

CONDITIONAL IMMORTALITY

A COHERENT THEOLOGY

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INTRODUCTION

"To be or not to be: that is the question"

This famous extract from Hamlet, in its relation to the revelation of God, is the question of this paper.

The traditional view of the church says we continue to be, no matter what. We can live joyfully for ever with God, or suffer horribly in a living death, that never ceases and will not end.

This theology which is under scrutiny, has enormous repercussions in our preaching and apologetics. This is particularly so in reference to pluralism, the problem of our day. What shall we say to those who have no, or a different faith, of the consequences of resistance to the Holy Spirit and rejection of the offer of life in Christ?

It is a debate which is engaged with vigour at the present time. The Church of England has recently recommended 'annihilationism' in the publishing of the 'Mystery of Salvation', possibly in an awareness of the above issues, but has done so amid cries of abandoning belief in hell. The arguments rage in popular and Christian press. Indeed the stakes are not small.

It is the thesis of this paper, that in matters of immortality and judgement of the wicked, the doctrine of conditional immortality represents the view which is rooted in scripture, and is powerful in its coherency with the other doctrines of the Christian faith. In contrast, the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, innate or contingent, is philosophical and demonic¹ in origin. This 'traditional doctrine' has blunted some, and corrupted other fundamental doctrines of the faith, and has thus been a burden to the church in proclaiming the 'acceptable year of the Lord's favour'.

¹This is not the subjective reception of the doctrine that is termed demonic, but the objective origins. Error may be received innocently. Truth may be held badly.

METHODOLOGY

The basis and authority for this examination will be the canonical scriptures. There are schools of theology which would agree and disagree with the result of this examination, but would arrive at their conclusions by a method which would tend to bypass the authority of the 'difficult' passages of scripture. There is not the same tension for those schools of theology in this discussion. Appeal would be made to arguments regarding the origins of man and the nature of death,² that would not engage the debate which exists in what *might* be termed the evangelical, charismatic and reformed sections of the church.³

Therefore the method *generally*, is to restrict the argument to the meaning of scripture, particularly to the understanding of figures, with consideration of their history of interpretation. Significant associated doctrines will be looked at in this approach. These doctrines will not be examined comprehensively, but only in their relation to the doctrine of conditional immortality.

Some parts of the argument have been informed, but not decided by, allusions to patterns in our own society and some recent scientific observations.

In order to deal with some background anthropology and origins, I have not gone over in detail, ground already covered by able scholars of conditional immortality, unless there is specific reason for so doing, instead sources are indicated. A compare and contrast form has been used in many instances to highlight the thesis.

The area in which the debate centres most today, because of ground given by traditionalists, are the texts implying sustaining of life for punishment. These have been looked at, both in text and in theological argument, in some detail.

The practical implications are woven into the argument, and examined for both the traditional doctrine, and conditional immortality.

²"... there could not be a you, and there could not be a universe, without death, the death of stars and the death of succeeding generations of organic life." [Bowker:215]

³Therefore the argument from theodicy for annihilationism in the 'Mystery of Salvation', and the preceding argument of origins from appeal to recent scientific theories, the Doctrine Commissioners being mindful of the theologically broad church which they represent. [Graham:10-14,199]

TERMINOLOGY

The term 'conditional immortality', gives information of the nature of the debates which follow from these words. Stated first in the negative, it is opposite to the view that man has immortality innately, by virtue of creation, or granted in order to sustain unending punishment. Positively, it maintains that man is created with the capacity for immortality, but this is dependent on union with Christ Jesus. This is the core of the doctrine in whichever variation it is found. It is of vital importance that this root is fully understood in its significance. All other arguments in respect to the nature of judgement flow from this root as shall become clear.

In the debate which follows as to the meaning and significance of imagery and the events of judgement, [Harmon:214,215] it is important that the idea of 'condition' is fully understood and grasped. It is a bedrock for the implications of the doctrine. It is here that the influence of philosophy as distinct from scripture must be firmly dispelled. It cannot be stressed too greatly, that for the 'traditional'⁴ doctrine, the detail of argument flows from an assumption (stated or unstated) of innate or conferred immortality, and colours every statement of scripture.⁵ Condition, means the options are open, we may or may not gain immortality.

There are variations in the ideas of conditionalism. They vary mainly in the area of anthropology; man made mortal with the capability of immortality, or man made immortal but losing this through judgement, or eschatology; immediate extinction on death, or resurrection to judgement, with annihilation as the end of a process of destruction. (conditionalist eventual extinctionism) [Harmon:197] Harmon points out rightly, that it is the combination of man made mortal, with the capability for immortality, but eventual extinction in judgement, which is the area of greatest support today against the traditional doctrine. It is this view which is primarily argued for in this paper. It is also true, that this position has implications for the intermediate state. Implications which are very important historically, and in today's society.

⁴The traditional doctrine being the innate or conferred immortality of the soul, which for the unredeemed results in unending conscious punishment.

⁵"...ecclesiastical tradition and a vague notion (often overtly denied but constantly reappearing in print) that even the wicked have a soul (or some other aspect of substance) which will always exist.." [Fudge:xii]

COHERENCY

Can this doctrine, which appears to be a newcomer on the Christian scene, claim in any way to be a genuinely Christian position? Does it have any serious basis in revelation, and what are its implications for the Christian Church and Mission?

One of the tasks of the Church, for our own sakes as Christians and also for those outside of the church, is to present our beliefs in a logical and sensible manner. Questions arise in people's minds, and if those questions are reasonable but there is not a sensible coherent answer to them, then growth and conversion are resisted by the conscious mind.

God is able to overcome our rational and sometimes irrational objections. But that is the result of his grace. The objective cohesiveness of our systemisation and presentation of our faith, does aid our task in fulfilling the Great Commission. presentations of the gospels, and the teaching of the epistles in the New Testament, show this engagement. The task of presenting the nature, acts and revelation of God in Christ Jesus, is done in forms which can be held objectively in the mind by the use of 'sound language'⁶. There is the necessity for the same coherence in this theology.

The

What can form our criteria for a 'coherent' theology? What would indicate that we had found one? What would indicate that present theologies in this matter were incoherent?

One primal and vital area of coherency is with scripture. The theology must find its base in the revelation of God. It is true that no theology can be completely 'tidy', simply because of the complex use of language. Further, our time distance from the original use of the language and its nuances, complicates this. However something as important as the matter under discussion, should find an overwhelming consensus of support in documents which purport to speak with authority on this vital subject.

Secondly, and vital in further identifying validity, are the practical implications of that theology. How does it interact with other areas of Christian thought, and have there been any historical evidences of its effect on the life of the Church?

⁶Col 1:28 "We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ."

DIFFERENT APPROACH?

David Powys in reviewing debates on this subject in the last two centuries, makes a plea for a fresh and different approach. He is very conscious of the presuppositions with which the debate has been entered. His disappointment is that all debates take as their starting point, "a pervasive though perverse allegiance to a questionable 'orthodoxy': the doctrine of immediate, unending, physical punishment." [Powys:135] He desires the theology to be approached from a completely fresh point of view; "future constructive contributions to the debate will be made by those deeply committed to fresh, radical and unbridled examination of the biblical data. To this end human reason will need to be employed to the full, but to elucidate rather than evaluate that data. This process is now urgent." [Powys:135] His desire is admirable, but it is certainly most difficult in our current church and theological climate to ignore what is already uppermost in the mind.

What constrains contributors to the debate, to take as their reference point the 'orthodox' doctrine? One reason may be simply because it is so prevalent! It has been the general view of the church since around 400AD.⁷ It may also be the most obvious from our current translations of the scriptures.

Nevertheless, it is worth considering carefully the possibility that something intrinsic to the fall of humanity, causes a tendency to see things connected with immortality from a distorted viewpoint.

⁷Froom documents the fascinating and extensive history (first part) of the debate, with the position argued for in this paper, reaching into the sixth and seventh centuries. [Froom 1:757-1079] Froom's second volume is entirely dedicated to the history of the debate up to the 1960's.

DUALISM

It has been one of the concerns of recent theological scholarship, to uncover the extent to which Greek and derivative philosophies of dualism have influenced the nuances of theology in Western thought culture, over the last two millennia. Some have counted it overdone as a 'witch hunt', but there is no doubt that as early theologians grappled with making theology relevant in their age, they adopted thought patterns reflecting the current philosophies. From documents in his investigation of the early period of the church, that there was no universal acceptance of the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. Rather, there was an oscillation in the early church fathers⁸ of various points, one of which would be defined as 'conditional immortality'.⁹ As Platonic philosophy gained dominance within the church, no doubt facilitated by the change of status of the church following Constantine's conversion, so the opposition to innate or contingent immortality diminished.

[Tugwell:73,78] Surprisingly, following the Enlightenment and Reformation, the extent and influence of dualism was not thoroughly examined or detected. Colin Gunton argues that even with the new era of theology ushered in by Schleiermacher, the most influential of 19th Century theologians, his new era is but a dressing up of the old dualism in new language.

It is widely accepted that dualism still influences us dramatically in our general reading of the scriptures, but it is particularly true regarding the question of immortality. Those more open to recent anthropology, [Kung:110] and often times (though not necessarily) a liberal theological stance, view this differently. The dualism and Greek philosophical thought in theology is recognised more clearly. The earlier Hebrew and more biblical thinking, viewing humans as person, rather than as a tenuous amalgamation of body and soul has become uppermost in their theology.¹⁰ This aligns with the thought of Paul, when he speaks of Christian hope as being the 'redemption of the body'. [Romans 8:23] However as suggested above, it may be that there is a 'perverse' bent in man to view things from a position of dualism. The nature of the fall of humanity as related in Genesis 3, reveals a deep and deadly division of what was once a unity.¹¹ Dualism it will be

⁸Burns in his assessment of Irenaeus's position says, "Instead of giving humanity immortality and beatitude at the outset and risking their loss through free choice, therefore, God devised a strategy to foster a firm commitment to good which would then treasure and preserve full goodness once he had finally bestowed it." [Burns:3]

⁹"Theophilus [of Antioch], in common with other writers of this period [180AD], such as Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, argued that the immortality of the human soul was conditional, rather than intrinsic. A similar assumption underlies the argument in Anselm of Canterbury's *Cur Deus homo*." [McGrath:355] Hans Kung also comments, "Neither in Judaism nor in the New Testament is there any uniform view of the period of punishment for sin. ...throughout Church history, in addition to the traditional dualism, the possibility of annihilation or even universal reconciliation (restitutio omnium, apocatastasis ton panton) have been defended." [Kung:140]

¹⁰Frances Young speaking of her severely handicapped son says, "It doesn't take some elaborate scientific theory to prove to me that Arthur's personality is inseparable from his limited brain function. There is no 'soul' trapped in the prison of his twisted body and 'peeping out through his eyes' ... "The problem with the notion of the 'soul' is that it creates a dualism, the human being becomes a composite being, and the fundamental anthropological problem becomes how the (impassible) soul relates to the (passible) body." [Young:108,112]

¹¹That division is most positively illustrated in this comment of Torrance on the unity of the one who came to redeem from the effects of the fall, "This oneness of the Creator

recalled posits "the theory that the universe is explicable only as a whole composed of two distinct and mutually irreducible elements". [Encarta: Dualism] Therefore we have; good and evil, God and the Devil, body and soul, all as basic irreducible facts in opposition.

At the heart of the fall was a dispute as to the nature of man's destiny, "You will not die" was suggested by the serpent. [Genesis 3:4] This dispute was related by the serpent to a certain understanding of knowledge, "knowing good and evil". [Genesis 3:5] It is perhaps a subtle idea. What kind of knowledge is this? Paul Badham outlines a concept of knowledge in his book, 'Christian Beliefs about Life after Death'; "I have sought to establish that in our present lives the mind or soul is a reality which is both logically and contingently distinct from the body, and that indeed it is only on the assumption of such a distinction that we can formulate a valid theory of knowledge." [Badham:133] The nature of the conclusions which Paul Badham draws from his position of dualism and theory of knowledge, is one of potential disembodied existence, which can be continued whilst we search for God.¹² [Badham:134] Thus *dualism, and the immortality of the soul*, are vital for his theory of true *knowledge*! These ideas are linked to the temptation made to Adam and Eve.

Paul

The term 'valid theory of knowledge' is but a synonym for the question of why we are thinking, rational beings, indeed of why we exist at all! It is the question, in slightly different form asked by all philosophers down through the ages. Its asking, Genesis indicates, was initiated by a question of temptation, and then a reality of division.

Descartes, to whom Badham owes much in his thinking, when he formulated the statement "I think therefore I am", was potentially stating the core of the knowledge of good and evil.. existence without reference to God. It may even be suggested that the 'I am' is a parody of the divine name and a claim to god-likeness, as it was so recognised when Jesus said 'Before Abraham was, I am.' [John 8:58] Descartes was a powerful advocate of the immortality of the soul, and his thinking has been extremely influential to our present time.

Paul the Apostle however, stated existence for himself in terms of the life of God through Christ dwelling in him. The 'I' for him had ceased to exist as an independent ego. Descartes is the arch exponent of the immortality of the soul. Paul is the arch exponent of life through Christ.

The tendency of humanity to think dualistically originates from that original temptation. It is a dualism which originates in the idea of the survival of the individual. It is the product of a lie. This is what colours the question of immortality. It is the question of the knowledge of 'I'. Knowledge of good and evil is quite simply

and the creature in the Lord Jesus is an essential part of his absolute singularity and lies at the heart of the universal range of his activity as the incarnate Son inseparable from that of God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible." [Torrance: 231]

¹²This 'disembodied existence' as the means of survival is vitally important as we look later at the 'coherence' with other doctrines, and in relation to New Age theories.

existence without God¹³, which demands its own self sustaining life. In opposition, the essence of redemptive history is the statement of Paul the apostle, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." [Galatians:2:20] Life for Paul is 'conditional' on unity with the God-man, and his redemptive death and resurrection.

Thus it will not be surprising, since all humanity has been tainted with that sin, if we have a predilection to see evidence for our own immortality. We appear to have done so, even in the scriptures: immortality that has nothing to do with God's saving acts. It is a result of having accepted that lie. For immediately we find the traditional doctrine's approach to be coherent with the above negative scenario¹⁴. Death does not affect the soul only the body. Man merely dies spiritually, leads a life subject to the pull of sinful desires out of fellowship with God now, and when he dies physically he merely changes his state of living to being a disembodied soul, but nevertheless living.

In this understanding the death pronounced as judgement has been separated from its execution, not as in the Scripture by virtue of the purposes of grace operating in redemptive history¹⁵, but by the influence of valid theory of knowledge, i.e. the suggestions of the serpent, 'you shall be as God knowing good from evil,... you shall not surely die'. This dualistically separates body and soul, and purports or implies a continued immortal existence for disembodied humans or souls. This has grave repercussions for the intermediate state. It has until very recently, overtly influenced our understanding of eternal punishment. It still continues to influence our thinking.¹⁶

Banishment from the tree of life in the Garden of Eden, was not merely bodily life but life in totality. That is the natural and coherent sense of the words indicated there, and reflected in Paul's statement in Galatians 2:20. The fact that it was not fully realised immediately is simply because God desired to save humanity, to give humanity an opportunity to repent. Suggesting that because there was a delay in the judgement, that this indicates an immortality or survival of the soul, is to read God's grace in salvation events as the conferred or contingent immortality of man. *There are no statements in scripture as to this wonderful event.*

Conditional Immortality seeks to be consistent with the scripture here, avoiding the trap of postulating any kind of survival of humanity apart from resurrection. As a theology it approaches scripture conscious of the effect of the lie suggested by the

¹³ In embryo, thus the first commandment, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." [Mt 22:37] Unity of man is found in the apprehension and love of God.

¹⁴ This is true in practice even for the more subtle approach of contingent or conferred immortality.

¹⁵ i.e. death pronounced in Eden was not carried out in total immediately because of the divine intention to redeem. Only the process was begun, which gave opportunity for redemptive history, and individual and community response.

¹⁶ Many defenders of the traditional doctrine would point to the fact that it has been held by the church that it is 'contingent' immortality which is understood for the purposes of punishment. But the language of some of the early church fathers and Calvin, [Colwell: 297] implies a position which to all intents and purposes means that God endows the soul with immortality, and not just for the purposes of punishment.

serpent. It is conscious that humanity returning to dust is the promised judgement. We look more closely at that now.

ORIGIN AND DESTINY

The nature of humanity as mentioned above is confirmed by the details of man's creation. God breathed (spirit: ruach) into the body which he had formed from the dust of the ground, and man became a living soul. (nephesh) [Genesis 2:7] There is a union of the physical and the breath of life, resulting in man becoming a living personality. The terminology and procedure is the same used for the animals who also become living souls. (nephesh) [Genesis 7:15,9:12] The terminology does not therefore imply that man had immortality by virtue of creation. The distinction of humanity is rather that we are made in the image of God. The result of the fall was banishment from the garden, and more specifically from the tree of life, which would have allowed man to live forever. Instead man would return to the dust of the ground, not just his body, but by implication his soul or personality also, since this was a function of the unity of the breath of life and the body. However, even in the Old Testament it is indicated that although Sheol is spoken of in terms which would indicate this death i.e. oblivion, darkness etc., there is anticipation that God will do something special. Job reflects this, [Job 19:26] and it is very specifically the subject of prophecy at the end of Isaiah 53.

It may be objected by some, that this form of belief is also held by groups who differ substantially in the most critical area of the understanding of the person of Christ. As John Wenham puts it in his book the 'Goodness of God', "we should be suspicious when our bedfellows are heretical groups". But this in itself does not invalidate the belief.¹⁷

Other ideas of the nature of man speak of a part which is irretrievably eternal and unending i.e. the spirit in the dichotomy and trichotomy debate. But these do not reconcile well with the complex and sometimes shifting use of the words spirit and soul in the scriptures. [Harris:140] Speaking of this, Bruce Milne says "Today the dichotomy/trichotomy issue has been largely superseded by an emphasis on the *unity* of the person. According to Scripture I do not consist of composite 'parts', whether two or three; I am a psycho-somatic unity. The terms the Bible uses, whether 'body', 'soul', 'spirit', 'heart', or 'mind' are simply different ways of looking at the one person." [Milne: 97] Furthermore, in the absence of the positive alignment of immortal and soul in the scriptures, the use of the argument that God can sustain, if he wishes, the consciousness of the soul in unending sensory torment, is grasping, and inconsistent with a developed and coherent theology.¹⁸

This idea of contingent immortality is expressed by Harris as he says, "... the annihilation of the unrighteous by divine fiat, with or without prior punishment, is not the necessary corollary of belief in immortality as the destiny only of the righteous.

¹⁷Peterson calls this type of argument an 'Argumentum ad Hominem', citing Copi as his authority. In other words, blackening an argument on the basis of someone else of dubious reputation holding the same. It is he says, 'an irrelevant argument' not leading to the truth. [Peterson: 23]

¹⁸It is true that the influence of the book of Genesis with regard to human origins has been seriously weakened in the last 150 years even in evangelical circles. The development of the theory of evolution cuts at the authority of scripture in the origin of death and thus the nature of man.

Forfeiture of immortality means the deprivation of eternal blessedness but not the destruction of personal existence. Because immortality has positive content, being more than mere survival beyond death, its opposite is not non-existence." [Harris:199] However Harris argues following this, that the distinction between immortality and eternal life is that the *primary* sense of immortality is *undyingness*, and *the secondary sense is quality*. Regarding eternal life, *quality* is the *primary* sense and *undyingness* a *secondary* sense. [Harris:199] Any reasonable estimate of the language here would say the opposite of Harris's conclusion above that, "forfeiture of immortality ... (is) not the destruction of personal existence.",¹⁹ Quality would obviously be absent in non-existence! It is incoherent to try to justify a definition of continuing existence for 'forfeiture of immortality', *on the basis of a secondary meaning of immortality*.

Fudge in debating this issue, of whether God could sustain the life of the wicked in judgement, acknowledges that "both sides concede the ultimate point to the greater sovereignty of God. The issue really becomes a matter of exegesis." [Fudge:26] For Fudge it becomes a matter of slogging out the various texts, seeking to prove the impossibility or unliklihood of the 'eternal judgement texts', suggesting the sustaining of life for the purposes of judgement. This he does with admirable tenacity and effectiveness. Ultimately his argument loses power as it gets bogged down in the detail, and does not do justice to the whole picture which is drawn in the scripture. That picture is not only to be related to the moment of the writing, but to be held in tension with the strategy and plan of God toward humanity over the ages as revealed in the scripture. [Ephesians 3:9] In the light of above arguments, this point of concession is ignoring the clear revelation of scripture.

There is a secondary, though very important issue here. The argument for contingent or conferred immortality operates, in practice, not only for the time of final judgement, but also for the intermediate period between death and final judgement. This reinterprets death. Compare the recent revised edition of Motyer's book 'After Death' where he asserts that, "there are no biblical grounds for saying that 'death means the end'. The unbroken witness of the Bible is that the dead are alive and that death ushers a person into a new sphere of life." [Motyer: 46] He then takes this definition of death to undermine any words relating to destruction. The argument of origins is vitally important, and in this case Motyer has made the critical error of misreading delayed judgement, because of grace, as the justification for seeing death as a mere 'change of state'. [Motyer: 45] Augustine was the first to make this change in the meaning of death to justify his concept of eternal suffering. [Hughes: 404]

It will be argued more fully later in this paper that the first and second deaths are of the same nature: a returning to dust or non-existence. The first death is recoverable because of the salvation

¹⁹Asking my son taking sixth form English studies in school what he thought the opposite of Harris's definition of immortality would be, he replied, "death by cancer". The opposite of immortality as defined by Harris, in linguistic terms, is more correctly, a slow painful extinction.

plan of God through the death and resurrection of Jesus.²⁰ Thus we rise, either to the judgement of the second death, from which there is no recovery, or to eternal life.

Some argue for an increasing understanding of death and judgement in the scripture. It is an increase which changes the judgement from the straightforward and simple 'return to dust', to the complex scenarios of the orthodox doctrine. They justify it because of increasing revelation through the Old Testament to the New Testament. But they are in danger of applying discredited evolutionary concepts of interpretation. [Kung:48,49] The sum effect of those discredited arguments, is to make the idea of judgement and blessing different, not only in detail, but in fundamental understanding.

In the previous century, Edward White in his volume 'Life in Christ', makes a relevant comment regarding descriptions of judgement found in Revelation, "The description of future punishment as 'the second death' determines the question as to the general nature of the penalty. As already remarked, there cannot be a '*second*' of anything unless it be at least of the same genus as the '*first*'. If we say a second house, there must have been a first house, and not a first tree. If there be a first and second death, there must be a generic likeness between them. There would be no likeness whatever between death as threatened to Adam, or death as men suffer it here, and the everlasting torment of a living body and soul united in immortality. But there is a strong likeness between the first dissolution of humanity and the second 'destruction of body and soul' in Gehenna hereafter.". [White:411]

Strengthening this argument, White deals at great length with how everyday Greek language is turned on its head, because of the assumptions of innate and contingent immortalists, when considering man's destiny. Therefore the secondary meanings and implications i.e. the sense of pain, misery, loss of quality, inherent in words like destruction, perish and corruption are assigned *primary* importance when applied to an unredeemed man's destiny. Since man had obviously no consciousness as dust, a body created from dust and returning to dust should constitute a return to unconsciousness. The explanation in the absence of other prevailing evidence, is that the salvation programme of God has been misinterpreted to read immortality. White writes, "There must exist some argument of almost overpowering influence which has thus determined the interpretation of masses of language to a sense exactly contrary to its natural meaning. For the process by which such terms as *death*, *perishing*, *destruction* are made to stand for the idea of *endless misery*, is one so remarkable as to arrest attention and demand instant inquiry. A corresponding action on the word *life*, so often used in the Bible to denote the eternal reward of the saints, would result in making it stand for the strange idea of a *happy extinction*, or a blessed abolition of existence - an *euthanasia*." [White: 357]

²⁰ Jesus said, "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell." [Mt 10:28] This does not mean that the soul is alive and well, but rather that it can be reconstituted with a resurrection body. See details later under Intermediate state.

The terms used in scripture of death, perishing, destruction and kill, are said by traditionalists to represent only a breaking down and not a complete dissolution. Therefore an interpretation of the wineskin perishing would be that only its usefulness was destroyed, but not its existence. However this is a specious argument. The consequent action with a perished wineskin is to throw it into the rubbish tip for destruction to ashes. It is of no further use. Just as a vine which no longer bears fruit is cut down and burned. [John 15:6]. The natural interpretation of the figure is of consequential non-existence ... not survival.

Recent debate on the destiny of humanity has centred on the difficult texts of scripture. Restriction to those texts alone is too limiting. The above arguments give powerful reasons for the coherence of conditional immortality with the scriptural evidence on both origins and destiny. They are consistent with each other.

Before dealing with the difficult texts, there is an event crucial to the destiny of humanity which must be examined, and to which we now turn.

DEATH OF CHRIST

The nature and significance of the death of Jesus, must be central to a breadth of understanding regarding eternal judgement.

There are many aspects to the death of Christ, ranging from the example aspect, probably the weakest, to the idea of a propitiatory sacrifice, perhaps the strongest and to some the most objectionable. It is without doubt the most significant event, along with the resurrection, of the action of God amongst men. It is the work of reconciliation and the fulfilment of all the Old Testament experience, patterns and revelation. It is not the intention here to look at all the aspects or implications of the Death of Christ. But rather to show the dovetailing of the distinctives of conditional immortality with this central event.

It is most reasonable to believe, as the scriptures indicate, that the death of Jesus Christ is tied up very deeply with the punishment of death which was pronounced upon Adam²¹ and repeated throughout scripture²², "The soul who sins is the one who will die." [Ezekiel 18:20] "Christ died for our sins", [1Cor15:3] is the recurring theme of Paul's writings, he arguably being the theologian of the early Christian Church.²³ The integrity of the doctrine of conditional immortality, means that there is a direct connection between what Christ suffered on the Cross, his subsequent death, and what is the judgement considered as biblical by this theology. Christ suffered apprehension of the judgement to the point of sweating great drops of blood in the Garden of Gethsemane. He suffered humiliation and torture at the hands of the soldiers, before the extreme suffering of the Cross. He became sin for us, bearing our sins on the tree, and the curse which was associated with hanging on a tree. He was "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, [John 1:29] taking the penal wrath of God, reflecting so much of Israel's history. But then after these, Christ *suffered*²⁴ death. It was in the moment of death as he surrendered his Spirit into his Father's hands, that he cried 'it is finished'. The judgement executed on Christ as the offering for sin is that eternal judgement of the second death,²⁵ from which we are

²¹ Particularly important is the treatment by Paul of death entering the world by one man and the obedience of one man (Jesus) bringing life in Romans 5. A very clear comparison.

²² There is an enormous bulk of texts which promise, death, destruction, disappearance, devouring, killing etc. on the wicked, as a result of the wrath of God.

²³ We have to be aware that never in the New Testament does theology stand simply on its own. It is always in the context of an ethical nature, reflecting the holiness of God and our relationship to him.

²⁴ Suffering ultimately is concerned with death. It is not something which stands alone as a separate or greater aspect of the punishment of death. It is a corollary of it. Thus the interchange in the scripture of phrases like, "the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death," [Philippians 3:10] "Christ also suffered for sins .. he was put to death". [1Peter 3:18], "for the suffering of death ... should taste death for every man" [Hebrews 2:9] and "Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead." [Acts 17:3] See also argument on 'torment' later in paper, the same Greek word being translated 'torment' or 'suffer' on occasion. The word suffer is used in the same fashion as torment defined in that section. Torment is not used related to the death of Christ, because that term, referring to judgement, is reserved for the destruction to non-existence from which there is no return: the second death. "But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony (travail, sorrow) of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. [Acts 2:24] Suffering can be redemptive, torment can never be.

²⁵ It is not called that because it is *death*, as White explains previously, but it is applied for the second time. The second time there is no return.

saved; "Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath." [1Thess 1:10] Or in the words of Hebrews, he 'suffered death' and 'tasted death' for everyone. [Hebrews 2:9] Not in any sense is there an aspect in scripture which suggests that Christ suffered something akin to 'unending conscious punishing'. Rather that in every way the death of Christ was the complete answer to the fall of man. The triumph of the resurrection was over death. The victory is celebrated with extreme clarity in 1Corinthians 15, when Paul compares the perishable and the imperishable, the mortal and the immortal. This is what Christ's victory over death has won, of which he is the firstfruits by the resurrection. This type of clear language with regard to judgement and salvation is everywhere in the New Testament. It is the use of language in a straightforward sense of mortal to immortality, death to life, and the lack of any additions by way of concession to a concept of endless punishing that is so striking.

Some have sought to construe that Jesus was conscious when dead, taking the obscure allusion in 1Peter 3:18,19 as an event happening during the three days in the tomb. It is suggested that he underwent more suffering in a descent to hell as spoken of in the Apostle's Creed. This has been shown to be but the import of pagan ideas into the scriptural text. [Du Toit:73-83]

In contrast is the simplicity, but not naiveté, of understanding the death of Christ as fundamentally a punitive death of dissolution with prior suffering. This has coherence with the rest of scripture in descriptions of the sacrifices offered throughout the Old Covenant. The death (no suggestion of subsequent conscious torment) of the lamb as an offering for sin, is a fundamental theme of the Old Testament. This very description is used of Christ himself in John 1:29. It is the influence of dualism, originating in the lie of the serpent and demanding immortality, which would ignore the composite weight of the Old and New Testament statements regarding the punishment of sin. But instead, symbols of biblical heritage are twisted on the basis of some apocalyptic statements, to support a position which is essentially a pagan philosophy. Professor Tom Torrance has an abhorrence of dualism, and in opposition he lays great emphasis on the 'singularity' which the 'finality' of the Cross achieved.

Some measure of the confusion caused by the orthodox position, is the lack of satisfaction which exists with the death of Christ. There has been endless speculation as to the amount of suffering which Christ underwent on the Cross prior to death, and also after death. Has it been enough in quantity or quality for the whole of mankind since the beginning of Creation? Such speculation is altogether unbiblical. It leads to ideas which are foreign to the scripture, and have caused untold harm to the Church and the reputation of Christ: ideas of limited atonement which claim that Christ did not suffer for the wicked, or at least only for the elect.²⁶

²⁶In discussion at length of this subject Torrance concludes, "It should now be clear that universalism and limited atonement are twin heresies which rest on a deeper heresy, the recourse to a logico-causal explanation of why the atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ avails or does not avail for all people." [Torrance: 248] That 'logico-causal explanation' finds legitimacy in the unbiblical notion of the immortality of the soul, and unending sensory torment as the punishment for sin.

The Evangelical Times recently published an article by David Clark that was a response to the announcement of the Church of England doctrine committee recommending a position of annihilationism. It speculates about the Death of Christ as outlined above; "it is important to grasp that Christ did indeed suffer enough for all the sins of the elect." David Clark does make reference to the nature of the one who died, but fails to explain why the suffering sustained by Christ on the Cross is the equivalent to the wrath of God in conscious punishment of the wicked, for which "ten thousand years will not be enough; nor will a million, or even eternity". He uses hints instead, "Perhaps the choice of the most cruel and degrading form of death - that of the cross - hints at the true extent of his suffering." [Clark: article]

The scripture is clearer, "Then I saw a Lamb looking as if it had been *slain*....". [Revelation 5:6] This approach of Clark's may be termed a popular response, but it does indicate the path along which the orthodox doctrine is likely to, and indeed has already led.

Peterson has a more considered response to the dissolution of Christ. A response to a particular view of the death of Christ i.e. only the human part of Jesus died, not the divine part.²⁷ This suggests a separation of the person of Christ in his death, and is not dealt with through the scriptures. Instead he makes appeal to the statements of the Council of Chalcedon with regard to the person of Christ. Peterson would argue that Christ's death as dissolution would be impossible since, "...if the extinction - re-creation account of Jesus' resurrection is true, then the teaching of Chalcedon is false." [Peterson: 27] It is an argument of contradiction, not from the Bible, but to the extended statements regarding the nature of Christ by that Council. Statements which despite their worth, are nevertheless answering a particular problem. His argument therefore shifts from scripture to a non-inspired source. [Peterson:26]

There is no doubt that the incarnation is a great mystery. Our forms for representing it stretch our language to the very limit. Using the language and ideas of Chalcedon in this way, which were conceived for another purpose, is to do violence to that Council's work. He therefore denies the original 'return to dust' judgement on Christ. He maintains a consciousness of soul, and gives a basis for all the gross speculation of quantifiable suffering. In addition, ground is strengthened for the decensus; a thoroughly pagan concept. The scripture would indicate rather that Jesus did die (dissolution), but that in virtue of his person and the action of God (the Spirit, 1Peter 3:18), he was raised from the dead. Revelation 1:18 is a very clear depiction of the victory of Jesus over Death and Hades. The writer compares, consonant with the weight of Old and New Testament references, a situation of Jesus being a corpse (*nekros*) with the statement 'alive', being full of life. The contrast is in terms consistent with the original judgement.

The idea of Christ's death being effective for the punishment of unending sensory or conscious torture, is not a comparison found in

²⁷ This is not the view suggested by this paper. Jesus died, entered non-existence, the deep, but in virtue of his person i.e. as God/man death, non-existence could not hold him.

the New Testament. It is however a function of separating the body and the soul. If man has an immortal soul (innate or conferred), then the body is ancillary. It then means that the death of Christ, like humanity's death, is merely of the body. Any real punishment in this view is then assessed by the amount of suffering which Jesus underwent in his soul. The fallacy of such a position is found in every line of scripture, which emphasises the death of Christ effective for salvation.

The reason why Christ's death is only ever spoken of as death, and the suffering of death, and never equivocated with endless sensory or conscious torment, becomes clear from the next section.

TORMENT: A CAUSE OF INCOHERENCE!

The word which undoubtedly causes the greatest difficulty in scripture with regard to the fate of the wicked is the word TORMENT. Normally this word has been associated with the infliction of sensory pain. It was understood in such a way by Augustine. In respect of the logic as to how any resurrected body could survive such 'burnings' as were suggested by this interpretation, he postulated a body which could never die, an immortality. [Hughes:371] More recently it would not be viewed in quite this way, the emphasis is put on conscious mental torment because of separation and isolation, but nevertheless without end, as repeated often in the book of Revelation.

This seems to be the teaching in general of the book of Revelation. Its imagery is powerful and the immediate context of this word, implies not a destruction, but a conscious awareness of sensory torture. As such it has been interpreted by all. Conditionalist argument has concentrated, on the destructibility of the persons in the lake of fire, and the shortening of the time span of the words 'aion to aion' .. 'ever and ever'. The idea is to avoid the endless continuation of conscious suffering, and incorporate it into the process of destruction. [Guillebaud:24,25, Fudge, White and others] Although these words are capable of interpretation as limited periods, [Wenham 2:176] they appear not to be used in that way here. Additionally, because of the close connection between Rev 20:10 and 14:11, the distinguishing of the fates of the human wicked, and the devil and his angels seems improbable. The idea of 'no rest' in Rev 14:11 also seems to confirm this. There is the sense of living, and yet no peace in these verses.

However, in the light of the earlier discussion on our innate tendency, because of the fall, to view humanity as always surviving, the examination of the words 'torment' and 'rest' in their biblical settings may yield greater understanding.²⁸

It is important in interpreting the book of Revelation, to understand that it picks up and uses themes for its teaching and imagery which were first used in the books of the Old and New Testaments. In addition it more closely defines its own terms by repeated use of them. Richard Bauckham speaking of this says, and I quote at length, "One way of understanding John's literary technique of repeating phrases is to relate it to the Jewish exegetical technique of *gezera sawa*, which John, like many of his Jewish contemporaries, used to interpret the Old Testament Scriptures. This technique depended on observing verbal coincidences between scriptural texts. Texts containing the same words or phrases could be used to interpret each other. In effect, Scripture was treated as containing the same kind of network of internal cross-reference by repetition of phrases (often, of course, in somewhat varying form) as John has created in his own work. Since John certainly understood himself to be writing the same kind of inspired, prophetic work as the prophetic scriptures he studied, the parallel

²⁸... how cautious we have to be when we read of metaphysical, and especially Christian, claims. Let us never be misled by the all-too-obvious and all-too-misleading grammar of the phrases. Always, and especially in controversy, when the phrases seem nonsense, let us go back to the rock whence they were hewn.."[Ramsey:148]

is surely not accidental. John wrote a work to which he expected the technique of *gezera sawa* to be applied, a work which would yield much of its meaning only to the application of this exegetical technique." [Bauckham:29] Vital to the following study are ideas and concepts which are provided in the text, but do not necessarily use the same Greek words.

The use of the word torment in connection with the judgement on Babylon in chapter 18 of Revelation is enlightening. Babylon's torment is to be destroyed, consumed by fire, and the symbol after burning is finished, is the smoke of her burning. This is what strikes fear into the hearts of the merchants: her destruction, her extinction, her torment [Rev 18:10]²⁹. When the merchants see her destruction it is spoken of as her torment and mourning. The Angel declares, "With such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, *never to be found again*." [Rev 18:21][White: 411,412] All of the pronouncements about Babylon's torment are connected with inability to do, and finally inability to be. Thus the essence of torment and what gives it power is the very explicit, "Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, and said, ' With such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, *never to be found again*.'" Torment is intimately linked with the strongest possible biblical representation of utter destruction, disappearance and extinction.

When the book of Revelation speaks of the two prophets who have tormented [Rev 11:10] the inhabitants of the earth, Revelation itself reveals the nature of those torments, "If anyone tries to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and *devours* their enemies. This is how anyone who wants to harm them must *die*." [Rev 11:5] The other torments for which they are responsible all have as their result; death. Death, disappearance, destruction, and extinction are again the source and substance of torment.³⁰

The same idea is used in Isaiah 50 where the adversary against God's chosen is said to lie down in sorrow, or torment, verse 11. But this is those of whom it is said in verse 9, will "wax old as a garment" and be "eaten by moths" implying complete dissolution, a return to dust. Torment, sorrow, grief and terror are translations of the Hebrew word used here, in people returning to dust and disappearing. Seen as a prophecy of Jesus as the Servant of God, these verses have even more potency as a description of the fate of the wicked. Thus even those who burn the fires of rebellion and reject and betray Jesus, will be tormented with being eaten up and disappearance. [Isaiah 50:11]

There is one torment which seems to contravene this approach. The plague of locusts in chapter 9 of Revelation indicates a torment which was the torment of the sting like a scorpion. It was *less* than that of killing the people, "not given power to kill them, but *only* to torture (or torment) them for five months". [Rev 9:5] The power to torment in this way was *inferior* to the power of killing

²⁹The same Greek word for torment is used in Rev 11v10, 14:11,18:7 and 20v10 in different tenses; 'basanismos' noun.

³⁰The more refined arguments of those who say that God sustains the wicked in punishment, drawn in substance from these verses in Revelation, falter at this point. There are no other grounds in scripture which can justify the traditional doctrine. This is their last stronghold. [Wenham 2:180]

them, but in alignment with the type of torment suggested by the traditional doctrine; a *sensory or conscious* torment. Here the abnormal nature of the torment is stated, "they will seek death and not find it." This is the fullest description of the traditional doctrine in scripture, but it is announced as *less than the power to kill and death would be the ending of it*. Thus the second death will be the ending of any sensory torment by the infliction of the greatest torment. It was an unusual torment since all torments will eventually lead to death and extinction; a *greater* torment.³¹ The *greatest* torment is the second death because no return is possible. This *exception* was particularly ordered by God.

The demonic spirits are held in the Abyss which is a place of judgement. It is spoken of as blackness, the deep pit, the bottomless pit, a place where they are chained in darkness, a punishment, a torture. It is in fact identified with Sheol, Hades, the grave, but deeper. In the Septuagint the equivalent Hebrew word is 'the deep', used in Genesis 1:2, indicating the nothingness of the earth (formless and empty), before God created light or life of any description. Tartarus (the Greek equivalent of Hades), is a place of punishment or torment, not because of sensory pain or conscious awareness, but because of its darkness and lack of those very things; non-existence. As referred earlier, only because of salvation history (in this case judgement to come), is there return for anyone from the punishment which God inflicts. In the Gadarene demoniac's encounter with Jesus, the demonic spirits did not wish to experience this before their time. They did not wish the equivalent of our death³², not even the first time. [Luke 8:28,30, Matthew 8:29] The action of the pigs in their rush into the sea, (by associated use and translation a reference to the 'deep') to death and destruction, is the association which Jesus intended for the torment or torture. 'Their time' will be one of the torment of destruction and extinction for ever in the lake of fire, which for wicked humanity is the second death. [Rev: 20:10] It is the eternal perpetuation of what was the torment of the Abyss before the Day of Judgement. It is this 'deep of non-existence' into which Christ entered at his death, but it could not hold him. [Romans 10:7, Acts 2:24]

In this context, and with this understanding, the references to the fire and furnace of the deep pit [Rev 9:1], can be understood in the destructive sense, (the only use of judgmental fire in scripture is destructive, apart from Luke 16) as maintaining the equivalent of non-existence on a temporal basis. It is only in Luke 16:19-31 that we have a reference to *Hades* in terms of experiencing sensory torment through fire, and that parable it is generally agreed, is

³¹This is related to real life: with my wife's permission I relate her story. Whilst she was working in a nursing home on night shift, a burglar entered the premises. He assaulted my wife whispering to her before the attack, "you are going to die". I thank God the police arrived in time to prevent that happening. In the months following the attack, the thing which required particular healing in my wife were the words of torment, "you are going to die". The pain of the physical blows had passed, but the memory of the torment of impending death remained for a long time. But the torment was not realised. Her attacker had expected to carry out the torment of death. He was convicted of *attempted* murder.

³²Language is stretched here. But if what happens to them is similar to humans then it may be termed death, although the scriptures do not say this because the 'order of being' is different. However they share in the second death, the lake of fire. Again for them it is not called that, since there is no meaning attached to this in respect to their history, i.e. non corporeal. Therefore torment as defined in terms of the Abyss above i.e. non existence, is the figure, and only pigs (unclean animals to the Jews) were utilised to demonstrate it.

not teaching on the nature of Hades, which would be allegorical, but of the 'great gap fixed'.

The phrase 'no rest day or night', gives the sense of consciousness of pain or disturbance for the wicked, in contrast to the redeemed who are entered into their rest. [Rev 14] It is a powerful and difficult picture for the conditionalist position, and again along with torment has been avoided by virtue of concentration on the duration of 'ever and ever'.

This other word of difficulty, 'rest', which would invalidate the doctrine of conditional immortality, yields a similar idea of extinction from a different angle. It is said of God that on the seventh day, [Genesis 2:2] he rested from his work of creation. That rest indicated the completion and sanctification of God's creation. Thereafter the creation is sustained in existence by the word of his power. [Stedman:56] Bruce Milne describes that sustaining in this way, "God has called the universe into being out of nothing, and hence at every moment it 'hangs' suspended, as it were, over the abyss of non-existence. If God were to withdraw his upholding Word, then all being, spiritual and material, would instantly tumble back into nothing and cease to exist." [Milne: 74]

We are exhorted to enter God's rest and take care not to miss it. [Hebrews 4:1] God's rest here carries the idea of fullness, (within the strictures of pre-resurrection life) of our recreation in Christ. [2Cor 5:17] The writer to the Hebrews speaks of the word of God being mixed with faith in order to enter that rest. [Hebrews 4:1-6] God's word sustains us, or as the apostle Peter puts it, "You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God." [1Peter 1:23] To be in God's rest is to be assured of life in his creation, which is imperishable. In that rest we have no part in death or sweeping away. The agreement with death and the grave, which the wicked had in Isaiah 28:12-19 would not stand. They would be swept away in the scourge, because they had not accepted the resting place of God. The same idea is present in the words of Jesus, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." [Mt 11:28] That appeal comes just after the mention of the judgemental destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and before the debate with the Pharisees over the eating of the wheat on the Sabbath. Jesus declares himself, in this debate, to be greater than the temple and goes on to restore a withered hand on the Sabbath.

Salvation thus means a re-creation through acceptance and obedience to the word of God, to obtain the rest of God. If we do not meet these requirements we have no place in God's new creation. In the book of Revelation, the "dead in the Lord" [Rev 14:13] rest from their labour and are blessed. They are free from the original judgement in the Garden of Eden, whereafter they would labour in order to have food to survive, "sweat of your brow", [Genesis 3:19] and still would return to dust. They now have the sustaining of God, access to the tree of life, [Rev 2:7] and have rested from their labours.³³ The new creation is, "... the old order of things has passed away.", He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am

³³Although the Greek words are different here from the words used in Hebrews to describe the 'rest' the phrase and connection are made in the context.

making everything new!" [Rev 21:4,5] This indicates the new heaven and earth with the dead in the Lord having a new resurrected body. It is this rest, the biblical rest of *recreation to life and sustaining in life by the power of God*, that the wicked will never have day or night for ever and ever, because their punishment is destruction. Thus hanging over the abyss of non-existence, they are dropped.

In these verses, the traditional doctrine's concept of rest conversely perpetuates the lie of "you will not surely die". [Gen 3:4]

The phrase "day and night"³⁴ in the context of judgement is meant to represent the total inability at any time, in any way, to come back to life. The words day and night are first used biblically in Genesis 1:3 at the beginning of creation. It was the first result of the creation from nothingness. The imagery is that they will be denied rest, life or existence, a return to nothingness, by God's first act of creation. The new heaven and new earth is a place where "mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." [Rev 21:4]

The same force may be felt in Revelation where it speaks of the "smoke of their torment rises up for ever and ever." [Rev 14:11] It is the smoke of their destruction. They are held in destruction, in extinction. It carries the sense of the *positive action* of God to maintain the new heaven and earth without evil returning. Theodicy might suggest the use by God of evil for redemptive purposes in the old order, but not now. The strongest possible reference to the same idea is made with respect to the Devil and his angels. They shall be tormented with extinction for ever and ever in the presence of God and his angels. In other words the most permanent association possible is made. The use of the future tense for tormented, is meant to convey that as long as God is, the devil, his angels and all thrown into the Lake of Fire shall be held extinct, in nothingness. No return ever.

The scriptures are consistent all the way through, if not interpreted according to a foreign philosophy. Significantly, the key to interpretation of torment and associated imagery, is found in the very book which supplies the bedrock of the traditional theory. God created from nothing 'ex nihilo', and it is the clearest expression of scripture that those who disobey him in wickedness, he will punish in the forfeit of life and be returned to nothing. The traditional doctrine has fulfilled the suggestion of the enemy, 'you will not surely die', and the doctrine of conditional immortality opposes that lie.

³⁴Peter Cotterell in evaluating these phrases from the standpoint of the traditional doctrine, has to resort to philosophical 'post -Einsteinian' arguments to explain their use. [Cotterell:75] Language this side of eternity has to explain something in respect to what lies ahead or else we flounder badly. Torment, seen as destruction and annihilation, consistent internally with the book of Revelation, gives power to the biblical language of day and night.

THE WORDS OF JESUS

It will be helpful for the continuity of the thesis to briefly review the words and imagery which are used by Jesus himself in speaking of judgement and hell.

Indeed it is often claimed that the words of Jesus alone are the justification for the doctrine of everlasting punishment. Here we have some measure of the problem. Conditional Immortality has no difficulty in endorsing eternal punishment, of which Jesus speaks in Matthew 25:46, the difficulty has come in determining what that punishment is.

There is a distinction drawn between eternal punishment and eternal punishing. That is, that the effects of annihilation, extinction or dissolution in Gehenna are eternal in their effects. There is no recovery from that punishment of death and destruction, therefore it is eternal. This is completely understandable in terms of what lies around us. We see and understand that suffering and sensory torment come before the final execution from which there is no recovery. Our present penal system is criticised for the inhumanity and torture of life incarceration, and the destructive effect it has on the personality. But the alternative of penal death is even more strongly resisted. Despite the protestations of many that death is no punishment, society bears a different witness.

Death is very clearly an enemy to be destroyed in the scriptures also. Paul in considering the resurrection of Christ and its effects in 1Corinthians 15, juxtapositions what can only be the "day of the Lord"... when "he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power" and when death itself is destroyed. We have a clear statement of the finality of judgement. One which will destroy death itself, that it will no longer have any power over any of God's creation.

Many of the interpretations which seek to uphold the traditional idea of conscious soul torment, mollify the nature of the punishment to a "locking the door from the inside" [Blocher: 296] and "In the eschaton the sinner who desires to live apart from God is given over to seek satisfaction in himself, a final doom of eschatological incurring...". [Harmon:221] In so doing, they oppose the words of Jesus about Gehenna and the finality of judgement.

In opposition to annihilationism however, Blocher protests, when considering the Biblical data inclusive of the words of Jesus, that it "seems to insist on the durational, permanent character of the state of torment." [Blocher:288] He writes, 'as remaining unlikely' that the biblical words of destruction mean 'cessation of existence', yet does not examine these. He prefers the previous study of Jean Cruvellier and the recommendation of a 'rationalistic critic' to the examination of detail. 'Seems', is too loose a word to use for what has been the centre of the debate.³⁵ Blocher is not guilty of misinterpreting some of the other imagery of scripture. He recognises that the 'undying worm' of Jesus's words in Mark 9:48,

³⁵Ultimately Blocher suggests a scheme of torment which is just about as close to cessation of existence as one can come, without actually using those terms. [Blocher: 308,309] This is typical of the softening of figures which takes place in the 'eternal torment' camp, and will be examined later in the paper.

is not a picture of continuing sensory tormented life, but rather as in its original use, a picture and figure of unremitting death. [Isaiah 66:24] However Peterson would not be so lenient, and wishes to note that the worm would cease to exist normally, unless it was able to keep feeding i.e. on the continuing life of the person. In Peterson's figure, details are being misapplied and ignore their original use in such an interpretation.³⁶

Jesus often speaks of 'eternal fire' and 'unquenchable fire' in relation to the question of judgement. [Matt 18:8,Luke 3:17,Mark 9:48] There can be no doubt that there is a developed emphasis in the words of Jesus regarding eternal punishment. Fire was always associated with destruction in the Hebrew mind. Its use in the Old Testament was in that manner, most notably of Sodom and Gomorrah which no longer exist. The one occasion when destruction did not occur .. the burning bush, was notable as an exception and was not connected with judgement but related to the presence and holiness of God.

The term which Jesus used for hell, the place of final judgement, was Gehenna, which was the rubbish dump outside of Jerusalem where fires burned continuously for the purposes of destruction. Unlike the incinerators of our day. It was not a place of survival but destruction. The use of the adjectives unquenchable and eternal are thus descriptive of the permanency of that destruction. They are not intended to describe an eternal continuance of what is put into the fire.³⁷ That would be to turn the overwhelming clarity of the concept in scripture on its head, making what is meant to indicate the last word in destruction the exact opposite.

Not

Kendall Harmon recognises the conflict which exists when the images of the fate of the wicked are 'pressed woodenly'. [Harmon: 224] There are contradictions. He prefers to see them as simultaneous realities of the one fate. But the contradictions would not be present if he did not reject the concept of destruction with its obvious progression of figures³⁸ in judgement. These are coherent with all the emotions and responses a moral system of judgement would exhibit. The charge by Harmon of a "neater package than the original", it should be noted, is followed by a confession of the 'murky waters' in respect to a positive understanding of hell. us be clear, it is only the setting aside of the overwhelming weight of scriptural description of the fate of the wicked, on the basis of a few philosophically misinterpreted texts which causes Harmon's 'murky waters'. [Harmon:215] John Wenham reckons the overwhelming weight of scriptural evidence in favour of conditional immortality to be 99.5%. [Wenham 2: 180] The remaining 0.5% has been dealt with under the section on torment in this paper.

Let

³⁶Fudge's treatment of this statement originating in Isaiah 66, is both competent and comprehensive. [Fudge: 61-65]

³⁷ A rather colloquial illustration of the importance of permanence of destruction is found in films. We have the famous phrase of 'Arnie' "I'll be back". In the 'Terminator' series, the most horrifying aspect was the seemingly indestructibility of what was evil. The scriptures take pain to eradicate those fears in respect to evil and evildoers.

³⁸The idea which Fudge suggests: the sense of guilt, the wailing and gnashing of teeth as destruction is carried out, the outer darkness of nothingness following.

THE INTERMEDIATE STATE

In this context it is important to realise that the doctrine of the Immortality of the Soul, or the sustaining of the soul, has a consequent effect on thinking regarding the intermediate state of the soul. That effect is one of immediate conscious survival.³⁹ That is the logical progression. Historically we can see one of the awful fruits of this thinking. The serpent lied that humanity would not die. The church embraced the Greek Platonic thinking of soul survival, married it to the Christian doctrine of resurrection in order to bolster resurrection,[Tugwell:111] and ended up with a hybrid monster of a doctrine that agreed with the lie. By the eighth century it was almost completely dominant in the church. The hideous abuse of the Medieval Roman Church on the issue of purgatory was the result. It undermined the grace of God and caused all manner of evils.⁴⁰ The Reformation was precipitated on this very issue.⁴¹ Consequently, Luther originally opposed [Froom 2:74-79] any idea of survival after death, maintaining the dead were asleep awaiting resurrection to life or judgement, but seceded to Calvin on this point for the sake of the unity of the Reformation. Froom's account of the circumstances of Calvin's opposition to soul sleep and conditional immortality makes sorry reading. [Froom 2:112-120] Even if there is muted evidence in the medieval times of witness to conditional immortality in respect to final judgement, there is plenty of evidence of the opposition of many through the church ages to conscious survival after death in the intermediate state. Waldensians, John Wycliffe, Martin Luther, William Tyndale, Isaac Watts, Anabaptist and many, many others opposed this idea on the basis of scripture's teachings. [Fudge:35,36]

The

The

There is a highly dangerous and continuing problem with the traditional doctrine. It encourages an unhealthy interest in the dead, since it postulates that they are alive after death,⁴² albeit without a body. That also applies to the practical implications of holding that there is no innate immortality, but that people are sustained for the purposes of punishment. People, unless carefully taught, do not make this fine distinction. This is a significant pastoral problem.⁴³ Bowker in examining Hertz's philosophical view where someone continues after death, says that Hertz, "examines one the Nakhi, a people of the far west of China, who have strong interaction with the 'dead' so much so that they have a *problem with suicide*." [Bowker:22]

³⁹In fact this has become so important to so many regarding the death of loved ones, that it causes great distress to suggest any alternative. However the long term pastoral effects of indulging this attitude are serious. Many start wishing to contact their dead, or attribute 'happenings' in their life to them. Worst of all is the temptation to join them!

⁴⁰Froom gives an account of the effect of the teaching of 'soul sleep' on the 'trade of apparitions' by the Franciscans. [Froom 2: 116,117] Even today the complications caused by the view of survival of consciousness after death, can be seen from the 'difficult passage' quoted in McGrath's Theology Reader by Hans Urs von Balthasar. [McGrath: 368]

⁴¹Therefore justification by faith had to be recovered, and not justification through post mortem experiences, as is becoming popular again!

⁴²David Pawson in 'When Jesus Returns', affirms the conscious recognisable state of people in heaven immediately they die, but notes that there is very little said in the New Testament about this. He says additionally that it is not the thrust of Apostolic teaching and that 'heaven is only a waiting room'. [Pawson: Foreword]

⁴³One which I have encountered frequently in counselling the bereaved.

It is a problem which we face today in the Church with the rise of the New Age. This is a multi-faceted group with conglomerate beliefs. They are founded on a compilation of evolutionary and spiritistic ideas, which sometimes complement and sometimes compete with each other. There is a strong emphasis in many on the continuation of the person after death. They concentrate on development of the personality or psyche, through mediumistic and other prohibited practises. The more material based New Agers have developed ideas of Omega Man, (a type of evolved superman) and a biologically based survival of the person, centred on computer technology. [Akers, Hon 401:8] It has captivated many on the fringe of the church, for it seems to provide a greater exploration of areas which the church already endorses. Thus many new agers would see no division between orthodox Christianity and themselves. The view of the immortality of the soul, (which is the popular conception) or the emphasis on the conscious experience of people after death either with Christ or without, must bear responsibility for the weakness of the church in this area. Conditional Immortality as expounded in this paper and by the majority of exponents, declares according to scripture that the dead are dead⁴⁴ (the Christian dead, asleep in Christ) awaiting resurrection.⁴⁵ They have no consciousness, cannot take any action⁴⁶ on their own, and are not available for communication of any description.

There is a strong connection between the anthropological position in man's creation taken earlier, and the identification of Sheol and Hades, as the grave and the shadowy abode of both righteous and unrighteous. The majority⁴⁷ of Biblical texts speak of Sheol and Hades as non-existence or nothing. The examination of the word torment determines that the state of the first death is one of return to dust with no sense of consciousness. Any events which take place in the Old or New Testaments concerning people who are or have been dead, are inextricably linked with the developing plan of salvation, and are highly remarkable.

In the New Testament the *Christian* is understood to have fallen asleep in Christ. Other texts which would appear to be inconsistent with this position, have a focus other than the state of the dead in their teaching. The parable of the Rich man and Lazarus found in Luke 16, must be recognised in its genre as a parable. It does not teach regarding the final state, Gehenna, or anything other than

⁴⁴Tugwell in his volume relates how amongst the early Christian fathers, even those who believed in some kind of survival of the soul were hesitant to say that in any sense the dead were alive. [Tugwell: 110-114]

⁴⁵Bauckham has relevant comments on a dualist stream in Jewish and Christian thought, and an earlier Jewish concept of which the latter sees "no sharp distinction between Sheol and the grave, or between the dead person and the dead body." [Bauckham: 63]

⁴⁶There are some metaphorical actions attributed to the dead in the scripture. Also it must be noted that there are three persons who have obtained an unusual state, two of whom (Moses and Elijah) appeared on the Mount of Transfiguration. Note that Moses was buried by God and his body later taken into heaven. Elijah went straight to heaven in a chariot. The third, Enoch was taken straight to heaven, we do not hear of him. Additionally, the thief on the cross, "I say to you today you shall be with me in Paradise.", could not have been in Paradise that day with Christ, since Christ was not. Jesus did not ascend to the Father until after the resurrection. This gives theological reason for the placing of the comma after *today* in Luke 23:43. The textual possibility for this placing is covered comprehensively by Dr. Joseph Hong. [Hong: 408-417]

⁴⁷Texts which do indicate something happening are very few and are capable of other interpretations. Space precludes discussing this here but Fudge's treatment is recommended. [Fudge: 41-46]

that there is a great gulf fixed between good and evil which is decided in this life. Application any further than this point is recognised as going outside the bounds of reasonable interpretation, and into unjustifiable allegory. The parts in Paul's expositions in 2Corinthians 5:2-4 and Philippians 1:21-24, regarding the intermediate state, are not written to support an idea of conscious soul survival, but rather to indicate that because of *salvation in Christ*, death was gain. There is no experience of the passing of time in this sleep of death or indeed any true sleep. death in Philippians 1:21 -24 is thus transformed by the event of resurrection at the return of Christ, which is but a moment of time in the experience of those who sleep in Christ.⁴⁸ It is not Paul's intention in using the Philippians passage, to reinterpret 2 Corinthians 5, where he says he does not wish to be unclothed, but rather clothed with the resurrection body. This is consistent with the rest of Paul's thought.

The event of

In Revelation 20:4 it speaks of the "*souls* of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus..". It then says, "they came to life", and intimates that this is the first resurrection. The rest of the dead do not come to life until after the thousand years reign of Christ. The inference is that the souls are not alive, (dead, but sleeping in Christ), and the persons (souls) come to life when they have a resurrected body in a recreation, or perhaps more accurately restoration through resurrection, similar to the original creation.⁴⁹ The logic of 'souls' in Rev 20:4, is that there will be a *continuity* of identity of the person (the mechanics of which lie with God).⁵⁰ This is different from the original creation where the body was first animated to *become* a living soul, by the breathing into it, by God.

Under this scheme of theology, the two most important events concerning Christ, which are spoken of unceasingly in the New Testament, are held in their proper place. Right throughout the New Testament, the constantly reiterated theme is one of resurrection. Our redemption is the resurrection. It is a resurrection which takes place at the return of Christ. This is just what one would expect with the details of the origins and fall of humanity. The climax of our salvation is the rising of resurrection to meet Christ at his return.

This was the attitude of the early church. Burns says of their situation, "Judging from the Acts of the Apostles, the earliest Christian preaching laid great stress on the resurrection. It was precisely as a 'witness to the resurrection' of Christ that someone was needed to replace Judas in the company of the apostles (Acts

⁴⁸Many Christian's experiences, my own included, testify to the remarkable events which often surround the death of a Christian. A deep awareness of the presence of Jesus welcoming them, assuring them of peace and their part in the kingdom of God are commonplace. Nothing of what is written here, regarding the intermediate state, invalidates this. We fall asleep in Jesus rejoicing as did Stephen in Acts 7:59,60.

⁴⁹Recent work on mind/brain identity correlates with this: "As scientists we cannot define consciousness, but we do know that it depends on the integrity of brain structure. Certain areas of the brainstem which have very widespread connections to higher centres are essential for the maintenance of consciousness. ... When a person dies, their brain ceases to function and the 'I' ceases to exist in any form that we recognise directly." [Sloper:45,47]

⁵⁰'Mystery of Salvation' speaks of the 'information-bearing-pattern' of the body which is retained in the mind of God at death, until the time of resurrection of a new body. [Graham:11,13,191]

1:22)... what annoyed the priests and the Sadducees was the apostolic proclamation of 'the resurrection of the dead in Jesus.'" [Burns:110]

It is incredible folly to rely on a few odd texts in the New Testament to prove a consciousness survival of people after death. The New Testament overwhelmingly declares the resurrection of Christ as the basis for, and the pattern of, our entrance to life. Yet this is the position of the traditional doctrine. When one understands that the first death is dissolution commuted to sleep by the promise of resurrection,(some to life, some to destruction) it becomes even greater folly to suggest that people survive consciously in death. Once again the grace of God in salvation events is misunderstood to suppose survival, apart from the clearly stated purpose of those salvation events.

The traditional doctrine of the soul with the entry to heaven at death has the result of reducing the return of Christ, which is by everyone's account the most important doctrine in the New Testament after the death and resurrection, to a *secondary issue*. It is merely the raising of the body, which is less than the best, since the Christian has already, under the traditional scheme, virtually all that is required for their eternal bliss. They have conscious appreciation of the presence of God and of fellow believers, are able to praise God and worship the Lamb, give fellowship and encourage the church on earth (according to some), and generally experience all that heaven is meant to be, but without a body. *All this is made possible by the event of **their** death ... in other words you don't really die!*

Conditional Immortality as a theology sustains the grace of God operating in the person and work of his Son Jesus Christ. It does not attribute passage into life other than to the actions of a redeeming Saviour. In this it removes the opportunities, which have arisen under the traditional doctrine, for the doctrines of demons to deceive and corrupt.

UNIVERSALISM: AN ATTRACTIVE OPTION

Some have gone much further, not only developing the idea of death as an entry to life, but throwing out any notion of resurrection. Part of their motivation in doing so is a recoil at the traditional doctrine of hell, mixed with an unclear concept of the function and place of resurrection. [Badham:63,64] John Hick has greatly and persuasively developed unusual and lateral methods of philosophising the New Testament data, to bring himself to a theology which is very akin to certain forms of Hinduism. [Akers:8,9] This theology, through its sequential periods of reincarnational 'lives' for the purposes of personality development or 'person-making', amounts to a torturous form of universalism. Eventually everyone makes the necessary grade to justify acceptance by God. This kind of thinking, Hick confesses is partly as a result of the traditionalist doctrine. The idea of that punishment being so horrific that he looked for alternatives.

This is not the exclusive attitude of those on the fringe of orthodoxy. Colwell in his answering the case of conditional immortality, appeals to the teaching of Jonathan Edwards. He defends that teaching against conditionalist arguments, arguing in favour of the strongest points of Edwards' preaching on the subject. But then Colwell realising the enormous implications of this reasoning says, "When we speak of the reprobate we are not merely contemplating a nameless mass who have committed horrendous crimes. We are thinking of friends, of family, of those who here and now we love, of those we long to lead to a knowledge of God's mercy. How can we possibly contemplate rejoicing before God when such as these suffer this relentless and horrific fate?" [Colwell: 304] Colwell then argues himself, on the basis of statements made by Jonathan Edwards that, "God's mercy and God's justice do not stand in an unresolved and equal tension and, for this reason, *the ultimate salvation of all men and women cannot be finally discounted* but can remain the goal of our prayers and our hopes." [Colwell: 306] This is one typical result of holding the traditional doctrine of hell. The horror of it, while protested as being justified by scripture, inevitably causes people to seek some way around it. In this case it is a leaning, for he does not say he believes it, to universalism.

This

Paul Helm, outlining a position of universalism, shows how the great defenders of the traditional doctrine of conscious torment have nevertheless been at pains to state that there are very few that will not be saved! He refers to Hodge, Shedd, and Warfield who sought a kind of universalism in two areas. One is the scope of application by the Holy Spirit of the death of Christ, to those who would have no knowledge of Christ but pray according to his character. [Helm:276,277] The second is that they hope for and *claim* an overwhelming majority of humanity to be in this situation. Helm rightly points out there can be justification for the first, although the grounds are not explicit in scripture, but scripture would point against the second on account of the words of Jesus about the many and the few. [Helm:274] Significantly we have here, 'fathers of traditionalism' yearning, against good scriptural account, for what amounts to universalism. Anyone of redeemed and sensitive heart would desire the reconciliation of humanity to God

Helm

through Christ, a hope which the Apostle Paul reiterated, but to state that this is *going to be the case* indicates a different mind set.

Another reason for the attractiveness and acceptability of universalism, is because it redresses the lack of satisfaction with the death of Christ. This we observed earlier restricts the effectiveness of Christ's death to only those for whom he suffered enough i.e. the elect. The notion of the gospel which is offered to all is curtailed. 'For God so loved the *world*' [John 3:16] is now a restricted world, and lacks the fullness of grace which is indicated in so many other scriptures. Berkouwer, according to Fudge, suggests that as a consequence the doctrine of "apocatastasis (or restorationism) has flourished." [Fudge:205]

Appropriately Fudge observes, "...the traditionalist answer, which has so long charged conditionalism with being an 'easy way out', has itself become the basis for restorationist speculation which conditionalism precluded from the beginning." [Fudge:200]

MOLLIFIED METAPHORS

Another, more common way in which the awfulness⁵¹ of the traditional doctrine is modified is to change the words, by reinterpreting the existing ones or majoring on alternatives. It is not that the models suggested have no value in communicating some aspects of eternal judgement. Some of them are very effective and biblical. But because of the requirement of the traditional doctrine that "death does not involve non-existence", [Blocher:308] they take on a completely different character, substituting, changing and weakening the words of scripture in their context.

Thus the representations made by the very able minds of C. S. Lewis and F. F. Bruce, [Fudge: Foreword] who do not systematise their ideas of hell, but rather philosophise. Their ideas of eternal torment offered in their philosophising centre on the exclusion from God. The torment is a self inflicted awareness of the ungodly's isolation, and the gnawing of their conscience from past sins. In the ideas of Lewis, there is almost a sense of an enjoyment, albeit a demonic enjoyment, of the lot they have chosen.

Simon Chan deliberately sets out from a philosophical position to disprove annihilationism. He supposes a number of situations which carry difficulties, in his opinion, for annihilationism. His criteria plainly stated is the logic of knowledge; philosophy. Thus in dealing with the most apparently sensible of his arguments; human freedom, he does not take into account the revealed conditions of that freedom, i.e. following the Creator's guidelines, or death would otherwise be the result. What he does in effect is to create a definition of freedom which is based, as Descartes and Badham's immortality of the soul, on the 'true theory of knowledge'. This idea discussed earlier, maintains in essence, that true thinking and therefore existence, requires immortality. Effectively it is independent of God. Thus Chan argues, that if God made us to be free, he will not unmake us. Unmaking us, would change the ground rules with which God started out on our creation as free will agents. We would therefore not be really free, if God had determined to unmake us. [Chan:26,27] Freedom it should be noted, is defined in this argument, as action independent of God. This was the suggestion of the serpent; true freedom only belonged to God. This is the force of "you will be as God knowing good and evil". Humanity could have this freedom, in knowledge and action, by eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and disobeying the commandment. Chan is suggesting that humanity would not return to dust (body and soul), because it would invalidate the grounds of choice, which is intimately linked in philosophy with true knowledge.

The logical progression from this kind of thinking is that Chan also says, 'the doors of hell are locked on the *inside*'. In other words it is their choice. This is a situation of 'you will not die', in

⁵¹Other great world religions have Hells of their own, with surprisingly familiar scenery: Hindus number up to several million of them, while Buddhists count from eight hells to several thousand. None of these hold a soul eternally however, and no other religion ever raised hell to such importance as Christianity, under which it became a fantastic underground kingdom of cruelty, surrounded by dense strata of legend, myth, religious creed, and what from a distance, we might call dubious psychology." [Turner: 3]

which the wicked will continue as 'God', knowing good and evil, and even enjoying it in C S Lewis's picture. Such thinking does not square with scripture, which even Blocher, a defender of the traditional doctrine, acknowledges, "Yet the Biblical picture of the wrathful Lord and Judge of all hardly suggests a mere passive role. There is something suspicious in the zeal to exonerate God of responsibility in judgement" [Blocher:300]

Henri Blocher we have already noted draws from C S Lewis, "who exploits the word 'destruction' as used in scripture: '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?'" [Blocher:309] He also utilises Barth's idea of man as '*past*' to indicate a state where man is cast into hell dead, or his remains are thrown in, or, he throws himself in. What is most noticeable from the treatment which Blocher uses here, is the definitive use of 'remorse-consciousness' in the place of being tormented in hell-fire. He says, "There can be no proportion more exact to guilt than that of the suffering of seeing oneself in the light of truth." [Blocher:310] That certainly would be true in the facing of God at the great white throne in judgement, and to hear his pronouncements on our unrighteousness. But why the words of fire and torment⁵² can be so easily reinterpreted to mean something which is already implicit in the facing of God in judgement, is not explained. No scriptural justification is given for this interpretation of fire.

There is the desire by many traditionalists, to say that God does not inflict the punishment, but it is self-inflicted. Noted already by Blocher, this reduces the sense of penal judgement on sin and sinners exercised by God. The idea behind this is to minimise the charge of 'sadism' which is aimed at the God who inflicts this conscious torture in perpetuity. But this mollifying is not justified from scriptural declarations of the penal wrath of God in judgement. The lake of fire is specifically designated for the execution of the wrath of God. [Rev 14:10]

This desire indicates a lack of coherence in the traditional doctrine, breaking down in its morality and in its cogency with God's revealed character. Conditional immortality requires no alteration in the biblically interpreted figures for its coherence.

⁵²Alec Motyer in his recently revised book 'After Death', *assumes* the traditional interpretation of 'undying worm', and interprets the fire according to this presupposition. [Motyer:54] His only other reference to 'fire' as torment comes from a totally unrelated passage concerning widows and lust [1Cor7:9] where fire is not the subject, or indeed mentioned. [Motyer: 58]

A COHERENT THEODICY

The question of the origin and nature of evil has been one which has vexed humanity greatly. The scriptures give some indication of that origin, but it is not extensive, and seeks to deal rather with the situation here and now. The questions of the absolute origins of evil i.e. the nature and power of Lucifer, are outside of this discussion. However of the nature of evil in respect to men, the scriptures and thus Christianity, has a great deal to say. Inevitably because of the nature of that revelation, the relationship of God to evil is brought into critical focus. The relationship which the traditional doctrine reflects is one which, "renders any coherent Christian theodicy impossible by giving the evils of sin and suffering an eternal lodgement within God's Creation." [Hick:95] Henri Blocher has to admit the same and in detail, "orthodoxy has to maintain that the lost, in the final state, still depend *metaphysically* on God, and have in him their being if they are to exist at all ... and, yet, the very energy of their sinning, at every instant, is given them of God." [Blocher:302]

Speaking concerning the notion of endless sensory torment (however mollified), of the traditional doctrine, John Stott says, "I find the concept intolerable and do not understand how people can live with it without either cauterizing their feelings or cracking under the strain." [Edwards: 314] Pinnock and Brow comment on a less personal basis, "It has heaven and hell existing alongside each other forever and history ending badly in stark dualism." [Pinnock, Brow: 93]

In contrast conditional immortality, "does not impute to God the sadistic behaviour of torturing people endlessly, hell as destruction is just God will be completely victorious over sin and death, suffering and Satan. Only if all of them go up in smoke does history end in the unqualified victory of God." [Pinnock, Brow: 92,93]

Sometimes the representation of the judgement under the auspices of the traditional doctrine can appear very reasonable, apparently doing justice to the important idea of the reconciliation of all things to Christ: "Those sentenced to hell will see the justice of the act, they will confess Christ as Lord, yes, even their Lord, God will be vindicated in his acts and none shall doubt it for all eternity. There will be no resistance to his will in any part of creation, not because he has annihilated any potential but because he has convinced all of the goodness and perfection of his justice. God will be glorified in hell as well as in heaven." [Mathie: 7] Endless conscious torment in this hell is spoken of as; separation, loneliness, a sense of loss, both regarding the past life and now the missing of eternal life.

This polished and well worded statement regarding the reconciliation of all things to God under the traditional doctrine, has one major flaw. Like all statements of similar tone, it fulfils the lie in the Garden of Eden. A paraphrase of the encounter with the serpent in the Garden using the above ideas reads like this; 'you have not ceased to exist, but now really know, as God knew all along, that you will be endlessly consciously tormented because of your

knowledge, of the good you had, and the evil you now experience.'

It sounds very believable!

Conditional immortality avoids the potential of fulfilling that lie of the serpent, and attributing a hideous theodicy to God, by adhering to the word of God: **you will die**.

The lie told by the serpent and referred to in this paper is devastatingly powerful. It is immediate, intermediate and eschatological in its influence. It draws its power illegitimately from the truth of the grace of God operating in salvation and salvation events. Humanity is seduced by its power, and tragically the church is compromised by it. Where it influences the church in its thinking, it corrupts and distorts the grace and the character of God.

CONCLUSION

This paper has dealt with the very difficult phrases of judgement. It has shown them to be the strongest possible expressions of extinction and non-existence. It has further established that all complementary biblical doctrines point to death as dissolution or extinction. In addition, this paper has demonstrated that the traditional doctrine has carried a deadly payload doctrinally and practically. There is an agreement, contained within it, with the original temptation and lie.

In the scope⁵³ of this paper and in examining these issues, conditional immortality emerges as a theology which upholds, in detail and in breadth, the witness of scripture concerning the acts of God.

In the last two centuries, there has been increasing witness to the truths related in this paper. In the last two decades, it is a matter of record that more and more respected church leaders have acknowledged the validity of the theology of conditional immortality. God is moving in his church in a particular way with respect to these truths. Why?

We are a conglomerate and pluralistic society. It is one which has been permeated by materialistic and evolutionary thought. There has been a great backlash in the form of the New Age, a people seeking for spirituality. As a result, old thought forms have disappeared. Metaphysical concepts which may have allowed the traditional doctrine to function for the gospel, despite its hideous payload, have disappeared. The battle has sharpened in times which many consider to be drawing close to the fulfilment of all things, and the return of Christ. The church cannot now afford, in its task of evangelism and world mission, ungodly ideas in its basic fundamental doctrines, to which God's Spirit will not bear witness. The effect of the communication revolution which is under way, means that the society which we have here today in this country, is the world's society tomorrow.

In order to meet these changing perspectives and mentalities of society, God is sharpening his church in her thinking. These changes are driven by a combination of technology and pseudo spiritualities, into which the doctrine of conditional immortality speaks uncompromisingly and with authority for the Glory of God.

The challenge to us today is whether we will we stay with the old familiar ideas, comfortable in the approval of centuries of tradition, or whether we can be discerning and courageous ...

*Let God be true, and every man a liar.
As it is written:
"So that you may be proved right
when you speak and prevail when you judge."
[Romans 3:4]*

⁵³A concern which has not been dealt with here include the relationship to other religions and cultures, for which Hebblethwaithe and others suggest a post-mortem possibility of salvation to circumvent the exclusivism of Christianity. [Hebblethwaithe:218,219]

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