

THE FINAL STATE OF THE WICKED

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We may not share Robert Browning's robust optimism about human life—

The world is so full of a number of things,
I'm sure we should all be as happy as kings—

but most of us much of the time are moderately cheerful and happy. As Christians we believe with Browning that "God's in his heaven" and therefore that, while sin makes it impossible for us to add "all's right with the world," we are convinced that in the end everything must turn out right for God's creation. Our relative pessimism regarding the temporal order is engulfed in an ultimate optimism regarding the eternal *telos* toward which history under divine direction is moving. Seldom, I suppose, do we find ourselves brooding over the awesome doctrine of eternal punishment. Only on rarest occasions and then fleetingly is our mood that of Rodin's famous statue, "The Thinker," who sits in mute amazement watching lost souls entering hell. What William Gladstone wrote about eternal punishment in the late nineteenth century is equally true today: It "seems to be relegated at present to the far-off corners of the Christian mind, and there to sleep in deep shadow."¹ Except for classroom study or evangelistic preaching, "the final state of the wicked" is a subject that in the privacy of our own minds we repress and in our social interchange prefer to wrap in a shroud of silence.

Yet the British jurist Fitzjames Stephen made this trenchant statement:

Though Christianity expresses the tender and charitable sentiments with passionate ardour, it has also a terrible side. Christian Love is only for a time and on condition; it stops short at the gates of Hell, and Hell is an essential part of the whole Christian scheme.²

Is it? If so, what can be said Biblically concerning it?

As we venture into this forebodingly dark region of theology, let us consult some of the reports furnished by the host of explorers who have preceded us. Their observations are bewilderingly contradictory, but five conclusions have been drawn.

The first is that of sheer *agnosticism*. It is impossible so much as to ascertain whether there is any such reality as hell because it is impossible to determine what happens after death. Some of these—shall we call them eschatological agnostics?—hold that human beings are nothing but biological organisms that expire and disintegrate like, in Bertrand Russell's memorable phrase, every other accidental collocation of atoms. A second agnostic group, confident that man in

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¹Quoted in W. Moberley, *The Ethics of Punishment* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968) 339.

²Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 365.

some way survives death but dismissing *in toto* the claim that the Bible is a Baedeker of the terrain beyond the grave, submits a shrug-of-the-shoulders report. No dependable data can be obtained. Guesswork is unavoidable. Hence the best result available is a frankly speculative "perhaps." A third group, though sure of a world to come and willing to accept the Bible as revelation, holds that its delineation of that coming world is too vague and imprecise to permit the drawing of any detailed topography. God, this group further holds, has in his wisdom deliberately confined us to a state of reverent ignorance. It is enough to know that we are destined for an afterlife. In childlike trust we accept our ignorance of what that life after this life will be like. We are akin to immigrant children who only know that our wise and loving Father awaits us in a strange new land, and we therefore need not fret because our little minds cannot imagine—even with the help of the sketches he has sent us—what we will experience once we reach there. Reverent agnosticism is accordingly the evidence of a profound faith that refuses to engage in prying speculation. Let Joseph Butler, author of the once-celebrated *Analogy of Religion*, sum up this report: "Must we not confess ourselves in the presence of dark sayings, meant for hope and meant for warning but too fragmentary and incomplete for systems?"³

The second conclusion drawn by explorers of human destiny is that of *annihilationism*. A great number of eminent philosophers and scientists support this negative view. Often with emotional dogmatism, they affirm that intensive research and arduous reflection afford no convincing evidence whatever of another world. Indeed they proclaim all reports of that supposed world as mistaken or fictitious. In their sober judgment it is a never-never land. It is Samuel Butler's *Erehwon*, and the name of that imaginary utopia is of course *nowhere* spelled backward. Thus the nonbeliever, the incorrigible atheist, the sacrilegious playboy, the sadistic tyrant, the fear-ridden fideist—none of these really needs to allow a twinge of dread to becloud his conscience. At death, Bertrand Russell assures all of us, we rot. Inelegantly though tersely put, that is the lot of the wicked as well as the righteous. The poet asks with anguish:

Is this the whole sad story of creation,
Told by its toiling millions o'er and o'er,
One glimpse of day, then black annihilation,
A sunlit journey to a sunless shore?

Yes, retorts Russell, and far better an unending sleep than a pilgrimage that brings most of our fellow travelers to an endless hell.

The third conclusion drawn by explorers of human destiny is that of *universalism*. Certain Biblical passages give at least a flickering intimation that eternity does not embrace anything corresponding to the hell of traditional theology. Out in man's post-mortem future there is no sulphurous abyss in which lost souls will forever endure conscious suffering. Nels Ferré, who early in his career reported otherwise, is absolutely positive that traditional theologians have misinterpreted the Biblical data. With restrained passion he rejects their tragic distortion of the truth about the world to come.

The Christian conception of last things. . . is squarely based on the eternal and faithful love of the sovereign Lord. Eternal hell is naturally out of the question, both

³Quoted in *ibid.*

as subjustice and as sublove. The very conception of eternal hell is monstrous and an insult to the conception of last things in other religions, not to mention the Christian doctrine of God's sovereign love. Such a doctrine would make God a tyrant, where any human Hitler would be a third-degree saint, and the concentration camps of human torture the king's picnic grounds. That such a doctrine could be conceived, not to mention believed, shows how far from any understanding of the love of God many people once were and, alas, still are!

No worse insult could be offered to Christ and no blasphemy of God could go deeper than this. God's name has been libeled beyond belief even by those who sincerely think they know Him, love Him and serve Him. Yet an idol they serve, not the God of the Christian faith. A famous modern evangelist has been reported to have preached on God's "best laughter" which was at the sight of the eternally tortured! What indescribable lack of pathos and what woeful distortion of our wonderful God! . . . There are no incorrigible sinners; God has no permanent problem children. . . . The Good Shepherd insists on finding the hundredth sheep. The *mercy* of God, says the Bible, is *everlasting*; and love *never* fails.⁴

William Barclay is as positive as Ferré in rejecting the traditional reading of the Biblical data as a sad and gross misreading. Through the mists of eternity he perceives a shining heaven for every member of Adam's fallen race without a single exception.

I believe that it is impossible to set limits to the grace of God. I believe that not only in this world, but in any other world there may be, the grace of God is still effective, still operative, still at work. I do not believe that the operation of the grace of God is limited to this world. I believe that the grace of God is as wide as the universe.

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 (I Cor. 15:24-28). For me this has certain consequences. If one man remains outside the love of God at the end of time, it means that that one man has defeated the love of God—and that is impossible. Further, there is only one way in which we can think of the triumph of God. If God was no more than a King or Judge, then it would be possible to speak of his triumph, if his enemies were agonizing in hell or were totally and completely obliterated and wiped out. But God is not only King and Judge, God is *Father*—he is indeed Father more than anything else. No father could be happy while there were members of his family forever in agony. No father would count it a triumph to obliterate the disobedient members of his family. The only triumph a father can know is to have all his family back home. The only victory love can enjoy is the day when its offer of love is answered by the return of love. The only possible final triumph is a universe loved by and in love with God.⁵

A fourth group of explorers brings in a less sanguine report. Members of this scouting party discern the contours of both unending joy and everlasting ruin in the shadowy territory of men's afterlife. That is why they opt for *conditionalism*. An authoritative *précis* of their findings is given by David Dean (it ought to be remarked that Dean, a graduate of Westminster Theological Seminary, subscribes to the evangelical view of Biblical authority).

The opposite of *Conditional Immortality* is *Natural Immortality*—the view that all men are by nature immortal and will exist forever. Conditional immortality stresses that conditions must be met before the sinner can receive everlasting personal exis-

⁴N. F. S. Ferré, *The Christian Understanding of God* (New York: Harper, 1951) 228-229.

⁵W. Barclay, *A Spiritual Autobiography* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 60-61.

tence. Those conditions are two: God must give it, and man must receive it. The first condition should be obvious. Since God alone possesses immortality, only he can give it to anyone else. God is the Source of all life, including the physical life of human beings. He breathed into Adam and the first man became a living creature. He breathes into the deadness of the sinner's heart and that person becomes a new creature in Christ, quickened as a believer. Thus, we should not be surprised that God will raise the saints in the last day and bestow the fullness of eternal life upon them. Thus these weak, sinful, and diseased bodies will be raised in purity, perfection, and power. "We shall be like Him" (I John 3:2).

The God who raises the dead is also the God who confers immortality as his gracious gift to those sinners for whom Christ died. Paul shows that the granting of immortality (he calls it *glorification* in this passage) is simply the final step in the series of things which God does so that everything will work for the believer's good (Rom. 8:28-30). Salvation is the gift of God to man and it includes the granting of eternal life and the bestowing of immortality. Those gifts depend upon God's grace and are provided as the result of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8). If God refuses to provide immortality for a sinner, there is no way for the sinner to get it. Praise God, he provides it to all who believe.

Which brings us to the second condition. At the resurrection, the gift of immortality depends solely on God's activity. But he will not grant immortality to everyone; only to those who during this life repented and believed in Jesus Christ! From the human viewpoint, immortality is conditional upon repentance and faith. No one will receive immortality who does not believe. And no one who truly believes will fail to receive immortality.⁶

But what is the final fate of those who, refusing to repent and believe, "fail to receive immortality"? Is it conscious punishment that lasts as long as God continues to be? No, it is the obliteration of consciousness, the annulment of existence. Only those who by repentance and faith are in Christ have life and will forever have it. Those wilfully without Christ are spiritually dead and destined for eternal death. Let us listen once more to Dean's authoritative presentation of this view.

In the Bible, life and death are presented as opposites. Death is the destruction, cessation, or loss of life. Spiritual death is the destruction, or loss, of man's desire and capability of fellowship with God. This condition is evident in the facts that Adam hid from God after falling into sin and that sinners are called God's enemies (Rom. 5:10). To outward appearances, the spiritually dead person may seem to be alive. Nevertheless, the person "who gives (oneself) to wanton pleasure is dead even while (he) lives" (I Tim. 5:6). The Bible presents this as a death in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1, 5, 6).

Physical death—the destruction, or cessation, of the vital functions of the body—is a second result of sin.

The Bible makes it clear that man is an organic unity, a psychophysical being who lives and functions as a complete person. Man is not a soul imprisoned in a body, nor is he only a body that is alive! Man is a whole person, and each component of man is necessary in order for man to live. Certainly the human body is indispensable for a living man. But physical death strikes down the human being and destroys his body so that man's vital functions cease. Men are mortal, and physical death awaits them all.

⁶D. A. Dean, *Resurrection: His and Ours* (Charlotte: Advent Christian General Conference of America, 1977) 114-115.

Eternal death, called the "second death" in Scripture (Rev. 21:8), is the complete and total destruction of sinners in the judgment fires of the last days. In this death, the lost will be destroyed "body and soul" in hell, so that there will be an irrecoverable loss of personal existence and life. The wicked will "become as if they had never existed" (Obad. 16).

Spiritual, physical, and eternal death are stages through which unredeemed sinners are traveling—irreversibly and hopelessly.⁷

Such is the conditionalist vision of unrepentant and unbelieving sinners. Their end is an ended existence. Thus their doom while not conscious is eternal, their punishment forever irreversible and unchanging.

The last group of afterlife explorers is made up of Christians who differ widely in some of their doctrinal commitments but who concur in reporting that heaven and hell alike loom before mankind as inescapable eschatological realities that are Biblically disclosed. For instance John Henry Newman, who abandoned Anglicanism to become a Roman Catholic, voices in his *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* a belief that Protestantism no less than the Church of Rome has traditionally held regarding hell's indubitableness:

It is the turning point between Christianity and pantheism, it is the critical doctrine—you can't get rid of it—it is the very characteristic of Christianity. We must therefore look matters in the face. Is it more improbable that eternal punishment should be true, or that there should be no God? *For if there be a God* there is eternal punishment (a posteriori).⁸

Because the Biblical disclosure of hell stands on the same ground logically and exegetically as its disclosure of heaven, so run the view and the verdict of Christian orthodoxy, it is impossible to anticipate the bliss of heaven without at the same time asserting the terror of hell, a correlation pointed out by H. McNeile Dixon:

The kind-hearted humanitarians decided to improve on Christianity. The thought of Hell offended their sensibilities. They closed it, and to their surprise the gate of Heaven closed also with a melancholy bang.⁹

Regretfully, therefore, but unequivocally, Christian orthodoxy in the late twentieth century continues to warn that in the future life impenitent and unbelieving souls will be consigned to hell.

In recent years the logic of this traditional position has been spelled out by C. S. Lewis in his persuasive apologetic, *The Problem of Pain*, and he is merely one of the latest in a long line of convincing exponents of hell's intrinsic reasonableness.

Yet the basic reason for orthodoxy's refusal to redraw its topography of the coming world is ultimately exegetical rather than logical. Orthodoxy engages, no doubt, in rational argument to defend its vision of eschatology as compatible with divine justice, wisdom and love. Valiantly it endeavors to demonstrate the nullity of the criticisms brought against its understanding of eternal punishment. But regardless of how cogently or shoddily it may deploy logic, Christian orthodoxy unyieldingly maintains its belief in hell because it claims to have God's own dis-

⁷Ibid., p. 110.

⁸Quoted in G. Rowell, *Hell and the Victorians* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974) 163.

⁹Quoted in L. Morris, *The Biblical Doctrine of Judgment* (London: Tyndale, 1960) 69.

closure of man's afterlife. Not only that: It claims to grasp correctly the meaning of the sometimes enigmatical language God has chosen to use in that disclosure. Consider as illustrative of this claim the series of "Exegetical Essays on Several Words Relating to Future Punishment" that the distinguished Biblical scholar, Moses Stuart, prepared and published in 1830 when the controversy over hell was agitating Protestants in the western world. A century would pass before the issuing of Kittel's monumental *Wörterbuch*, to say nothing of the specialized monographs researching NT terms and concepts that would intermittently appear. Philological science, aided by archaeology, would make tremendous strides between the third decade of the nineteenth century and the seventh decade of the twentieth century. Yet the work of Moses Stuart would remain substantially immune against attack. His conclusions regarding *aiōn*, *aiōnos*, *holan*, Sheol, Hades and Tartarus have still to be invalidated. Taken with other relevant revelational data they compel Biblicists to believe in a future of endless punishment for impenitent and unbelieving sinners. Stuart, consequently, sets forth a mind-boggling antithesis:

Either the declarations of the Scriptures do not establish the facts, that God and his glory and praise and happiness are endless, nor that the happiness of the righteous in a future world is endless; or else they establish the fact, that the punishment of the wicked is endless. The whole stand or fall together. There can, from the very nature of the antithesis, be no room for rational doubt here, in what manner we should interpret the declaration of the sacred writers. *We must either admit the ENDLESS misery of Hell, or give up the ENDLESS happiness of Heaven.*¹⁰

Stuart also challenges his fellow scholars to confute his results, not simply indulge in contradiction or denial. He asserts that

neither contradiction nor denial, in this case, springs from philology, but from inclination, wishes, philosophy, or prejudice. If this be not so, why is not philology arrayed, in all its proper strength, against the idea that there is a place of future punishment? Who has done this? How is it to be done? All the examples in the Scriptures . . . are produced in these essays. There is no concealment. I trust there is no attempt to pervert or fritter away their obvious meaning. I am certain there is no such design on my part. Let them be philologically or critically set aside, or shown to be erroneously interpreted, and, as far as I am concerned, I promise to institute *de novo* another examination.¹¹

After a century and a half Stuart's challenge has yet to be accepted and victoriously met. Scripture teaches "the endless misery of Hell" as incontrovertibly as it does "the endless happiness of Heaven."

Revelation, we are now assuming, establishes hell's actuality, disclosing it to be a place of endless punishment. Does it with the same certainty reveal what hell is like, that destiny against which our Savior and Lord repeatedly warned? Does it permit dogmatism about the details of a post-mortem existence that seems to be one of unmitigated woe? Or does it, while requiring dogmatism with respect to the *that*, shut us up to Joseph Butler's reverent agnosticism regarding the *what*?

¹⁰M. Stuart, *Several Words Relating to Eternal Punishment* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Publishing Committee, n. d.) 89.

¹¹Ibid., p. 202.

Granted that since apostolic times Christians have given free rein to their imaginations in treating this dogma. Granted that a well-intentioned zeal has pressed into the service of evangelism a grossly literalistic hermeneutic and even in the cases of theological greats like Augustine, Aquinas and Jonathan Edwards has painted lurid pictures that revolt both sense and sensibility. Granted that popular preachers—a Charles Haddon Spurgeon, for example—have been guilty of an unconscionably sadistic depiction of lost souls. How far, we must inquire, are any of these eschatological pronouncements warranted by sober, careful, reflective study? How far is a Jonathan Edwards, whose philosophical insight even non-Christians applaud, justified in this sort of exposition?

The world will probably be converted into a great lake or liquid globe of fire, in which the wicked shall be overwhelmed, which shall always be in tempest, in which they shall be tossed to and fro, having no rest day or night, vast waves or billows of fire continually rolling over their heads, of which they shall ever be full of a quick sense, within and without; their heads, their eyes, their tongues, their hands, their feet, their loins and their vitals shall for ever be full of a glowing, melting fire, enough to melt the very rocks and elements. Also they shall be full of the most quick and lively sense to feel the torments, not for ten millions of ages, but for ever and ever, without any end at all.¹²

Does sober, careful, reflective study warrant—no, demand—such a ghastly prospect? Does it force us to adopt an attitude that Walter Moberley stigmatizes as “unconceivable callousness”? Does it close our ears and minds and, much worse, our hearts to Langton Clarke’s comment?

I remember once going through the dungeons of one of our old feudal castles, and looking down into the dark hole in the floor of the dungeon, the only entrance to or exit from an oubliette, one of those awful “places of forgetfulness.” And I well remember thinking—How could the people above be so stony-hearted as to be happy and merry with all this going on beneath their very feet? And then it suddenly flashed across me that this is what is said of the blest in the world to come!—that they are supremely happy with hopeless and endless torments continually going on before their very eyes.¹³

If a sober, careful, reflective study warrants—no, demands—that we agree with these all-too-common depictions, expositions and asseverations, then we evangelicals must apparently become schizophrenic. We must rigidly compartmentalize our psyches, keeping our normal mental processes and emotional reactions from contaminating our creedal commitments with sanity and compassion. What, therefore, does probing Christian thought warrant and demand?

Here as in so many other hard areas of orthodox belief C. S. Lewis proves to be an immense help—discerning, lucid, and above all clear-headed. Confronting the fierce objection to the very notion of hell drawn from not only medieval art but “certain passages in Scripture,” he argues that three symbols dominate particularly our Lord’s teaching: punishment, destruction, and “privation, exclusion, or banishment.” “The prevalent image of fire,” he suggests, “is significant because it combines the ideas of torment and destruction.” Then in an extended passage he develops the reality portended through the Biblical literary forms:

¹²F. W. Farrar, *Eternal Hope* (London: Macmillan, 1892) 57.

¹³Quoted in Moberley, *Ethics*, 333-334.

What can that be whereof all three images are equally proper symbols? Destruction, we should naturally assume, means the unmaking, or cessation, of the destroyed. And people often talk as if the "annihilation" of a soul were intrinsically possible. In all our experience, however, the destruction of one thing means the emergence of something else. Burn a log, and you have gases, heat and ash. To *have been* a log means now being those three things. If soul can be destroyed, must there not be a state of *having been* a human soul? And is not that, perhaps, the state which is equally well described as torment, destruction, and privation? You will remember that in the parable the saved go to a place prepared for *them*, while the damned go to a place never made for men at all. To enter heaven is to become more human than you ever succeeded in being in earth; to enter hell, is to be banished from humanity. What is cast (or casts itself) into hell is not a man: it is "remains". To be a complete man means to have the passions obedient to the will and the will offered to God: to *have been* a man—to be an ex-man or "damned ghost"—would presumably mean to consist of a will utterly centered in itself and passions utterly uncontrolled by the will. It is, of course, impossible to imagine what the consciousness of such a creature—already a loose congeries of mutually antagonistic sins rather than a sinner—would be like. There may be a truth in the saying that "hell is hell, not from its own point of view, but from the heavenly point of view." I do not think this belies the severity of our Lord's words. It is only to the damned that their fate could ever seem less than unendurable. And it must be admitted that as . . . we think of eternity, the categories of pain and pleasure . . . begin to recede, as vaster good and evil looms in sight. Neither pain nor pleasure as such has the last word. Even if it were possible that the experience (if it can be called an experience) of the lost contained no pain and much pleasure, still, that black pleasure would be such as to send any soul, not already damned, flying to its prayers in nightmare terror.¹⁴

Help in cracking the shell of Biblical literary forms and so extracting their intended teaching comes as well from Robert Anderson. Inspector of Scotland Yard in Queen Victoria's era, he was a gifted and prolific author of theological works. His discussion of eschatology, *Human Destiny: After Death—What?*, Spurgeon praised as the most satisfactory treatment of that problem he had ever read. After examining the theories of universalism, conditionalism, and annihilationism and showing their untenability from a scriptural perspective, Anderson states some of the prevalent misconceptions about hell. He then proceeds to undercut the case against eternal punishment by an appeal to revelational principles. Suppose with a minimum of editing we quote his own phrasing of this rebuttal.

1. The destiny of the lost is a great mystery, but it is only one phase of the crowning mystery of Evil. There must be some moral necessity why evil, once existing, should continue to exist. . . . By redemption God has won the undoubted right to restore the fallen race to blessing. But who can tell what moral hindrances may govern the exercise of that right and power?
2. In a sphere where reason can tell us nothing, we are bound to keep strictly to the very words of Scripture, neither enlarging their scope nor drawing inferences from them. But in contrast to this, the inspired words have been used in such a way as to produce a mental revolt which endangers faith.
3. All judgment is committed to Jesus Christ precisely "because He is the Son of Man." Hence because He is both the Son of Man and God the Son, His justice and goodness and love are beyond all question and doubt.

¹⁴C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan, 1943) 113-114.

4. The Bible was not written to gratify curiosity. . . . As regards the destiny of those the Gospel fails to reach, it is absolutely silent. The fate of the heathen is with God. And "shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"
5. The lost will not be sent to their doom unheard. Twice in Scripture they are represented as parleying with their Judge. Each one will be fairly dealt with. The record of each life will be laid bare. The books will be opened, and the dead shall be judged every man according to his works. Each sinner in the countless multitude to be arraigned at the great assize shall hear his indictment, and be heard in his defense.
6. Instead of absolute equality, Scripture indicates an infinite inequality in punishment. There will be the "few stripes" and the "many stripes."
7. The "everlasting fire" is not to be the Devil's kingdom. it will be his prison, not his palace. . . . The word-pictures which describe the shrieks and curses of the lost on earth, as demons mock their anguish or heap fuel on their torture fires, are relieved from the charge of folly only by the graver charge of profanity. There is no spot in all the Queen's dominions in which the reign of order is so supreme as in prison. So shall it be in Hell.
8. Obedience will be the normal condition in Hell. To speculate how it will be brought about is idle. It may be that the recognition of the perfect justice and goodness of God will lead the lost to accept their doom.
9. There are no idlers in a well-disciplined gaol: in God's great prison-house is idleness to reign supreme? . . . Are we to suppose that all the energies of the lost are to be consumed in tasks of aimless punishment? . . . May we not suppose that in the infinite wisdom of God there are purposes to the accomplishment of which even they will be made to minister? . . . Why assume that the lost will be battered down in some huge dungeon with no occupation save to bewail forevermore their doom?
10. Scripture leaves no doubt that in the world to come sin's punishment shall be real and searching. We know that it will entail banishment from God, and further we know that infinite love and perfect justice shall measure the cup each must drink. But beyond this we know absolutely nothing.¹⁵

Confessedly these revelational principles with their undeniable admixture of logical extrapolation fail to remove all difficulties, but at any rate they make hell a doctrine that does not offend the heart and crucify the mind.

Help in clearing away rhetorical fog from this area of theology is also provided by Friedrich von Hügel. He distinguishes between, on the one hand, "the essence of the doctrine of Hell," which he takes to lie "above all, in the unendingness of that destiny," and, on the other hand, "the various images and interpretations given to his essence." In contrast to saved spirits, he reasons, lost spirits "according to the degree of their permanent self-willed defection from their supernatural call" will persist in four tragic, destructive dispositional patterns and behavior orientation. First, they will persist in "the all but mere changingness, scatteredness, distractedness, variously characteristic of their self-selected earthly life." Only in hell they will feel far more intensely "the unsatisfactoriness of this their permanent non-recollection more than they felt it upon the earth."

Second, lost spirits will persist "in the varyingly all but complete self-centredness and subjectivity of their self-selected earthly life." Only in hell they will feel

¹⁵R. Anderson, *Human Destiny: After Death—What?* (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1913) 113-179.

far more intensely "the stuntedness, the self-mutilation, the imprisonment involved in this their endless self-occupation and jealous evasion of all reality not simply their own selves."

Third, they will persist "in their claimfulness and envious self-isolation, in their niggardly pain at the sight or thought of the unmatched greatness and goodness of other souls." Only in hell they will experience their consciousness of this "more fully and unintermittently."

Fourth, lost souls will persist in the pains felt on earth—"the aches of fruitless stunting, contraction . . . the dull and dreary, or the angry and reckless, drifting in bitter-sweet unfaithful or immoral feelings, acts, habits, which, thus indulged, bring ever-increasing spiritual blindness, volitional paralysis, and a living death." Only "the very pains of Hell (will) consist largely in the perception by the lost soul of how unattainable" is the opportunity to endure the sanctifying sufferings which saved spirits endured on earth. That very perception will be an intensifying source of "fruitless pangs."¹⁶

Though all of von Hügel's extrapolation is vastly removed from the wooden, offensive literalism of much traditional theology, it is closer, one surmises, to Biblical truth and eschatological reality.

Lewis and Anderson, together with von Hügel, help to make hell a credible dogma despite the residual difficulties that compel the exercise of a reverent agnosticism and a post-critical faith.

What to say, then, in conclusion? The issues we have been considering are unspeakably momentous, the most momentous indeed that can occupy the human mind. It is impossible to exaggerate the seriousness and urgency that the doctrine of hell imparts to life here and now. How better to express this than to repeat what James Orr affirmed as he came to the end of his masterful lectures on *The Christian View of God and the World*?

Scripture wishes us to realize the fact of probation now, of responsibility here. We should keep this in view, and, concentrating all our exhortations and entreaties into the present, should refuse to sanction hopes which Scripture does not support; striving, rather, to bring men to live under the impression, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" (Hebrews 2:3).¹⁷

¹⁶F. von Hügel, "What Do We Mean By Heaven? And What Do We Mean By Hell?", *Essays and Addresses on the Philosophy of Religion* (London: J. M. Dent, 1924) 216-221.

¹⁷J. Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World* (New York: Scribner's, 1897) 345-346.