questioning of their allegiance; (3) they found champions in some of the deepest thinkers and ablest writers of the three largest schools of Alexandria, Antioch and Cappadocia. Remember, too, that Antioch, while fully espousing restorational teachings, rejected – in fact, was antagonistic to – so-called 'Origenism,' which indicates how the eschatological component was independent of a single individual. As to the significance of these things, the reader must, as always, decide.

Before moving on, we will reflect for a moment on the Eastern Orthodox Church, whose origin and doctrine emerged from the Greek-cultured East and spread to Byzantium, Russia and Eastern Europe. 'Orthodoxy' remained, to a considerable extent, shielded from the Latinate eschatology that developed in the West, maintaining instead greater adherence to the Greek-speaking patristics. In his book, *The Orthodox Faith*, Bishop Timothy Ware provides a summary of Orthodox belief: "There is no terrorism in the Orthodox doctrine of God. Orthodox Christians do not cringe before Him in abject fear, but think of Him as *philanthropos*, the 'lover of men.' Yet they keep in mind that Christ, at His return, will come as *judge.* Hell is not so much a place where God imprisons man as a place where man, by misusing his freedom, chooses to imprison himself. And even in 'hell,' the wicked are not deprived of the love of God, but by their own choice, they experience as suffering what the saints experience as joy. 'The love of God will be an intolerable torment for those who have not acquired it within themselves'…It is heretical to say that all *must* be saved, for this is to deny free will; but it is legitimate to hope that all *may* be saved." The 7th-century theologian and mystic, Isaac of Nineveh, once asked: "What is a merciful heart?" He answers: "It is a heart that burns with love for the whole of creation, for men, for the birds, for the beasts, for the demons, for all creatures." Unlike the Catholic faith, the Orthodox view is that men do not have to agree on every detail, much less be infallible; unlike the Protestant faith, Eastern Orthodoxy does not to this day denigrate or persecute her saints for fully embracing the universal implication of Paul's words in Colossians 1:20.

PART III: THE MIDDLE AGES

"It would have been far better for the Church," writes Farrar in *Mercy and Judgment*, "if her medieval admiration of Augustine had been less blind, and her sense of his fallibility, and the many limitations of his knowledge and intellectual

power, more decided" (295). But alas, it was not to be. Augustine's writings were destined to become the 'Textus Receptus' of the faith, his dualistic eschatology firmly entrenched in the rising centuries. It was the most fitting framework on which the now-established religio-political machine of Western Christendom could wield and sustain its power. In earlier centuries, when Christianity was a persecuted faith, it was easy for believers to find common ground without going into precise shades of meaning. But when 'the faith' became the official religious and political tool of the Empire, the exact definition of its principles became an affair of the state. Accordingly, it was in the 6th and 7th centuries that restorational views received their 'official' condemnation. Some of the speculative opinions that had surrounded the doctrine were associated with Origen's system of belief. Up till then, a few of these had received criticism even from his friends and allies. This was only fair and proper, although some defended Origen on the ground that many of his views were speculative only and never declared as "that which is in harmony with ecclesiastical and apostolic tradition." Athanasius and Jerome had defended him on this ground. As Farrar rightly observes, "In this, Origen shows his wisdom. The wisest teachers regarding the future are those who repudiate untenable dogmatism, not those who themselves dogmatise." But medieval Christendom could ill afford such liberal notions and sought to enforce its authority by the anathema of not only Origen but restorational teaching at large.

Before moving on to these dark events, we digress briefly to consider two other significant episodes. The first, occurring in 514, was a revival of restorational views that flourished for a time among the inhabitants of Palestine. Its prosperity was such that over the next two decades, conflict broke out between protagonists and antagonists. Inevitably, the intrigue reached the emperor's ears with devastating consequences. The second pertains to what Allin calls "a striking incident in the history of religious thought." In 533, after that long period of gloom known as the fall of the Western Roman Empire, the works of Dionysius were published in Constantinople. What these writings embrace recalls the earlier teaching of Alexandria, Antioch, and Cappadocia, "asserting, as they do, that all things come out of God, and return to Him, cleansed from all stain" *C.T.* 153. One or two excerpts illustrate their general tone: "All things – whatsoever exist and are formed – exist and are being formed for the sake of beauty and goodness...and He is the beginning and end of all things...for 'of Him and through Him, and unto Him are all things'" (Rom 11.36); "Even of all evils, the beginning and end is the good, and those which are opposed to it (God) converts and holds together all things...nor permitting them to fall away from Himself, and perish by departing from the all perfect home" – *De div. Nom*. Thus, the belief prevailed, and fortuitously, numerous courageous souls continued to make its influence felt amid the rapidly ensuing darkness.

The Emperor Justinian (482-565)

Justinian was the most powerful of the Byzantine Emperors, reigning from 527 to 565 in Constantinople. One of his great passions was to lay down dogmas for the Church's guidance and to enforce them through persecution when other persuasions failed. In the year 540, Justinian ordered the formation of a lengthy edict suppressing certain doctrines. Just seven years earlier, at the

behest of his wife, the empress Theodora, he had issued a similar edict in an attempt to destroy the reputation and works of the Antiochian, Theodore of Mopsuestia. Now, his sights were set on the foremost from the Alexandrian school. Setting forth the position to Patriarch Mennas of Constantinople, he wrote, "If anyone says or thinks that the punishment of devils and impious men is temporary and that it will one day end, or that there will be a restitution and reintegration of devils or impious men, let him be anathema." It should be stressed that this was merely Justinian's personal opinion, and the opinion of a creature hardly fit to tie the shoes of an Origen or a Theodore. One has said of him, "For good or for evil, Justinian was wholly cast in the mould of formulas; he knew nothing higher than an edict." In particular, the emperor sought to make it very plain that the life of the saints was *everlasting* and the doom of the lost likewise. He did not claim that the Greek word *aionios* had been misunderstood. When setting out the position of the Church, he did not say, "We believe in aeonian punishment," as so many of the Church Fathers had 300 years earlier. Rather, writing in the expressive Greek language, Justinian laid down that, "The Holy Church of Christ teaches an "UNENDABLE aionian" (*ateleutetos aionios*) life for the righteous and UNENDABLE (*ateleutetos*) punishment for the wicked." Justinian did not attempt to argue that *aionios* signified endless. Instead, he added a word the meaning of which is quite unequivocal, and, more to the point, a word found nowhere in scripture! Justinian's letter still exists and offers compelling evidence for the correct definition of *aionios*. Thus did Justinian "serve the enemies of Christian civilization well" – Henri de Lubac.

The reaction to this outrage, recorded by Facundus, was not dissimilar to Theodore's earlier denunciation by Cyril. Facundus passes on a confession of Domitian of Galatia (546), former Bishop of Ancyra, who writes, 'they have hastily run out to anathematise most holy and glorious teachers on account of those doctrines which have been advanced concerning...restitution; and this, indeed, under pretext of Origen, but thereby anathematising all those saints who were *before* and have been after him'" – *Pro. Def. Trium*. The *Westminster Handbook* (p60) points out that what was of immediate concern here was the contemporary (so-called) 'Origenist' faction, the Isochristio Monks, who, in fact, expressed views far-removed from the one whose name they honoured. For Justinian and his synod, it seemed good and proper to condemn Origen too, whose writings were assumed to have spawned their heresy. But in this lies a further embarrassment unknown to many. According to the *Westminster Handbook*, the objectionable texts were not Origen's at all; they were the writings of Evagrius Ponticus! This may help explain why the Fifth General Council of 553, though expressly convened to formally denounce the teachings of Origen, did not condemn his teaching on Universal Salvation! It was not until 150 years later, in 696, that a council publicly condemned this doctrine for the first time as the "drunken ravings as to the future life of the dead." Notably, this attack had to be repeated at the seventh council (787) and then again at the eighth (869), which is some indication of the persistence of the teaching and the esteem with which it was held.

Vigilius, the (then) current Pope in Rome, makes an interesting footnote to this tawdry affair. Initially, he refused to sign Justinian's indicting document

alleging the complicity of "The Three Chapters," which concerned the writings of Theodore, Theodoret, and a letter of Ibas of Edessa. The blackening of their names was a political manoeuvre to appease the Monophysites with whom Justinian sought union. There were no justifying precedents for dealing so harshly with the memory of men who had died completely in harmony with the Church. Because of his reluctance, Vigilius was summoned to Constantinople in 545. Held captive in the city, the Pope suffered much over the next few years until, in February 554, he relented and gave his consent. Vigilius died on his return journey to Rome the next year.

The Latin Infernum

Predictably, the broad effects of anathema and formal condemnation were those of stifling free inquiry and checking theological growth. The spiritual darkness that followed lasted almost a thousand years, during which, Henry Oxenham says, "the theology of Western Christendom slept her winter sleep." By the time of Pope Gregory (590-604), the age of barbarism had begun. Gregory's dialogues abound in legends and visions that are the chief source of common beliefs about hell and purgatory in the Middle Ages. Pagan Rome's hellish *infernum* doubtless played a role in influencing the writings of the early Latins. We also know that intertestamental literature (known as *Apocrypha*) was in circulation at this time; the *Apocalypse of Enoch* and the *Apocalypse of Ezra* are prominent examples, both of which postulate the concept of unending retribution. Tertullian, among others, was influenced by these writings; indeed, he considered them virtually on par with scripture. On occasions, he was not unknown to employ their language in his vitriol against the persecuting despots of the day (2nd-3rd C). Despite his formal dismissal as a heretic, Fairbairn reminds us that Tertullian was the first "to embody the Western spirit (and thus) did so much to shape its later course" (*Ibid*. 95). As such, he was first to proclaim in his *Apology* a fire that "does not consume what it scorches, but while it burns it repairs." He further exhorts us to "expect the greatest of all spectacles (at) the last eternal judgment of the universe. How shall I admire, how laugh, how rejoice, how exult, when I behold so many proud monarchs and fancy gods groaning in the lowest abyss of darkness, so many magistrates who persecuted the name of the Lord, liquifying in fiercer fires than they ever kindled against Christians" (48:31-33). Such forceful (not to say, vengeful) rhetoric, along with his stoic philosophy and jurisprudence – moreover, the "massive one-sidedness of his nature" (Neander) – left a dark and disconcerting legacy for those of like temperament or persuasion to follow.

Almost certainly, one of these was Minucius Felix (185(?)-250), about whose life we know very little. His lasting legacy is a single written labour entitled *Octavius*. In this work, Felix elaborates on his predecessor's unhealthy captivation with fiery punishment, exclaiming in what seems pitiless delight, "Nor is there either measure or termination to these torments…The intelligent fire burns the limbs and restores them, feeds on them and nourishes them…As the fires of the thunderbolts strike upon the bodies, and do not consume them; as the fires of…burning lands (volcanoes) everywhere glow, but are not wasted; so that penal fire is not fed by the waste of those who burn, but is nourished by the unexhausted eating away of their bodies" (*Oct*. 35:3).

A few years hence, Cyprian (210-58), Bishop of Carthage, would take up this infernal baton. Unlike Felix, his written legacy is considerable. In *Glory of Martyrdom*, we find terminologies such as "never-ending punishments," "eternal vengeance," "perpetual burning," and an endless 'torment' that has at last morphed into "torture" (8:5). Cyprian was a brilliant but controversial figure who, after deserting his post during the Decian persecutions, paid the ultimate price under the emperor Valerian. His was the era of believers meeting the swords of their executioners and being torn asunder by wild beasts in the arena. It is therefore scarcely coincidental that *satisfaction* – more than solace – be sought in the vengeful rhetoric of flamboyant authors. The innocent victims of pagan Rome's violence naturally looked for a voice. However, writings such as these seek a vengeful hatred utterly out of step with the true Gospel and, even more, the gracious, weeping spirit that mourned over its persecuting oppressors and sought forgiveness for its brutal slayers. Nor does this so much as touch on the ghastly spiritual impact such projections potentially have on those who embrace the view.

It was in this environment that the sordid Apocalypse of Peter made its first appearance, which probably further influenced – perhaps even justified – the evolution of harsh dogma through its depictions of a hellish afterlife. Greek historian Dimitris Kyrtatas writes that it "was seriously considered for inclusion in the New Testament canon, and…exercised a lasting influence on Christian doctrine, iconography, and popular morality. As late as the middle of the 5th century, it was still being read in some Palestinian churches" – The Origins of Christian Hell 288. All this notwithstanding, an intriguing paradox about the document rests on its latent restorationalism. Yes, that's right; even here, the depicted horrors appear more as threats than omens of endless torture! Indeed, in all probability, its restorational sentiments proved a stronger disincentive for its ultimate inclusion than the horrors it depicts. It seems that (in the West at least) virtually any amount of exaggerated profanity could be voiced over God's judgments, but at the slightest mention of the glories of his mercy to all (Rom 11:32), the stake was ready.

Within all this lies a tension between what is fact and fiction, parabolic and literal, pagan and Christian, divinely just and implacably human. Of course, uncertainty in such an environment seldom endures. Less than two centuries on, Augustine produced his own vision of damnation in The City of God – a 'City,' incidentally (by his own calculation), little more than a hamlet dwarfed by Satan's metropolis. Thus, human destiny was sealed by a tradition that flourished in "definiteness and horror with each succeeding century, until we come at last to the unmitigated atrocities of…the Elucidarium, the writings of Bede, and the visions of Dante" – M. & J. 233.

Because the Bible offered no single, structured image of hell, medieval theology sought to marry authentic scriptural judgment to ideas borrowed from classical paganism, producing many foolish and contradictory visions. In his *Divine Comedy (*c.1321), Dante attempts to organise hell into a rational, moral cosmos of eternity for the first time. Although pure fiction, his brilliantly structured imagery, with its novel psychological edge and undeniable elements of moral truth, had a resounding and, in many ways, devastating impact on all subsequent generations. Dante learnt very early in his career the power of well-chosen words, and no doubt his natural genius was enhanced by his use of the

common tongue (instead of Latin), thereby conveying his verse to a broader audience. The poet makes no attempt to conceal personal prejudice – the pope who casts him out, along with the many others who, to his own mind, betray him – yes, he names names! – now agonise in the lowest level of his *Inferno*; while the woman he adores, though hardly knew, resides in the highest bliss of his *Paradiso*! Naturally, such sophisticated and poetic symbolism was welcomed by those who either favoured or were fascinated by the terror, lending considerable weight to the existing tradition. Volcanoes were indeed seen as the vent holes of the subterranean inferno, and their roaring the sound of the damned. Archbishop Wake informs us that "the flames of Etna and Vesuvius were thought on purpose to have been kindled to torment departed souls. Some were seen broiling upon gridirons, others roasting upon spits, others shivering in the water or choking in chimneys" – *Discourse*. By contrast, the silence, vagueness, or distinct counter-testimony of the Greek Patristics is not without deep significance. The ancient scholars certainly speak of a 'purificational fire' after this life – their words have been repeatedly used to endorse purgatory – but as Farrar points out, "It has been sufficiently shown that the Fathers are usually speaking of a fire at the Day of Judgment, and not of purgatory" – *M. & J.* 69. Even so, as Allin informs us, "the creed then current was mercy itself compared with (later protestants), leaving as it did a door of hope widely open, beyond the grave, to all but a few exceptionally great sinners" – *C.T.* 151.

{Purgatory may well be a limited concession to the broad hope of early Christendom, though it just as likely grew out of a need to mitigate the excesses of the Augustinian inferno (Augustine rejected the notion of a purgatory). Jukes more or less melds the two, believing it "a natural result of the efforts of Augustine and others to silence the doctrine of Restitution" – *Rest*. 190. Purgatory at least provided an element of comfort and hope, something Calvin's schemes hopelessly failed to offer in the Reformation and post-Reformation era.}

Maximus The Confessor (580-662)

August Neander (d 1950), along with more recent scholars such as Paul Blowers and Jordan Daniel Wood, have highlighted an Eastern scholar of prodigious interest. In his *Ecclesiastical History*, Neander refers to the mystic Maximus as the ablest theologian of his day, holding teachings that logically lead to the doctrine of final restoration. Neander ascribes the following insights to this humble Byzantium teacher: "It is necessary that as all nature is to receive at the resurrection immortality of the flesh...so too the fallen powers of the soul must, in the process of the ages, cast off the memories of sin implanted in them, and having passed all the ages...come to God; and so by knowledge, not the fruition of good, receive strength and be restored to their original state" (242). The expression "the process of the ages" is a reminder of the striking difference in vocabulary between East and West. Nonetheless, Maximus is something of a cautionary tale regarding *apokatastasis*. He lived within a century of Justinian's barbarity and therefore approached the topic of restitution with caution. At times, he critiques views attributed to Origen, although Origen is neither named nor his actual beliefs explicitly denied. On the contrary, the monk shares a deep identity with the now long-deceased Alexandrian. A fine example lies in his handling of 1 Corinthians 15:28, where

he writes, “God will truly come to be ‘all in all,’ embracing all and giving substance to all in himself, in that no being will have any more a movement independent of God, and no being will be deprived of God’s presence. Thanks to this presence, we shall be, and shall be called, gods and children, body and limbs, because we shall be restored to the perfection of God’s project” – *Amb*. 7:1092C ff. According to (among others) Michaud, Grumel, and von Balthasar, Maximus did indeed preserve the doctrine of a complete restoration, but with all due caution following Justinian’s deadly purges. However, what this saint *does* reject is the notion of an *automatic* redemption, which formed part of the ‘Origenism’ that followed in the wake of the Alexandrian’s death. Critics, of course, are quick to jump on this error and apply it to anyone who celebrates the teaching. In fact, excepting Augustine (paradox or paradoxes!), all the notable patristics believed in a redemptive process that in no way violated freedom of choice, but one that nonetheless led inexorably to Christ. Their one major difference from so many subsequent disciples (subsequent to Augustine, that is) was that they rejoiced in a God sufficiently powerful, wise, patient, and loving to achieve that end.

Some indication of the force of Maximus’ writings and speech is revealed in the shocking way he died. In 662, at the stoic age of 82, he was tried for his beliefs; his tongue was cut out and his right hand mutilated so that he could no longer speak or write. In so doing, the religious authorities believed they had silenced his witness. What they failed to realise is that a ‘Confessor’ not only confesses with words, but with his life and death. And so, this now mute and disabled sage became an even greater symbol through suffering, his silence testifying more than any written or spoken word ever could. Maximus was exiled to present-day Georgia, where, debilitated by his maltreatment, he expired that same year.

Isaac of Nineveh (613-700)

Mystic, monk, and theologian, Isaac is recognised as being one of the utmost, if not *the* utmost, advocates of God’s Infinite Love and Providence. As such, this East Arabian saint has been a positive spiritual force for generations within Christian communities worldwide. After initial monasterial seclusion, Isaac’s exceptional gifts secured him the post of Bishop at Nineveh, but he resigned within only five months to return to the contemplative life. It was this prolonged time of Spartan seclusion that helped shape his famous ascetic homilies. For Isaac, contemplating the life and sacrifice of Christ was less about sin than about God’s enormous heart. Even condemnation was viewed as a tool for transforming the will, leading to redemption and restoration. Isaac believed that this Love would be experienced as torment by any soul that willfully sealed itself against it, or even against the kindness of a neighbour. Under such conditions, one can readily imagine how the transformative process could feel like hellish torments. This doctrine was not unique to Isaac. Virtually all the Eastern Fathers up to his time ruled out a god that inflicted retribution without cleansing and instruction, which is why a purposeless, unending penalty was considered errant folly. As Diodore and Theodore were Isaac’s most immediate guides to scripture, doctrine, and spirituality, he closely adhered to their understanding and teaching of *apokatastasis*. It is

gratifying to see a renaissance of interest, even in the West, in the life and thought of this gentle, humble, and devout soul.
Clement Scotus I (8th Century)

Mosheim in his *Ecclesiastical History* alludes to Clement, a native of Ireland: "By the best and most authentic accounts, Clement was much better acquainted with the true principles and doctrines of Christianity...and hence he is considered by many as a confessor and sufferer for the truth in this barbarous age." Priestley thinks it probable "that if his sentiments and conduct were fully known, he would be ranked with the most early reformers" – *History of the Church*. An ordained presbyter, Clement at length renounced the Church's authority, discarded its superstitions, rejected its canons and the decrees of its councils, even the treatises and expositions of some of its Fathers – Clement argued against Augustine's dogma of predestination, earning himself the title of heretic in consequence. Although details of his beliefs are sketchy, he appears to have shared many of the views of his fellow countryman, John Scotus, who gained prominence in the following century. Under Clement's ministry, several independent congregations formed in France and Germany, where he enjoyed widespread support; these soon came to the notice of civil and ecclesiastical powers. His eventual falling out with Boniface, Archbishop of Mentz (Germany), led to incarceration in 745. He died in prison, leaving numerous disciples among the lower orders of the Clergy.

Johannes Scotus Eriugena (800-77)

This more famous Irish scholar produced a work entitled *De Divisione Naturae* (aka *Periphyseon*). Farrar unreservedly describes the work as "a profound and subtle argument for the universal restoration of mankind." Oxenham, in turn, describes its author as "one of the most original thinkers of his own or any age, as one born out of due time." He was one of the few Western theologians of his era to master Greek, and consequently, Farrar adds, "towered above the heads of all his contemporaries." This provided Eriugena a substantial advantage over his North African predecessor, leading him to ascribe Augustine's exegetical difficulties, somewhat generously, to his ignorance of Greek. Moreover, it established the Irishman's view that the most erudite from the past were, of necessity, the Greek-speaking patristics. These included 'St Origen' (as he affectionately calls him), Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose, and Maximus. Like Clement before him, Eriugena dismissed Augustine's idea of predestination because, in his extremity against Pelagian, he grew excessively pessimistic in imagining all humanity having lost its capacity for good, and because he interpreted 1 Timothy 2:4 ("God intends all mankind to be saved…") as referring to only the predestined elect. Scotus argued that future punishment consists solely in the absence of future bliss (i.e. loss through estrangement). Evil, having no origin in the Divine nature – the 'ontological view' – must be expunged through purposeful, temporary punishment. Therefore, what Christ redeemed cannot and *will not* be irretrievably lost. Eriugena deemed the contradictions of scripture to be apparent only, caused by the finite character of human language and

perception. Future pain will be of the mind; "fire," "brimstone," etc., are symbols designed to teach the carnal. All things must ultimately return to God (Rom 11:36); the distinction of sex will be abolished (Gal 3:28); heaven and earth shall become paradise (Rev 21) and the creature one with the Creator, *Him being* All in all (1 Cor 15:28). Amid such gloom, Eriugena offers powerful testimony to the fact that even in the darkest night God has His beacons shinning. He contrived to reconcile his revolutionary eschatology – which, when all is said and done, is merely reiterating the most lofty elements of scripture – with a nominal acceptance of everlasting punishment by saying that though all "malitia" is to be abolished, its "phantasiae" will remain in the conscience. But, like his Eastern predecessors five centuries earlier, he speaks with unmistakable certainty of a final and complete restoration. He thought it absurd that Christ would save only a fraction of His creation.

Of less note is Ecumenius (990), thought to be a bishop from Thessaly, Greece, who, like the many before him, believed that God could be all in all only after sin and evil were expelled from the universe. Theophylact (1071), a Byzantine archbishop from Ohrid, Bulgaria, held a similar view. But most surprising of all – certainly the most confounding – is the stern Anselm (1109) who, in a somewhat reflective (or uncharacteristically unguarded) moment, penned, "It is quite foreign to God's nature to suffer any reasonable creature wholly to perish...nor is it possible for the reasonable mind to think otherwise" – *Cur Deus Homo*. This astonishing and candid confession is another example (like Augustine's, 600 years earlier) of how *thinking* clergy – along with everyone else retaining the power to think – wrestle with the conflicts of this impossibly dissonant issue.

A trace of the teaching appears again in 1190, this time among the monks of France. According to Priestley, Rainold, abbot of St Martin, was accused in a council held that year of maintaining two 'errors,' one of which was that all men would ultimately be saved. The Dominican Thomas Aquinas also confirms a universal hope in his own 13th century; he was probably referring to Amauri. According to Fleury, this eminent professor of logic and theology at Paris taught that Jesus Christ abolished the old law and that persons were saved by God's grace through faith in Christ. Accounts given by his enemies accuse him of ten 'heresies,' the last being "that all creatures in the end would return unto God, and be converted into Him; so that they will be one, individually, with Him" – *Ecclesiastical History*. Amauri was forced to recant his views, presumably under pain of death. He left several disciples who, in 1209, were magnanimously condemned to either burning or life imprisonment. Although Amauri died peacefully, he was later anathematised, his bones exhumed and thrown on a dunghill (Luther considered him a Proto-Protestant).

Du Pin documents a brief re-telling of the Lollards (with whom John Wycliffe was affiliated), a sect that spread throughout Germany in the 14th century. He writes, "Trithemius...says that Bohemia and Austria were infected with them; that there were *above twenty-four thousand persons* in Germany who held these errors; and that the greater part defended them with obstinacy, even unto death" – *Eccl. Hist*. Du Pin records one of these supposed errors as being "that the damned in hell should one day be saved."

Fifty years later (1368) in England, Langham, Archbishop of Canterbury, convened a council passing judgment on thirty propositions taught in his

province. Among these propositions, nine were condemned, the most significant (for us) being "all the damned, even the demons, may be restored and become happy." Priestley, who lists all nine propositions, comments, "It was an honour to the age and to the country to produce such sentiments as these; but it was but a sudden blaze amid thick darkness, and, as far as appears, was soon extinguished."

John Picus (1463-94)

Just before the Reformation, a shining light appeared in the form of one Johannes Giovanni Picus, Earl of Mirandola and Concordia. A precocious child with an exceptional memory, Giovanni was schooled in Latin and possibly Greek at a very early age. Anticipating a role in the Church, he was named a papal protonotary (probably honorary) at the age of 10 and in 1477, he went to Bologna to study canon law. But at the young age of twenty-one, and already a distinguished Italian scholar, Picus alarmed the Church in 1486 by advancing certain radical ideas in a work titled *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, which has been called the "Manifesto of the Renaissance." Of the 900 theses he lists in this profound work, the most relevant (for us) is that infinite pain cannot be justified as a consequence of moral sin, since sin itself is finite; therefore, it only merits finite punishment. His views quickly raised concerns among the establishment. In response, Picus wrote an apology in which he subtly explained away the 'heretical' character of his propositions. Following his successful absolution, he devoted himself (according to Du Pin) to studying scripture and "controversial writings" after giving up his earldom and distributing his goods among the poor. He died in 1494 at the age of only thirty-one.

Farrar informs us that Universal Salvation was at this time also the outlook of the School of Poictiers, and, according to Durandus, that of "Aliquorum Juristarum."

***PART IV*:** THE REFORMATION

The Dean of Wells records a sentiment from an old English manual, *The Fifteen O's*, which illustrates the tone of religious feeling in England preceding the Reformation. He quotes a prayer which reads: "Be merciful to those souls for whom there is no hope...in their torment, save that they were made in Thine image...Put forth Thy right hand and free them from the interminable pains and anguish of hell, and lead them to the fellowship of the citizens on high." Again, these words exemplify that 'eternal' conflict which exists between the deepest feelings of humanity and the darkest dogmas of religion.

John Wycliffe (1328-84)

Wycliffe has been called the Morning Star of the Reformation, with C. R. Condor proclaiming that he "founded the Reformation at Oxford in 1360." In his opposition to the claims of 14th-century Rome, Wycliffe was without fear.

Well did he live up to his saying, "Christian men ought to travail night and day over text of Holy Writ." He has been described as the one Englishman in the past 1,100 years who was able to shape Christian thought on the continent of Europe. Using the limited tools available, Wycliffe set about translating the Latin of Jerome's *Vulgate* into the English language. Another Jerome (of Prague), friend and disciple of Jan Hus, was converted at Oxford to Wycliffe's views. Hus ended his life at the stake, but not before the Hussite movement gave birth to the Moravians, whose faith celebrated the Fatherhood of God, His great love for all humanity, and, apparently, with some, a full restoration. Eventually, the message spread to nearby South Germany, where it influenced a young Martin Luther.

Despite not having any Greek manuscript, Wycliffe came very close to fully understanding the 'ages' in scripture. Some of his beliefs on the future are detailed in his own works, most of which are written in Latin. One of them, *Trialogus*, is a discussion between three parties: Truth, Liar, and Prudence. It contains a lucid dissertation on the distinction between eternity, ages, and time. He writes, "It is one matter for a thing to exist always, and another for a thing to be eternal. The world exists always, because at every time and yet it is not eternal because it is created, for the moment of creation must have a beginning as the world had." Wycliffe believed God alone could be eternal, without change, without beginning or end. The world, on the other hand, had a mutable existence and experienced a continual succession of time with all its decaying consequences. For the saints and spiritual beings such as angels, he perceived a third form of existence, the "aevum" life, which could be termed the "age-long" life (*aevum* being the Latin word for 'age'). He supposed that in that life there would be no succession of time as we know it, for 'time' represents death under present conditions; though neither would it be eternal. It would be something in between (the 'deathless' state?). It is unfortunate that Luther and others could not have carried Wycliffe's insightful discoveries further.

{Wycliffe's life overlapped with the English mystic, Julian of Norwich (1343-1416), who lived only 170 miles away, and about whom much has been written or said by others already. It is sufficient here to honour her secluded devotion to the belief that "all manner of things will be well" as depicted in her *Revelations of Divine Love*, the first published work by a female author in England.}

By the beginning of the 16th century, the Church had become deeply entrenched in a vast system of financial exactions, draining gold from every corner of Europe. Luxury, materialism, irreverence, and even harlotry filled a burgeoning spiritual void among her worldly clergy. The spirit of questioning that had marked the Renaissance was now directed towards Christendom with intensifying vigour. Following the Bohemian Jan Hus, an Italian monk called Savonarola attacked the luxury and scandals of both church and state. Like Hus, he ended his life at the stake. Then the Dutch scholar Erasmus mocked the superstitions that had crept into the faith. Erasmus prized the writings of Origen, "for whom," according to Edward Plumptre, "he professed a far deeper love and admiration than for Augustine" – *Spirits in Prison* 190. Erasmus speaks of "evil tongues" having blackened the name of the noble saint. Plumptre provides a timely reminder that

wherever Origen is studied, let alone admired, an opening is made "for the reception of the views with which his name was identified" (*Ibid.* 191).

Martin Luther (1483-1546)

> It was the Augustinian friar Martin Luther, coupled with the timely invention of the printing press, that accelerated the trend away from Papal control and corruption back to a simple faith in God and His Word. In 1507, Luther was ordained into the priesthood and later appointed professor at the University of Wittenberg. Soon after, he came to believe the words of the Apostle Paul: "The just shall live by faith." Luther's reliance on the Bible as the one source of revealed truth, along with faith in Christ rather than well-intentioned deeds as the path to salvation, formed one of the basic principles of Protestantism. His views on the future were understandably influenced by the venerated Augustine; he was, after all, part of the brotherhood. Still, Luther's later writings and sermons lean more towards conditionalism, perhaps at times extending even some measure beyond. About this, Gerhard Forde states, "Modern scholarship has demonstrated that Luther simply did not share the views on the nature of faith and salvation that subsequent generations have foisted upon him" – *Where God Meets Man* 6. Men will no doubt argue this point for many years to come.
>
> Early in Luther's journey, he uncovered and published an anonymous 14th-century manuscript to which he gave the title *Theologia Germanica*. Luther praised the work and, in so doing, assisted its dissemination among fellow protestants. While this document does not explicitly proclaim restorationalism, it makes an argument for 'damnation' not being an irrevocable destination, but rather a catalyst for salvation, which is, of course, a necessary tenet of the Larger Hope. While Luther's impetuous nature gave rise to some unevenness, he could at times display a surprising generosity of spirit. An example of this is expressed in a letter he wrote to Hansen Von Rechenberg in 1523: "God forbid that I should limit the time for acquiring faith to the present life. In the depths of the divine mercy, there may be opportunity to win it in the future state."

Centuries later, a Lutheran equally famous for his courage would reflect the same spirit: "Justification and sanctification are inconceivable for anyone if that individual believer cannot be assured that God will embrace not only them but all those for whose sins they are responsible" – Dietrich Bonhoeffer (*Sanctorum Communio*). In his second dissertation, *Act and Being*, Bonhoeffer adds, "Not all roads appear blocked to the eschatology of apokatastasis." Perhaps, like Luther (at times), Bonhoeffer's position and office prevented him from openly proclaiming the view, though he obviously saw its possibility. Such latency on the part of both men was much less apparent with the darkly enigmatic John Calvin.

The event of the Reformation held as its ideals the liberation of the human mind, the search for truth, and a spirit of free inquiry. It ostensibly gave men the right to judge for themselves from the written oracles as to duty, faith and salvation. Of those who could read, and thus form meaningful judgments, many drew different conclusions from those of the principal reformers. For example, not all

shared the extreme view popularised by Calvin: that every soul passes directly and irrevocably to either heaven or hell at the moment of death. According to Farrar, this was never a widespread tenet of the early Church in the East *or West*: (even) Hilary, Ambrose, Lactantius, and even Tertullian "are all perfectly explicit on this point, and to our own (English) reformers it seemed so clear that the entrance to the state of aeonian joy or sorrow was not decided till the resurrection" – *M. & J.* 68.

John Calvin (1509-64)

With Calvin's eschatology, we again enter the atmosphere of the courtroom – like Tertullian and Cyprian, he was a lawyer – and witness the full and blatant logic of Augustinian predestination. Allin sees Calvin as a "mere imitator" of Augustine, while Hart suggests he embraced every bad aspect of his teaching, whilst avoiding the good. "By predestination," Calvin asserts, "we mean the eternal decree of God, by which He determined with Himself whatever He wished to happen with regard to every man. All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation" – *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Book 3) 21,5. James S. Stewart describes Calvin's scheme as "repulsive and immoral" – *A Man In Christ* 15; Lewis deems it a form of "devil-worship" – *The Problem of Pain* 28; while Bulgakov calls the notion a "monstrous misunderstanding which replaces the revelation of the living and personal God with the doctrine of an impersonal mechanism of causality" – *The Bride of the Lamb* 220. In Calvinistic terms, man is entirely without liberty in relation to a remote, deterministic God; deterministic to the point of preordaining sin itself...and then punishing the man, woman, or child alike for its unavoidable expression.

{John Calvin published the first edition of his 'Institutes' in 1536, six years after fleeing to Switzerland to escape persecution in his native France. This initial release consisted of a modest six chapters, which Schaff later described as essentially an "expanded catechism." Nonetheless, it was a commendable feat considering Calvin was only 27 years old, with no formal theological training, and just six years a Protestant. Only a shred of the systematic theology that would eventually influence millions was present in this early work. It was not until he met the predestinarian Martin Bucer three years later in Strasbourg that Calvin would introduce into the second edition a more radical theology. By the time of the fifth and final Geneva edition (1559), the work had grown to a formidable 80 chapters in length, four of which were devoted to predestination and reprobation. Many assumptions have been based on Calvin's completed work. They include the belief (or indoctrination) that predestination – at least, Calvin's conception of it – is scripturally verifiable through the writings of the Apostle Paul, and that Augustine, 1100 years earlier, had 'proved' this so (see *Appendix V* for an examination of these claims). What is less well known is that the Western Church, within 100 years of Augustine's death, rejected his view of absolute predestination! Thus, Calvin, over a 23-year period, laboured to develop a Stoic/Manichaean synthesis that the Church had not only rejected throughout its first 400-year history, but also renounced later at the Council of Orange in 529 (ratified two years later). Much of this controversy centred around one of Augustine's last books, *On the Predestination of the Saints* (428), written two years before his death. Along with Bucer's early influence (also an admirer of Augustine), this work helped shape and consolidate Calvin's thinking on the subject as much as anything.}

Reports variously describe the darker side of Calvin's temperament as self-righteous, ill-tempered, vindictive, and (if required) ruthless. This was the man over whom the guardianship of the city-state of Geneva was to be submitted. Under his watch, Geneva became the new 'Protestant Rome,' wielding even greater intrusive power than the Catholic Inquisition. Politics as much as ethics was its driving force – a virtual police state ruled by Consistory Council, made up of pastors and lay elders with a conformist mindset to Calvin's. If we add to this the intense zeal for reform, it becomes clear how these new protestant 'horrors' paved the way for the heartless and fanatical persecutions not just in Geneva, but throughout much of continental Europe. There can be little doubt that historically, as civic rule permitted, Christendom has mirrored the harshness of its own beliefs. An inexorable law changes men and women, more or less, into the God they worship – if God is seen as hard & cruel, they too become hard and cruel. Thus, for the foreseeable future, passions raged while wars were fought, witches hunted, books burned, and freethinkers persecuted on a scale rarely paralleled in history. Thomas Allin observes an acerbic irony here: The "greatest advocates of the larger hope have been the most earnest champions of *free will*, and often base it on their teachings; while the advocates of endless sin and hell, like Augustine and Calvin, have been" its greatest enemies – *C.T.* 29, 30.

Calvin's views became the tour de force of protestant Augustinian semantics: Christ's death on the cross must appease the wrath of a magisterial God over the depraved issue of man's inherited sin or, more especially, his inherited *guilt* (see *Appendix V*). It was, to use Jonathon Edwards' infamous words, a case of *sinners in the hands of an angry God*. The picture thus painted of Deity – it has been modified many times to fit sensibilities – becomes essentially one of despicable cruelty: a distantly cold God imputes to all newborns a 'guilt' inherited from a distant ancestor, though quite how one *inherits* guilt is never adequately explained. In consequence, all who die unbaptised (infants included) go straight to the torments of hell. This has been described as the single greatest perversion of thought on Christian record. N. T. Wright likens it to the pagan myths where children were sacrificed to appease the gods.

Like his late-antique hero, Calvin was a master of forcefully presenting ideas extracted from suitably chosen texts. Any criticism was denounced; recourse to human feelings or reason was even more tridently rejected. Like most repressive dogmatists, the French lawyer found defiance of his views intolerable, and, in extreme cases, this could lead to the disparagement of the challenger in abusive and demeaning ways. It all sounds so disagreeably familiar. John Calvin was, in the words of one recent critic, a "theological bully" (a quality equally apparent in a few of his later protagonists). As much as anything, he ruled Geneva by an iron hand of fear. In fact, his stature eventually achieved such loathsome proportions that any determined dissenter coming within his grasp – Michael Servetus, for one, in 1553 – could be imprisoned, tortured, and, if unrepentant, executed. The impetuous Servetus was in due time burnt at the stake, the sentence being issued by the Geneva Council (Calvin is said to have preferred him beheaded); the contention lay in his conflicting views on baptism and the exact nature of the Godhead. Another

example involved an anonymous note left at the church altar. Its message was interpreted as 'abusive,' but it more likely had to do with justifiable accusations of hypocrisy. Regardless, the assumed culprit was jailed, confessed only under prolonged torture, and was beheaded. Over seventeen years of reliable record keeping, a total of 139 executions were carried out in the city, including the beheading of a child for striking a parent.

Religious tolerance barely existed in this era; however, something began to shift following Servetus' death. Prominent voices within the Reformation movement began questioning the intolerance that had permitted it to happen. Stella figures such as Sebastian Castellio, David Jorus, and Bernard Ochino were outraged by the execution; the synods at Zurich and Schaffhausen were, according to one somewhat politically correct report, "hardly enthusiastic." Castellio, in particular, became enraged over what he saw as blatant murder; he viewed Calvin as one whose hands dripped with the blood of Severtus. It was one thing to execute someone for a capital offence, quite another to kill over doctrinal disagreement. Three months later, Castellio released a co-written book titled *Treatise of Heretics*. As a French protestant himself, he wrote, "When Servetus fought with reasons and writings, he should have been repulsed by reasons and writings." He then damningly invoked Calvin's own words, penned when Calvin himself had been a persecuted outcast: "It is unchristian to use arms against those who have been expelled from the Church, and to deny them rights common to all mankind." Asking who is a heretic, Castellio concluded, "I can find no other criterion than that we are all heretics in the eyes of those who do not share our views."

Following the premature death of Calvin in 1564, Geneva continued under his posthumous guidance for a further forty years. Eventually, the enlightenment of men such as Costellio caught up with the city's governance. The great irony is that the Swiss lake town, like other cities established under a strict Calvinist regime (such as Amsterdam & New York), became one of the world's great economic centres based not on rigidly theocratic law, but on a tolerant, even permissive secular democracy.

Coelius Secundus Curio (1503-69)

Costellio co-authored the above work on the just treatment of 'heretics' with Coelius Curio. Moreover, this Italian Professor of Theology was at the time producing a work of his own in which he attributed opinions such as Calvin's to the devil. Although not a treatise of great force (like Calvin's Institutes), Coelius Curio's views nonetheless exercised considerable influence beyond the borders of his homeland, even as far as the royal court of England. He writes in one place, "Whatever God wishes, that is right and lawful to Him, and since He wishes to be called rich in goodness and mercy, it follows that He wishes to pour forth His goodness and pity on the most and not upon the few. Otherwise, why does He wish to be called the Father of Mercy and God of all consolation? And envious are all who wish so great a God to belong to a few only." Moving frequently to elude persecution and imprisonment – from Catholic and Protestant alike – Curio taught successively at Turin, Milan, Pavia, Venice, and Lucca, before becoming a religious exile in, of all places,

Switzerland. At the recommendation of the reformer Heinrich Bullinger, he secured a position at the Academy of Lausanne, later moving to the University of Basel, where he held a professorship until his death. Curio's legacy is one of the more colourful within the current history. In addition to his own writings, this courageous iconoclast gained fame and admiration as a publisher/editor of obscure theological and historical works, as well as for his many friendships with the more interesting Protestants, reformists, and so-called 'heretics' of his time. The great irony of Curio's life – a marked exception to the rule – was that his death was honoured by a panegyric and burial in Basel Cathedral.

Two inevitable consequences of the Reformation were the introduction of new opinions and the multiplication of sects. The principles of reform did, after all, undermine *all* human authority in scriptural matters, including those of the leading Reformers. One of the most formidable of these dissident factions was the Anabaptists. Hated and persecuted on all sides, this widespread community was studious in scriptural matters and showed great fortitude in suffering. As Bayle remonstrates (*Hist. Anab*.), some absurd and unbalanced doctrines were unfairly thrust upon the sect as a whole when, if applicable at all, they should have been limited to a few. That Anabaptists held the doctrine of Universal Reconciliation is almost certain, though how extensively is not known. Both Evans (*Art. Univ*.) and Adams (*Art. Uni. Rest*.) believe it was part of their teaching even before the Reformation. A French encyclopedia (1735) adds that some of them "maintained that the souls of the dead sleep until the Day of Judgment, and the pains of hell are not eternal;" the *Augustin Confession*, produced by the principal Reformers as to correct doctrine, condemns them for their belief (among others) "that there shall be an end to the punishments of the damned."

Widespread persecution persisted for some time, its brutality also being felt by the Libertines and other similar groups. Thomas Whittemore observes, "Catholics and Protestants, kings and subjects, united in their extermination; but perhaps, after all, we must award the palm of pre-eminence in this cruel undertaking to the Reformers themselves" – *Modern History of Univ*. 19. The motive for this was as much political as it was religious. These sects were a source of acute embarrassment to the Reformers because they were voicing the very arguments by which Luther and his followers upheld their own dissent from the Catholic fold. "Had the leading Protestants justified the Anabaptists in asserting new opinions, deploring at the same time if they felt...that these opinions were erroneous, they would not have put into the hands of Catholics that weapon by which they were so frequently wounded. But it constitutes a most striking contradiction in their character, that while they maintained their right to separate from the Mother Church and express and maintain their opinions, they justified the infliction of penalties on those who refused to conform to their standards of faith and worship" (*Ibid*. 20). Such was the hypocrisy and bigotry of the time.

In succeeding decades, the rigid Calvinism of the Reformed Church continued to be challenged by many among the ranks of the "learned and pre-eminent." Arminius, Episcopius, and Le Clerc, while not embracing universalism, were typical of a growing dissatisfaction among contemporary religious thinkers; all three raised serious objections to the 'orthodox' tenets of Calvinistic eschatology.

A problem, however, remained. By the time of Arminius, the notion of original sin, issues over freewill, predestination, and election, along with the inexorable semantics of 'eternity,' had so altered the landscape that those theologians who would challenge Calvin were caught up in the same web. Thus, in the words of Axton, they posed "the innovation of prevenient grace to combat total depravity, and are left with a focus on voluntarism in which the issue of human will and God's will is the dominant factor in the universe."

***PART V*:** THE AGE OF REASON

It was especially within our next time bracket that an increasing number of famous scholars throughout Europe began exploring the sentiment – Jukes lists such eminent names as Bengal, Oberlin, Hahn, and Tholuck "to have been believers in final restitution." Out of this burgeoning culture emerged several interesting though lesser-known exegetical works, one of which deserves mention. Produced in 1653 by an unknown author (as we will see, anonymity was not uncommon during this era), the *Torments of Hell* is an expository work, in which Hades, rather than being the abode of punishment after death, is viewed as the state before resurrection; and Gehenna, pure and simply, the Valley of Hinnom near Jerusalem. Other listed authorities are brought forward to support both claims. In contrast, ten differing opinions – all held by the "learned" – furnish a glimpse into the general disarray on the subject, which, incidentally, still exists! The author then demonstrates the misapplication of parabolic language to support endless misery, and, most importantly, offers clear examples of the misguided use of 'eternal' and 'everlasting' to prove the same end. The rise of works like the *Torments of Hell* by bold, scholarly authors signalled a trend away from the glibly ingrained attachment to received dogma.

English Puritanism

It may seem very odd indeed that 17th-century Puritanism – at its core, an intense form of English Calvinism squarely aimed at challenging the complacency of a Romanised English Church – helped pave the way for the 18th-century Enlightenment. Puritanism encouraged the bypassing of the established hierarchy and fostered an individualistic mindset that relied directly on the word of God. Two men in particular exemplified these characteristics in their lives and teaching. Both gained prominence in Oliver Cromwell's "Commonwealth of England," and both spiritually expanded the Calvinistic view – liberated from its tyrannical dogmatism – into the paradoxical realm of Universal Reconciliation.

Peter Sterry (1613-72)

An independent English theologian and Westminster Divine, Peter Sterry shared his esteemed position as Chaplain to Oliver Cromwell with Jeremiah White (considered next). The historian Vivian de Sola Pinto describes Sterry as having "exactly" the qualities that most other Puritans lacked: "intellectual freedom, flexibility of mind, imagination, tolerance and loving-kindness" –

Peter Sterry, Platonist & Puritan 63. In *The Larger Hope*, Robin Parry summarises him as something of an anomaly: a "Puritan who was a lover of the arts and poetry, a Platonist who was a theological determinist, a deeply rational mystic, and a Calvinist universalist (*Vol 2*, 47). Adding to this anomalous mix was an adherence to a full-blown Millennialism, an unusual position for the time, especially considering Sterry's lifelong identification with rigid Calvinism. And yet, he never allowed that association to 'determine' or limit the Divine nature, the preeminent factor of which, for Sterry, was not just sovereignty, but *Loving* Sovereignty. As Wayne Fair points out in his podcast *A Calvinist Universalist* (on his channel, coincidentally called *Sovereign Love*), "He followed its core principles to their logical end. If God is truly sovereign, can anything ultimately resist him?" In one of seven known works, Sterry writes, "Dear soul, whatever, whoever thou art, thou art the offspring of God...God had the love of the gospel in His heart and sowed it as a secret seed in the foundations of the whole creation...Jesus Christ is the seed of nature as well as of grace, and so he lieth hid in the bosom of every creature" - *The Rise, Race, and Royalty of the Kingdom of God in the Soul of Man* (1683).

Jeremiah White (1629-1707)

The Restoration of All Things is described as "a vindication of the goodness and grace of God, to be manifested at last in the recovery of His whole creation out of their fall." Published posthumously in 1713, this work was later revealed to be written by a late fellow of Trinity College and contemporary of Peter Sterry, Dr Jeremiah White. Aside from sharing Cromwell's chaplaincy, White also held the office of preacher to the Council of State; as such, he was a man in the very midst of battle (so to speak), the English Civil War. According to Whittemore (*Modern History of Univ.* 79), White prized his views of the final happiness of all mankind while still holding to predestination and election. He thought the salvation of those elected was the pledge of the salvation of the rest (the Body of Christ is, after all, "the first fruits of the spirit" [Rom. 8:23], "first fruits" naturally implying a greater harvest to come). White nonetheless retained a firmly held belief in the doctrine of future judgment.

{At first glance, it is hard to imagine two more opposite approaches to God, sin, and judgment than Calvinism and Universal Reconciliation. Yet, the stupendous irony is that the latter, as expressed from this era on, probably came out of the Calvinistic view of God's sovereignty as much as anything! Very likely, in the eyes of the above two 17th-century clerics, Calvinism and Christian Universalism were, in a quite compelling way, two sides of the same coin. The difference lay in Sterry and White viewing the sovereignty and power of God through the 'predestinated' lens of a love and goodness that demanded the reconciliation of the entire universe.}

In response to the callous indifference of earlier eras, the 17th and 18th centuries would place more emphasis on the humanities and the faculty of reason. The traditional political and religious structure of Europe was in decline. With greater freedom of thought and increasing knowledge, men became more capable of

contrasting raison d'être with the ignorance, superstition, and uncritical acceptance of authority that had dominated the previous thousand years. "Reason is the only faculty by which we have to judge anything, even Revelation itself," wrote Bishop Butler in 1752. It would be quite wrong, however, to assume such sentiment held sway over the teachings of the organised Church as a whole. The subject of human destiny continued to spark controversy, with Augustinian dualism still very much intact; however, the rigid Calvinistic framework was under increasing assault. John Wesley wrote at this time: "If such a doctrine could be found in scripture, it would be sure proof that we had mistaken the meaning of scripture." His younger brother Charles referred to it as the "horrible decree." Both thought it made God worse than the Devil. Yet despite a more reasoned and humanitarian societal attitude, a certain macabre fascination with the excesses of the Middle Ages remained. Works like Pinamonti's *Inferno Aperto* and Rusca's *De Inferno* were prominent examples. The morbid desire to perpetuate such horrors incensed one to ask, "What crimes of men can merit the endless tortures here set forth except the crime of conceiving such tortures, and ascribing the malice of their infliction to an all-wise and Holy God?" It might be hoped that it was no longer the custom to stain the vulnerable imagination of children with, in William Lecky's words, "ghastly pictures of future misery," and "to imprint upon the virgin mind atrocious images" – *European Morals*. But such works were quite common and widely taught to children. The sermons of Jonathon Edwards (1750s), which emphasised this terrifying element of the religious imagination, were still sold in England and America as cheap tracts up until the 19th century. About them, American professor and clergyman Dr David Swing lamented, "Our modern religion should learn a lesson here; for if we talk about God as Jonathon Edwards did, there is no form of cruelty left to ascribe to Satan."

Repulsed by these horrors, many of the more informed and independent, especially on the continent, turned away in disgust. Sickened by the religion that had propagated and imposed them, some became humanists or atheists; others, charging Christianity with the grave errors of men, turned to the speculations of Deism (natural religion). But a third class, having the insight to re-examine revelation in the fresh light of reason, strove to distinguish between the coherent and the incoherent, the real and the alleged. This last category laboured long and hard to overthrow what Oxenham calls "parasitical accretions...as startling and repulsive as they are destitute of any reasonable or authoritative basis." To some, they were the main cause of scepticism or despair, and to vanquish a belief in their horrors was to remove the worst enemy of the Christian faith. The following remarks illustrate the growing dissatisfaction of the times:

Bishop Rust (1661): "I leave you to judge whether the whole subject matter in this periodical doom, the nature of that fire and its fuel...be not such as to ensure that it will be shorter than some men do; who, having got easy ways of assuring themselves it shall not be their portion, do little pity those calamitous souls whose lot it may be, as they darkly fancy God Himself does" – *Opinions of Origen.*

Gerald Winstanley (1669): "He will dwell in the whole creation in time, and so deliver all mankind out of their fall."

Dr Henry More (1688): “But this is a marvel to me, that the goodness of God, being infinite, the effect thereof should be so narrow as men commonly conceive. That one such share of the divine goodness should be active, but that the infinite remainder thereof, silent and inactive, is a riddle, a miracle that does infinitely amaze me” – *Divine Dialogues.*

Ralph Cudworth (1688): “...no man can endure the pain of sense eternally...For if you have recourse unto supernatural means and miracles, then I see no reason why God may not work a miracle for man’s salvation as well as for his destruction” – *Theological Review.*

Archbishop Tillotson (1694): “It can in no sense be said to agree with the justice of God to punish temporary crimes with eternal punishments, because (between the two) there can be no manner of proportion. And if it be so hard to reconcile this with the justice of God, it will be much more to explain how it can possibly consist with that infinite mercy and goodness we ascribe to Him.”

Bishop Burnett (1699): “Instead of stretching the severity of justice by an inference, we may rather venture to stretch the mercy of God, since that is the attribute which of all others is most magnificently spoken of in the scriptures; so we ought to think of it in the largest and most comprehensive manner” – *On Art. XVIII.*

William Law (1686-1761)

In 1729, Law wrote: “Every number of destroyed sinners must, through the all-working, all-redeeming love of God, which never ceaseth, come at last to know that they had lost, and have found again, such a God of love as this… (A love that) willingly suffers and dies among thieves, that thieves may have a life with him in paradise; the love that visits publicans, harlots and sinners, that wants and seeks to forgive where most is to be forgiven” – *Serious Call*. This humble Church of England cleric would go on to influence generations to come, including Edward Gibbon, Samuel Johnson, George Whitfield, and the two Wesley brothers. Law was a man of principle who refused position to overawe conscience. In doing so, he caused William Wilberforce to end his slave trading activities after Wilberforce read Law’s book, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life.* The South African devotional writer Andrew Murray was sufficiently impressed by Law’s pen that he republished a number of his works a generation later, stating that he did not know “where to find anywhere else the same clear and powerful statement of the truth which the Church needs at the present day” – *The Power of the Spirit* [Introduction/Preface]. In the 20th century, Aldous Huxley referenced Law as “one of the most endearingly saintly figures in the whole history of Anglicanism” – *The Perennial Philosophy* 204. To this day, William Law is honoured by a special day in the Church of England and the Episcopal communities.

Sir Isaac Newton (1723): “The degree and duration of the torments of these degenerate and anti-Christian people should be no other than that which would

be approved by those angels who had ever laboured for their salvation, and that Lamb who had redeemed them with His most precious blood" – *On Revelation.*

Dr Issac Watts (1748): "There is not one place of scripture where the word 'death,' as it was first threatened in the law of innocence, necessarily signifies a certain miserable immortality of the soul either to Adam, the actual sinner, or to his posterity" – *The Ruin and Decay of Mankind*.

Bishop Newton (1761): "Nothing is more contrarient to the divine nature and attributes than for God to bestow existence on any beings whose destiny He foreknows must terminate in wretchedness without recovery" – *Final State of Man* (Thomas Newton is the first high-ranking, orthodox Anglican to embrace a universal hope).

Dr Doddridge (1751): "We cannot pretend to decide a priori, or previous to the event, so far as to say that the punishments of hell must and will be certainly eternal" – *Theological Lecture.*

Bishop Butler (1752): "Our whole nature leads us to ascribe all moral perfection to God, and deny all imperfection of Him...and that regularity and order and right cannot but prevail finally in a universe under His government."

Georg Klein Nicolai (1753) writing under the pseudonym of Paul Siegvolck: "If but one soul were to remain in the power of death or hell to endless eternity (then) death would not be entirely swallowed up in victory, but always keep something of its sting, and hell would evermore be able to make a scorn to those who would say, 'O hell, where is thy victory'?" – *The Everlasting Gospel*.

Rev. Capel Berrow (1772): "The endless misery of the majority cannot be reconcilable with any one attribute of the Deity whatsoever" – *Theological Dissertation.*

Dr J. A. Eberhard (1778): "Punishment, being an evil, cannot be employed by a good Being unless for ends whose goodness is greater than the evils, and which could not be obtained without inflicting them. God punishes not for the common good only, but also for the reform of the sufferer, which being accomplished, punishment has no further use" – *Apology for Socrates.*

Andrew Michael Ramsey (1686-1743)

Principles of Natural and Revealed Religion is a rare work, written as it was by the Catholic Universal Salvationist, 'Chevalier' Ramsey. In 1730, Ramsey, a Scot who lived most of his adult life in France, was honoured by the University of Oxford with a Doctorate and, according to Whittemore, "excited the attention of many of the learned men of England." Ramsey maintained that, "Eternal Providence desires, wills and employs continually all the means necessary to lead intelligent creatures to their ultimate and supreme happiness." All reasoning agencies, he thought, acted towards this end: "Almighty power, wisdom and love cannot be eternally frustrated...therefore,

God will at last pardon and re-establish in happiness all lapsed beings." Ramsey passed away in 1743 in "the bosom of the Mother Church, while a warm adherent to sentiments she had repeatedly denounced as the most damnable heresy" (*Whittemore*). One can hardly fail to see in this a certain perverse irony!

Two other works were published in London shortly after this time. They were *The Eternity of Hell Torments* (1740) by William Whiston, and *Universal Restitution: A Scriptural Doctrine* (1761) by Sir James Stonhouse (originally published anonymously). Both authors demonstrate an intelligent grasp of Hebrew and Greek through which they navigate the muddied waters of the biblical time words with considerable dexterity. Whiston, a man of letters and instigator of the Longitude Act of 1714, was affiliated with Sir Isaac Newton and Samuel Clarke, both of whom shared his sentiments on human destiny. In an earlier work, *Reason and Philosophy, No Enemies to Faith*, Whiston expresses the view that the "common opinion in this matter (endless torments), if it were for certain a real part of Christianity, would be a more insuperable objection against it than any or all the present objections of unbelievers put together." Stonhouse (1716-1795), a baronet, physician, and eventually, Anglican cleric (he was a religious sceptic until meeting Philip Doddridge), makes the following five points regarding Christ's Kingdom (*Universal Restitution* 27,28): (1) That our saviour's kingdom shall have an end; (2) That its end will only occur after the subordination of all things to Him; (3) That this end will be a surrender of the Kingdom to the Father; (4) That this will lead to the subjection of the Son to the Father; and (5) that this marks the uttermost completion of Christ's office as mediator for the simple reason that it will have attained its purpose, God then being All in all. Naturally, controversy followed in the wake of both books – also in the lives of their prominent authors, especially Whiston – eliciting interest among the open and informed.

James Relly (1722-78)

Around 1750, Welshman James Relly ended a nine-year association with the English evangelist George Whitefield after being challenged over his account of the atonement. "How," his disputant asked, "can Divine retributive justice be satisfied if God on the cross punishes an innocent person in our place? Justice punishes the guilty, not the innocent. In precisely what way, therefore, is the cross a manifestation of Justice?" The question deeply troubled Relly, and he set himself the task of seeking a credible answer. After a good deal of study and reflection, Relly decided that what was true of Christ was true of us and what was true of us was true of Christ. Therefore, while innocent in Himself, Christ was *made sin* through His union with us *in our sin*, and God justly *punished sin* in Him. But more than this, Relly argued that because God had already punished the sin of all humanity on the cross, it would be unjust to punish the same sin again by sending anyone to hell. All must therefore be rescued already, and his task merely lay in persuading others of this fact. In so believing, Relly became something of a paradox, the first Penal Substitutionary Universalist.

Towards the end of the 18th century, a one-time follower of John Wesley was among the first on the American continent to advocate Universal Reconciliation in his *Dialogues*. He was Elhanan Winchester.

Elhanan Winchester (1751-97)

Later in life, Elhanan Winchester came out of the Baptists – *forced out*, really, along with about fifty others – due to teachings of the usual contentious nature. However, Winchester's flowering into Universal Reconciliation was far from sudden; it was, in fact, quite a drawn-out affair. After initially resisting a book given to him called *The Everlasting Gospel* (by German pastor Georg Klein Nicolai), he found himself drawn back to it many times. During a yearlong preaching tour, he began sharing its arguments with clerical colleagues of his persuasion. When even the brightest failed to adequately answer the book's proposals, he came away shocked. Yet his resistance held to the point of preaching against the doctrine at times. Finally, in 1880, he succumbed, founding the *Society of Universal Baptists* two years later. In due time, Winchester befriended John Murray, with whom he co-founded the *American Universalist Society*. With a thirst for greater understanding, he became a strong advocate of scriptural research, travelling even to the far reaches of Britain in order to foster his learning. He thought it absurd to imagine God's love narrower than his own, or that His intention to redeem all could ever be frustrated.

It is possible that Winchester's early influence, John Wesley, who (as shown) openly rejected Calvinism and emphasised the loving mercy of God *to all*, may have finally accepted this view. Wesley had eagerly imbibed the essays of noted Christian Universalist William Law during his early years; later, in America, he befriended Peter Bohler, a Moravian missionary who openly proclaimed Universal Reconciliation. As with many prominent teachers/preachers, the progression towards a radically 'new' position (if taken in the first place) may be gradual – reputations are frequently ruined by adopting faith in a bigger vision of God or a larger hope. Be that as it may, near the end of his life (1787), Wesley published as "one of the most sensible tracts I have ever read," a translation of Bonnet's *Palingenesie Philosophique*, which taught, "There will be a perpetual advance of all the individuals of humanity towards perfection." Just four years earlier, Wesley had announced in one of his sermons that "in the same manner as God has converted so many to Himself without destroying their liberty, He can undoubtedly convert whole nations or the whole world. And it is as easy for Him to convert a world as one individual soul." By any estimation, this is an astonishing statement from a man in Wesley's position.

***PART VI*:** THE MODERN ERA

The outspokenness against the hell dogma during the 19th century – the most widespread up until that time – is graphically revealed in articles that appeared in religious periodicals of the day, such as this one in *Contemporary Review* (1878):

Its author, a Dr Littledale, wrote, "The answer which popular theology has been tendering for centuries past will not be accepted much longer. This view (endless torment) puts God on a moral level with the devisers of the most savagely malignant revenge known to history – the deed known in Italy as la gran vendetta...The horror with which we read of such a crime ought to make us all careful lest we should give assent to the teaching which predicates it, only on an infinitely vaster scale, of the just and merciful God."

Three years earlier, in *Water of Life*, Canon (and author) Charles Kingsley expressed a similar sentiment with equal prophetic insight: "Can these dark dogmas be true of a Father who bids us to be perfect as He is in that He sends His sun to shine on the evil and the good, and His rain on the just and unjust? Or of a Son who so loved the world that He died to save the world – and surely not in vain? These questions...educated men and women of all classes and denominations...are asking, and will continue to ask more and more until they receive an answer. And if we of the clergy cannot give them an answer which accords with their conscience and reason...evil times will come both for the clergy and the Christian religion for many a year henceforth."

It cannot be denied that such distorted dogma has driven many far from the Christian faith. The Medieval historian Zachary Brooke saw this with devastating clarity (the following is attributed to him): "It is a terrible business to have falsehood domiciled with truth, and for its possessor, when he is only half convinced or not at all convinced of its truth, to take the greatest pains to dress it up like a truth. For the falsehood gets no good from the truth, but the truth gets maimed by the falsehood. They talk of the love of God, and His mercy, and His pity, and His justice, and His righteousness...while all the time they are speaking, this hideous companion in their soul is laughing at all these things. Love of God – what of eternal torture? Righteousness of God – what of eternal evil? Good news, salvation – oh, have done with it all."

In fairness, it must be stated that the English Church had long since withdrawn from its Articles of Faith the tenet condemning Universal Salvation (as well as the one supporting endless punishment). The precept was introduced in 1552 to guard against the assumed errors of the Anabaptists; it was retracted during the more tolerant reign of Elizabeth I. Since then, it has not been deemed 'heresy' to avow the doctrine within Anglican circles, though one could ill afford to formally teach it, as we are about to see.

According to Olshausen, the teaching in Europe continued "deeply rooted in noble minds." The scholar Hanson, too, reported that in 1850, "there were 1600 Universalists out of the 1800 Protestant clergymen in Germany" – *A Cloud of Witnesses* 11. He lists among the most prominent Neander, Balantine, Credner, Ullmann, and Schleiermacher. A few years earlier, Dwight's *Travels in the North of Germany* (1829) had expressed a similar sentiment, though in the negative: "The doctrine of the eternity of future punishment is almost universally rejected" (421). The proliferation of the teaching among the Teutonic people is most likely linked to the aforementioned Anabaptists, who, according to Whittemore (*M.H.U.* 310) and others, became the later German Baptists, some of whom (including their founder, Alexander Mack, a strong universalist) immigrated to the United States, where they established small communities.

{*Dwight's Travels* made the following incidental comments about the German evangelical universalists met during the tour: "From their conversation, we must look in vain for brighter examples of piety. They certainly manifest a greater spirit of love for those who differ from them than is found in most of our sects, and they feel very unwilling to shut the gates of heaven against those who do not believe every article of their creed. In this charity and love, the Christians of most Protestant countries would do well to imitate them." (423). These comments are reminiscent of that ancient breed of restorational believer who toiled and suffered in an atmosphere of joy and hope, unburdened by the crushing sorrow of an endless misery for the multitudes.}

19th Century Revolution

The 19th century proved a time of scholarship, learning and, indeed, scepticism of the many things that had been dutifully (if somewhat naively) received in bygone years. During this more discerning period, some of the finest Bible commentaries, translations, histories and reference works appeared in print. That these scholarly works were not used by the wider Church to deepen an understanding of our subject is unfortunate. "There appears to me," wrote one (unknown) author, "a want of believing, or disbelieving, anything because it is true or false. It is a question which does not seem to occur to them." Ignorance and fear have always been the great enemies of moving forward, as Samuel Garrett discovered in 1886: "I learned how afraid many whom I highly esteem were of comparing the tradition with scripture, from some vague notion that it was unsafe even to examine into the grounds on which it rested" – *World Without End*. Nonetheless, in purely eschatological terms, the 19th century proved revolutionary for the organised Church across much of Europe. It was as if the floodgates had opened up and centuries of repression could no longer be contained.

Thomas Erskine (1788-1870)

One of the most celebrated proponents of the restitution doctrine falling on the cusp of the modern era was Thomas Erskine from Linlathen. As an educated and independent Scot, a friend once told him, "Everything in you reminds me of God." Erskine breathes this exalted spirit into all his published works, which include *The Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel, The Purpose of God in Creation, Essay on Faith*, and *Evidences of Revealed Religion*. In a letter to a Mr Craig (author of *Final Salvation*), Erskine wrote, "I believe that the love and righteousness and justice of God mean the same thing, viz: A desire to bring His whole moral creation into a participation of His own character and His own blessedness. He has made us capable of this, and will not cease from using the best means for accomplishing it in us all. When I think of God making a creature of such capacities, it seems to me almost blasphemous to suppose that He will throw it from Him into everlasting darkness because it has resisted His gracious purposes toward it for the natural period of human life."

Henry Bristow Wilson (1803-88)

A controversy broke out mid-century involving the Anglican cleric and Oxford professor H. B. Wilson. Initially, a dissertation published by Wilson, supporting elements of 'The Larger Hope,' was condemned; however, the heresy charge was retracted two years later (1864) with the cleric being acquitted of all charges. The committee annotated their decision with the following statement: "We are not required or at liberty to express any opinion on the mysterious question of the eternity of final punishment, other than to say that we do not find it in the formularies." As with many iconoclasts (especially within mainstreamism), the cost proved high, and Wilson never fully recovered from the strain of the trial and appeal. It is somewhat incongruous that such an ordeal – at least within the *Anglican* community – was necessary in the first place. Recall that the two tenets formally rejecting universalism and endorsing eternal punishment were rescinded as early as the Elizabethan era. In light of this, one wonders what all the fuss and consequential pain were about! Moreover, as we will see next, Wilson's was far from an isolated incident.

Frederick Denison Maurice (1805-72)

F. D. Maurice, co-founder of Christian Socialism, initially held a professorship at King's College; however, the publication of his *Theological Essays* in 1853 caused a great stir, and he lost his position. This dark event yet again draws attention to how individual careers within institutions can be made or destroyed by doctrinal allegiances, and further (by implication), how this can affect overt or covert responses in matters of conscience. During this controversy, which, almost as a matter of course, involved biblical punishment – including the ongoing debate over *aionios* – the public sided with Maurice, seeing him as a beloved and respected spiritual teacher and reformer. One of his closest friends and fellow clerics, Charles Kingsley (author of *Westward Ho!*), referred to him as "the most beautiful human soul whom God has ever allowed me to meet." This innate kindness, along with an ability to touch the human soul through both his writings and person, profoundly impacted his generation. Maurice viewed the very idea of *unending* punishment as utterly incompatible with everything we know of God and the Gospel. He also stood firmly against 'party (creedal) spirit,' holding it utterly at odds with the unity of Christ. Maurice's courageous and uncompromising stance influenced many prominent figures, including Lightfoot, Westcott, Hort, MacDonald, Tennyson, Plumbtree, Forsyth, and, of course, Farrar. His legacy continues to resonate among many noble souls today.

It is instructive to examine the reasons (probably the central one) for Professor Maurice's dismissal from his teaching post. It should be noted that Maurice did not seek the position himself; he was offered it based on his credentials and reputation, which makes the dismissal all the more puzzling. In response to Maurice's submitted defence, the college principal wrote: "Far be it for me to enter now or hereafter into a controversial argument with you on so awful a subject (as endless punishment), on which, so far as attempting to fathom the mystery, it seems to me the less said the better." Within these

forty-odd words lies a fearful recognition of the darkness shrouding the whole subject, the sorest feature of which is that desperate need to avoid the scandal of facing it head on!

Søren Kierkegaard (1813-55)

The Danish existential philosopher and theologian, Søren Kierkegaard, may seem an odd inclusion here; yet, as we will see, he (ultimately) fits rather well. The greatest rebel within our current category – at least, in terms of challenging institutionalism – Kierkegaard wrote critical works on Christianity, organised religion (which he termed 'Christendom,' the mere *cultural* adoption of Christ), personal authenticity, love, morality, and ethics. In both philosophy (early life) and religion (later life), he prioritised reality over the abstract. In particular, Kierkegaard was critical of the dogma and practice of *caesaropapism* (state-controlled religion), viewing it as a perversion of true Christianity. Within it, he recognised a semblance of Plato's reference to 'crowd' mentality, whereby he could write: "Never have I read in the Holy Scriptures this command: You shall love the crowd; even less: You shall, ethico-religiously, recognise in the crowd the court of last resort in relation to 'the truth.'" Before the individual could become fully Christian, they had to let go of the 'herd mentality' and understand *what it means* to be Christian. Thus, the young Dane viewed controversies over God and Christ as pointless – mere speculations that manifested confusion. Believing requires what he calls a "leap of faith," which ends all confusion and leads to the individual living for and existing in Christ. Because his focus lay firmly on the indisputable ground of God's great Love, every true "Knight of Faith" could find their meaningful path in the Christian life. Part of the outworking of this principle lay in his deep identification with ordinary, everyday humanity. Disregarding personal advantages of social standing, education, and intellect, Kierkegaard loved nothing more than to stroll along the mostly avoided streets of 19th-century Copenhagen, greeting the common folk...the poor, every maid and manservant, every common labourer. Though the tone of his early writings was pessimistic, this deep identity with suffering humanity led him, towards the end of his life, to write more optimistically: "I do not pretend to be better than others. Therefore, what the old Bishop once said to me is not true – namely, that I spoke as if the others were going to hell. No, if I can be said to speak at all of going to hell, then I am saying something like this: If the others are going to hell, then I am going along with them. But I do not believe that; on the contrary, I believe that *we will all be saved*, I, too, and this awakens my deepest wonder" – *Journal* NB:163 (1854).

Andrew John Jukes (1815-1901)

From an expositional standpoint, one of the most remarkable mid-19th-century works came from the pen of another (at first) minister of the Church of England. Andrew Jukes was also associated with the Brethren Movement but eventually severed all denominational ties to serve God independent of institutions. Despite its controversial theme, *The Restitution of All Things* (1867) received acclaim from many in his day and since as an original,

thought-provoking treatise. Although he opposed its teaching, Sir Robert Anderson conceded, "the writer has the courage of his convictions. Taking his stand upon the great sacrifice of Calvary, he proclaims the gospel of universal restoration." Decades later, another reviewer wrote, "It is a courageous and logical exposition on the significance of Christ's cross for the whole creation. The sacrifice of Christ is never lost sight of, and the testimony of scripture is continually brought before the reader" – *Unsearchable Riches*. And for the Christian reader of the time, this indeed was its great strength. Contemporaries of Jukes, writing on a similar theme, were by this time moving toward a form of 'theosophising,' in which the biblical text, with its redemptive process, gives way to a singular end goal. Some may have thought this necessary – a few may still – Juke's testimony demonstrates it is not.

George MacDonald (1824-1905)

Another Scot, George MacDonald, possessed extraordinary literary and spiritual gifts that influenced generations of subsequent Christian writers, including G. K. Chesterton, Lewis Carroll, J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, and Madeleine L'Engle. Lewis, echoing the words spoken of Erskine only decades earlier, wrote, "I know hardly any other writer who seems to be closer, or more continually close, to the spirit of Christ Himself." Perhaps more than any other author mentioned here, MacDonald's writings on the Gospels, in *Unspoken Sermons*, have the stamp of a pristine and original mind. Indeed, he is so far beyond formulaic dogma that those who subscribe to it usually shun him; one or two (perhaps to their own spiritual loss) even go so far as to condemn his writings outright! All such, of course, must of necessity support the very dogmas MacDonald rejected. For it is something of an indictment on the Calvinistic influences of his youth that he could celebrate, in maturity, "the rediscovery of God *as Father*." He nonetheless retained a staunch view of Judgment: "When we say that God is Love, do we teach men that their fear of Him is groundless? No! As much as they were will come upon them, possibly far more... the wrath will consume what they call themselves, so that the selves God made shall appear." Chesterton wrote accordingly, "only a man who had 'escaped' Calvinism could say that God is easy to please and hard to satisfy." MacDonald's belief was not that everyone would be 'automatically' saved – a common and in some cases wilful misconception – he instead endorsed the view that all will finally repent and be restored, even though that repentance and restoration may come only through the severity of God.

Samuel Cox (1826-93)

Samuel Cox, an English Baptist who openly praised Juke's previously mentioned contribution, wrote his own work in 1877. *Salvator Mundi* (Saviour of the World) proved an enormously popular book, running to seventeen editions. In the preface to the eleventh edition, Cox wrote, "I have myself received hundreds of letters, since the publication of this book, from men and women of the English-speaking world, who have assured me that the reading of it has saved them from atheism or the utter unbelief to which they were being driven by the cruel dogmas in which they had been reared." Cox

remained active in ministerial work until a throat condition forced him into a wholly literary life. He became editor of the *Expositor* magazine in 1875, later contributing to the *Nonconformist*, the *Christian Spectator* and the *Quiver*. Over nine years, he gathered around him a distinguished staff, which for a time included F. W. Farrar. According to one recent historical review, "The influence of the magazine on religious thought in England can hardly be overestimated." Fortuitously, the English Baptists proved more tolerant than their trans-Atlantic counterparts, and Cox, becoming president of the *Baptist Association* in 1873, remained ensconced in the bosom of the Church until he died in 1893.

James Moorehouse (1826-1915)

Ordained into the Church of England in 1854, James Moorehouse journeyed to Australia 23 years later to become the second bishop of Melbourne. Moorehouse's tenure in Melbourne was very popular, owing to his unpretentious, broad-minded attitude and ability to attract all classes and creeds, who listened with great interest to everything he said. After his eventual return to England, Bishop Moorehouse made the following famous speech in 1878: "The 41st and 42nd Articles (against Millenarians and Universalism) were withdrawn because the Church, knowing that men like Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Tertullian were Millenarians, and men like Origen, Clemens of Alexandria, and Gregory of Nyssa were Universalists, refused to dogmatise on such questions. From these facts it appears to me that we are entitled to draw three important conclusions: First, we are at liberty to think and teach about the future of the wicked as we believe that Holy Scripture teaches us. Secondly, varying interpretations are not only allowable but inevitable upon mere matters of opinion. Thirdly, if perchance we hold 'the larger hope,' *as I will not conceal from you that for twenty years and more I have done*, we shall yet be ready to acknowledge the obscurity which surrounds it, and the right of any of our brethren to think and teach differently from ourselves" – *M. & J.* 35, 36.

Frederic William Farrar (1831-1903)

One-time student of Maurice, F. W. Farrar published two works that the current writer first encountered in the late 1970s, and for which he remains 'eternally' grateful. The earlier of the two, *Eternal Hope*, was composed of five sermons preached at Westminster Abbey in 1877 on our general theme. The reaction this publication stirred within conservative Anglican circles catalysed Farrar's second effort, *Mercy & Judgment* (1881). He describes the sequel as "a few last words on Christian eschatology" (an understatement!). Farrar tirelessly sought to separate from Christian eschatology those "human additions and inventions by which it is defaced, and to show that it has been surrounded by elements of hopelessness and horror which are not sanctioned by the teaching of scripture" (54). He believed that the common teaching was founded on misinterpretation, though his description of the revivalist's hell as "abominable fancy" might suggest more. Speaking further about the unwarranted dogmatism surrounding the subject, he wrote, "It would have

been better if religious teachers, from Augustine downwards, had imitated the deep reserve and reticence of the sacred writers, who would not speak when God was silent" (174).

Any consideration of Farrar's two volumes (especially the first), or indeed the general sentiments of the era, must take into account the response of Farrar's learned opponent, Edward Bouverie Pusey (1800-82). An incident between these two men illustrates the counter-argument issues better than any critique ever could. A year after the publication of *Eternal Hope*, Dr Pusey released his answer in *What Is Of Faith As To Everlasting Punishment* (1879). Retired by this time, Pusey had been a Professor of Hebrew at Oxford and a close friend of George Jelf, the principal of King's College, involved in the earlier Maurice debacle. No stranger to controversy, Pusey took exception to Farrar's first work, referring to the younger Dean's challenge as mere "mawkish sentimentality." Farrar's riposte to this astonishing perjorative in his sequel, *Mercy and Judgment*, is unsparing: "The phrase so applied is instructive! It reveals that abyss of selfishness and unreality that yawns in the heart of the loveless religionist. It shows what can be the influence of an unworthy dogma, no less than an immoral life, in that 'It hardens all within and petrifies the feeling'" (122). Pusey's subsequent effort to validate the entrenched teaching could be said to be equally "instructive." He argues from the favoured text, Matthew 25, that the dual use of *aionios* in verse 46, concerning "life" and "punishment," must amount to the word holding the same meaning in both instances. Failure here, he insists, indicates a lack of reasoning or, if intentional, dishonesty. We agree! Of course, if one holds to the view of the current work, it is a fatuous argument because we are not claiming two different, indeed, opposing definitions. We are claiming that *aionios* always holds a uniform meaning, BUT that that meaning has no connection with *endlessness*…here or anywhere else. It is therefore surprising – since Pusey assumes what we do not – that he spoils his case by conceding that *aionios* only means "endless within the sphere of its own existence"! And the story does not end there. The good doctor then contradicts his self-imposed 'rule of harmonies' by claiming that the two 'alls' in 1 Corinthians 15:28 actually hold a different sense – it seems that "all in all" amounts to little more than an idiom of speech! It is no surprise that Farrar considers Pusey's rationale here not only "singular" (i.e. strangely conceived) but also one he supposed nobody would be convinced by (*Ibid.* [*footnote*] 479). Alas, the reality is that the uneducated and prejudiced all too often succumb to such subterfuge. Pusey passed away a few years after the conflict, and by the dawn of the 20th century, the debate had largely faded from memory.

In *Mercy and Judgment*, Farrar quotes numerous contemporaries who were as sympathetic to his view as they were antagonistic to Pusey's. The following is a sample:

Dr Thomas Guthrie: "What sort of earthly government would that be where more than half the subjects were in prison? I cannot believe that the government of God will be like that" – *The Way of Life.*

Bishop Ewing: “With me, this final victory (of good over evil) is not a matter of speculation at all, but of absolute faith; and to disbelieve it would be for me to cease altogether either to trust or worship God.”

Professor Reuss: “If the highest glory consists in being all in all, it is plain that it would be a flaw in the perfection of God were He anything less than this; In religion, conscience, no less than logical sense, protests against any such imperfection in God – *Theologie Chretienne.*

Dr Arthur Penrhyn Stanley: “...punishment will be corrective and not final, and will be ordered by a love and justice, the height and depth of which it is beyond the narrow thoughts of man to conceive” – *Christian Institutions*.

Rev Samuel Minton: “We reject that tradition of man which has obscured the glory of Christ, reduced to an unmeaning form the doctrine that God is Love, produced a frightful amount of infidelity...incalculably weakened the saving power of the Gospel...” – *Unworthy of Eternal Life*.

Thomas Allin (1838-1909)

Another epic work followed in Thomas Allin’s *Universalism Asserted*, later reprinted as *Christ Triumphant*. This was also an incredibly popular work that showcased an exceptional breadth of perception and understanding. In her preface to the ninth edition (1890), Edna Lyall states, “Perhaps the most interesting part of this book is that which shows how throughout the entire history of the Church the belief in universal salvation has been held by many of the best and truest of Christ’s followers.” Dr Allin’s extensive research and writing within this historic genre contribute a valuable addition to the philosophical, exegetical and doctrinal issues he explores throughout the book’s 325 pages. His third work, in its own inimitable way, is equally compelling. *The Augustinian Revolution in Theology* (1911) compares the influential North African Bishop with his Alexandrian and Syrian counterparts. At one point, Allin writes, “Augustine, as I shall try to show, and always on the authority of his own writings, was in very truth the greatest revolutionary of primitive times. By sheer force of genius and strength of will, he deflected and darkened the whole course of Christian thought in the West. He left Latin Christendom, at his death, the dreadful legacy of belief in an angry and cruel Deity, at whose feet the whole human family lay in terror” (27). It is this uncompromising approach to their subject matter that makes Allin’s works, few as they are, so refreshingly candid. Few authors within mainstream Christianity have placed their reputation on the line with such conviction and (dear I say) perception. The present writer is very much indebted to this forthright and fearless Irish-born cleric.

Meantime, in the burgeoning North American republic, a new generation of bible scholars had emerged, independent, bold and explorative, much like the democracy itself. What is more, many of the names associated with the movement were identified as men of exceptional standing in terms of intelligence, education, and background.

Edward Beecher (1803-85)

The first of our lineup was born into one of the most exceptional American families of the time; the head of this troupe, Lyman Beecher, became known as "the father of more brains than any man in America." Our subject Edward was the older brother of Harriet Beecher Stowe (author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*) and Henry Ward Beecher (whom, it is claimed, was America's most famous preacher and abolitionist). The second son, Edward, after graduating from *Yale* at the age of 19, studied theology at *Andover*. From there, he went on to pastor several churches throughout the American Northeast and authored at least a dozen books, the last of which is (from our standpoint) the most engaging. In *History of Opinions on the Scriptural Doctrine of Retribution* (1878), Beecher started out by examining the historical precedents for Eternal Punishment, Annihilationism, and Universal Restoration from a mainstream perspective. Quite unexpectedly, his research led to a major doctrinal turnaround, transitioning him from the first camp (EP) to the last (UR) after uncovering the abundant evidence for the latter. *Hist. Retribution* is an authoritative book; its author demonstrates intelligence, skill, and even *civility* – referring to his opponents as 'fine scholars' – in overturning the many objections to its conclusion. The section dealing with the etymology of *aion* and *aionios* is at least as good (and probably better) than most from the period – Beecher re-examines the controversies over *aion*'s classical roots like a detective. Perhaps none of his contemporary authors - and there are many – handles the subject with more dexterity or thoroughness. However, the most compelling part of Beecher's work (for me) is the 30-odd pages he devotes to Theodore of Mopsuestia. As an antagonist to many of Origen's views, though sharing his restorationism, Theodore is of special interest. The current writer is grateful to the author for presenting in his book rarely found data on this exceptional patristic Antiochian.

John Wesley Hanson (1823-1901)

Born in Boston, J. W. Hanson served as chaplain to the Massachusetts Volunteer Militia during the American Civil War, later penning a historical sketch of his campaign experiences. After the war, Hanson journeyed to Scotland, taking up the post of pastor at St Paul's Universalist Church in Glasgow. In 1875, following a return to the States (Chicago), he released his study *Aion, Aionios* on the pivotal and divisive time words. This little volume has stood the test of time, being sourced and quoted by numerous subsequent authors. It provides, even to this day, a sound introduction to the subject. His later work on the Gospels, *The New Covenant*, has already been mentioned (*Chapter 3*; Part II); also his edited *Revised Version* in which he transliterated the terms directly into the main text, unlike the original Bible, which presented them as amended footnotes (or without the footnote, as the case may be). In all, Hanson produced around 20 works on various scriptural aspects of U.R. and other subjects during his lifetime.

John Mercer Patton (1843-1916)

Patton identifies himself as "an Orthodox Layman" on the title page of his book, *The Death of Death* (1878). Other than this single published work, little is known about the author. However, that should in no way deter, for *The Death of Death* is an ably constructed work, submitting to the holiness of God in connection with the existence of evil and its complete removal from the cosmos. Very likely, the 'holiness of God' is the book's chosen theme because of the common, though fallacious (that is to say, *scripturally unsupported*) claim that Divine Holiness by necessity demands *everlasting* punishment; Patton never claims that punishment will not form part of the solution. He ably demonstrates how such a proposition is wrong, postulating that the only acceptable scriptural and moral alternative is the complete expulsion of evil from the universe once "the ages," during which evil is manifest, have run their course. This work is characterised by thoroughness and detail, citing numerous contemporary scholars and authorities. Furthermore, like Hanson's, it is firmly based on the Divine purpose with the scriptural *aions*, which the author alludes to continually. At the end of his book, Patton discusses some of the reasons this perspective has been misunderstood and poorly received.

Arthur P. Adams (1848-1920)

Within a decade of Patton's work, one-time Methodist minister A. P. Adams shaped another worthy testimony in support of a universal redemption; in the process, he virtually coined the phrase "post-mortem probation." Adams, the great-grandson of Founding Father John Adams, compiled a collection of individual papers between 1885 and 1886 discussing various aspects of the subject. The complete set was shortly afterwards published under the title *The Spirit of the Word*. This work was not Adams' first or only writing, but it was very likely his finest. *The Spirit of the Word* is refreshingly original and insightful. Upon its release in the late 1880s, it generated considerable interest among free-thinking individuals of the time, adding impetus to the (by then) mounting awareness of our subject. Adams' chapter on Sodom's restoration (141-156) – a subject up to then rarely addressed – left an indelible impression on the current writer as a young man, introducing him to the idea of post-death probation; that is to say, the possibility of redemption *after* death. For a taste of his argument, see *Appendix I*.

Charles Hamilton Pridgeon (1863-1932)

This prominent American born in this era began his career as a Presbyterian minister. Charles Pridgeon graduated from Princeton Theological Seminary, but severed his denominational ties after twelve years of service, founding the non-denominational *Pittsburgh Bible Institute* in 1901. Pridgeon's life is a potent antidote to those who claim indifference to evangelistic efforts on the part of Universal Salvationists. He devoted his life to free bible instruction, an orphanage established in Wexford, Pa., and missionary work throughout North America, Africa and China. This alone would make a sufficiently

impressive epitaph, but there is more. According to *Who's Who in America*, Pridgeon was once ranked the fifth best-educated man in the U.S. In his most impactful work, *Is Hell Eternal; Will God's Plan Fail?*, he writes, "After the resurrection in 'the dispensation of the fullness of times' (Eph 1:10), there is to be the greatest season of the application of redemption in getting all back into Christ as their Head. 'All souls are mine' (Ez 18:4), saith the Lord. 'For He is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto Him' (Luke 20:38). Conscience is satisfied with such a God and such a plan; and our Lord also shall 'see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied'" *Is Hell Eternal?* 115. Little more needs to be said about this exceptional servant of the Most High God, except to point out the obvious: in this single sentence (above), he virtually summarises the entire case for Universal Reconciliation.

Of course, the teaching was well-known in the United States even before the time of the above authors. Hanson and Whittemore both document numerous testimonies from such illustrious figures as John Whittier, Benjamin Franklin, and (as it happens) Abraham Lincoln, who is said to have declared, "It must be everybody or nobody!" Hanson further relays an incident between a minister and a distinguished American jurist who rejected the appalling view of God's character then common among American churchmen. At the end of his discourse on the 'orthodox' character of God, the preacher asked the lawyer for his opinion. "It was a very logical production," he answered, "the premises and conclusions were perfect." To which the befuddled minister replied, "But I had understood you do not accept the evangelical views of the character of God?" "The character of God!" exclaimed the judge, "I supposed you were describing the devil!" – *Cloud of Witnesses* 152.

Benjamin Rush, one of the signatories of the *Declaration of Independence*, proclaimed to Elhanan Winchester in a letter: "The Universal Doctrine prevails more and more in our country." From this, one might have expected a more open and inclusive outlook unfolding within contemporary American Church circles. But alas, holding the belief, let alone teaching it, continued to have severe consequences. It is a fascinating irony how the vast numbers who immigrated to the U.S. did so to escape the entrenched bigotry of their native histories and embrace the declared message of free religious expression in a pristine land. Beyond question, the ideals of men are more easily touted than practised, even in a New World with a promised declaration of liberty. Human nature is not so easy to change! The resulting isolation and persecution of the insurgents led to the formation of the first American *Universalist Society*. The fledgling institution received strong support, especially in the American Northeast. In a poetic twist of fate, Farrar relates an anecdote he calls "natural nemesis": On the site of a former church associated with endless torture, one of the largest Universalist churches in America was established!

20th Century Iconoclasts

The 19th century produced several brilliant dissenters who rejected modern liberalism while promoting an eschatology still very much at odds with existing mainstream thought. As with (for example) Eriugena, centuries earlier, they

strove to plead their case *within* the hallowed halls of the inherited tradition (or, at least, most of it). Men like Maurice, Farrar, Lightfoot and Westcott had to a greater or lesser extent already begun the process of effecting change within the institution. However, as the 19th and 20th centuries merged, a new confidence began to materialise, advancing ideas that had seldom been fully explored by the modern Church. Some of these – like the many before them who embraced the 'Larger Hope' – were what could perhaps be best termed 'Contingent Universalists.' Gordon Knight comes close to summing up their position: "As long as we reject both the Calvinist claim that God did not intend to save all, and the hypothesis that it is possible for a person to choose freely to render themselves incapable of salvation, universal salvation *looks*...the *best bet* in town" – *Religious Studies 42*; 222 (emphasis added). The expression "looks...the best bet," one assumes, points to the idea that "the door to redemption is perpetually left open."

Andrew Fairbairn (1838-1912)

Admittedly, more a 19th than a 20th century phenomenon, Andrew Fairbairn was a Scottish theologian who wrote several works, the most relevant to our present study being *The Place of Christ in Modern Theology* (1883). Fairbairn held to something he called the "eternal will of good," meaning God would forever extend His redemptive favours with consequential "eternal possibilities of salvation." In his own words, Fairbairn recites the Divine Paradox: "God will never be reluctant, though man may forever refuse." Just as God's Sovereignty will ever strive to expel sin and create righteousness, so the Fatherhood will always love and seek to create happiness. But neither will forget that everyone has choice, and must be freely won to submission and obedience. "Sin is not to be vanquished either by the destruction or the compulsory restoration of the sinner, but by his free salvation; and should this fail...yet God will have been so manifested by the attempt at it, that all the universe will feel as if there had come to it a vision of love that made it taste the ecstasy and beatitude of the Divine" (468). These last poetic words are (to the writer's thinking) pure rationalisation by a mind not yet fully opened to God's *intention* to be All in all. One could say that Fairbairn gets close to believing in 'God's can' but is dashed at the hurdle of 'man's wont.' Not once in more than 500 pages does he examine the word *aion* or its derivatives, a very significant fact. Nonetheless, this man is a thinker; he's an example of perhaps countless others who have realised that something is wrong with the received wisdom.

Peter Taylor Forsyth (1848-1921)

P. T. Forsyth began his ministerial life as a congregational pastor in Manchester, UK. Forsyth, early on, saw the doctrine of double predestination as positing two non-reconcilable wills within God: "Preach the eternal, unappeasable wrath of God upon lost souls," he proclaimed, "and you offer men a devil to worship." In this, he doubtless reveals something of the influence of the man he greatly admired, F. D. Maurice; Forsyth's later writings hold many accolades for Maurice. The following depiction by Dr

Forsyth can only be described as one that reveals God's *universal* glory: "The purpose of a world created by a holy God must be holiness (but) can God secure it?" Forsyth claims *that* to be the ultimate inquiry of the spiritually mature life, and that "Christ and His cross are the answer, or they have no meaning at all. They reveal in their foregone victory the omnipotence of holiness to subdue all natural powers and forces…to the moral sanctity of the Kingdom of God. And if they do not reveal that, we are left without any ground of certainty about a holy ending for the world at all… It is a tremendous claim. And the improbability of it is either a pious absurdity, or it is the quiet irony of a God who has it already in the hollow of His hand." So, how do such splendid words fit Forsyth's explicit denial that all (necessarily) in the end will be saved? Frankly, they don't; moreover, they can't! Robin Parry states quite unambiguously, "Forsyth's theology was at heart fundamentally Universalist (despite Forsyth's denial of this)" – *Theological Scribbles* (For more on this dichotomy, see Jason Coroncy's *Hallowed Be Thy Name*).

Karl Barth (1886-1968)

Forsyth has been called the 'Barthian' before Barth, though they differed in many ways as well. Barth was a Swiss Theologian known for his break with 19th-century liberal theology, as well as many written works, especially his multi-volume magnum opus, *Church Dogmatics*. In contrast to his early liberalist education, Barth developed his "Theocentric starting point," placing God at the very centre of life and teaching. Barth revels in his famous "no" to nationhood and religious assumptions that "knocks one to the floor," and his "yes" to God's righteousness that "sets one on one's feet again." But it was his reworking of Augustinian-Calvinistic eschatology that caused the greatest stir. Some saw it as an improvement while others, loyal to the paradigm, viewed it with suspicion (or worse). In Barth's eyes, God's mercy is identified with His righteousness in such a way as to assure that His mercy invariably takes the initiative. This change of perspective naturally provoked 'accusations' of Barth's doctrine leading to Universalism, which, of course, it does. The paradox lies in Barth's denial: "I do not believe in universalism, but I do believe in Jesus Christ, reconciler of all." It is a subtle, though some might say less than meaningful, distinction.

Oscar Cullmann (1902-99)

Dr Cullmann, known for his ecumenical work, was one of the most erudite hermeneutical scholars of the 20th century. Like Ellul, he was of French descent; unlike Ellul, Barth and Forsyth, his background was not Reformed, but Lutheran. Trained in classical philology and theology, he wrote notable works on Primitive Christianity, Christology, Immortality and Resurrection. His most relevant labour (for us) is found in *Christ and Time*, where he assesses time and infinity as expressed in the early Church. His research on the Greek idea of *timelessness* and its influence on religious thought is of special interest, though it has been largely overlooked or ignored, doubtless owing to its challenge to the broadly accepted view. In his early chapters,

Cullmann examines the so-called time words (*olam*, *aion*, *aionios*) in their various contexts. Insight is offered into how, within this particular milieu, the Church arrived where it is today. Then Cullmann turns his attention to the controversy of *Redemptive History and Universalism* (177). Using a simple timeline, he plots Christ as "the One" decisive mid-point of *age-based* redemptive history. Stretching back from this crucial mid-point, the timeline widens and withdraws to its genesis (or primal creation), where everything was "good" and "very good." Reaching forward, and again widening from the same centre, we pass through the formation of the Church (including its future role in reconciliation) and move on to the ultimate goal of Revelation, the perfected New Creation. Cullmann's exegesis must stop there – not at some imagined 'eternity,' a view Cullmann believes to be Hellenistic – but to the primal view of infinite time *beyond the aions*. Revelation ends at the summit of the New Creation "wherein dwells righteousness," where God, now dwelling *with* humanity, has achieved the end/completion (*telos*/*sunteleia*) of His purpose and is All in all. However, Dr Cullmann is no dreamer! Right from the start, he concedes that the scriptural exegete will never do justice to the conclusions of the dogmatist (Barth said as much). Nonetheless, Cullmann reveals a generous spirit in his understanding that the "task of the dogmatic theologian is far more difficult than that of the New Testament scholar, insofar as the latter is required to show only what the New Testament teaches. He does not need to solve the difficulties arising in the teaching, nor wrestle with its basic presuppositions…it is (rather) his bounden duty to keep within the limits of his work..." (*Ibid*. xxviii; emphasis added). In this, Cullmann excels.

William Barclay (1907-78)

Professor of Divinity at the University of Glasgow, 'Bill' Barclay became a household name, especially throughout the Commonwealth, from his regular radio and television broadcasts in the 1950s and 60s. Dr Barclay was an ordained minister of the Church of Scotland with an expansive gift for biblical exegesis and devotional writing. His great strength lay in his openness – Barclay would often present multiple interpretations of a difficult passage, allowing the reader the privilege of choosing which one seemed most appropriate. In this, he demonstrated considerable intelligence, as the best teachers are not dogmatic – far from it – and Barclay embodied this practical approach in both his oral teaching and over 40 written works. His *Bible Commentaries*, always penned in accessible language, sold millions worldwide and remain popular to this day. In his biography, Barclay wrote, "I believe implicitly in the ultimate and complete triumph of God, the time when all things will be subject to him, and when God will be everything to everyone (1 Cor 15:24-28). For me, this has certain consequences. If one man remains outside the love of God at the end, it means that one man has defeated the love of God…and that is impossible" – *A Spiritual Autobiography* 67. Barclay (like Erskine & MacDonald before him) came to this view despite an early indoctrination in the Reformed Church of Scotland. Nothing, it seems, could prevent him from seeing with utmost clarity the full force of the Apostle Paul's triumphant message, nor his will to proclaim it to a worldwide public.

Jacques Ellul (1912-94)

In the writer's eyes, the French philosopher, sociologist and lay theologian Jacques Ellul is the most endearing of the current group. During his lifetime, Ellul authored over 60 books and more than 600 articles on a variety of subjects covering religion, politics and related social issues. At seventeen, the young Ellul underwent an epiphany of sorts that led to his conversion in 1932. During the war years, he became a leader in the French resistance, helping Jews avoid the Nazi death camps; he was posthumously decorated for his courage. Although Ellul identified with Protestantism, he was critical of all church authority because he saw in the institution a decided lack of reliance on Christ and scripture. He thus rejected, like all those mentioned here, the modern liberalism of his era. Ellul was very much aligned with Karl Barth's view of the Divine Sovereignty reigning supreme over and above all else. Thus, towards the end of his semi-biographical book, *What I Believe* (1987), he proclaims his conviction in Universal Salvation, though he admits he cannot commit to it as a dogmatic proposition. "I do not teach it; I announce it" (207). Some might view such separation between belief and dogma as artificial; after all, even dogma must, until that time we "see even as we are seen," remain an expression of belief or faith.

Independent Premillennialist Scholarship

Many (perhaps most) of the prior scholars were throughout their lives members of an established institution. Many of them (again, perhaps most) were also advocates of the traditional amillennialist template, which denies the 1000-year reign of the righteous on earth in the future eon. From the 5th century, this doctrinal position had become the broadly accepted framework for interpreting eschatology; even today, it remains the default position for many noble souls. However, with the advent of the modern era, this well-established substructure began to be challenged. The millennial or pre-millennial view – that of 'Primitive Christianity,' which anticipated a future 1000-year reign of Christ on earth – regained much of its standing via the work of scholars such as Irving, Darby, Scofield, Anderson and Bullinger. Many followed in the wake of this movement, re-examining scripture within a restored dispensational framework, and thus recovering beliefs long since forgotten.

{The technical term 'dispensational' merely reflects a hermeneutical strategy/devise that assists in "dividing things that differ." It thus allocates distinctive time settings (dispensations or administrations) for God's purpose with the heavens and earth (see *Appendix III* for more details). To claim, as some do, that this is 'new' or 'modern' – therefore erroneous – is misleading, and may lead to the conflation of law with grace and faith with works, or a blurring of distinct eschatological boundaries. To the extent that anyone honours such distinctions, they are expressing a dispensational point of view. That is all. A few within the early Church held tenaciously to the doctrine of Christ's literal earthly return (aka chiliasm) to establish the millennial kingdom, but like many teachings of the primitive era, the doctrine was gradually attenuated. Of course, as with any hermeneutical strategy, things can be taken too far; it is agreed that the so-called ultra-dispensational school of the 19th century was too extreme.}

Hundreds, perhaps thousands, worldwide, turned to the deeper study of scripture in the light of this teaching. Central to its understanding was the word *aionios*, and on this subject, Gelesnoff's *The Ages in the Scriptures* (1912) was a brilliantly succinct reply to the accepted tradition of contemporary critical reviews (such as Anderson's *Human Destiny*). Other prominent works (among many) emerging at this time included *God's Eonian Purpose* by Adlai Loudy (1929; an American Church of Christ minister); *Evil, its Origin, Purpose and End*, *The Judgments Of God* and *All in All* by A. E. Knoch; *The Image and Likeness of God* by M. E. Johnson (1953); Thomson's links scripture with scripture, conveying the reader far beyond the usual millennialist framework. With Scranton, the Great White Throne judgment marks not the end, but the beginning of the last great "eon of the eons" (Eph 3:21), and the Second Death has everything to do with God's intention to redeem his entire creation. During the Second World War, a series of radio programs on our general theme was broadcast in North America at a time when thousands were perishing on the battlefield. Public debates with orthodox clerics raged over the delicate issue of human destiny. During this period, various small, independent bible schools became established, as well as numerous periodicals and journals, all aimed at the respectful research of the Holy Scriptures. These initiatives were founded on the fundamental belief that Colossians 1:20 was a literal truth. One of several notable publications, the bi-monthly magazine *Unsearchable Riches*, began its publication in 1909.

Adolph Ernst Knoch (1874-1965)

Of German descent, A. E. Knoch was born in the United States to emigrant parents who spoke little English. At school, where he first learnt to speak the language, a proactive and perceptive teacher encouraged the young student to further his obvious talents in linguistics and literature. Although the parental home could not satisfy this need, a Lutheran Bible was at least available. From this, he first gleaned the message of salvation through grace. However, Knoch never forgot the advice of his early educator, and in 1900, he enrolled to study Ancient Greek at the Bible Institute of Los Angeles. Some time later, when the sophomore compared his newfound knowledge with the *American Standard Revised Version*, he became troubled by the discrepancies he found. As so often happens, the dilemma paved the way for future developments, out of which his 'concordant' method of translation was born, ultimately leading to the publication of the *Concordant Version* of the Greek Scriptures in 1926. Eventually, Knoch severed his original connections with the Brethren movement, from which he met his wife, and subsequently became involved in many projects on various aspects of scriptural research. Like all true pioneers, Knoch was considered controversial within mainstream circles. His foundation was firmly based on the scriptural 'eons,' which provided that wonderful hope implicit within them. With Knoch's passing in 1965, the *Concordant Version* was revised and renamed *The Concordant Literal New Testament* (Knoch was also co-editor and then editor-in-chief of the previously mentioned *Unsearchable Riches* publication).

Vladimir Michael Gelesnoff (1877-1921)

Count Vladimir Gelesnoff was born into a noble family with Russian, Italian, and British roots. From birth, Gelesnoff was a member of the Russian nobility, going back to 1425; however, he relinquished his fortune and title in young adulthood for his newfound faith. A graduate of the University of St Petersburg, Gelesnoff could speak eight languages and read more than twenty. Notwithstanding this extraordinary prowess in languages, he also excelled in the sciences, engineering, and the arts. His great passion, however, lay in the study of scripture, to which he devoted much of his short life of just 43 years. Disagreements with the Orthodox Church resulted in Gelesnoff's early exile from Russia to Rome, where he continued his academic studies before moving on to New York City. In the United States, he embarked on the lecture circuit, voicing many untouched biblical themes, which proved very popular in turn-of-the-century America. However, his was not the adulatory hand-clap of the unthinking crowd. He is known for saying, "I would prefer to get one man to think rather than get a thousand excited." It was an attitude of mind that led to innumerable articles provoking thought on the part of the reader, even if that thinking led to disagreement. Many of his finest articles were published in the magazine *Grace and Glory*, which later became *Unsearchable Riches* with Gelesnoff, now in his 30s, at the helm. By this time, the eclectic scholar had moved to the American West Coast, but it was here that an injury and a series of illnesses finally took their toll on his fragile health. Before his untimely death in 1921, Gelesnoff wrote or co-wrote studies on eschatology, including his excellent little work on *The Ages in the Scriptures*, from which the current writer derived so much delight and knowledge as a young man. He undertook other projects before his death, including several joint efforts with Knoch, Adams, and Jukes. All of these endeavours were from a premillennial/dispensational perspective.

The Differentiator was another periodical from this era, originating in post-Second World War America before moving to the UK in 1952. From '52 to '61, the late Alexander Thomson was editor-in-chief. In the eyes of many, 'The Diff' was seen as a journal *for* scholars, *by* scholars, and, in the opinion of the current writer, was among the finest (if not *the* finest) periodicals ever produced by independent scripture-based scholarship.

Alexander Thompson (1889-1966)

A colleague once summed up Thomson's singular skill as a scholar and translator as follows: "His knowledge of Greek and his understanding of the Greek Scriptures are so profound that any translation he makes is bound to have very high authority indeed." At one time, the British government and monarchy assigned Thomson to assist in translating their Greek documentation and communications. Originally taught "that old doctrine of eternal punishment," one day this young man from Edinburgh fell upon a copy of Stanley P. Smith's 1912 manuscript questioning the teaching on the grounds of Col 1:20. Smith had been one of the 'Cambridge Seven' who were destined for the missionary fields of China in 1899, preaching fearlessly "not

the milk and water of religion but the cream of the Gospel!" Thomson thought Smith's scripture-based arguments for the reconciliation of all things "were and still are unanswerable." Of humble personage, Thomson's Scottish temperament made him fearless in the face of opponents and uncompromising in unfolding scripture free from creedal allegiance and doctrinal bias. As with many before and since, this won him notoriety. He contributed hundreds of papers on the deeper concerns of scripture to fulfil his lifelong passion: "To know exactly what God has spoken, every word." For fifty years, he pursued this most worthy of goals. It led him to believe, as it has many before and since, that the dogma of '*endless* punishment' is the Adversary's masterpiece of deception.

In the 21st Century, a new group of scholars and authors has taken up the banner of what is now called the 'Victorious Gospel' (one of several epithets). Among the many contenders, two outstanding recent works are *The Inescapable Love of God* by Thomas Talbott and *That All Shall Be Saved* by David Bentley Hart. Both books focus on the character of God and His unassailable purpose within, more or less, the ages in scripture.

Thomas Talbott

Talbott, Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at Willamette University, Oregon, seeks to expose in his splendidly titled book (2014; 2nd ed.), "the extent to which the Western theological tradition has managed to twist the New Testament message of love, forgiveness and hope into a message of fear and guilt." He argues in particular, "that certain patterns of fallacious reasoning, which crop up repeatedly in the works of various theologians and bible scholars, have prevented many from appreciating St Paul's explicit teaching that God is merciful to all in the end" (from the back cover). The writer was first introduced to Dr Talbott's thinking in 2005 when he created one of the earliest online sites dedicated to U.R. He has since been a force in underpinning the profundity and viability of the teaching, whilst exposing the paucity of oppositional arguments.

David Bentley Hart

Dr Hart's work is a joy to anyone who appreciates powerful dialectics (unless, of course, one is disinclined to its conclusions). For this book has occasioned more reaction – outrage, even – than virtually any other work on the subject. It should be no surprise, of course, for Hart exposes better than anyone the dire moral, intellectual, and spiritual compromises posed by the received 'wisdom'. From the other side of the Atlantic, University of Nottingham's John Milbank writes, "If everything and everyone are not finally restored, then God is not God. This is the simple core of Hart's unanswerable argument, masterfully developed. He calls us back to real orthodoxy, perhaps just in time." Also, Simon Oliver (Durham University): "Hart shows with great clarity why the idea that our ultimate freedom lies in accepting or rejecting God as one option amongst others is profoundly mistaken. This (work) is some

of the most exacting, perspicuous and powerful theological writing I have read in recent years." Hart's original hardback (2019) has latterly been published in paperback form. This is the recommended edition because, for the new format, Dr Hart has composed a *Preface* that is worth the price of the book alone.

Ilaria Ramelli

One final work must be mentioned, if only because of its august proportions and learned author (it is, of course, much more). Ilaria Ramelli, an Italian scholar, researched *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis* for a mammoth sixteen years. This extensive 900-page book (2013) examines the teaching from its roots in the New Testament, throughout the patristic period, up to the Middle Ages. Dr Ramelli writes, *"*The apokatastasis doctrine is historically very far from having been produced by an isolated character, excessively influenced or even 'contaminated' by Greek theories, such as Origen has been long considered to be" (817). She considers it "an authentically Christian, or Jewish-Christian, doctrine. Before Christianity, no religion or philosophy had ever maintained it, not even Plato or mystery religions." (819). Ramelli demonstrates that the *apokatastasis panton*, or 'restitution of all things,' is the grandest of all the not-so-hidden gems of the faith of Christ; being firmly grounded in the Greek New Testament, it therefore deserves its rightful place in Christian thought. A condensed paperback version of the textbook titled *The Larger Hope* is available.

It is a bewildering paradox how the early Christian community, the majority of whom (as we have seen) imparted little knowledge of the concept of endless penalty and embraced either annihilationism or a much wider hope for the race, went within a few short centuries from being savagely persecuted to an authoritarian persecutor itself. Furthermore, the latter entity not only failed to preserve the depth and richness of the earlier faith, but its venom and hatred were all the more unleashed on the reflective minority who steadfastly upheld it. By far the worst of these persecutors were the leading Protestants; the very same who claimed a more intimate and practised knowledge of the scriptures, full as they are of exhortations of love, mercy, gentleness, and forgiveness. These are not mere opinions but readily discernible facts of ecclesiastical history, available to anyone prepared to examine them. As a final note, history may also suggest (although it is a more arbitrary point) that the most decidedly powerful minds – certainly, some of her biggest hearts – adopted the doctrine of Universal Restoration.

***Part VII*:** SIGNS OF CHANGE

In an interview published in *Newsweek Magazine* (Aug 2006), one-time crusading evangelist, the late Billy Graham (then 87), described how his thinking had radically changed over the years. Once a strong protagonist of endless penalty

for all but the saved (apparently, Graham in his younger years believed only 15% of even church people would ultimately be saved), the article revealed that more mature perspective that comes with deep reflection over time: In the article Dr Graham intimated that "the core message of the Gospel, and the love of God '*for all people*' should take priority…more recent years have given him something he had little of in his decades of global evangelism: time to think both more deeply and more broadly...he refuses to be judgmental…thinks God's ways and means are veiled from human eyes and wrapped in mystery. '*There are many things that I don't understand…the Bible is open to interpretation, and fair-minded Christians may disagree or come to different conclusions about specific points*.' Like Saint Paul, he believes human beings on this side of paradise can grasp only so much. *'Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror,' Paul wrote, 'then we shall see face to face. As time went on, I began to realise the love of God for everybody, all over the world*,' he says. '*And in his death on the cross, some mysterious thing happened between God and the Son that we don't understand. But there he was, alone, taking on the sins of the world*'… When asked whether he believes heaven will be closed to Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus or (even) secular people, though, Graham says, '*Those are decisions only the Lord will make…I believe the love of God is absolute. He said he gave his son for the whole world, and I think he loves everybody regardless of what label they have*.'"

Was Graham's awakening an isolated incident? Far from it. Back in 1995, the Church of England released *The Mystery of Salvation*, an official report backed by its House of Bishops. Contained within this document was the hope of Universal Salvation, arguing that it is "incompatible with the essential Christian affirmation that God is Love to say that God brings millions into the world to damn them." This will be of little surprise to anyone who has read the current chapter with anything resembling open eyes. Anglicanism has held in its bosom a generous share of clerics and theologians who, over recent centuries, have openly embraced and competently expounded the faith of a larger redemption.

Catholicism, too, in recent decades, has spoken out against the hellish dogma in favour of *apokatastasis*. This indeed has been a joyous thing to observe. Starting with the Second Vatican Council (mid-1960s), the Church of Rome spoke (positively) about Universal Salvation. These references have continued to impact the faith message into the current millennium. In 2001, for example, the late Pope John Paul II released a message with the title, *All Creation Recapitulated in Christ* (doubtless an attempt to reiterate the Church's position). In this uplifting and *biblically*-orientated communication, John Paul stated the case for a full restoration by referencing passages such as Ephesians 1:10 (from whence his title was borrowed), moving on to John 12:32 where Christ speaks in unqualified terms of "drawing all" to Himself, and lastly, to what is incontestably scripture's loftiest declaration, that one day "all" will be freed from death and at last reside in God (1 Cor 15:28). John Paul was far from being the only Pontiff of recent times to express these sentiments. The late Francis, too, in his attempt to redress the historical wrong, said the following: "Just as surely as the grass is green, the sky is blue, God is in heaven, and Christ is Lord, Jesus taught Messianic/Christian Universalism. The apostles preached it and the early Church believed it for well over 500 years—long after the Christian Church had become the State Church of the Roman Empire."

A less grandiose, though no less notable, example comes from a protestant denomination not generally known for *apokatastasis*. In a sermon delivered at the Baptist Church at Bornholm in Denmark (2018), the following proposition was delivered to the congregation: "To belong to the flock of Christ – to be a part of his church – means to confess that he is one with the Father and that all and everything has been put into his hands. This also means to have a hope that is larger than a particular and narrow hope for the elect only. This larger hope is exactly what distinguishes the Church from the Pharisees of Jesus' time and indeed all religious elites who want to narrow down the gospel." To that, we should all be able to say a heartfelt 'Amen'!

Author and pastor John Hopler believes there has been a small but steady shift in thinking in American evangelical circles, too, recently. He writes, "In 2014, no pastor in my relational network believed Jesus would restore all. Today (2026), of the ones who have talked to me, *most* have confided in me that they believe Jesus will restore all or think that it's a reasonable hope." Hopler also observed that in 1997, there was no mention of U.R. in the *Counterpoint Series on Hell*, a review of the four most popular views of the subject among evangelicals. But in 2016, following an essay by Robin Parry, the series editor noted that the biblical evidence for U.R. actually appeared stronger than for eternal conscious torment. One scholar, after studying Parry's work, considered it "very convincing," an attitude reflected in the increasing number of people viewing the position as legitimate within the evangelical world. Great news indeed!

Even works of fiction such as *The Shack* (2007) can have a huge impact on the modern Christian and, perhaps, even non-Christian. Written by William P. Young, this initially self-published novel, which strives to portray the Divine in a more Christ-like light, became one of the best-selling books of 2008. As of May 2010, *The Shack* had run to over 10 million copies and remained at #1 on *The New York Times* bestseller list for 70 weeks. Not bad for a book that Young claims to have penned for his children! The writer (of the current work) neither endorses Young's book nor rejects it; in fact, he has never read it. It is mentioned merely to indicate the hunger out there for a God that is bigger than the one broadly portrayed in mainstream circles. As that lovable radical David Bentley Hart observes, "Over the years I have seen plenty of people driven away by the teaching of hell; driven away by what they take to be a terroristic religion. I have seen no one driven away by the teaching of Universal Salvation."

American Lutheran scholar Martin E. Marty sums up the contemporary situation thus: after 1600 years, "Hell went away; No one noticed!" And that is perhaps the real tragedy: that so few ordinary, everyday church-goers seem aware of the above facts, any more than they are about the much-contested and distorted affairs of ecclesial history.

Chapter 12

FOR THE CAUSE OF CHRIST

Deliver me O Lord, from the narrowing influence of human lessons, from human systems of theology; teach me directly out of the fulness and freedom of Thine own Word - CHALMERS

Elhanan Winchester and John Murray formally established the American Universalist Church in 1872 out of necessity due to the ostracism they faced from their fellow brethren in Christ. After being excommunicated, they had little choice but to organise themselves and their growing community into a formal fellowship. It is unfortunate, especially in light of our current knowledge, that the smears and misrepresentations – less so the malice, one hopes – continue to this day. One persistent falsehood is the claim that all (or most) forms of modern 'universalism' originated with the organisation established by Murray and Winchester. Those who hold this view are either naive or misinformed to a degree that contradicts the facts of history. True, a small number of their successors, in an attempt to eliminate any remaining remnant of Calvinism, veered too far by subscribing to a form of non-penitential salvation; certain factions among them even strayed from the biblical or Christian framework. For this reason, the term 'universalism' is not typically used in the current work without qualification. However, it is important to note that few, if any, of the scholars mentioned in the last chapter share this perspective. Indeed, the vast majority of those embracing Christian or Biblical *Apokatastasis*, from the early patristics onward, have held to the Christology, Soteriology, and Eschatology of scripture.

Critiques of restitutional teachings come in a variety of forms. With some critics, it seems that any evidence will do, provided a shadow is cast on the teaching, or the individual associated with it is discredited. For example, the outrageous denunciation of Origen – as if he were the sole root of everything suspect – continues to this day (less so among genuine scholarship). Let the reader be mindful: the blind bigot who attacks Origen also attacks Iraenaus, Clement, Athanasius, Diodore, Theodore, Ambrose, Basil, and Gregory. As we have seen, the evidence indicates that the belief was held and taught widely even before the Alexandrians' day. That is precisely why the Byzantine emperor, Justinian, managed to work his deplorable mischief – many noble generations had passed, and by then the Church had entered her prolonged spiritual malaise. That certain contemporary schools and individuals prefer to deny this is tantamount to ignoring, minimising or denying the facts available from reliable literary sources. Acknowledged authorities of the distant and not-so-distant past, such as Mosheim, Schrockh, Bayle, Gieseler, Neander, Harnack, Lightfoot, Schaff, Farrar, right up to Ramelli in the present day, have not researched ecclesiastical history merely to appease 'universalist' sentiments. It is quite perverse to imagine that any of these scholars were (or are) interested in distorting the historical record. Doubtless, quite the opposite is true; they went all out to preserve authenticity. That ecclesial history may not neatly fit a particular doctrinal outlook is beside the point. As Ramelli highlights, the scriptural teaching on the subject – particularly as found in Paul – was unknown to the pagan world; nothing

like it had ever existed in Gnosticism or Stoicism. Indeed, it would be strange if it were, given that the whole concept revolves around a holy God of personified Love. This was a new and revolutionary idea. So revolutionary that some before and after Origen's day could not accept it, just as *the majority* today either do not out of ignorance or refuse to out of obduracy. The modern critic who returns to the same debased, archaic arguments would do well to scrutinise the inferred 'pagan' roots of his own eschatological heritage, not to mention the blindness that so culpably assumes it infallible.

Another prod at *apokatastasis* has been to write off its current resurgence as emanating from non- or quasi-Christian 'esoteric' sources. It is somewhat trite to denigrate inconvenient truths through academic conjecture – clever smoke screens, really – seeking a quick fix to a burgeoning, awkward reality. While it is true that any of the differing views on a particular subject may make one or more aspect/s of those views suspicious, that hardly justifies the wholesale denigration of the subject matter itself. Over the centuries, there have been untold variations of so-called 'orthodox' teachings, some of them highly suspect; should we consequently throw out the teachings altogether? As already conceded, some *have* held to a more mystical, esoteric or non-penitential vision of *apokatastasis*, placing a distance between themselves and scripture. Any form of teaching that reduces or rejects the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice abandons the foundation of biblical truth. But, again, the majority of scholars, recent and past, have *not* ventured down this path. The central issue must always come back to the one true source, as opposed to some suspected link with 'esotericism'...which is the argument from scripture itself. The tireless and largely forgotten biblical research (a taste of which was presented in the preceding chapters), which crosses all denominational boundaries and has not the slightest link to any new or old age esotericism, is ignored or debased. Why? Because it fails to fit the pattern of familiar, comfortable and dogmatic assumptions. It is also difficult to debunk, at least without bringing attention to discomforting evidence. Doubtless, it is easier to compose misleading artifice that steals attention from the central issues. Such prodigious efforts to protect 'the tradition,' no matter how well-intentioned, are just too tenuous or prejudiced to take seriously...at least for the informed. The great irony lies in the fact that while Protestant advocates tirelessly strive to maintain their tenuous grip on a specious Augustinian dualism – at the same time attacking all things (supposedly) 'Origenist' – the Catholic leadership are turning back to the early Greek teachers. As we have seen, the recent Papal See has increasingly favoured the Eastern Patristics, thereby indirectly denouncing the later Western convention of an *endless* hell.

The Problem

The writer is sometimes asked: "If the doctrine you believe is true, then why is it not more openly accepted and taught in the established churches?" Perhaps the most direct answer is, to use Fairbairn's words, "the persistence of the old consciousness." Institutional theology changes little because its foundations are set in prior commitments. With greater light, individuals within the institution may change; small groups may even ruffle feathers sufficiently to provoke token concessions. But the status quo normatively remains. In such an environment, scripture effectively becomes the servant of the Church; thus, by necessity, 'all

roads lead to Rome.' The outcome, as Fairbairn further suggests, must ever remain the same: no transcendence beyond the institutions of man, and little real faith worthy of the majesty and grace of God. It is hoped that the previous chapter has gone some way in exposing this situation; it was the main reason for including it (along with *Part II* of *Chapter 3*) in a book primarily devoted to exegesis. The astute reader will by now understand that the truths of Colossians 1:20 and 1 Corinthians 15:28 were widely acknowledged in the Primitive Church...a concession made, incidentally, by even its greatest contemporary antagonist, Augustine!

We must also keep in mind that the epistles used valuable space correcting erroneous notions that had already infiltrated the community of faith. Paul warned the early saints that after his departure savage wolves would attack the flock (Acts 20:29); that sound teaching would fail to continue among them (2 Tim 4:3). He further cautioned that doctrines of demons would arise (1 Tim 4:1); and, perhaps most noteworthy of all, that their struggle was not against flesh and blood but mighty unseen forces: the rulers and authorities of darkness…evil spirit powers inhabiting the celestial realms (Eph 6:12).

Naturally, interpretation of such foreboding depends on religious and doctrinal allegiances. One thing is nonetheless clear: On more than one occasion, Paul either directly or indirectly labels the current age "evil." Should we therefore conclude that the truth concerning God's greatest glory would be openly proclaimed during such a time? That His love would be universally and unitedly expressed through the words and actions of those who claim Him, Lord? That justice would be freely administered through the righteous application of Divine law? History suggests otherwise. God is acting in purest grace towards humanity at present (Eph 3:2) – it is *man's day* (1 Cor 4:3) and therefore reveals the extent of human error...of human vanity. Everything we touch is tainted by our own inherent 'weakness' (the word is generous). Despite its proximity to the Oracles of God, the historical and contemporary Church is no exception here; ecclesiology lies as vulnerable to complacency and corruption as any other institution. Seemingly, God shrouds His *full* purpose and glory, even from the elect, should they fail to seek it in all humility. The "oncoming ages" are the Lord's; then *all* will know such things, for His presence and truth will be felt and seen by all. Perhaps herein lies the reason why so few see the full glory of His "*aionian* purpose," because so few actively and humbly seek it. To be sure, the testimony of the 'Victorious Gospel' has rarely been the path to popularity within mainstream circles. True, many individuals have been attracted to the truth of Colossians 1:20, walking even a short distance down the "ever-brightening pathway" that leads to it, only to lose courage when they realise how far it takes them from the security and comfort of the common thoroughfare. Others, acknowledging the evidence, remain silent in order to sustain their harmonious position with the creed. Perhaps some imagine – wrongly, I believe – that its outward show is a hindrance to the work of the ministry. Of course, the majority see no reason for changing paths in the first place.

Louis Abbott sums up some of the reasons why so few (in relative terms) rigorously accept the teachings of Colossians 1:20 and 1 Corinthians 15:22-28:

1. The retention of a self-righteous or vengeful streak. We all know this to be true. Indeed, if we search our hearts, we might see it in ourselves; the Lord Jesus exposed its reality. Such an attitude resents the eleventh-hour vineyard

labourer's equal reward (Matt 20:1-6), as did the Pharisees the raising of Lazarus, as, too, the elder brother the paternal welcome of the prodigal. All such are victims of their own spiritual immaturity. Like the sons of thunder who asked Christ to bring down fire from heaven to consume the Samaritan village, they "fail to see what manner of spirit they are!"

2. The imposition of paganistic or semi-paganistic views upon scripture. Catholicism and Protestantism alike are guilty of this sin, and innumerable scholars and historians know it. These corruptive elements of our doctrinal heritage present a persistent barrier to comprehending God's perfect *Plan of the Ages*.

3. The preference for familiarity over reality. What is familiar and comfortable tends to be favoured, even when it is ridiculously or profanely untrue. For example, centuries ago the word 'damn' held the legal meaning of 'loss;' any *religious* connotation was, at that time, unknown. Its familiar meaning now is quite different, though few acknowledge this because they remain ignorant of its history. Humanity's foibles subscribe all too willingly to 'better the devil I know.'

4. The use or abuse of an *endlessly* hellish punishment as a fear tactic for control and coercion. Many among the indoctrinated still believe this strategy works. Although one wonders if there remains a semblance of gratification in its utility (with some, at least). Most educated and intelligent unbelievers dismiss the notion of *endless* torment as ridiculous or grotesque parody. In the writer's experience, it is an impediment to the true Gospel; it most certainly distorts God's true purpose.

5. A failure to hold or fully understand "the breadth, the length, the height, and the depth" of God's true nature and character, first and foremost of which is His *unconditional* love; but also His absolute sovereignty (power) and foreknowledge, His perfect holiness and goodness, His righteous justice, and His multifarious wisdom. Many *think* they fully comprehend these things, but the fulness of their faith ultimately fails in the test of doctrine. If our doctrine falls short of what Scripture categorically states, then our view of God is compromised.

6. A failure to acknowledge or understand the great scriptural affirmatives of salvation, restoration, reconciliation and recapitulation. It is lamentable how ignorant or evasive many pastors and ministers are of the uncompromising passages that point to God's all-embracing victory at the end of the eons. If the teachers are ignorant, so too will be the disciples!

7. A near complete ignorance of the teaching of the Scriptural *aions* that pervades Scripture from beginning to end. Enough has already been said on this point.

8. A profound failure to see that God's "love never fails," that His "mercy endures forever," and that that same mercy "boasts over judgment." Even the worst bible translations clearly convey these glorious facts. Many simply don't (or can't) see their implications.

9. The unseen sway that the celestial powers and principalities have over humanity in this current evil age; even the saints are deceived. While Satan cannot altogether destroy faith in God, he does the next best thing by undermining God's

greatest glory, diminishing His supreme purpose, and challenging His unlimited power and resources. FAITH is the issue here, not evidence.

10. The failure to see the Pharisee within. This has to do with pride. Many leaders and teachers within Church circles pride themselves on being mainstream and see any doctrinal retraction as weakening their status within the institution and/or threatening their credibility. Genuine humility – the willingness to openly admit error and face the consequences – has always been a challenging issue in human affairs.

The Point?

Another may ask, "If Universal Reconciliation is true, then what is the point of being a Christian at all?" Put another way, 'If all are to be saved, why not just let things pan out to their fatalistic conclusion?' The question itself may reveal more about the individual asking it than does any posited response! Regardless, one obvious answer (there are several) is, of course, JUDGMENT! "Would you rather your hand be cured by a balm or by amputation?" asks one ancient. Rejecting Divine Grace, of necessity, implicates not just the element of judgment but also the possibility of condemnation. In the court of God, the *deliberate* rejection of His grace and goodness is not a smart choice. Nonetheless, fear should never be the *primary* driver because fear fails to expose the true heart of God. We agree with Tom Wright, "the appeal of the Gospel is the appeal of love." Anyone, therefore, who asks, "Why embrace Christ?" or "Why preach the Gospel?" if God is going to save all in the end, really hasn't figured out who God is and what the Divine endgame amounts to; perhaps, even, what life represents with (or without) Him at the helm. A *heartfelt* response to the grace freely offered only comes through an understanding of God as personified, infinite, co-suffering Love; only in the depths of this profound knowledge lies true joy, peace, and security. In the words of Paul Axton, "Putting on Christ is to put on the wisdom and virtue of God." Such a state of being is impossible under any other terms. As George Sarris reminds us, the power of Christ is indeed "transformative." For those who 'get it,' there is nothing else this life can offer that comes close.

There is, of course, the other more regrettable side of the coin: the bizarrely incongruous 'limitation of grace,' where the Almighty's salvific favour belongs to an exclusive few, 'the elect.' Betrayed by an attachment to certain tacit doctrines, grace is seen under this umbrella as necessarily limited in scope and effect. But is a rescue mission any less praiseworthy because it ends in saving all whose lives are in danger? No, this unfortunate foible's roots lie in an insidious blend of pride and selfishness – the very sins Christ came to nullify – much as it did with the Prodigal's elder brother. Do we need to be reminded that it was the Father who rejoiced at the return of the son he had lost to a life of worldliness and sin, while the elder brother, who had stayed home under his father's loving care, refused to join in the joyful celebration of his wayward sibling's return? Exclusivity may be a central issue for worldly individuals, primarily driven by pride and status, but it should have no place in the Body of Christ. There, it reveals selfishness completely out of step with the essential message of the Gospel. Such a view doesn't fear, as Hart suggests, an endless hell; *it rather fears there won't*

be one! The tedious mantra is, "No hell, no heaven; no favoured winners without a whole lot of losers."

Progress Is Unorthodox

The term 'orthodox' strictly means *correct (straight) opinion*, but is used today more in the sense of *mainstream* opinion or *traditional* opinion. The presumptuous nature of the former definition (and its antonym 'heresy') is seen in the contrasting views held throughout church history by those who themselves have been termed 'orthodoxy.' As Schopenhauer pointed out in *Art of Controversy*, if general opinion were to determine the truth or otherwise of propositions, then we would have to admit that truth varies with time and space, since different opinions have come, over time, to be generally accepted. Even today – perhaps especially today – what is orthodox? Is it the Holy Apostolic Church? Is it the Assyrian Church of the East? Is it the Church of Rome? Is it Eastern Orthodoxy? Is it Protestantism (if so, which strain)? Is it collective institutional Christendom with its sordid history of power and cruelty? Throughout the last two millennia, 'orthodoxy' has been associated with the largest body of believers; those who, at the time, held power and authority. In defence, one might of course riposte: 'But they merely sought truth!' That may be correct…but it was *their* truth, the truth of *their* ideology, of *their* esteemed church, of *their* particular dogma.

The blindness of certain people in this respect was brought home to the writer recently in anecdotal form: The story goes that a church council was convened to review an acute problem within its congregation, when one of the members asked, 'What would the Lord have done in this situation?' Seemingly, this astute question stunned all present...all except one, that is, who with great indignation responded, 'He would have done what the Church said, that's what he would have done!' Well does Fairbairn answer this folly: "…no two things may be nearer allied than submission to authority and indifference to truth" – *Christ in Modern Theology* 131. Few, it seems, realise that until each one appears before the "Judge of the whole earth," none can say with finality, 'This is *the* Truth…this is Orthodox and therefore correct.'

The following is from the book *Progress is Unorthodox*. On page 35, its author, F. I. Cairns writes, "To ask a man to believe anything as a condition of admittance to an organisation wherein he desires membership is to place before him a great temptation to profess whatever the order demands, and to worry but little over possible dishonesty. The Church has had its share of those who profess belief without even attempting to understand...It is not too difficult to train men to believe almost anything, and there are more 'trained' ministers and priests than intelligent individuals among present-day apostles. Let anyone who has gone through a theological seminary be honest with himself and say whether or not he was led into certain opinions by a careful, if not dogmatic, inclination on the part of teachers who decided long before he entered the school what he should believe by the time he graduated. This, I contend, is not education, but training."

Then there is the contrarian issue of heresy. How does one define it? It is astonishing how freely this word is bandied about, even still. When people inflict upon others the accusation of heresy, they imply infallibility for themselves; in

doing so, the Protestant visits the same arena that was once vehemently denied the pope! Does scripture extend to us the right to thrust subjective accusations at a dissenting brother or sister on purely doctrinal grounds? Is it the Master's will that we enact the judgments that are strictly God's by 'burning,' literally or metaphorically, dissenters at the stake...to act as judge and jury, separating wheat from chaff? William Barclay, in one of his innumerable biblical studies, distils the matter thus: "There is a kind of heresy in which a man differs from orthodox belief because he has honestly thought things out and cannot agree with it. He does not take any pride in being different; he is different simply because he has to be. Such a heresy does not spoil a man's character; it may, in fact, enhance his character, because he has really thought out his faith and is not living on a second-hand orthodoxy." The Apostle Paul never once referred to the Corinthians who denounced the resurrection as 'heretics.' Although he strove to correct their error, they remained beloved brethren to him all the way through; nor did he at any time command their removal or excommunication.

The persecution of individuals or groups who have, through conscience, departed from contemporary dogma has many times led to vile acts; acts that could more validly be labelled *heretical*. From the clear testimony of scripture, it is by our acts and *works* that we are judged; much more, it seems, than by our beliefs, which may be arbitrary and fleeting at best. In that future day, it will doubtless come as a shock to some – amidst much weeping and gnashing of teeth – who throughout their life basked in assumed piety, only to discover that *they* were the heretics; and not in the least for what they believed or didn't believe, but for *how they did or didn't act*. Justice, mercy and humility have always been our safest allies in true discipleship. "By their fruits you shall know them."

Wrapping Up

It has been repeatedly asserted that the teaching of Universal Reconciliation fails to recognise the evil of sin – even encouraging laxity in its adherents – and fails to convict the sinner in this present age. The great tragedy is that this is, in part, true. Some individuals (even segments) within the reconciliation cohort have found an excuse to exploit the glorious liberty of the children of God. But why paint *everyone* with this same tainted brush? Is mainstream Christendom so pure in this regard that it can make such cavalier judgments? Not if the innumerable and highly publicised megachurch scandals (where, according to Jamie Blaine, "Everybody's wrecked behind the scenes") are anything to go by, or the hateful, violent spectacle of gun-toting evangelicals. How are righteous fruits and knowledge-surpassing love manifested through these kinds of crass display? Moreover, if they are goodness and love in practice, what then does evil and hatred look like? Someone may retort, 'But they're the exception.' Perhaps they are...perhaps not. The German Lutheran Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-45) pointed to many in his own day who were departing from a genuine, effective faith, and Bonhoeffer was not targeting Christian Universalists!

Other portions of this work have clearly demonstrated that some of the most learned, respected, loved, and holy saints have held a belief in universal reconciliation. As to the claimed lack of conviction, or put another way, the need for the sinner to repent and accept Christ, it is equally difficult to see any validity. If, for the cause of Christ, we need to threaten the average unbeliever with eternal

torment in hell, then it seems that a fundamental lack exists in the gospel we are preaching. We must ask, is *fear* the motive for conviction, or is *love*? Which of these two is the most powerful and enduring force? I have yet to see an individual won, let alone *held*, by the emotion of terror. The indignation, chastisement, and (if required) retribution of God against wilful sin are fair and scriptural incentive enough, without extending things beyond the bounds of credibility; an exaggeration, incidentally, which leads to mockery of the Gospel. As Keith DeBose writes in *The Really Good News*, "I have received many e-mails from those who have related that the doctrine of eternal hell was the biggest stumbling block to their accepting Christianity, and many others said that believing that doctrine interfered greatly with their ability to love God." Indeed, the concept of an endless hell keeps many people well away from the faith. This fact is evident in the current world climate – decent, seeking men and women are turning increasingly to, as they see it, more loving and reasonable gods, or the pursuit of activities that better express this divine attribute. Love is still the most powerful and convicting force in the universe – no other will *hold* conviction – and no gospel is more loving than that of the ultimate reconciliation of all things to God in Christ (Col 1:20). At this present evil time people may still reject it – they are free to do so, though this is no argument against it – they reject and desert orthodoxy too…in droves!

IN CONCLUSION

**God's love is unconditional; God's power is irresistible;
and God never gives up - GEORGE SARRIS**

The independent German-American scholar, A. E. Knoch, once wrote, "The marvelous message of the ultimate reconciliation of all to God is the most powerful incentive to peace. We look upon all our enemies as potential friends. We welcome and anticipate the time when all enmity and every difference will vanish, and it is bound to have a soothing and salutary effect on our present conduct, in the measure in which it has gripped our hearts." The historical Christian experience most certainly proves his words true.

The inevitable effect of accepting falsehood is that truth becomes harder and harder to see, in much the same way as yielding to temptation makes future resistance weaker. In like manner, the closed mind is the fortress of ignorance, erected on a foundation of pride, fear, and stubbornness. These are among the most insidious traits of the human condition, especially within the blinkered environment of religious belief. Perhaps no one fully escapes. But there are levels to the blindness, and there are few so blind as those who emphasise certain scriptures that suit their party, over and above those that may oppose it. The current work has tried to look at scripture *as a whole*…no significant portion (as relates to our subject) has been overlooked. Even those parts that seem at first glance to contradict its model have been addressed. The largest part of 'error' – we all have it – is based on the false premise. If the scripture being examined is a poor or misleading translation (of which there are many), no amount of exegesis will help. Furthermore, if scripture is examined from the narrow standpoint of creed, again, exegesis will not change what is assumed to be true. Throughout these pages, no denomination is on offer, no alignment with creed or one highly esteemed individual, no prejudicial system of theology, no exclusive sectarianism, and no rigid conformity to convention. Quite the contrary, our prime task has been to construct an eschatological model freed as much as possible from all preconceptions and misconceptions; one based on the evidence of scripture, extended to all who accept its authority. Many will, of course, baulk at such an approach, for it relies just a little too much on the Divine…and not quite enough on convention. In the end, of course, truth, however unwelcome, must prevail.

One final aspect I would like to consider in this closing section is humility. John Hopler says, "I have found that when Christians genuinely round the bases of humility (admit their biases, study all the scriptures, listen to other views), they either believe Jesus will restore all, or they consider it a reasonable hope. The primary issue is not the scriptures but our heart attitude when coming to the scriptures" – *An Appeal for Humility*. Hopler explains his last statement with the words of Christ in Matt 22:29: "You are mistaken, not understanding the scriptures nor the *power of God*." We have all done this; we have all misunderstood, we have all underrated the power of God in some way at some time in our life and walk. The only way to correct this is through humble re-examination of all the issues involved.

As we have seen, there have always been searching souls who have questioned the common view of human destiny; those, too, who have conceded a hope of wider proportions. But, except for the early centuries, only a minority, though a *significant* minority, has openly embraced a faith of universal proportions. With the emergence of the Internet, that has begun to change. Today's technology allows for instant access to historic or contemporary resources that were unthinkable when the first edition of this work emerged in 1988. Increasingly, online sites and blogs offer free access to articles, books (past & present), videos, interviews, and an array of in-depth studies on the subject. Of course, history and experience teach that numbers in and of themselves are of little consequence in matters of fact or truth. Our basis for evaluation should not rely on *how many* have believed or understood a particular subject at a particular time. Even that great bastion of late 19th-century dispensationalism, Sir Robert Anderson, conceded (with surprising humility) that "The minority may, after all, be right. What men call heresy proves sometimes to be the truth of God" – *Human Destiny* 4. In the current era, truth is wholly unaffected by numbers. As Erich Fromm also observed: "...the fact that (millions of people) share so many errors does not make the errors to be truths..." Indeed, quantity, in this present age, makes its appeal not to spirit but to flesh. Scripture most assuredly supports this view. The "faithful remnant" has always played an important role in theocratic history – that is, the relative few seeking the less-travelled byway. The Bible testifies to this throughout its pages. Therefore, if the view this book proclaims is true, its validity must be evaluated neither by statistics nor popularity, but by the Scriptures. Equally, any criticism or rejection must be based on the same intelligent evaluation (not withholding prayerful guidance).

When the apostle in Philippians informs us that every tongue *freely and openly* confesses Jesus Christ, Lord, it is "to the *glory* of God the Father." It seems that few even today realise that God's greatest glory lies in this consummate fact. The scriptures that form the focal point of this work are a powerful testimony to Divine Universal Fatherhood. Taken as they stand, they remain utterly opposed to the widespread teaching where sin remains endless, death lasts eternally, estrangement is everlasting, and punishment continues forever. Consequently, they are rarely understood as they stand. Indeed, most of these texts are seldom, if ever, alluded to in common teaching or preaching at all. When they are, their significance is almost invariably overlooked. But this is a profoundly important issue and one on which we must all make a choice. Which is it to be?

1. The failure of God's Love to accomplish its desired end, or the ultimate triumph of Divine Love?
2. The partial victory of Calvary, or the complete victory of Calvary?
3. The eternal antagonism of the human will to the Divine will, or the perfect accomplishment of the will of God?
4. The endless existence of evil, or the entire removal of evil?
5. The permanent rebellion of most of the human race, or the consummation of all creation in the reconciliation of all?
6. The persistent stain on the character of God consequent upon the foregoing points, or the glory of God in full vindication of His character and purpose as revealed in His Word and His Son? (adapted from *Truth For Today Digest*).

Epilogue
What If We Are Wrong?

by Louis Abbott (1915-96)

Those who have seen the fullness of (God's) Plan of Redemption are often asked, "What if you are wrong? You will then find yourself in the very 'hell' which you preach against, and furthermore find yourself an accomplice to having led many others to hell. But if what you say is correct, then *my* belief in hell will still get me to heaven. I can't lose with my beliefs, but you can sure lose with your beliefs."

First of all, anyone with just a slightly open mind can see there are quite a few Scriptures that support eternal punishment, annihilation, or the salvation of all mankind through Jesus Christ. Throughout the centuries, there have been sincere Christians in all these groups. Even Augustine, the champion of eternal torment, said in his day, "There are very many (*imo quam plurimi*, which can be translated 'majority') who, though not denying the Holy Scriptures, do not believe in endless torments." (*Enchiria, ad Laurent*. c. 29). St. Basil the Great (c. 329-379) in his *De Asceticis* wrote: "The mass of (Christian) men say that there is to be an end of punishment to those who are punished."

Now if all three positions seem to have Scriptural grounds, this presents a problem for some. The solution to the problem is found in Matthew 16:17. You see, apart from the spirit of revelation, which comes from above and not from ourselves, the Bible can really be made to say anything we want it to say. Look at the thousands of denominations, each based upon differences of interpretation of basically the same Bible. Most Christian cults are even more intense in Bible study than average church-goers, and they often come up with some very bizarre teachings. Most people are usually sincere in their beliefs. They really believe they have the truth. But until we have what Peter received when Jesus asked him who He was...until then, we only have knowledge which gets filtered through our culturally conditioned mind. The Scriptures, apart from the spirit of revelation, often produce horrible systems of belief. Few of us are honest enough with ourselves to cry out to God to be completely set free from the traditions of men, from cultural, parental, and political mindsets which affect how we read the Scriptures.

The teaching of eternal torment has permeated Western civilization for about 1500 years. Few realize the early believers were not indoctrinated into this mindset by Christian leaders. Today, it is not long before a child, even though having never read a Bible. is exposed to the doctrine of eternal torment as fact. It is important to be absolutely certain regarding such an important subject, whether we are reading the Bible through pre-conditioned eyes or through enlightenment by the Holy Spirit. Ask God to reveal through the spirit of revelation all of His attributes and character. One must not know His love, power, omnipresence, and mercy through words on a page; one must receive these things by the spirit. Then the Bible will be read with clear eyes of understanding. Then the Bible will confirm what the spirit has revealed.

Peter did not believe that Jesus Christ was the Son of God because he properly interpreted the Scriptures prophesying a Messiah. It was revealed to him

by our Father. Upon *this* is the body of Christ built, not upon Bible interpretation. Interpretation produces division; revelation supported with Scripture produces unity. Revelation first, then the Scriptures will witness to the revelation.

A person may read the Bible and believe what he reads based upon the fact that people have told him it was the word of God. Some may read it because it is the most widely published book in the world. A person may decide to go to church and become a Baptist, Methodist, etc., as a result and yet still not have true understanding. The natural mind may spend years studying the Bible and produce very carnal and often very evil systems of belief. I was amazed reading a Ku Klux Klan paper at how often they quoted Scripture to justify their hate. How are we delivered from this deception? Humility, brokenness, sincerity of heart, childlike faith, and a willingness to acknowledge that we really know very little of the ways of the Creator of the Universe – these are some of the steps to deliverance. But true deliverance comes when the spirit of revelation brings light.

The problem with this method is that it smacks contrary to the Bible study mentality based upon the creeds, articles of faith, denominational position statements, etc. It contradicts the typical 'Bible study' mindset of most fundamental evangelical systems. These systems are full of leaders and laity who just pass on the tradition of the elders through reading the Bible with preconceived ideas of what it should say. Then, when one comes along reading the same Bible and forms a different interpretation, these people know they are right, and the other individual is wrong. Why? Because it doesn't line up with what they have already decided was the right interpretation. They become locked into the 'tradition of the elders.' They have quenched the Holy Spirit. They will not stop *talking* about the Holy Spirit, but nevertheless, they will have made the word of God of none effect through their traditions. One should deeply reflect upon the words of our Lord and Savior Who said, "Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. [Ye] hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with [their] lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching [for] doctrines the commandments of men." (Matt. 15:6-9)

Now, concerning those who believe in the salvation of all mankind, (the majority) have come to this conclusion by revelation and/or intense study of the Bible, church history, language studies, etc. They are often severely persecuted for their beliefs, not by the world systems, but by the church systems. They have cried out in earnestness to our Father for truth because they would have gladly abandoned this teaching to avoid the severe persecution which their entire family suffers at the hands of the 'orthodox.' We are not masochists. We do not long for cold stares, whisperings behind our backs, hate letters, being called wolves, anti-Christ, and a host of other defaming names. Could we wash away this humiliation and be accepted by our other Christian brothers and sisters, we would most gladly give up this rejection, but not at the cost of maligning the precious name of our Father. We would rather receive the praises from above than compromise the glory of our Father and exchange it for the praises from man.

The Scriptures declare to "Study to shew yourselves approved." Having been in the 'hell-fire' brand of theology and in the camp of the Saints who have entered into their rest, I can say from years of observation that those who believe in the Salvation of All Mankind are usually more diligent in their endeavor to

study the Scriptures and "sincere prayers" with proper motives than those locked up in the fear of 'eternal torments.' Those who embrace the Lamb of God slain for the 'sin' (singular) of the whole world discover the truth that Paul was certainly correct in his assessment that the height, length, breadth, and width of God's Love was immeasurable. There is no end to it, and "Love never fails." Those embracing the Eternal Tormentor can never discover these and hundreds of Scriptures to ever come true because their 'heaven' is usually much smaller than their 'hell.'

And this should cause one to seriously think. When we look at the ultra-fundamentalist whose judgments, whose finger-pointing, whose dogmatism have relegated the most to 'hell' through their supposed 'Scriptural proofs,' these individuals are the ones who do not exhibit the characteristic traits we find in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The traits of those who have painted the largest 'hell' are those who look more like the Pharisees who Jesus condemned as 'sons of hell (gehenna),' making their converts "two times the sons of hell (gehenna) as themselves." "You will know them by their fruit," not by their theology. There is the key.

Observe for yourself. Look at those preachers and Christians who spend the most time warning of 'hell' and judgment day. The more 'hell and damnation' they preach, the more unlike Christ they appear. This should tell you something. The more an individual glorifies God and His power to save, the more an individual rests from their labors, their boasts, their judgmental ways, their vindictive spirits...in other words, those who believe in an absolutely Sovereign God Whose Love has ceased striving in their works and have entered into the "rest" promised them. They can begin to enter into the labor of the Lord, which brings forth fruits of righteousness, not *self*-righteousness produced from labors of religion. A person who is still in their own works cannot bring forth the fruit of the kingdom. They can talk about "agape" love, but they can't manifest it. They can only manifest "Moses, the law-giver," who is dead and can only bring forth death. The "letter of the law" kills. Those who still serve as "Hagar and her son" cannot receive the promises the Scriptures hold out. Those who have ceased from their labors have an assurance built on a substance which, although not seen, is more sure than the substance of religion, which is nothing more than the traditions of men brought forth by carnal minds.

But what of those whose mentality says, My belief in a 'hell of torture' is 'safer' because at least that way I am sure of being 'in' – what can we ascertain from such a view? If they are wrong, then they have spent their entire life maligning God's name and character to the whole of creation. But they will say, 'Well, God will understand. I just wanted to be sure I was in.' What kind of spirit is this? Do not the Scriptures tell us that the "fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom?" The fear spoken of here is a reverence, a respect, a lifting up of His being above our own. It speaks of exalting Him, magnifying Him, glorifying Him. Those who preach a 'hell' because it is 'safer' reveal to the world they are thinking of themselves, not of glorifying God in the highest. They have given themselves away. It is clear this kind of person has not laid down their lives. They are still very much into themselves. They cannot enter into the promised "rest." Their 'religious works' will hopefully earn them a place in the kingdom.

A religious person is probably the most 'stinky' thing on the face of the earth. But amazingly, that kind of individual loves their own stink, and no one

can dissuade them from it. This kind of individual is locked in their own 'hell' already and seeks to enlarge it by bringing others under their power. The church buildings of the world and the temples of the world are full of these kind of people – putting burdens upon the backs of God's people which the Lord did not command – placing fear into their minds which never allows them to enter into the rest of the Good Shepherd – fleecing and devouring the sheep for the benefit of their own religious kingdom, no matter how small, even if it is as small as their own family over which they can rule as a tyrant, locking out the love of God by filling their little minds with fear. I am speaking right now, not only from observing the lives of others, but from my own personal experience. I am guilty of operating in this spirit. So please do not think I am throwing stones at others.

What can I say about this self-serving mentality that the religious mind is so poisoned by? A mentality that thinks preaching 'hell' is safer than to seriously study, truly cry out to the Lord, and truly lay down one's life that they may cease from striving in their own self-righteousness. What can I say to dissuade such a narrow-minded and small-hearted one who cares more for themselves than the Name and Character of their God? I can say nothing to that heart which it can hear. But I can say to you, dear reader, that the Scriptures declare, "You will know them by their fruit." Look at the life of such a person, and you will discover what kind of tree it is. There are "Trees of Righteousness," and there are 'trees of self-righteousness,' commonly called 'religious.' Just because someone doesn't 'drink, cuss, or smoke,' that doesn't make one "righteous." We have all seen that often the greatest "law-keepers" are also the greatest tyrants.

Now our Father will certainly have to make some kind of provision for these souls. Imagine, the very heaven they hope to attain would become the very 'hell' they hoped to escape. How could anyone live in a place of perfect love created by the One Who loved so much that He gave His life? How could a person who told people here on earth that this very One was going to torture many of His own sons and daughters in the most diabolical ways and never cease this activity – how could that individual live with themselves? Every time they saw Jesus lovingly embrace one of those who surely should have been roasting in hell, the conscience would gnaw at that individual, reminding them of the picture of Jesus they described on earth, one who took His enemies and did to them what no human being could ever do – torture them ceaselessly, forever and ever, without even taking a break! Talk about a "worm that dieth not." *There* is a worm that would gnaw at their conscience and make heaven 'hell.'

These 'religious folks' often say that this world would be a mess if we took away the teaching of an 'eternal hell.' This shows two things about this individual. First, they obviously do not study. If they did, they would discover that there was a church which preached an 'eternal hell' and had complete control of the government, economic system, and religious system. It should have manifested the kingdom of God. But what it produced was the 'dark ages.' The Roman Catholic Church has used the doctrine of eternal torment for centuries, and it has never manifested the kingdom of God nor its righteousness, but just the opposite. Study European history, which is nothing more than church history. See what thousands of wars, killings, hatred, and decadent societies the doctrine of eternal torment has wrought upon the earth.

Then spend some time studying the lives of some of those who have embraced the 'Larger Hope,' those who have been redeemed by the Lamb, those

who have laid down their lives and exchanged them for the life of Christ Who lays down His Life. Look into the fruit of their lives. Compare the lives of those who have written the most about hell, judgment, damnation and compare them with those who write about love, glory, mercy. Look into their lives, and you will see that we become what is the passion in our heart. A heart full of hate will love to write about 'hell and judgment.' A heart full of love will want to write about glorious things. It will try to live in peace and seek to spread that peace to others. It will look to the author and finisher of their faith, the author of the love in their hearts and hope to plant that love into another heart. It will look into the very Kingdom of God itself and express the joy of their salvation, and that joy encompasses all of creation. It will not lust after possessions, for they have been given the Kingdom. It will not seek to 'sin' because it knows that "the wages of sin is *death*," death to the joy, love, and peace that is in its heart and it would not trade the short pleasures of sin for the fruit of the kingdom because it has tasted of both and has developed a taste for the fruit from above which is the only thing which will satisfy the hunger of a spiritual person.

A religious mind cannot fathom that. It is still chained to the lusts of the flesh and whips it to obedience through the Laws of Moses. It does not understand the higher Law which Christ brought, the Law of Love, the New Commandment. The Law of Moses says, "Love your neighbor as yourself." But most people are self-condemned. They do not love themselves, and so to "love their neighbor as themselves" gives them the right to actually hate their neighbor and still fulfill the Law of Moses. But the New Commandment, the Law of Life in Christ Jesus, commands us to love our neighbor more than ourselves. This can only be done by laying down our own lives and taking on the Life Who laid down His life for the whole world, including the enemies, ours and God's.

"*He who clings to his life shall lose it, but he who loses his life for my sake will find it.*" Lay down your life today, for "His sake," that He may be magnified in your life and declared to all of creation, and you will also discover that He is indeed the Savior of the whole world. Until then, remember, "you will know them by their fruit."

About the author

Louis Abbott came to know Christ at the young age of 13. As his faith matured, his deep devotion led him to pastor a church. One day, he was challenged by a member of his congregation over the teaching of eternal torment. In response, he set about studying the dogma in Hebrew and Greek – he had studied Greek at Loyola University, among other places. After three years of active research, he realised his error in teaching eternal torment. Through conscience, he resigned his pastorship. For the next five decades, Abbott believed and taught the apostle's teaching in Colossians 1:20: that "all things," through the blood of the cross, will be reconciled, whether in heaven or on earth.

APPENDIX I

Sodom and Post-Death Probation

There is perhaps no other scripture in the Old Testament (or the New, for that matter) more confounding to the traditions of endless punishment and annihilation than Ezekiel's 16th Chapter regarding Sodom's return and restoration. While not widely acknowledged *or even known* – the majority are ignorant of these highly significant statements – the return and restoration of Sodom are precisely what the prophet predicts. We all understand that these people were exceedingly wicked (Genesis 13:13) and were destroyed because as few as ten righteous individuals could not be found among them (Genesis 18; Romans 3:10). We further understand that none survived the rain of fire; the entire populace was wiped out (Luke 17:29). What then were these sins committed by Sodom and her daughters? In fact, they were very similar to those carried out by many other cities in the ancient world and, indeed, countless others of today: pride, gluttony, idleness, indifference to the poor and needy, haughtiness, and gross immorality (Ez 16:49,50). They were nonetheless said to be *not* as sinful as the "holy city of David," Jerusalem (v47). What then was the great iniquity of the privileged Jerusalem that caused the Lord God to say that *her* "disgrace" made her sisters, Sodom & Samaria, "appear righteous" (v51) by comparison and a "very little thing" (v47)? *Sodom and Samaria did not sin against light*! The Lord Jesus tells us that had Sodom received the light and advantages of Jerusalem and Capernaum, she would have repented.

In Ezekiel 16, Jerusalem is presented as the "wife" of Yahweh, but through pride, unfaithfulness, and immorality, is subsequently termed the odious embodiment of infidelity and harlotry; furthermore, she schools her children in these abominations (v20). Consequently, she is to be shamed before her lovers and judged as a woman who breaks wedlock: "Destruction, ruin, shame and war shall come upon you." Jerusalem followed the Amorites and the Hittites, wreaking all manner of abominations. Samaria and Sodom are then referred to as her elder and younger sisters, but it is likely less their age that is meant than their comparative *guilt*. All three are represented as sisters with one common, corrupt parentage. Sodom is the 'lesser' of the three, having received the least light and the least privileges; Samaria is next in line, but Jerusalem, receiving by far the highest blessings and privileges, is the worst. Therefore, Jerusalem is admonished: "As I live, says the Lord God, Sodom your sister has not done – she nor her daughters – as you have done…neither has Samaria committed half of your sins, but you have multiplied your abominations more than they; and have justified your sisters in all your abominations…they are more righteous than you…and bear your shame in that you have justified your sisters" (vv48-52). So great were the sins of Jerusalem that those of the other two sank into virtual insignificance.

Now, every serious student of the Millennialist camp knows that the prophets abound with glowing predictions of coming good for Jerusalem (e.g. Isa 40 & 60; Jer 30 & 31; Hosea 2, and others). Many prophetic students accept these promises and expect to see them fulfilled, but few rejoice in the blessings likewise extended to Sodom in Ezekiel's inspiring 16th Chapter. Reading from the popular *NIV*, the following are the key verses: "However, I will restore the fortunes of Sodom and her daughters and of Samaria and her daughters, and your fortune along with them, so that you may bear your disgrace and be ashamed of giving them comfort. And your sisters, Sodom with her daughters and Samaria with her daughters, will return to what they were before" (vv53-55)... Then you will remember your ways and be ashamed when you *receive your sisters*, both those who are older than you and those who are younger. I will give them to you as daughters, but not on the basis of my covenant with you" (v61). Note that Jerusalem will "receive" her sisters, Sodom and Samaria, in that future time. And that God will "give" them to her as "daughters" outside of (or perhaps in addition to) the covenant He has with the Holy City. It is hard to imagine how words could be less equivocal and convey greater astonishment than these.

A. P. Adams penned a comprehensive commentary on this passage in *The Spirit of the Word* (147). Adams alludes to the fact that most bible students believe in the promises of future good to Jerusalem and expect to see them fulfilled, but then asks, "Why endeavor to explain away similar promises in the same chapter to less sinful Sodom?" He answers, "Because future

blessings for Sodom necessarily imply probation after death, while such blessings for Jerusalem do not necessarily imply that doctrine. The promises of future good for Jerusalem may be fulfilled for those of Abraham's seed who are living at that future time. But similar declarations concerning the Sodomites cannot be so fulfilled for the simple reason that there are no descendants of that people; they were utterly exterminated by the rain of wrath that God sent upon them; hence, if there are future blessings for them, they must be raised from the grave and receive those blessings after death...Great efforts have been made by various classes of Christians to break the force of this argument in favor of probation after death. This is a very troublesome passage for those who oppose this doctrine…it is so plain and straightforward that they have much ado to clear it out of the way; but there it stands in plain terms, as stubborn as the bedrock of God's truth upon which it rests."

The rationalisations of this passage by systems opposed to its truth are as futile as they are numerous. One explanation is that the prophecy concerns the *land*, i.e. the site of the ancient city (Matt 11:24 is offered as proof: "It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom"). This theory is destroyed at once by Ezekiel's use of the personal, plural pronoun "their" – "Sodom and her daughters shall return to *their* former estates" (v55). Other assaults have claimed that descendants of Sodom *did* survive, thus eliminating the need for post-death probation. In light of what scripture states regarding Sodom's destruction, such speculations are really too foolish to consider. But perhaps the most desperate of all these diversions is the argument that imposes an 'ironic' explanation. Namely, that when Sodom returns to her former estate, then shall you return, implying that *as Sodom will not return*, neither will Jerusalem. Surely such artifice is the last resort of the failed argument! Nowhere is there the slightest indication of irony in this passage. The only irony – indeed, tragedy – is that the profound truth of the Sovereign God's concluding remarks is, to many, unacceptable.

So, what does all this prove? Simply this: That the argument drawn from the case of Sodom in favour of the doctrine of restoration after death is virtually unanswerable. As Adams justly concludes, "When intelligent men – able, thoughtful, learned men – are driven to almost stultify themselves in their desperate efforts to disprove this doctrine, it is one of the best evidences that doctrine is true. The case of Sodom stands as a tower of strength in favor of this grand, scriptural doctrine; and all efforts to break down this tower only bring out its strength more and more; and if probation after death is proved for Sodom, it is proved for all the dead."

One last point about this prophecy is that it undermines the idea of annihilation as much as it does that of eternal conscious torment. This is more important than may at first be realised, for the annihilationist easily explains, to his own satisfaction at least, the great scriptural 'affirmatives' (*Ch10*) based on his own eschatological stance.

APPENDIX II

Punishment of the Living Nations

Matthew 25:31 reads, "When the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory;" the next two verses continue, "And before Him shall be gathered all nations: and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from his goats. And He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on His left." After judgment is passed, verse 41 informs us about the fate of the goat class: "Depart from me, you accursed, into everlasting (*aionion*) fire..."

Naturally, our view of the future, along with our understanding of the words used here by the Lord, influences the interpretation of this passage. If, for example, one holds to Amillennialism, the scene is viewed as the last judgment at the 'end of the world' or 'the end of time.' The Millenarian, by contrast, places the narrative not at the end of the world (*kosmos*), but at the end of the current age (*aion*) following the judgment era of John's Apocalypse. The future to which the narrative points is thus the next great age, the thousand years in which Christ reigns supreme over the earth. This much is certain: Satan is free to delude the nations during this present "evil age," whereas he is bound during the 1000 years of peace that follow (Rev 20)! Unless we imagine he is currently sealed in the abyss (v3), the millennium must remain ahead.

Another aspect lies in application: Is the narrative parabolic or prophetic? The current writer leans towards a blending of the two – part parable *and* part prophecy – a *parabolic prophecy* if you will, with unmistakable realities within the text. Its application or timing is the second option (above), the end of the present age. These events lead up to the appearance of the Son of Man, who comes with the clouds of glory, as mentioned numerous times in scripture (Mk 13:26; Rev 1:7; *cf.* Matt 25:31, "*in His* glory").

Who, then, are these "brethren" Christ mentions? Surely, they are no other than His special people, Israel, who have just endured the end-time events described by [1] the prophets in the Hebrew Bible [2] Christ in the Gospels and [3] John in Revelation. The *ethne*, on the other hand, are the surviving Gentile nations, and they are judged collectively (as nations), according to their treatment of Yahweh's Holy people. Consider Christ's exact words are, "and *all the nations* will be assembled before Him" (v32), not 'all *of* the nations.' Next, He will separate "them" (*autous*); "them" being the nations. These things in mind, we will proceed with an examination of a few Old Testament prophecies concerning this era and beyond.

Beginning with Zechariah 14:16, we read of "every one that is left of all the nations *which came against Jerusalem*..." Here are the same remaining, rebellious states to which Matthew 25 surely refers, bearing in mind that by this time their national armies have been ruinously reduced or "laid waste" (Rev 19:19-21). They form part of "the families of the earth" (Zech 14:17), the most significant point being that they, or more likely representatives from them, "go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of Hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles." Strange language, indeed, if they are suffering the fate commonly allocated to them. The words here more likely indicate a *collective* national judgment rather than a judgment of individuals. Therefore, it follows that in their failure, these nations suffer the humiliation of becoming the servants of those they failed: "Foreigners will rebuild your walls, and their kings will serve you" (Isa 60:10); "You will feed on the wealth of nations, and in their riches you will boast" (61:6). These "goat" nations could hardly carry out such servitude if they were confined to a literal burning lake, the 'hell' of Augustine or Dante! They are instead placed in a nationalistic position and forced to face their allotted chastisement in that coming age – the once downtrodden Israel's *age of glory* – the Millennium. Doubtless, there will be a 'hellish' element to it, but the hardship will be in exact proportion to the judgment administered in Matthew 25.

The Prophet Isaiah writes of a time when the Word of the Lord will go forth from Jerusalem: "And He shall judge among the *nations*, and shall rebuke many people" (2:4); a time when "the inhabitants of the world will *learn righteousness*" (Isa 26:9). It is something of a mystery how the *sheep class* in Matthew, the "righteous" ones who go on into (so-called)

'eternal' life, need to learn righteousness all over again! It is surely the *goat class* that Isaiah insists learn righteousness.

The Book of Revelation informs us – three times, no less – of Christ's "shepherding" (*poimanei*) the nations with an "iron rod." If this figure does not symbolise chastisement and discipline, it is very hard to imagine what else it could mean! Zechariah 14:17 warns of the consequence for those who fail to come to Jerusalem and worship the King, the Lord of Hosts: "Upon them shall be no rain." It is a truly influential government that has nature at its command! But then, as if seeing the inevitable outcome, David extols: "Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for Thou wilt judge the peoples with uprightness, and guide the nations on the earth" (Ps 67:4). We are, of course, perfectly free to imagine the peoples of these nations being glad and singing for joy amidst the *judgment* fires of hell!

The Devil And His Angels

But what, one may ask, of Christ's reference, in verse 41, to the fire *aionion* "made ready for the Adversary and his messengers"? Doesn't this change everything? It has certainly proven a stumbling block for many noble saints. These eight tantalising words make objective deciphering of the pivotal *kolasin aionion* very problematic indeed. This, as much as anything, has led translators to skew the lawful meaning of both words. A recent example is N. T. Wright's translation of the New Testament. Although Wright concedes that *aionios* is in most places best translated as "the age to come," he cannot bring himself to so render it here and falls back on 'everlasting.' Fifteen hundred years ago, Augustine was seized by the same dilemma. Indeed, Matthew 25:46 became his 'locus classicus' for sealing the fate of the word *aionios*, thereby also sealing it for most of humanity. But Augustine, like so many since, could only form his doctrine by explaining away the many other scriptures that manifestly state the opposite.* If he had only examined Colossians 1:16-20, detached from his Manichean lens, he might have learnt that just as Paul describes Christ as the mighty *creative* force behind "all things" (v16), so is He the expansive *reconciler* of the same "all things" (v20). It is granted that Paul provides no details about *how* spirit beings, such as Satan and his angels, are to be reconciled; He merely infers that they *will* be. The rest he leaves to our faith and trust in the might and wisdom of God. The apostle's mention of things heavenly as well as things earthly in the context of both creation (v16) and reconciliation (v20) should be sufficient. The onus, therefore, lies with the doubters to provide evidence as to "The All" in heaven that are to be reconciled. They are certainly not the *holy* angels who throughout the ages have tirelessly served God, any more than they are the ones who accompany the Son of Man at His return. We also know from Revelation 20:10 that Satan is cast into the lake of fire at the end of the Millennium, where he serves out his sentence in accordance with his works. As to how long this takes, scripture is silent, and so should we be. Moreover, as with everyone cast into the lake, he must ultimately come under the headship of Christ in order to fulfil what Paul states in Colossians 1:20.

Once awakened to the profound truth and *reach* of Colossians 1, all assumed difficulties with the ultimate reconciliation of the "powers and principalities of the heavenlies" (Eph 3:10), the "cosmic rulers of darkness," and the "spiritual forces of wickedness in the celestials" (6:12) fade into the mist. And with that goes, naturally enough, those of Matthew 25:41. Thomas Ballinger, writing decades ago, concluded, "The Bible is the most radical book in print...not so hard to understand *as it is to believe*."

*For a more complete exposition of Augustine's handling of this verse, see J. Philip Scranton's *Journey To And Through The Second Death* (pages 51-61 [e-book version]).

APPENDIX III

The Body and the Bride

(their part in the reconciliation of all things)

The matter of Israel's (i.e. the Jewish nation's) future position in relation to Hebrew prophecy, and its distinction from God's present calling and purpose with 'The Church,' has been the source of enormous controversy over the years. The 'amillennialist' argument gained formal acceptance in the 4th and 5th centuries when Augustine, who had initially supported the millennialist view, swapped camps. Once Imperial Rome gained power, the widespread persecution of the first centuries ceased; thus any thought of Christ establishing an earthly kingdom became increasingly redundant.

Amillennialism constrains God to a single calling and purpose. This perspective begins with Israel as His chosen people and continues with the Church (*ecclesia*) following Israel's national rejection (Matthew 13:14-15). Essentially, amillennialism denies Christ's thousand-year earthly reign and the restored "elect" of the nation, which begins after the end of the current age. Doubtless, this view gained traction with the allegorical style of interpretation popularised by Alexandria during the 2nd and 3rd centuries (CE) – Origen is first to have devised the idea of symbolising the 1000-year reign of Christ as a heavenly spiritual experience (*De Prin*. Bk. 2:11) – which led to the conflation of scriptural declarations concerning two groups with distinct callings. The idea of 'Spiritual Israel' – which seeks to convey God's 'new' relationship with the Church – remains a popular notion even among those who may anticipate the nation's future restoration. The millennialist viewpoint, on the other hand, upholds a literal interpretation of biblical statements (both O.T. and N.T.) concerning Israel's future position on earth under a triumphant *Yeshua HaMashiach* (Jesus the Messiah) reigning for a thousand years (aka the 'Millennium') in Jerusalem. This was the prevailing view in the earliest era of the Church. What assisted its decline was the unfulfilled expectation of Christ's 'imminent' return. However, the Lord made it clear to His disciples that it was not for them to know "the times and seasons" (Acts 1:7). Scripture places no durational limit on the current "times of the Gentiles." Nor do any of the apostles witness to an 'imminent' return: James exhorts patience till the parousia of the Lord (Ja 5:7), which he merely concedes has "drawn near" (v8) – paradoxically, many things that have drawn near remain a long way off. Paul foresees a prolonged decline following his own departure, but never loses sight of "the coming of the Lord;" Peter states emphatically that heaven must receive the Lord Jesus "*until the times* of the restoration of all things" (Acts 3:21). He also speaks of scoffers who will ridicule the idea of the Lord's presence (2 Pet 1:3-4), of which there have been many. Two thousand years later – a mere two days by God's chronology (according to the same apostle) – the faithful remain true.

Had subsequent generations understood all these admonitions and cautions, the chiliastic view might have persisted. As it happens, the teaching became all but lost until the Bible became freely available again during the Reformation. With this eventuality, interest in Hebrew prophecy was re-ignited, primarily among the more 'marginal' Protestant groups. Nonetheless, Israel's distinct national identity and election, as contrasted with the present calling of "the Church which is His body," remain to a greater or lesser extent a vexing issue within mainstream circles. No doubt, this has been compounded by the worldwide secular and ecclesiastical animosity towards the Jew over the last 1900 years.

Early Patristic Rejection of Israel

The early church was obsessed with the idea that the Jew had been cast aside *forever*; first to record this departure (later termed 'supersessionism' or replacement theology) was Justin Martyr. In his *Dialogue with Trypho* (160CE), he wrote: "Christians are the true Israel; their new law was predicted and prefigured in the Old (Testament) and has superseded it." While Justin adhered to the millennarian viewpoint, he nonetheless argued that the Church was now the legitimate and exclusive heir to God's covenants. This opinion gained traction among later theologians such as Tertullian and Augustine, and found favour in contemporary apocryphal literature such as the *Epistle of Barnabas* [130CE]. The destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 – foretold by a weeping Jesus – only served to bolster this assumption, with many in the Church evaluating the terrible event as God's final, absolute rejection of the nation. Indeed, with the possible exceptions of Papias (60-130) and Theophilus (d.183), virtually all early Christian authors adopted replacement theology, a point often invoked to discredit dispensational hermeneutics. In fact, no modern position can claim complete "early Church support" for the simple reason that all views at all times are shaped by cultural and historical influences as much as scriptural evidence. The best policy for those open to it is to value *Scripture* – the single Divine source – over fractured Church history and frail human tradition.

God's vouchsafed promises to the Patriarchs were never at any time conditional upon the faithfulness of the Jew (Rom 3:3). Jeremiah's assurance (30:11) that Yahweh would not bring an end to His special nation as He would all others is supported by Paul's response concerning God's forsaking His people in Romans 11:1,2. His unequivocal answer: "Absolutely not"! (Gk. *genoito*; the verb form here is indefinite, implying past, present *and* future). Then there are the multitudinous visions of Israel's restoration in the next great age, which were the glory of her prophets. No fewer than 27 times does Ezekiel refer to Israel returning to and dwelling again on its own *soil* or *ground*, the LAND given to them by Yahweh. Lastly, we have the distinctly Jewish atmosphere of the Book of Revelation, where, in chapter 7, the twelve tribes are not only mentioned but also *identified by name*. In most cases, all of the above (and more besides) must be either rationalised or allegorised to make it conform to the 'Spiritual Israel' template. In so doing, hundreds of unambiguous scriptural statements concerning God's foreknowledge of the nation's establishment, the reason for her election, her heinous sins, and her gloriously purposeful restoration in an age yet future are reduced to something that is, frankly, superfluous.

Israel As The Bride, The Lamb's Wife

It is the *physical* Israel that is brought before us in the Old Testament as the "wife" of Yahweh until her repeated adultery with foreign gods forces her true "husband" to divorce her (Jer 3:8). Yet, Hosea 3 also gives the promise of that same physical Israel's restoration "in the latter days." The divorce was irrevocable only inasmuch as it comprised the "first Covenant": for the "days come, says the Lord, when I will make *a new covenant* with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah" (Heb 8:8). To regard this as the current Church stretches the imagination to breaking point. Here, the subject comprises *two* entities: the "house" of Israel and the "house" of Judah. By contrast, the current Church of God is a *single*, holistic unity – the Body of Christ in which "all are ONE"! Additionally, Paul never refers to the "Body" as the "house" of either Israel or Judah; such wording pertains exclusively to the descendants of the twelve sons of Jacob from which the nation of *Israel* was generated.

Within institutional Christendom, the trend Justin began nineteen centuries ago has hardly waned. Although a few like the Anglican cleric E. W. Bullinger have resisted, the baton

has mostly been carried by the outer branches of the Christian tree. Even here, differences exist as to details, and none more so than on the subject of 'bride' and 'church.' The term "bride" is prominent in Isaiah and Jeremiah and is clearly referring to the nation. Later, it resurfaces in the New Testament where its significance is revealed in connection with "the Lamb's wife" (Rev 21:9). However, it is in the Gospel of John (3:29) that Israel is first called "the Bride." With the conclusion of the Baptist's ministry – whose role as the "friend of the Bridegroom" was to prepare a people for the Lord – both "Bride" and "Lamb" vanish from the New Testament until the Book of Revelation.

The Body Of Christ – Dividing Things That Differ

Rightly understood and translated, there should be no contradictions in scripture; the ones imagined have likely been introduced *by us* in the form of copyist error (from the original text) or poor division (2 Tim 2:15). With the latter especially in mind, we come to the "apostle of the GENTILES;" only in Paul do we find reference to the "Body of Christ." Throughout scripture, his ministry lies in contrast to the twelve. Called apart from all the others following the Lord's ascension, there is no sign of Paul anywhere in the terrestrial atmosphere of the Apocalypse. Instead, we find the "twelve Apostles of the Lamb" (Rev 21:14) – the twelve Apostles of the Lord's earthly ministry, sitting on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt 19:28). The mystery of the "body" now having been revealed, Christ is *presently* identified with the "Church which is His Body," whereas His *past* and *future* relation to Israel as His "Bride" is quite different. The present unity between Christ as "Head" and His "Body" Church should indicate that future marriage between the two is not only unnecessary but incompatible – the "head" and "body" form an intimate, inseparable whole (Eph 4:16) – "an indissoluble unity" (Fairbairn) – quite opposite to the idea of Bride and Bridegroom, which are yet to be joined. Conversely, Israel is presently estranged from her Messiah (*lo ami*), but through tribulation will be brought back (*ami*). This makes her perfectly qualified for the position of "Bride," leading to her becoming "the Lamb's wife" once she genuinely repents. That the "wife" is Jewish should be apparent from her having "made herself ready" (Rev 19:7). We, the Body, on the other hand, are already complete (Col 2:10), already accepted by God (Eph 1:6 *AV*). The word used in verse 6 is *charito*, which shares the same root as *charis* (grace). It denotes God freely and unconditionally lavishing His grace upon believers simply because they are united with His Son. The marriage of a bride to a bridegroom is not only unnecessary under such a circumstance, but completely inappropriate!

A challenge to the above often arises over the apparent contradictions in 2 Corinthians 11:2 and Ephesians 5. This contest becomes much less plausible when Paul's words are closely examined. In the first case (2 Cor 11:2), the apostle is comparing the betrothal of a pure woman to the Church's union with Christ, so that the Corinthians might be presented to Him "as a chaste virgin." The subject here is *purity* and bears no direct relevance to a bride, let alone "*the* Bride." Indeed, the expression is found nowhere in the context! "This no more declares that the Church is the Bride of Christ than the apostle himself was their father (1 Cor 4:15)" – *Bullinger* ('Bride of Christ,' by the way, is *not* a scriptural phrase).

In the second passage (Eph 5), Paul's comparison of the marital relationship with Christ and His Church also gives little weight to "The Body" being "The Bride." Here, the apostle merely describes, by way of simile, how a loving husband should treat his wife ('as' is used seven times between verses 22 & 33). Nor does "bride" occur anywhere in this passage. Indeed, Paul avoids the term throughout his entire corpus, which in itself should sound warning bells. By contrast, he employs "body" repeatedly, twice in this chapter alone. The "Body" was never revealed in the Old Testament – it was a "mystery" or secret "hid in God" (Eph 3:9) until

its revelation was made possible by the (temporary) casting aside of Israel (Rom 11:25) – "Israel," in this case, must *of necessity* be seen as the literal nation, which is some indication of the level of hermeneutical inconsistency – a want of dividing things that differ. The Body is composed of a redeemed company of believers knowing no racial distinction (Gal 3:28), whose "citizenship belongs *to the heavens*" (Phil 3:10), being "blessed with every spiritual blessing *among the celestials*" (Eph 1:3), and through which God is now making known "to the sovereignties and authorities *among the celestials*, the multifarious wisdom of God" (Eph 3:10). The "Bride" on the other hand, being from the first instance an Old Testament revelation, awaits her reunion in marriage with "the Lamb." She must endure the "time of Jacob's trouble," through which she is saved (Jeremiah 30:7) and brought to acknowledge her sins, mourning the One whom she pierced (Zechariah 12:10). How can these prophetic words bear any relevance to a church that took no part in the "piercing"? It is the "house of David" and the "inhabitants of Jerusalem" that the prophet is talking about! The context is Jewish and earthly through and through, not Gentile and heavenly. Israel's is a distinctly terrestrial calling; it is through her, the seed of Jacob – with Christ as her rightful King, seated on the Throne of David in Jerusalem – that "all the families of the earth will be blessed" (Gen 28:14; "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring" - *NIV*). In this, we begin to glimpse the marvellous wisdom of God and His eonian purpose for both the heavens and the earth.

The Meaning of the Word 'Church'

What we understand by the English word 'church' may be quite different from what scripture means by the Greek word *ecclesia*. Within this quandary may yet again lie the failure to distinguish between ideas. The Greek *ecclesia* – better translated 'assembly' and meaning *literally* 'out-called' – is sufficiently broad to include *the whole* of God's chosen not only in this present dispensation when He is calling 'out of the Gentiles' a people for His name (Acts 15:14), which is the "Body of Christ," but also in the coming period of judgment when God will elect out of the nation of Israel many destined to become His "Bride." Doubtless, the term ecclesia will also apply in Israel's glorious future age (the 'Millennium'). Indeed, could it be that the so-called 'Great Commission' of Matthew and Mark will have its supreme fulfilment in the next age when the Lord Jesus' words, "Lo, *I am with you always*, even unto *the end of the age*," will be true in their fullest sense?

Then again, the word *ecclesia* may not refer to a 'church' at all, but rather to any company of people gathered together and separated. It is used this way in Acts 19 of the mob at Ephesus; no credible translator would be so foolish as to render it 'church' here. *Ecclesia* is also used in the *Septuagint* (2nd/3rd century BCE) to translate Hebrew words meaning an assembly, gathering, or group. These entities are quite distinct from the *ecclesia* typically mentioned in Paul's epistles. Neither should it be assumed that all instances of the word in the New Testament, when referring to a church, signify the same entity. For example, when John employs the term in the opening chapters of Revelation, he may not be referring to the same 'out-calling' Paul had in mind in Romans or Ephesians (the Body of Christ). Not without significance does John employ the noun "synagogue" twice in Revelation (2:9 & 3:9). This term occurs in the Gospels, Acts, and the epistle of James, but only in the presence of or concerning the Jews. It is certainly not a phrase Paul's employs in any of his 13 epistles; rather, he speaks specifically (and exclusively) of a body having "*neither* Jew nor Greek." Naturally, both John and Paul would have recognised their respective assemblies as a part of the *universal ecclesia*, though each with distinctive roles and spheres of activity. These are important points if we are to understand the obvious (and confounding) dissimilarities between Paul and the twelve. Most expositors associate John's seven ecclesias with the current Body

calling. But at the risk of repetition, the tenor of the Book of Revelation – certainly the part under discussion – is as Jewish in character as Paul's epistles are Gentile. Again, we must look to divide that which differs! The seven assemblies identify with the Bride – the future elect of Israel – who, before and during the tribulation (and after the snatching away of "the Body"), are first to embrace Christ as Lord. They must therefore endure the indignation leading up to the coming of Christ, but, equally, they will have the privilege of participating in the inauguration and governance of the earthly Kingdom.

Jerusalem As The Bride, The Lamb's Wife

Three of the four occurrences of 'bride' in the Book of Revelation refer to the Holy City, the New Jerusalem. Realistically, the expression "the bride" (important as it is) signifies something necessarily fleeting, while "the Lamb's wife" stands for that which endures. It is worth keeping this in mind when reflecting on our subject.

Just as the 'old' Jerusalem in the Hebrew Bible was associated with the apostate nation, so the new one identifies with her in her restored and glorified state. In verse 12 of Revelation 21, John describes twelve gates, each inscribed with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. Why would the names of Jacob's twelve sons be so inscribed if "the Bride" is the same as "the Body," which, having Christ as its "Head," *already* forms an indissoluble whole with Him? Additionally, in verse 14, we find on the twelve foundations the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb (all Jews, incidentally). Where, asks George Trench, is the great "Apostle to the Gentiles" found here? In his widely read but undervalued work, *After the Thousand Years* (pp 87-89), Trench lists the reasons for doubting that the "body" Church is identified with the New Jerusalem as the bride, the Lamb's wife. This may seem an astonishing impertinence to any whose indoctrination leads to that conclusion, but Trench's provides fairly compelling evidence. As a preliminary, he encourages every student to take Scripture seriously and not spiritualise the literal meaning of words such as "Israel," "Judah," and "Jerusalem!" In so doing, we honour God's Word free from a subjective allegory that can be made to mean virtually anything. He first calls attention to the city's name. Just as the prophet Ezekiel associates the old Jerusalem with the nation, so does John the New Jerusalem (which Trench describes as "the glorious abode of Israel in the *post*-millennial age"). He then alludes to the city's location, the new earth. Yes, undeniably, the New Jerusalem's origin is heaven, but it "comes down" to the new earth. Israel's domain has always been terrestrial; ours, as the body, is celestial. That the Body of Christ has access to the city is not disputed, but its administrative affairs must lie with the restored house of Israel and its twelve apostles if words mean anything at all (Trench reminds us how the city's gates and foundations identify with both). This is the future metropolis made by God, of which the father of the nation (Abraham) earnestly anticipated and for which he remained his entire earthly life a sojourner and stranger (Heb 11:13). The reason the Apostle Paul is excluded from the twelve "Apostles *of the Lamb*" is because – the epistle to the Galatian's makes this very clear – he was the "apostle to the uncircumcision" (*akrobystias*), an expression contrasting him from Peter's apostleship "to the circumcision" (*peritomes*) – Gal 2:7. In contrast, Paul could be justifiably described as the 'apostle of the *mystery*,' that secret hidden in God for all ages of which Israel's prophets and the circumcision apostles either knew nothing or found hard to understand (2 Pet 3:15,16).

Of course, none of the preceding suggests that the two realms (heaven and earth) *remain* 'separated' permanently or in any real moral, ethical, or spiritual sense. Not at all. The distinction likely has to do with adminstration as much as anything. Doubtless, a full "unity" (Eph 1:10) between heaven (the Body's realm) and earth (Israel's realm) is coming, but not just yet.

God's Gospel is most certainly one entity, which the apostle defines as concerning His Son, "in the death, entombment and resurrection of Christ according to the scriptures" – 1 Cor 3-7. There is no other means under heaven whereby men may be saved. Nonetheless, Paul speaks of "*his* Gospel," the Gospel "which *I received* through Jesus Christ," the evangel (of which) "I, Paul, became the dispenser," as if it were in some way different, even unique to him. Paul's words would be the height of presumption were there no truth to his claim. What then can this truth be? At the start of his ministry, Paul could wish for nothing more than to be God's instrument of redemption to his own precious kin. However, what was to be of far greater moment was his taking salvation to the nations through Israel's defection (Rom 11:11). Simply put, Paul's *Gospel to the Gentiles* became peculiar to him in the sense of it being outside Israel's covenant promises. This is likely why the Hebrew Saul did not become "Paul" (Acts 13) until well after Pentecost and the opening of the Kingdom to Gentiles by Peter through Cornelius (Acts 10) – Paul was Saul's Greek (or Gentile) name, and as such, more appropriate for his mature ministry and calling. Recall that Peter was entrusted with the keys to the kingdom (note the plural 'keys' here, anticipating more than one unlocking). Pentecost was a strictly Jewish affair, during which "Jews from every nation" received Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4,5). It was (if you like) the 'first' unlocking; that is, "to the Jew first" (Rom 1:16). Clearly, the narrative's incriminating language early in Acts targets its audience: the crucifiers and slayers of the Just One. What followed was the election – "the remnant," as Paul calls it in Romans – from out of the apostate nation. This appears to have been a relatively short-lived affair, a mere prelude to what the prophets promised as a worldwide *future* ingathering. And here it is important to distinguish between 'a' remnant and "the" remnant. In Romans 9:27, Paul alludes to Israel, out of which "*the* remnant will be saved." Many versions follow the *KJV* here and insert an indefinite article. But, as Ellicott points out, the text reads literally: "*The* Remnant (*to hypoleimma* [emphasised in the Greek] shall return (to God)." Why is this important? Firstly, it is clear from the context and confirmed by this verse that Paul is referring to *the* nation and nothing else. Secondly, it is *the* remnant (mentioned by the prophet whom Paul is citing) that at this time returned and were saved. Nor at this point should we assume (as some do) that the rest were lost. To the contrary, Paul's words of the previous verse (v26) make it very clear that "ALL ISRAEL shall be saved."

The Remnant as Firstfruits (Romans 11)

The remnant was chosen by grace (Rom 11:5). Collectively, what the people of Israel sought was not obtained (v7); though some obtained it, the rest were hardened (v8). Even in this, God's wisdom is apparent. For through their transgression, a way was made clear for the Gentiles to enter in (v11); furthermore, if their transgression meant the world's – that is to say, the Gentiles' – riches, "how much greater riches will *their full inclusion bring*!" (v12). Paul then falls back, in verse 16, on the idea of "firstfruits." Just as we, the Body of Christ, are termed firstfruits (of the spirit) in Chapter 8, so too it is inferred of the remnant spoken of here. As if anticipating future apostasy, Paul, drawing on the olive tree analogy (vv17-24), offers a timely caution not to imagine superiority on our part (the in-grafted branches) over Israel (the natural branches): "Do not be arrogant, but tremble" (v20), for God is well able – indeed, 'much more ready' – to graft in the natural branches again (v21). Continuing, the apostle again warns against ignorant conceit: "Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, *and in this way*, all Israel will be saved" (vv25,26). He thus concludes: "As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies for your sake; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. Just as you

who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all" (vv28-32). Obviously, Paul is contrasting Israel throughout this passage with the Gentiles. When he speaks of "the Gospel" (v28), he is referring to that which he *and he alone* received through the Lord Jesus Christ *for the uncircumcision*, and, for the sake of which, *the circumcision* was made an enemy. Nonetheless, the nation remains loved *for the sake of the patriarchs*, and their eventual *full inclusion* will bring even greater riches. As if to reinforce the future certainty of these facts, Paul makes clear the irrevocable nature of God's gifts and callings; that is to say, they cannot and will not ever be taken back. Human beings may vacillate in their intentions, but no such inconsistency or weakness applies to the Creator of all things in heaven and on earth (Col 1:16) – He remains the same yesterday, today, and into the eons (Heb 13:8) [Bible quotes from the *NIV*].

The Body Celestial

Luke provides a detailed account of Peter's missionary experiences and miracles early in 'Acts.' Later, he transitions to a similar retinue for the newly appointed Saul of Tarsus. However, there are important distinctions between the two stories, signalling a change in God's plan and purpose with the latter's ascendancy. First and foremost, Saul was told from the outset of his calling that he was especially chosen to evangelise *the Gentiles*, though he did not submit this to "flesh and blood" (i.e. other men) till much later (Gal 2:2). While he at first preached in the Jewish synagogues, his ultimate allegiance lay in a gospel free from any tie or obligation to "the circumcision" or any indebtedness to its contemporary pillars, James, Peter & John. Saul's distinct calling and teaching are further emphasised by his "being set apart" (*aphorisas*) from his mother's womb (Gal 1:15), almost certainly a reference to his formidable Judaistic roots. Moreover, he received his instruction not from any man (the twelve, for example), *but as a direct revelation from Jesus Christ* (Gal 1:12). Beginning in Acts 13, "Paul," now under his new name, takes centre stage, while the circumcision apostles fade from view. Although they (of the circumcision) would ever remain his beloved brethren in Christ, their two spheres of activity likely became ever more distinct, leading up to the diaspora following the destruction of the second temple in AD 70. As witnessed by Romans 11 (above), the otherwise unrepentant nation was (*as a nation*), for the time being, grafted out of the olive tree, becoming *lo ami* (not My people), but only until "the fullness of the Gentiles enter in" (Rom 11:25). Individual Jews could, through faith, be part of the newly revealed "Body of Christ," only now – as was the case with Paul himself (Phil 3:8) – a fundamental change had taken place in their relationship to God.

Under current circumstances – where God's grace reigns supreme – the Gospel (as proclaimed by Paul) is presently operating entirely free from race (*neither Jew nor Gentile*), from gender (neither male nor female) and from human convention (neither bond nor free). For all are ONE in Christ Jesus. The apostle here anticipates a glorious spiritual future described as a "mystery" *hid in God from all ages* (Eph 3:9); a celestial calling, the full glory of which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has entered into the human heart. Furthermore, a celestial calling where nationality plays no part, and thus any racial distinction between Jew and Gentile or advantage of one over the other exists! Is it any wonder that Paul has been so grievously misunderstood when people force on him things distinctly belonging to the nation, such as the writings of the Hebrew prophets, and the Lord's prophetic words spoken to "none but the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt 10:5,6; 14:24), and those events found in the Jewish atmosphere of John's Revelation where Paul is manifestly absent? God's dealings on

earth will return to His chosen people – they becoming once more *ami* (*His* people) – when we, the Body of Christ, are changed in the "twinkling of an eye" (1 Cor 15:52), to meet the Lord (in clouds) *in the air* (1 Thess 4:17). Note that there is no mention of Christ returning to the earth at this time, only His "descending from heaven," whilst we, the Body of Christ – those raised along with those still living – *ascend* to meet Him in the air. This mighty event will mark the close of the current Pauline calling on earth, and thus, of necessity, "the times of the Gentiles." As long as "The Body" exists on earth, God's dealings with His earthly people remain in abeyance. Our snatching away therefore clears the path for the "circumcision," who will then resume their proper place in the terrestrial sphere – called forth out of all nations (Deut 30:3; Ez 20:34) – and under a New Covenant relationship with God. Remember, it is "those who pierced Him" who mourn at His coming. It was Jewry, and none other, who crucified their own Messiah; it is the geographical *Mount of Olives* that will cleave in two on His descent to earth, just as it is "all the *tribes of the land* that will grieve" (Matt 24:30; Rev 1:7). These are physical, earthly events quite at odds with our own current spiritual standing in Christ as much as they are with our heavenly destination. Under these future conditions, the calling of the body will be out of place because Gentiles will then, as under the Old Covenant, have to approach God through His (*New*) Covenant people: "Of the sons of Israel Christ will make princes in all the earth (Ps 45:16) – *After the Thousand Years* 70. God's Evangel will still be "concerning His Son" – who is by then reigning on earth – as much as its earthly dissemination will be through the twelve disciples, sitting on twelve thrones, judging over the twelve tribes (Rev 7). Thus, the reigning and ruling blessings divinely ordained for them, the regenerated Israel, will filter through to all the families of the earth.

The Final Uniting of ALL Things in Heaven and on Earth

In this wondrously complete plan, we have two spheres of Divine activity: one in the heavens comprising the Body with Christ as Head, and one on the earth comprising the restored nation under the Kingship and Priest-ship of Christ. In the final great eon - the dispensation in which God will realise the fulness (completion) of His glorious purpose - "all things" (*ta panta*; lit '**the all**') will be headed up in Christ and, thereafter, divisions once necessary will be united under one administration. Before this last great eon of eons ends, ALL creation will bow the knee in homage and *open* confession that Jesus Christ is indeed Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil 2:9-11). *All* (things) will henceforth be united in Christ (Eph 1:10), the same *all* having been reconciled through the blood of His cross (Col 1:20), which is the same *all* subjected (in Christ) that GOD may at last be "ALL in *all*" the creation He so loves (1 Cor 15:27, 28).

APPENDIX IV

The Case of Judas

The case for or against Judas cannot help but incite strong feelings. In what follows, the writer in no way wishes to make light of the sin nor lessen the guilt of Judas Iscariot. He rather means to review the scriptural evidence surrounding a controversy that few seem willing to objectively face. Naturally, as the one who "gave up" Christ, Judas is typically viewed as guilty of 'the most heinous sin ever committed.' The very name 'Judas' has become a byword for 'traitor' or 'betrayer'…a veritable demon. By contrast, the Gospel writers show surprising restraint towards him, referring to Judas most often as the one who "gave up" (*paredoken* - 'handing over to an authority') the Lord. The graciousness Christ revealed in calling Judas "comrade" at the very moment of His betrayal also stands in stark contrast to the damning language of later accusers. We may forget, too, that Satan "entered" (*eiselthen*) Judas before he performed the horrific task (Luke 22:3). Regardless as to whether this is to be taken literally or metaphorically, it is notable that no parallel expression exists in scripture.

A verse occurs in Matthew's Gospel concerning the delivering up of Christ by Judas, the common rendering of which may colour our viewpoint. It is a difficult passage to translate, and the prejudice commonly brought to it only serves to compound the textual vagaries. Rotherham restores the sentence structure of the original Greek:

> **But alas! for that man through whom the Son of Man is being delivered up:**
> **Well it had been for HIM if *that man* had not been born (Matt 26:24).**

The second clause, omitted in the parallel passage in Luke, is expressed in a manner that makes its meaning ambiguous. It reads literally, "good were it for him if he had not been born, that man." Farrar comments, "But for dogmatic objections to such a translation, the verse would seem naturally to require the rendering, 'It were good for Him (the Son of Man who has been last mentioned) if that man (Judas) had not been born.'" – *M.& J. 459*. An objection arises from the fact that "it were good for him not to have been born" was a common Jewish expression. But as Farrar further points out, "The words 'that man' at the end of the (second) clause look as if they were added...lest there should be any confusion in the grammar as to the nominative verb." The placing of the personal pronoun in the next verse seems to support this supposition: "And Judas, who was delivering *Him* up..." Is it possible that Christ, though His sufferings were preordained, meant that it would have been good for Him (humanly speaking) if the traitorous disciple had never been born? It may be recalled (v39) how that same humanity shuddered at the cup that He nevertheless drank because it was the Father's will.

As to the first clause of this verse, which in most versions is rendered, "Woe to that man…", the word rendered "woe" is the Greek *ouai*, which, according to Young, means an 'interjection of sorrow;' Strong has an 'exclamation of grief.' Rather than being an anathema, one scholar calls these words "the most affecting and melting lamentation of love, which feels the woe as much as holiness requires or will permit" (*Stier*). Farrar calls it "an expression of the deepest pity," as does Barclay, who writes, "This is more a lament than a savage condemnation; its whole tone is tragedy rather than wrath" – *The Apostles' Creed* 206. Far from being 'the son of perdition,' as the *A.V.* portrays Judas in John 17:12, the Lord describes him with great pathos as "the son of lostness" (*apoleia*).

While we are not called to speculate on the future position of Judas, let us not forget the forgiveness that Peter, who denied His Lord with curses, later received through the grace and mercy of God. MacDonald asks, "...must we believe that Judas, who repented even to agony, who repented so that his high-prized life became worthless...and met with no mercy at his own hand, could find no mercy in such a God?" MacDonald's thoughts on this subject, which appear in *Unspoken Sermons* (Series I; 28), are worthy of consideration. He links Judas' deep regret in Matthew 27:3 with Christ's prayer regarding the baying crowd as He hung, fading on the cross: "Father, forgive them…" If Christ could forgive those who hated Him even as he hung pierced and bleeding – at their mercy (or lack of it), and in the presence of their still unrepentant hearts – could He not equally extend ultimate forgiveness to Judas, who a little later demonstrated a very real repentance by hanging himself? It is true, as some have pointed out, that the Greek word *metamelomai*, used in Matt. 27:3, regarding Judas' final state of mind, means 'regret or remorse,' not 'change of heart' (*metanoeo*). But whether this is a valid point or a mere quibble is debatable. Exactly why Matthew chose one word over the other here is difficult to say, or indeed if his doing so holds any veiled significance. This much can be said. In English, two of the words we use to define repentance are *regret* and *remorse*. Moreover, could it be that Matthew provides a provisional answer in the next verse? Judas declared (v4) to the High Priest and elders: "*I have sinned in delivering up righteous blood*." They, of course, cared not, but the depth of feeling with which Iscariot spoke these words is graphically illustrated in his next and final act.

APPENDIX V

Original Sin and Total Depravity

The paradigms of Augustine's Original Sin and Calvin's Total Depravity logically flow one into the other. Augustine's response (or, more likely, extreme reaction) to Pelagius's criticism in the 5th century seems to have been a contributing or precipitating factor to the formation of his notorious dogma – the dark idea that through Adam's sin, an innate or 'inherited *guilt*' tainted every aspect of human existence.

Romans 5

Critics of this idea believe it begins with a misreading of a single verse, a poor *Latin* rendering of Romans 5:12, constituting "one of the most consequential mistranslations in Christian history" – *The New Testament* [footnote] 296. The original Greek phrase *eis pantes* (wherefore all) was in the Latin rendered *in quo* (in whom), and thus made to say *in quo omnes peccavcerunt* (in whom all have sinned), instead of "wherefore all sinned." Modern Bibles often use 'because all sinned', which, while admittedly better than the *Vulgate*'s 'of whom,' still retains an element of forensic accusation, whereas Paul's sense here is more likely that of *consequence*. Thomas Allin asserts that Adam's sin, about which virtually no Old Testament writer has anything to say, nor any Evangelist (bar Paul in Romans), nor even Christ Himself, becomes to Augustine everything. Thus, sin's entry, spread, and devastation are amplified, as by contagion, to the point where the entire race – apart from the fortunate, predestinated few (the 'elect') – becomes *massa damnata*.

It is important to point out that we are not denying the obvious effects of Adam's sin, only Augustine's extreme view of it, which reverses cause and effect. As Axton points out in two seperate papers on this subject: "In Paul's original argument, it is the reign of death which accounts for the spread of sin and not vice versa...("death spread to all men" v12; "death reigned" v14; "the many died" v15; "death reigned through the one" v17; "as sin reigned in death" v21)" He concludes, "To miss that sin reigns through death is not simply a theological error but the human error (the work of the deception) that Paul is tracing throughout Romans" – *Reified Nothing* / *10 Contrasts Between Romans 7 & 8*. As if to anticipate a future perversion of the facts, the apostle states quite categorically in verse 14 that "death reigned from Adam to Moses *even over those who had not sinned* in the manner of Adam"! (For more, see Axton's paper, *The Real Tragedy of Augustinian Original Sin* - available at *forgingplowshares.org*).

Inherited Guilt

The forensic element – the 'inherited guilt' part – seems to have been manically added by Augustine lest anyone (such as Pelagius?) imagine they might escape the impact of that first disobedient act. The 'late' Augustine was a master of installing new ideas as if they had always been there. This much seems clear. The language of *scripture* rests not so much on collective guilt as on shared slavery; the Pharisees were, despite their claim to 'freedom' as sons of Abraham, *bond-slaves to sin*. The metaphors Paul employs in Romans equally allude to enslavement, creating alienation, which in turn requires rectification. Paul's emphasis in Romans falls on alienation and ruin to highlight the contrasting reality of a glorious reconciliation and redemption (5:18,19; 11:32). Christ frees us from the slavery of sin and resulting death, rather than any inherent, congenital guilt! Archbishop Lazor Puhalo

summarises it this way: Christ's death on the cross was an indication of God's co-suffering love for humanity. Sin, which is the missing of the required divine mark, means *alienation from God* (not guilt). Through Christ, we are ransomed or freed from that alienation, which restores us to fellowship with the Divine Nature. Nothing else is possible, implied, or desirable.

The most common Greek word for guilt or guilty, *enochos,* is used sparingly throughout the New Testament, primarily in Matthew and Mark concerning the so-called unpardonable sin. It should be clear that the Lord's condemnation, in this instance, arose not out of inherited guilt but through the evil *intent* of those involved and their wicked identification of Christ's miracles as diabolical manifestations. With a single exception, involving the Lord's supper (1 Cor 11:27), Paul never uses *enochos* at all. Moreover, in the one verse most often thought to support a universal guilt, Romans 3:19, the "whole world" (*pas kosmos*) is not found 'guilty' before God, but "accountable" (*hypodikos*) to Him. Quite a different thing.

Other Factors

David Hart also draws to our attention how the legal metaphors Paul employs were altered through the transmission of Greek into Latin. Hart postulates that Paul's language (in Romans) is predominantly that of civil law. It concerns slavery and *manumission*, the payment required to free a slave. He shows how the Greek *lytron* (commonly translated 'ransom' in the *A.V.*) equates to a redemptive fee that was required for emancipation – in other words, a contractual necessity under law. With later Latin Christianity, the language changed to one of debt before a legal tribunal where guilt was implicit. Hence, we have moved from a civil legal setting to one of criminality, all of which brings us full circle: that is, to the theological weight placed on a poor translation of Romans, and upon which rests much of the debate over the Augustinian question of Original Sin.

Another important element relates to *collectiveness* – that of the *joint* 'guilt' ostensibly imposed by Adam's fall upon the *entire* race. Recall that Christ and Paul both insist that *everyone* – not just 'the elect' – must give an account and have their individual works examined (Jn 5 & 2 Cor 5). Why would each person be required to give an account if they were already pronounced guilty at birth? In fact, there is no mention of *collective* debt or guilt in any passage concerning judgment. Again, where guilt *is* stated or implied, it typically refers to the individual – "each one" must be judged according to the things done in the body, whether they be good or evil (2 Cor 5:10); "the dead were judged" from what was written in the scrolls (Rev 20:12); those having "done good" will rise to live, and those having "done evil" will rise to be *judged* (Jn 5:29; not 'condemned' as in the *NIV*; and certainly not 'damned' as in the *KJV*). Notice, too, that "good" is not only *included* in two of the above verses but placed *before* "evil"! Our magnificent God is always quicker to reward good than He is to repay evil. The Greek for "evil" here is *phaulos*. Unlike the word 'sin' (*harmatia* - 'to miss the mark'), which occurs nowhere in the context (nor any other related to judgment), *phaulos* has intent or purpose built into it, meaning one whose *intention* is to sin, to enact evil, or perform wicked deeds.

It is of interest to note that the Hebrew word for sin (*chatta'ah*) occurs for the first time not in relation to the Edenic fall, but later in Genesis 4:7 concerning Cain's rejected offering and, by implication, the wicked act he was about to commit against his righteous brother. Again, intentionality is the culprit here, not determinism. In the words of the *NIV*: "If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but *you* must rule over it."

Total Depravity

In his work *The Augustinian Revolution in Theology*, Thomas Allin lays the bulk of the blame for these terrible teachings at the feet of the Bishop of Hippo, viewing Calvin essentially as his dupe. Both men certainly appear to have shared strong similarities in temperament and leaning. On numerous occasions, the latter betrays his unhealthy allegiance to the former; time without number, Calvin either mentions or quotes Augustine in his work, even boasting that he could write a single treatise on his subject by quoting or referencing the African exclusively. Calvin's boldness is nowhere more apparent than in his willingness to extrapolate Augustinian 'guilt' into the explicit arena of *Total Depravity*. In the lawyer's eyes, each human being is born not only guilty before God but totally depraved – yes, even the newborn, whom, incidentally, Calvin's idol viewed not as "belonging to the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matt 19:14), but to the kingdom of the devil (a view mercifully rejected by the Church of the time)! That Calvin deduced his notion from Augustine is beyond doubt. At one point, writing in 380 CE, the bishop implicitly states, "Adam **depraved** in himself by the hidden corruption of his carnal concupiscence (i.e. sexual desire, a huge issue for Augustine, as it was for Mani) all who came out of this stock." However, what was duplicitous in the master was forthright in the student. Calvin states unequivocally: "To sin is, in this case, to be corrupt and invitiated (damaged), for that **natural depravity** we bring from our mother's womb…deserves His vengeance, and this is the sin they call original." The problem is that scripture contains no such notion as "natural depravity;" indeed, the concept reveals more about its inventor than it does about the written oracles. If each individual has within them a God-given conscience, as Paul in Romans 2 assures us is true, then each one has a rudder to steer his own ship. That none do this *perfectly* (except One) is never in doubt – any more than that which *is* done can of itself affect salvation – but the capacity for every human being to do good is equally never in doubt, if Paul's words carry any meaning at all.

In categorical terms, the situation for Augustine and Calvin can be summarised as follows:

1. A mistranslation opens the way to a nonsensical error, which in turn produces an equally nonsensical notion of salvation – **penal substitution** and **divine satisfaction**.
2. An entire system of doctrine develops from these errors that has nothing whatever to do with New Testament semantics; nor did any such teaching exist in the Church prior to Augustine.
3. Calvin's later idea of 'Total Depravity' then gives rise to **unconditional election** and **double predestination**. As with Augustine, Calvin makes no attempt at an explanation; instead, he attributes it (conveniently) to a *divine fiat* that no human mind can comprehend. The result is so-called **limited atonement**, effected by God Himself with no involvement of the human will, later referred to as **irresistible grace** and **perseverance of the saints** (in the latter case, *more than a decade* later).

The fact that so many informed Catholics avoid the embarrassment of later Augustinian semantics, and, perhaps even more, that many Calvinists either deny or modify the more extreme aspects of the Frenchman's musings, should be telling us that something is seriously amiss in both camps. As Axton says, "Paul's cry, 'Who will deliver me from this body of death' (Rom 7:24) goes unanswered where Augustine's (and Calvin's) mistaken reading reigns" – *The Real Tragedy of Augustinian Original Sin* (2019).

The figure of Pelagius is inextricably linked to the above events. When, over 40 years ago, the writer was first introduced to the so-called "Pelagian Controversy," it was easy to comply with the villainy heaped upon this Briton monk. Yet, the truth ultimately comes to light. It would seem that the sole desire of this honourable man was to travel the byways of Europe, proclaiming the noble Christian life of a monk. As the following evidence will hopefully reveal, Pelagius (354-418) should now be seen as a committed disciple of Christ, not the arrogant 'heretic' he has, for so long, been ignorantly and unjustly portrayed as.

Unhappily for Pelagius, around the turn of the century, he made the fatal error of crossing swords with the powerful Augustine, criticising (justly so, some might say) something the Cathanigian wrote in his *Confessions*. Under most situations involving ordinary participants, this episode would have resolved itself with little more than a ripple, but this was Augustine, and Augustine did not take kindly to having his authority challenged. Thus was ignited a conflagration that stirred hearts and minds everywhere, negatively impacting generations of the faithful for long years to come.

Pelagius was a well-educated Christian teacher, a scholar in fact, at home with the writings of the Eastern Patristics and, unlike his nemesis, familiar with the Greek language. He is recognised for being the first British author, famous for his defence of 'freewill' during a time when, paralleling the foundations of Empire itself, that doctrine was being undermined within the established Church. Like many of his contemporaries and forebears, Pelagius clung to faith in man's ability to perform good works; notwithstanding Adam's expulsion from Eden, some part of the Divine Image was believed to remain. This view – later known as "synergism," and promoted even during the Reformation by scholars such as Erasmus – only became controversial in the West after Augustine's mischief-making in the early 400s. Athanasius (*Life of Antony*), for example, had always resolutely held to a positive anthropology – nothing like Augustine's "radicalization of God's sovereignty" (Greer) – where free choice gave virtue its value. Even Jerome shared this sentiment. In 388, he wrote the following: "So as not to appear to condemn the common nature of humanity, and *to make God the author of evil in creating beings of a kind unable to avoid evil*, he distinctly guards against this by saying that *we were created good by God*, but because we are left to our *free will*, we slip toward what is morally inferior by our own fault" – *Commentary on Ecclesiastes*. Unfortunately, Jerome, friendly with Augustine and no doubt mindful of the heresy charge, compromised his standing on the issue around 414. Concerning the above facts, there seems little doubt. Dr Kenneth Wilson says that there was no free will debate within the first 300 years of the Church; indeed, his exhaustive studies (published in 2019) have revealed it to be one of the few doctrines during the nascent era "on which there was absolute unanimity" (*The Foundation of Augustinian-Calvinism*).

So, what of the other novelties that Pelagius was accused of and later condemned? A change in attitudes on this subject was initiated following the publication of a 1943 biography by Georges de Plinval, whose work portrayed Pelagius as a victim of unjust denunciation. Plinval's book stimulated further research by other scholars, the most recent being Ali Bonner's 2018 publication, *The Myth of Pelagianism.* Dr Bonner shows how Pelagius' surviving works (four in number, of which there are literally hundreds of copies) actually contradict the accusations made against him, perjoratively labelled 'Pelagianism.' This includes what is perhaps the most unjust claim of all – his ostensible rejection of the need for Divine grace. Bonner demonstrates how Pelagius described nothing of the sort; he rather *qualified* the use of the Greek *charis* (or *gratia* in Latin), according to its contextual setting. In other words, there is a disjunction between what is *claimed* by the accusatory faction – primarily Augustine and Jerome – and what the evidence actually reveals. Our author encourages interested parties to

read the four surviving documents in order to form their own opinion. “Nothing in Pelagius is original, *nothing*,” she noted in a recent interview. “What that means is he cannot have invented a set of new ideas.” Indeed, he was merely “defending what was Greek aesthetic theology.” By contrast, the teaching of Augustine qualified very much as “New Theology.” It broke with a dominant pattern that had governed mainstream faith up to the end of the 4th century. Although it is true that the teaching had been seeded centuries earlier by Valentinus (100-80) in Rome, it was fiercely denounced by Irenaeus and those who followed him. The difference now was that Augustine cleverly ‘Christianised’ his new determinism, dressing it up in the garb of established orthodoxy! The great irony lies in his claim that Pelagius taught a “new and very dangerous heresy,” which in reality was something akin to the pot calling the kettle black. Dr Bonner views the episode as a “very effective smear campaign,” creating a “toxic caricature” that led history to judge a man in stark contrast to the facts; moreover, one that led men to evaluate established Christian doctrine as novel and non-Christian innovation as established teaching. Something Bonner sums up as “the invention of heresy in order to relocate orthodoxy” – *The Myth of Pelagianism* 27.

This entire procession was taking place amidst catastrophic social and political upheaval; Rome was sacked by Barbarian tribes in 410, leaving its power base in tatters. This allowed the North African bishops to convene their own council, which led (ultimately) to the mandatory sentence. Pelagius had already been exonerated twice outside the region (the accusations having come from within it!); a third was convened by Augustine in his native diocese, and for a third time these charges were overruled by the pope. But this time the exasperated bishop was having none of it. Accordingly, he wrote directly to the Emperor, Honorius – by all accounts a weak man seeking a scapegoat for his failed management of the rapidly disintegrating West – the Briton was thus expediently condemned. François-Joseph Thonnard observes that Augustine, a gifted rhetorician, made full use of his skill throughout the proceedings – *Controverse Pélagienne* 199-200 (1967).

Bonner points out that of the fourteen tenets that Augustine claimed Pelagius held and taught, *only half of one of them* can be categorically attributed to him (the 9th, on *gratia*). Augustine knew this: twice he admits (in writing) that he did not particularly care whether Pelagius believed them or not! Such a recklessly conceited admission leaves little doubt that at least one within this party was arrogant – a claim, incidentally, hurled against Pelagius – yet there is no obvious sign of it in his writing (unless one interprets a confident, corrective mannerism as arrogance). It is of more than passing interest, too, that the fourteen tenets had virtually nothing to do with the issues at stake, which were Augustine’s three inventions of original sin, prevenient grace and predestination (as preordination). Of course, the bishop was astute enough to know this; the trio (or ‘triune,’ as Bonner refers to them) had never been an established part of traditional teaching up to that point, nor a topic of discussion at any synod. Indeed, as we have seen, Pelagius’ positive anthropology (view of human nature) and free will doctrine were foundational in the immediately preceding era. Bonner believes the tenets were a ploy, a clever smoke screen to conceal the true motive, which was the denouncing of a ‘heretic’ and his ‘heresy’ for polemical reasons. Due to policy and circumstances, it worked.

In the end, each reader must decide as to these little-known or *little-acknowledged* facts. In 1956, another Pelagian biographer, John Ferguson, left no doubt as to *his* view: He writes, “If a heretic is one who emphasizes one truth to the exclusion of others, it would at any rate appear that (Pelagius) was no more a heretic than Augustine. His fault was in exaggerated emphasis, but in the final form his philosophy took...it is not certain that any statement of his is totally irreconcilable with the Christian faith or indefensible in terms of the New Testament. It is by no means so clear that the same may be said of Augustine” – from *The Pelagian*

Controversy (quoted by Beck) 694. Pelagius died in Egypt in 418, the year of his final excommunication and exile.

The Dark Side of Augustine

Augustine was a complex individual, living in an era of catastrophic flux and turmoil. His early life was marked with carnality, of which, to his credit, he openly admits. His midlife, following his conversion and move to Milan, contained his most moderate period, although guilt over a misspent youth often plagued him, as expressed in his biographical work, *Reflections* (penned during this time). However, his final two decades were by far the most turbulent. Once more on his native soil, we witness the combined impact of age, temper, political upheaval, and religious disarray, the muddy waters of which Augustine navigated with undiminished power and skill. Thomas Allin sheds light on these closing years, especially the last eighteen. While Allin acknowledges the enduring impact this ecclesiastical powerhouse has had on Christendom's thinking – with almost universal Catholic and much Protestant acclaim – he scorns Augustine's oft-portrayed image (especially in art) as a mild and gentle saint. Allin begins by addressing the bishop's almost obsessive association of the sexual act with sin. There is no scripture that equates the reproductive act in and of itself with sin; only its misplaced abuse and exploitation. But with Augustine, sex becomes the modus operandi of virtually everything wicked...even, one imagines, the eating of 'the apple' in Eden – from whence the sensuality of fruit likely had its origin – which of course all agree was the catalyst of sin's entry. One consequence of this is that the newborn by nature is practically the devil's own, which (as already alluded to) was a teaching of Manichaeism, Augustine's earliest influence. This must be the case because it was the devil who first implanted the desire for sex! Thus, he writes somewhat presumptuously, "the Catholic faith teaches that all unbaptized infants go to the damnation of perdition" (as already noted, Rome rejected this notion). Yet on this very point, Augustine is forced to place restraint, assigning to unbaptized infants the "most tolerable form of damnation." He seems to imagine such a state superior to non-existence, though he fails to explain *how* or *why*, any more than he demonstrates how or why one form of *eternal torment* is more tolerable than another! From the fall, a complete loss of free will results, and on this subject, Allin notes Augustine's adroitness with words. Occasionally, it seems, God's grace does make men truly free, *but only free to sin*. Of course, for Augustine, all this is by the by, for it is God himself that orders even that which He does not create (sin). Writes Allin, "To understand this, a very awful part of Augustine's theory must be kept in view. He holds that God punishes sin by ordering fresh sin, and makes a clear distinction between sin per se and sin as the *pa-na peccati*. To the latter, being judicially inflicted, man's consent is not necessary. He *must* sin." Hence, Augustine concludes that "after the Fall an obligation to sin was (penally) transmitted. Liberty has gone, and there has come (the harsh necessity to sin). There is a *necessarium peccatum* (necessary sin) from which we cannot abstain" – *Revolution in Theology* 147,48. This, in essence, is Augustine's doctrine of original sin. When we explore his theology, Allin continues, "a fresh terror is in store for us at each step. We have here, for instance, a representation of God as One who ordains an ever-fresh and ever-growing crop of sins, whose deadly vengeance takes the form of compelling the multiplication of sins; who thus, I am forced to say, seems to do the devil's work. Nor does even this exhaust the list of Augustine's assumptions. 'The appetite grows with what it feeds on,' and the next step is a declaration that God actually forces sin on man. We must ever bear in mind the advance in severity, the gradual crystallization by Augustine of theory into dogma, if we would understand his ultimate position" – *Ibid.* 148.

On the subject of Augustine's predestination, enough has been said already (see *Chapter 11*). We now move on to his influence in other sombre matters. However, before

proceeding, it should be noted that Augustine acknowledges his own limitations as an exegete, as compared (for example) to his contemporary, Jerome. Unfortunately, the reader (of his works) is apt to quickly forget such diffidence owing to Augustine's authoritative manner of writing.

Another of Augustine's penchants was inciting persecution towards those deemed 'the enemies' of the Church (which, on his own rigid terms, might now arguably amount to most of Catholic and Protestant Christendom!) – if nothing else, in his later years, he was an arch 'heresy hunter.' While we cannot claim originality for him on this score, he freely endorsed the writings of those who so qualified (the aptly named Lucifer of Cagliari, for one). Augustine's view that the Church had the right to persecute was established along the usual lines (described by Allin below). By the time he had finished, the Catholic Church was in possession of a virtual Manual of Persecution which, Allin records, led to "the most horrible chapter in the Western ecclesiastical story" (166). "We must regretfully admit that no picture of Augustine would be adequate which did not recognize the zeal he throws into the advocacy of this awful theory. It is not too much to say that when he had finished his case for persecution, there remains literally no scripture text unperverted and no sophism unemployed in order to justify it. The Inquisition may fairly boast that it has virtually received a complete authorization from the greatest of the Western doctors" (166, 67). To support his case, Allin provides two pages of samples taken directly from Augustine's writings; three will suffice to give a taste: "It would be cruel to spare heretics"; "The charity of the Church is what leads her to percecute"; "It is mercy to persecute even though some may be driven to kill themselves in order to escape persecution – better so than that all should be cast into the infernum" (170). What a contrast all this is compared to the message contained in the Sermon on the Mount, or, for that matter, the words attributed to Isaac the Syrian, who centuries later would echo its sentiments: "Be persecuted, rather than be a persecutor. Be crucified, rather than be a crucifier. Be treated unjustly, rather than treat anyone unjustly. Be oppressed, rather than be an oppressor. Be gentle rather than zealous. Lay hold of goodness, rather than justice."

Very little of human life escaped the breadth of Augustine's sweeping gaze. For example, it was his opinion that neither the wicked nor the heretical had any just claim to own property. "Set apart from righteousness," he asks, "what are states but robberies on a great scale?" Thus, it follows, "because righteousness can only exist in the Divine state, there is no right to any property outside the Church. This is the Divine right on which all other rights ultimately rest." As a rule, writes Allin, "it is Church property whose forcible seizure from the heretics he defends, but his arguments justify the seizure of any kind of property by the true Church from the outsider" (173). Then there was his view on slavery. For many years, the Western Church had turned a blind eye to this controversy, but not our Carthaginian. To him, slavery was a divinely ordained institution, the abolition of which he deemed impious. It was one of the many things on which Augustine switched camps following Theodosius I's legislation to make Christianity the official religion of the empire in 380-90 CE. This was the single ground-shaking event that changed (or began to change) everything. Prior to this, Augustine thought slavery wrong; afterwards, he proclaimed slave ownership as something divinely ordered. He had thought the same about persecution, but later came to justify it, as he had his position on the salvation of all (or most) of Humanity. This is how the phrase, "the *late* Augustine," came to be adopted. Many of his key doctrines were reversed once the religious/political milieu altered. The tragic reality of this 'about-face' rested less on a search for truth – largely, the foundation on which it had rested till now – than on a struggle for *power* (the authority of the Imperial Church). *That*, as much as anything, was what the bitter confrontations with Pelagius and the Donatists were about. Allin, again: "Slowly, steadily, surely, as his thoughts developed, the fetters were drawn ever tighter round the human spirit. More and more dim grew the light; the gloom more oppressive, the austere twilight of earlier Latinism faded into the chill of night.

Hope fled for the world at large. Humanity lay bleeding to death at the feet of a rigorous and awful judge. For all explanation, it was assured that in the dim past ages before birth it had sinned somehow (*per rationem seminis*!) and deserved an endless death. Nor is this all. He further left mankind with many of the motives to progress paralysed; with the principles at the root of all morality seriously compromised; with slavery as a divinely ordered and therefore permanent element of human society; with persecution enjoined as a positive duty to God; with a nameless haunting fear over shadowing the soul; with a harrowing uncertainty weighing on even the holiest all their lives through doubt as to whether they would be granted the grace of perseverance; a fear, awful, inscrutable, deadly, lest by an arbitrary act of will that grace might at the last moment be withdrawn, and they might, after all, be plunged, after vain prayers and tears, in endless pains, victims of a God, in fact, more terrible than man's unassisted ingenuity had ever devised, though He continued, but in word only, the God of Love" (192, 93).

Reaction Within The Wider Contemporary Church

Augustine's turnaround did not go unnoticed by the educated and informed of the time; far from it. The monks of his own province were among the first to reject his musings as absurd. Later, Prosper of Aquitaine (a great promoter of Augustine), revealed more than he probably meant to by informing his hero of a certain party (possibly John Cassian) who had written against him. Drawing on Augustine's own writings, this unnamed author exposed the bishop's blatant inconsistency in proclaiming doctrine diametrically opposed to what he (and virtually the entire Church body) had held just a few years before. It is quite implausible to imagine that many in the West – virtually all in the East – who still valued the doctrinal framework of bygone centuries, did not react similarly. In the long run, of course, none of this proved of any real consequence. For just as Christ assured His disciples His kingdom was not of this world, so the power behind the world's throne (under the name of religion) ignored the honourable complaints of the spiritually awake. The thousand years that followed have, with more than a modicum of truth, been so labelled The Dark Ages.

APPENDIX VI

What is the Outer Darkness?

The phrase "outer darkness" occurs three times in Matthew (8:12, 22:13; 25:30). It is used twice within the context of parable and once (22:13) in comparing the faith of a centurion to the unfaithful of the Kingdom. All three passages point to a particular type or group who, by implication, assume privileges they do little to deserve. Indeed, those implicated appear spiritually unfit to partake of the Kingdom and are excluded from the wedding feast of the Lamb. The "useless slave" in the latter parable is useless because of his unwillingness to do his master's bidding. He sees his master as hard, but still takes the easy route and returns nothing on the property with which he is entrusted. Therefore, he is cast out, and his allotment is given to the servant who made the most effort. The words Christ uses here, "weeping and gnashing of teeth," are apt, for they well describe the bitter or perhaps even raging sense of loss experienced by the last servant who, though he kept safe the master's allotment, failed in his effort to augment it. The first passage, by contrast, concerns the centurion (8:12) and honours the concern of an elite Roman soldier for a lowly servant; Christ then compares (favourably) this Gentile's essential spirituality with the "sons of the Kingdom," who will be cast into the darkness outside.

There are as many interpretations of the expression "outer darkness" as there are lessons from the narratives accompanying it; however, a common thread connects all of them, which encompasses preparedness and faithfulness. Here, a privileged position leads to a presumption that overrides the critical 'Kingdom' qualities of kindness, faithfulness and trustworthiness. It is a repeated theme in the Gospels, the consequence of which is best summed up by the statement, "The first shall be last, and the last shall be first." This declaration alone should inform us that it is not an avowal of exclusion, but of *priority*. And that is precisely what the Lord Jesus announces to the nation's elite who expect priority in all things: He says, "I assure you the sinners and prostitutes go into the kingdom *before* you" – Matt 21:31. Then, a little later in chapter 23, He proclaims to the same audience these astonishing words: "You may by no means be perceiving Me henceforth, till you should be saying, 'Blessed is He Who is coming in the name of the Lord!'" (v39). Never at any time does Christ deny their *ultimate* inclusion in the Kingdom, merely that their assumed priority will not be met. While all three narratives are directed towards the nation – specifically, the "sons of the Kingdom" – they naturally hold powerful spiritual lessons for everyone.

Unfortunately, the expression "outer darkness" has, over the centuries, acquired a theological nuance that extends beyond its immediate context. The great majority of readers assume it to be an allusion to the hell they have been steeped in since childhood, and from which there is no escape. Yet, evidence of this is entirely lacking in the texts; indeed, as we have observed, the indications are to the contrary. Then there is that angst expression, "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt 22:13 *AV*) from which so much mileage has been extracted. We all understand this expression, and most of us know someone who has experienced the deep sense of loss and bitterness it invokes. Interminable doom is not the message here. Rather, those prideful souls who experience the outer darkness suffer a sense of profound humiliation and agonising loss. In their removal from that which they presumed theirs by right, they are thrust into a condition of enforced reflection on their own deficiencies. They will remain outside the Kingdom blessings until the last penny is paid, which is their true and rightful debt; nothing more is implied or stated. The essential truth of any parable is the moral lesson conveyed by it.

APPENDIX VII

Aion – Aionios

(As they occur in the Greek Scriptures)

Below are the occurrences of *aion*/*aionios* as found in their various forms in the New Testament. For consistency and concordance, all translations are taken from the *Concordant Literal New Testament*, which uses what is arguably the simplest *literal* rendering of the terms: eon, eonian, and eon/s of the eons (in CAPITALS below). By way of contrast, the *King James* rendering occurs in parentheses (**bold lettering** where it matches the *C.L.N.T.*). The *Authorised Version* is chosen to expose the many expressions that have left their mark on Protestant eschatological thought.

EON in the singular:

(a) Referring to the eon in which we now live.

1. THE PRESENT WICKED EON – Gal. 1:4 (*AV* = world).
2. THE CURRENT EON – 1 Tim. 6:17; 2 Tim 4:10; Tit. 2:12 (world).
3. THIS EON – Matt. 12:32; 13:22; Luke 16:8; 20:34; Rom. 12:2; 1 Cor. 1:20, 2:6,8; 3:18; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 1:21 (world); Eph.2:2 (course of this world).
4. FOR THE EON – Matt. 21:19; Mark 11:14; John 12:34 (for ever); John 13:18 (never); 1 Cor. 8:13 (while the world standeth).
5. FROM THE EON – Luke 1:70; Acts 3:21 (since the world began); Acts 15:18 (from the beginning of the world).
6. OUT OF THE EON – John 9:32 (since the world began).
7. OF THE EON – Mark 4:19; Eph. 6:12 (world).
8. THE CONCLUSION OF THE EON – Matt. 13:39, 40, 49; 24:3 (end of the world).

(b) Referring to the next eon.

1. THE COMING EON – Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30 (world).
2. THE IMPENDING EON – Heb. 6:5 (world to come).
3. THAT EON – Luke 20:35 (that world).
4. FOR THE EON – Heb. 7:24 (ever); 7:28 (for evermore); Mark 3:29; John 4:14; 8:51,52; 10:28; 11:26 (never); Luke 1:55; John 6:51,58; 8:35,36; 12:34; 14:16; 2 Cor. 9:9; Heb. 5:6; 6:20; 7:17,21; 1 Peter 1:23,25; 2 Peter 2:17; 1 John 2:17; 2 John 2; Jude 13 (for ever).
5. FOR THE DAY OF THE EON – 2 Peter 3:18 (for ever).
6. THE CONCLUSION OF THE EON – Matt. 28:20 (end of the world).
7. BEFORE THE ENTIRE EON - Jude 25 (omitted in the *AV*; the *RV* reads: before all time).

EON in the plural:

1. THE EONS - Eph. 3:11; 1 Tim. 1:17 (eternal); Heb. 1:2; 11:3 (world).
2. FROM THE EONS – Eph. 3:9 (from the beginning of the world); Col. 1:26 (**from the ages**).
3. FOR THE EONS – Matt. 6:13; Luke 1:33; Rom. 1:25; 9:5; 11:36; 16:27; Heb. 13:8 (for ever); 2 Cor. 11:31 (for evermore).
4. THE IMPENDING EONS – Eph. 2:7 (**ages to come**).
5. THE CONCLUSION OF THE EONS – Heb. 9:26 (end of the world).
6. THE ENDS OF THE EONS – 1 Cor. 10:11 (ends of the world).
7. BEFORE THE EONS – 1 Cor. 2:7 (before the world).
8. FOR ALL THE EONS – Jude 25 (and ever [modern translations often render this 'for all eternity']).

EON used twice in the same phrase:

1. THE EON OF THE EON – Heb. 1:8 (for ever and ever).
2. THE EON OF THE EONS – Eph. 3:21 (throughout all ages, world without end).
3. THE EONS OF THE EONS – Rev. 1:18 (evermore) Gal. 1:5; Phil. 4:20; 1 Tim. 1:17; 2 Tim. 4:18; Heb. 13:21; 1 Peter 4:11; 5:11; Rev. 1:6; 4:9,10; 5:13,14; 7:12; 10:6; 11:15; 14:11; 15:7; 19:3; 20:10; 22:5 (for ever and ever).

EON as the adjective EONIAN:

1. EONIAN TIMES – Rom. 16:25 (since the world began); 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 1:2 (before the world began).
2. EONIAN LIFE – Matt. 19:16,29; 25:46; Mark 10:17,30; Luke 10:25; 18:18,30; John 3:15,16,36; 4:14,36; 5:24,39; 6:27,40,47,54,68; 10:28; 12:25,50: 17:2,3; Acts 13:46,48; Rom.2:7; 5:21: 6:22,23; Gal.6:8; 1 Tim.1:16; 6:12,19; Titus 1:2; 3:7; 1 John 1:2; 2:25; 3:15; 5:11,13,20; Jude 21 (everlasting/eternal life).
3. EONIAN GLORY – 2 Cor. 4:17 (eternal weight of glory); 2 Tim. 2:10; 1 Peter 5:10 (eternal glory).
4. FIRE EONIAN – Matt. 18:8; 25:41 (everlasting fire); Jude 7 (eternal fire).
5. EONIAN CONSOLATION – 2 Thess. 2:16 (everlasting consolation).
6. EONIAN COVENANT – Heb. 13:20 (everlasting covenant).
   EONIAN PENALTY – Mark 3:29 (eternal damnation).
7. JUDGMENT EONIAN – Heb. 6:2 (eternal Judgment).
8. LIFE EONIAN – Matt. 25:46 (life eternal).
9. CHASTENING EONIAN – Matt. 25:46 (everlasting punishment).
10. EONIAN DESTRUCTION – 2 Thess. 1:9 (everlasting destruction).
11. EONIAN ALLOTMENT – Heb. 9:15 (eternal inheritance).
12. EONIAN KINGDOM – 2 Peter 1:11 (everlasting kingdom).
13. EONIAN GOD – Rom. 16:26 (everlasting God).

14. EONIAN EVANGEL – Rev. 14:6 (everlasting gospel).
15. EONIAN REDEMPTION – Heb. 9:12 (eternal redemption).
16. EONIAN SALVATION – Heb. 5:9 (eternal salvation).
17. EONIAN TABERNACLES – Luke 16:9 (everlasting habitations).
18. EONIAN IN THE HEAVENS – 2 Cor. 5:1 (eternal in the heavens).
19. HONOR AND MIGHT EONIAN – 1 Tim. 6:16 (honour and power everlasting).
20. EONIAN REPAYMENT – Phm. 15 (for ever).
21. EONIAN SPIRIT – Heb. 9:14 (eternal spirit).
22. EONIAN – 2 Cor. 4:18 (eternal).

Most modern translations have altered the KJV's wording in the case of the singular noun (*aion*), which means that 'age' has, in the main, displaced 'world.' In the case of the compound expressions (*tous aionia ton aionon* / *tou aionos ton aionon*), the tautology 'forever and ever' is usually retained. The adjective (*aionios*) also typically continues as the familiar duo 'eternal/everlasting.' It seems that the Bible would not be the Bible without these religiously-charged words and expressions. Indeed, one cannot deny the lyrical appeal of many KJV expressions, including the word eternal. The choice will, therefore, always remain between poetry and truth.

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