

A MORE CHARITABLE CHRISTIAN ESCHATOLOGY

**Attempts from the Victorian era to the present day to mitigate the
problem of eternal punishment with particular attention to the
teaching of T.R. Birks and its influence.**

Submitted to the University of Wales through the department of Religious and
Theological Studies in the University of Wales College, Cardiff for the degree of M.Phil.

By

RAYMOND GWYN BROMHAM, 2000

SUMMARY

The central purpose of this study is an assessment of the development of the Christian doctrine of eternal punishment from the early Victorian age to the present day. This has been done with a view to examining any drift from the traditional view, noting in particular how far this movement away from orthodoxy has been part of the thinking of those of an evangelical persuasion. The growth of other views such as universalism and conditional immortality (annihilationism) is traced, the latter being discovered as the increasingly more acceptable alternative for evangelical Christians than the conventional teaching of eternal conscious suffering for those believed to be finally rejected. Of the many nineteenth-century figures involved in this debate, T. R. Birks has been selected for closer examination, because of the somewhat unique character of his ideas on this doctrine and because of their disturbing impact on the Evangelical Alliance of his day. Similarly, the assessment of twentieth-century developments has focused on Henri Blocher, who, like Birks, has been noted for the rare view that those ultimately lost will acquiesce, despite their eternal suffering, in the righteousness of God, their judge. However, in the conclusion, one's findings incline to conditional immortality as the more acceptable alternative view of eternal punishment, especially in the context of biblical teaching, theodicy and the promotion of the gospel. This opinion is endorsed by the fact many scholars and leaders of the evangelical sector of the church strongly favour the conditionalist stance.

Contents

Introduction

1

Chapter 1: The Victorian Debate: Everlasting Punishment

Or Eternal Hope	12
<i>Causes of this wind of change</i>	13
<i>Conditional Immortality: growth and consolidation</i>	17
<i>Opposition to conditionalism</i>	30
<i>Universalism: latent and explicit</i>	32
<i>Stronger universalism</i>	47
<i>A hesitant attempt to defend the traditional view</i>	49
<i>Classic evangelical defence of the traditional view</i>	51

Chapter 2: T. R. Birks: (1) Victory: Hell Without Evil

55

<i>Historical Background</i>	56
<i>“The Victory of Divine Goodness”</i>	

64

<i>Originality of Birks</i>	66
<i>“Difficulties of Belief”</i>	84

Chapter 3: T. R. Birks: (2) “This Painful Yet Interesting Controversy”

<i>The role of E.H. Bickersteth</i>	93
<i>The coverage of the controversy in ‘Evangelical Christendom’</i>	97
<i>Birks and F.D. Maurice</i>	105
<i>F.W. Grant’s critique of Birks</i>	107
<i>“Lux Mundi” and R.L. Ottley</i>	113
<i>Assessment</i>	115

Chapter 4: Twentieth Century Developments, Particularly The Consolidation of Conditional Immortality Among Evangelicals

117

<i>The pull towards universalism</i>	
--------------------------------------	--

117		
	<i>A kinder hell and the missionary imperative</i>	
125		
	<i>Mission, evangelism and the wider hope</i>	
127		
	<i>The growth and consolidation of Conditional Immortality</i>	130
	<i>Other advocates of conditionalism</i>	138
	<i>Reaction against conditionalism</i>	144
	<i>Wenham: the sequel</i>	147
	<i>Continuing conflict and official consensus</i>	148
Chapter 5: Henri Blocher: Birks Redivivus?		
150		
	<i>Blocher's thesis: a re-appraisal of the traditional view</i>	153
	<i>Blocher's thesis: sin shall be no more</i>	153
	<i>The contribution of C.S. Lewis</i>	156
Conclusion: What more can He say . . . ?		159
	<i>Some reactions to Blocher's theory</i>	159
	<i>Pawson's original contribution</i>	160
Bibliography		172

INTRODUCTION

In his discussion of Christian beliefs, the celebrated astronomer, Fred Hoyle, expresses his exasperation over the way Christians approach life after death:

In their anxiety to avoid the notion that death is the complete end of our existence, they suggest what is to me an equally horrible alternative. If I were given the choice of how long I should like to live with my present physical and mental equipment, I should decide on a good deal more than seventy years. But I doubt whether I should be wise to decide on more than 300 years. Already I am very aware of my own limitations, and I think that 300 years is as long as I should like to put up with them. Now what Christians offer me is an eternity of frustration.¹

This 'horrible alternative' of heavenly frustration is a far cry from the terrible possibility of hellish torment, which has been the more usual cause for concern of those contemplating the next world. And when such a prospect is proclaimed by the Church, with the alleged support of Scripture and tradition, as an eternally conscious experience, the sense of outrage or hopelessness is unbearable for those lacking the assurance of God's love. Certainly, the Calvinistic doctrine of reprobation would consolidate such a reaction. However, acquiescence in despair for oneself or others has not been an option for a growing number over the last one hundred and fifty years or so, who have challenged the dogma of eternal torment, and who have sought alternatives more in accord with divine justice and human worth. The object of this study will be to consider such attempts of a growing body of Christians in this period to mitigate the horrors of eternal punishment, while seeking more humane ways of understanding the final judgement and while acknowledging the authority and full inspiration of Scripture.

Granted the steady and powerful progress of the liberal and critical approach to Scripture and theology during the period under consideration, it has to be admitted that the growth of the challenge to the traditional doctrine of eternal punishment has virtually paralleled this less constrained attitude to the Bible and its teaching. As Leslie Houlden has observed:

In the matter of the integrity of doctrine, the effect of liberal thought has seemed to involve a gradual attenuation of the orthodox doctrinal ‘package’. First one, then another element has been challenged and apparently abandoned: the inspiration and authority of Scripture, the magisterium of the church, the incarnation, the Trinity, hell, life after death.²

However, the misgivings of various evangelicals over this harsh dogma are hardly likely to have been the result of an erosion of their confidence in the Bible (including its teaching on the existence of hell), if the essential definition of evangelicalism is to mean anything. It cannot, then, be gratuitously assumed that denial of eternal punishment as traditionally taught goes hand in hand with a weak view of the inspiration of Scripture³. Even so, the attempts of some evangelical Christians to mitigate the horrors of the traditional view of hell by promoting ideas such as conditional immortality (or annihilationism⁴), have not met with the approval of fellow evangelicals or from others of a conservative doctrinal stance.

The object, then, of this study or quest is to review and evaluate the progress of this doctrine from Victorian times to the present, particularly, but not exclusively, noting the interest and reaction of the evangelical fraternity. This will be done, then, in as broad a context as possible. Since the rapid growth of the tenet of *conditional immortality* in the nineteenth century and its consolidation in the second half of the twentieth century have

¹ Fred Hoyle, *The Nature of the Universe*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1963, p. 123.

² Leslie Houlden, *Liberalism: Britain, Modern Christian Thought*, Ed. Alistair McGrath, Oxford, Blackwell, 1997 reprint, p. 322.

³ This can be seen again, e.g., in the doctrinal stance of the Christadelphians (originating in the middle of the nineteenth century) who have always held to the infallibility of Scripture despite rejecting eternal punishment (as well as other doctrines, such as the Trinity). Further, of particular note here is **T.R. Birks**, whose independent ideas on the future of the unsaved were considered unscriptural by some of his contemporaries in the Evangelical Alliance. Yet, far from abandoning the orthodox view of the Bible, he demonstrated [in his *The Bible and Modern Thought*, 1861] his allegiance to scriptural authority by mounting an assault on the notorious *Essays and Reviews* soon after its appearance. Published in 1860 *Essays and Reviews* was perhaps the earliest major and classical case of the liberal attempt to accommodate traditional belief to various aspects of ‘modern’ knowledge.

⁴ Early in the debate about eternal punishment, F.W. Grant assumed conditional immortality to be identical with annihilationism. See his *Facts and Theories as to a Future State*, London, Alfred Holness (or New York, Martin Cathcart), 1879, p. 5. This thesis virtually follows this view. Incidentally, Grant, a staunch evangelical traditionalist, cites the example of the unorthodox Christadelphians, to warn against entertaining ideas such as annihilationism (p. 8f).

proved to be of major significance in the history of modern evangelicals, this view will have to occupy a large part of this enquiry.

The emergence of the Evangelical Alliance in 1846 promised a new stage in the promotion of unity among evangelicals. However, this aim was threatened by the unfortunate over-reaction to the views of T. R. Birks, general secretary of that body, almost a quarter of a century later. Our study will focus on this for good reasons. Because of the row over Birks' apparent mitigation of the unproductive horrors of hell, his views do not appear to have been adequately considered at the time as another serious interpretation of the dogma. His theory seems to have resurfaced at the Fourth Edinburgh Conference on Christian Dogmatics in 1991, in the form of Henri Blocher's lecture, indicating perhaps that its appeal is not exhausted. One has given extended consideration to the ideas of Birks, then, because his contribution to the debate has not received sufficient recognition or appreciation, in my opinion. No doubt the reason for this is due largely to the fact that his books, relevant to the topic, are virtually unknown even in evangelical circles. Again, it may be assumed that the notoriety attached to his name has not encouraged those who have heard of him to explore his teaching further. Hopefully, this exercise will go some of the way in remedying this gap in knowledge when it comes to the history of the doctrine under review. The boldness and originality alone of his views deserve some acknowledgement; but when they are seen to encourage a greater awareness of the problem facing theodicy in the traditional dogma of eternal torment they merit more than passing attention. The proportion of the thesis devoted to Birks should not be seen as an attempt to promote his approach to the problem, despite a certain empathy I have had with his thinking. Such objectivity, I hope, will be evident if only through my sympathies for the conditionalist stance.

The main scope of this study

Several of the significant contributors [to this debate] reviewed could not be described, properly speaking, as evangelicals as such; but, as already intimated, this enquiry is not intended to be exclusive or narrow. However, it ought to be made clear that the focus will

be chiefly on the way *evangelical* Christians have been involved in questioning the traditional expression of the doctrine of eternal punishment. Although, from a historical perspective, the word evangelical is associated largely in many minds with a particular party in the Anglican church, the term cuts across denominational boundaries. Geoffrey Best, for example, pictures the “Evangelical impulse” as a stream flowing towards the nineteenth century along the three channels of Methodism, Nonconformity and Anglicanism.⁵

Briefly surveying the history of evangelicalism, John Stott, the elder-statesman of British evangelicals, sees the tradition soundly rooted in the New Testament *evangel*.⁶ Furthermore, while he recognises that the label, ‘evangelical’, did not come into widespread use until the early eighteenth century in connection with the so-called ‘Evangelical Revival’ associated with John Wesley and George Whitefield,⁷ he acknowledges the significance here of the fifteenth-century *doctor evangelicus*, John Wycliffe, and the sixteenth-century Reformers, who were also known as evangelicals⁸ [which was particularly the case before the Second Diet of Speyer in 1529, after which the term gave way to the label, Protestant⁹ - albeit, *evangelical/evangelisch* is still used in Germany to distinguish Protestants from Roman Catholics]. Of the many celebrated eighteenth/nineteenth-century evangelical stalwarts, Charles Simeon¹⁰ is worth noting in connection with the main subject of this dissertation, for he was vicar at Holy Trinity Cambridge from 1782-1833, the church where T.R. Birks ministered from 1866.¹¹ Further, concerning this period David Bebbington claims that the hundred years or so

⁵ G. Best on Evangelicalism and the Victorians, in A. Symondson (ed.), *The Victorian Crisis of Faith*, London, S.P.C.K., 1970, pp. 40-42.

⁶ John Stott, *Evangelical Truth*, Leicester, IVP, 1999, p. 18.

⁷ In his examination of the origins of evangelicalism, David Bebbington traces this “popular Protestant movement” back to the 1730s in his *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, London, Routledge, 1989, p. 1.

⁸ *Evangelical Truth*, *op. cit.* p. 17f.

⁹ See, e.g., Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought: an Introduction*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1993, pp. 238 & 240.

¹⁰ For the considerable influence amongst evangelicals of Charles Simeon see G. Kitson Clark, *Churchmen and the Condition of England 1832-1885*, London, Methuen, 1973, p. 47.

¹¹ Birks was ‘perpetual curate’ there until ill-health forced his resignation in 1877. See article on Birks in *The Blackwell Dictionary of Evangelical Biography* Vol. 1, Oxford, Blackwell, 1995, which, curiously, makes no reference to Birks’ controversial book, *The Victory of Divine Goodness*.

before the First World War deserve to be known as the “Evangelical Century”, albeit by the early 1870s evangelicalism was “on the ebb”.¹²

Again, Stott is anxious to distinguish between evangelicalism and *fundamentalism*, which sometimes seem to be identified in popular thought. Although he accepts that originally in the early twentieth century fundamentalism was an acceptable synonym for evangelicalism, he asserts that now the great majority of evangelicals (at least in Europe) repudiate the fundamentalist label because of its somewhat obscurantist tendencies.¹³

Of the various types of evangelical that have been identified¹⁴, *conservative evangelical* perhaps best describes the principal type of evangelicalism, which will be focused upon in this work - particularly British conservative evangelicalism. However, this description is not used in an overly strict way, as *conservative evangelical* sometimes appears to be used by non-evangelicals virtually in the sense of *evangelical* in the broad sense; and also some of those evangelicals, whose views will be examined, are more properly speaking *liberal evangelical* in their position. Yet, whatever the differences between the different kinds of evangelical might be, there is essential agreement; and such differences are not so fundamental [*pace* I. Murray, whose views we will note presently] as to disqualify a basic common definition. Owen Chadwick observes that the evangelical Anglicans of the Victorian age were numerous and did “contain a wide range of opinion” and “were as various as the Tractarians”. Yet, he notes also that “they held certain broad principles”: they preached the cross, the depravity of man and justification by faith; they were conscientious students of the Bible, and while they feared Rome as the antichrist they

¹² D. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, *op. cit.* pp. 149 & 152.

¹³ *Evangelical Truth*, pp. 18-24. Iain Murray, *Evangelicalism Divided*, Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 2000, pp. 17 & 178 also notes how non-evangelicals tend to consider all evangelicals to be fundamentalists. Interestingly, one of the celebrated fundamentalists of the early twentieth century, Robert Anderson, seems to echo Birks, when he suggests, “It may be that the recognition of the perfect justice and goodness of God will lead the lost to accept their doom.” R. Anderson, *Human Destiny: After Death – What?*, London, Pickering and Inglis, 1913; quoted by Vernon C. Grounds in his article, “The Final State of the Wicked”, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 24, 1981, p. 219.

¹⁴ Nigel Wright notes the six “sub-communities” proposed by Gabriel Fackre [in ‘Evangelical, Evangelicalism’ in A. Richardson & J. Bowden (eds.), *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology*, London, SCM, 1983, pp. 191-92]. See N. Wright, *The Radical Evangelical*, London, S.P.C.K., 1996, pp. 5-9. Stott

were friendly to “orthodox and Protestant dissenters”.¹⁵ The redoubtable nineteenth-century evangelical Anglican, J.C. Ryle, lists five doctrinal features characteristic of evangelical conviction: the absolute supremacy of Scripture, human sinfulness, the work of Christ, the inward work of the Holy Spirit, and His outward work.¹⁶ Again, more recently, David Bebbington has isolated in his book, “Evangelicalism in Modern Britain”, what he considers to be the four basic characteristics of the evangelical stance: *conversionism, activism, biblicism* and *crucicentrism*.¹⁷ Bebbington maintains that despite the variations in the statements made by evangelicals, these four characteristics are “a common core that has remained constant down the centuries.”¹⁸ Such an analysis is shared by John Stott, who describes Bebbington’s book as a “magisterial survey”,¹⁹ and by other leading evangelical scholars, for example Derek Tidball, principal of the London Bible College, who comments that Bebbington’s basis “has quickly established itself as near to a consensus as we might ever expect to reach.”²⁰ According to this view, then, evangelicalism is chiefly characterised by an emphasis on the necessity of conversion; on subsequent strenuous effort for God and others particularly in evangelism;²¹ on the

also refers to Fackre’s classification: *Evangelical Truth, op. cit.* p. 25f. One wonders, however, if there is too much overlap to make too much demarcation.

¹⁵ Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church* (Part One), London, SCM Press, 1971, p. 440f. Chadwick goes on to note that in practical matters evangelicals of this period were characterised by an austere lifestyle and a severe discipline, and that there was a tendency on the part of others to despise and caricature them. See pp. 444-46. In Part Two of his *Victorian Church*, SCM Press, 1972, p. 336f Chadwick notes how little regard Queen Victoria had for evangelicals and Tractarians alike, even instructing her adviser, Davidson, not to promote them in the church. Both groups she considered to be extreme and damaging to the fabric of the established church.

¹⁶ E. Jay, *Faith and Doubt in Victorian Britain*, London, Macmillan, 1986, pp. 13-15 (where reference is made to Ryle’s, *Evangelical Religion: what it is, and what it is not*, 1867).

¹⁷ D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain, op. cit.*, pp. 2-19.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 4. See also p. 19. Stott also notes J.I. Packer’s ‘anatomy of evangelicalism’, which has six fundamental principles[in his *The Evangelical Anglican Identity Problem*, Oxford, Latimer House, 1978, pp.15-23], *Evangelical Truth, op. cit.* p. 26f.

¹⁹ *Evangelical Truth, op. cit.* p. 27.

²⁰ D.J. Tidball, *Who Are the Evangelicals?*, London, Marshall Pickering, 1994, p. 14. (Tidball’s book also has a short but useful account of evangelicals and the problem of hell, making a brief [but potentially misleading, when he speaks of Birks as having “universalist tendencies”] reference to T.R. Birks p. 151; and it would appear that he needs to be a little more explicit or accurate when he affirms that John Stott and Peter Travis hold the view of conditional immortality, p. 153; for while both may be strongly sympathetic to this position, they are tentative or agnostic in the final analysis. See S. Travis, *Christian Hope and the Future of Man*, Leicester, IVP, 1980, pp. 133-36; and D.L. Edwards & J. Stott, *Essentials*, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1988, p. 302.) Stott notes others, who have adopted Bebbington’s ‘quadrilateral’: see *Evangelical Truth*, p. 154n.

²¹ The ‘popular’ evangelism (in domestic or city mission work) of adventurous Anglican evangelicals came under censure from the 1820s onwards, for its “irregularity” and its “proximity to Nonconformity”. See

atonement work of Christ on the Cross; and on the centrality of the Bible as the infallible - if not inerrant - revealed word of God.²² Of these primary characteristics of evangelical conviction, *conversionism* is of especial interest in the context of this thesis, for, as Bebbington notes, traditional evangelicalism has insisted on preaching on the “terrors” and “reality” of hell to secure conversions.²³ Likewise, writing about the decline in the belief in hell in the latter part of the nineteenth-century, Jeffrey Cox comments: “When Hell was abolished, conversion became less urgent.”²⁴

According to Bebbington the unity of evangelicalism was broken²⁵ in the 1920s because of various pressures and differences particularly in connection with the question of the inerrancy of Scripture; and from this time conservative and liberal evangelicals were “walking apart”, as something of a battle raged within evangelicalism between liberalism and conservatism or “Fundamentalism” and “Modernism”, concurrently in Britain and America.²⁶ Iain Murray, a staunch defender of historic evangelicalism, gives a more up-to-date assessment of the way this division has developed. In his recently published, *Evangelicalism Divided*, he gives a detailed and penetrating account of the “crucial change” in evangelicalism in the years 1950-2000. Substantially, he claims, this unfortunate trend [as he views it] can be traced back to the appearance mid-century of the “new evangelicalism” in Fuller Theological Seminary in the United States.²⁷ This reaction to stifling fundamentalism was popularised in America by Billy Graham, who in turn, through his evangelistic crusades, influenced evangelicals in Britain to adopt a more

Geoffrey Best, *Mid-Victorian Britain 1851-75*, London, Fontana, 1985, p. 210. Again, “the subjective experience of conversion” is considered “the key validation of evangelical Christian faith” in R.J. Helmstadter & B. Lightman (eds.), *Victorian Faith in Crisis*, London, Macmillan, 1990, p.15.

²² This high view of Scripture makes evangelicals confident, when studying biblical doctrines such as God’s judgement, that their effort is meaningful, because the Bible is seen to be consistent with itself; and this enables the pursuit of ‘systematic theology’. See M.J. Erickson, “Principles, Permanence, and Future Divine Judgement: A Case Study In Theological Method”, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 28 (3), 1985, p. 319; and also R.J. Bauckham, “Universalism: a historical survey”, *Themelios*, 4 (2), 1979, p. 52.

²³ *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, *op. cit.*, p. 5f.

²⁴ Jeffrey Cox, *The English Churches in a Secular Society*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1982, p. 146.

²⁵ One feature [relevant to our enquiry] of this division is the differing opinions of evangelicals on the question of the fate of those who have never heard the Gospel. See M.J. McVeigh, “The fate of those who’ve never heard? It depends”, *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, 21.4, 1985.

²⁶ *Evangelicalism*, *op. cit.*, ch. 6, 181f.

²⁷ I. Murray, *Evangelicalism Divided*, *op. cit.* pp. 20f, 70.

ecumenical approach in the task of reaching the unconverted.²⁸ This development had the support of many evangelical Anglicans, particularly John Stott, who encouraged Graham to pursue this more flexible stance in ecclesiology and evangelism.²⁹ Indeed, Murray sees Stott as one of the chief architects of the new evangelicalism in Britain; and he notes particularly the lead given by him in this direction at the first National Evangelical Anglican Congress at Keele in 1967 and subsequently.³⁰ Bebbington interprets this particular development more positively, and he sees the Keele congress as “the chief landmark in a postwar Evangelical renaissance”.³¹ For many Anglican evangelicals such a broader policy was pursued to ensure that the evangelical party had a significant voice in the Anglican communion; and instead of coming out from an institution which had become vague in its convictions (for example no longer requiring its clergy to assent to the Thirty-Nine Articles) they became involved both in its ecumenical and liberal developments.³² In fact such a bold departure from the narrower historic evangelicalism seems to have resulted in an actual increase in the numbers of evangelicals in the Anglican church, at least in the late 1960s.³³ (Incidentally, despite his more liberal ecclesiology, Stott would certainly be considered a champion of conservative evangelicalism in his general doctrinal stance, as any reading of his *Evangelical Truth*, for example, would make clear.) This trend continued steadily, and by the time of the second National Evangelical Anglican Congress at Nottingham in 1977, it became clear that many younger evangelicals especially were keen to take this wider view even further. The increasing sympathy towards Rome was illustrated in the way one up-and-coming leader, David Watson, “deplored the division of the church at the Reformation”.³⁴

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 24-31, 58f.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 49f.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 44, 132-41, etc.

³¹ *Evangelicalism, op. cit.*, p. 249.

³² The appeal of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones at the 1966 Evangelical Alliance’s ‘National Assembly for Evangelicals’ for a more separatist approach did not receive any support from the ‘new evangelicals’ such as Stott. Later Jim Packer also distanced himself from his friend Lloyd-Jones on this issue. See *Evangelicalism Divided* pp. 44-47 and 93-99.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 126-7.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 100f.

Also in the realm of biblical scholarship, a greater readiness to listen to liberal theologians and critics was being manifested increasingly at this time; and again, younger evangelical scholars were in the vanguard, Free Church as well as Anglican.³⁵ Clearly, it was increasingly felt necessary by many evangelical intellectuals that a less rigid approach to biblical scholarship and interpretation should replace the older view, which included biblical inerrancy and verbal inspiration. This was considered unavoidable if evangelicals were not to be marginalised and seen to be irrelevant in the academic world.³⁶ Murray notes how one of the more conservative evangelical Anglican scholars, Jim Packer, was becoming disenchanted with the way matters were developing, particularly with respect to increasing compromise with theologically liberal ideas; even so, he regrets the participation of Packer in the recent American phenomenon of ‘Evangelicals and Catholics Together’.³⁷

In short, then, Murray is clearly concerned at the way things have been going with evangelicals, with the slide towards a broader (ecumenical and Rome-bound³⁸) ecclesiology and towards an understanding of Scripture, which has led many of them to abandon the doctrine of the verbal inspiration of the Bible.³⁹ Significantly, while Murray is deeply disturbed at the way this has led to the undermining of traditional biblical

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 174-76.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 179f.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 132f, p. 230-34. In *Evangelicals & Catholics Together*, C. Colson and R. Neuhaus (eds.), London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1996, p. 167, Packer defends his integrity and consistency by arguing that, while he still holds to the Reformed theology, he has been a long-time supporter of “informal grass-roots collaboration with Roman Catholics in ministry”.

³⁸ Murray is concerned about another dimension of this trend, which may be seen in the evangelical *Alpha* outreach phenomenon. See *Evangelicalism Divided*, p. 244. Significantly, in *Alpha News*, April-July 2000, it is reported by Mark de Leyritz on p.12 that 500 French Roman Catholic priests have been trained to run the *Alpha* course. Incidentally, one of the paradoxes facing some evangelicals whose broad ecclesiology would allow them to be sympathetic to Rome is that they would not want to embrace Roman Catholic conservative teaching on certain dogmas, such as hell and purgatory; and some might have more sympathy with Alan Richardson’s view that the “whole medieval mumbo-jumbo of hell and purgatory and limbo must go . . .” (*An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament*, 1958, London, SCM, p. 363.)

³⁹ *Evangelicalism Divided*, *op. cit.*, ch. 7 (with the telling title, “ ‘Intellectual Respectability’ and Scripture”), especially p. 193f, where Murray dismisses David Bebbington’s attempt to substitute ‘infallible’ for ‘inerrant’.

doctrine, nowhere does he directly refer in this book to the conditionalist-traditionalist debate on eternal punishment, which has been so active among evangelicals.⁴⁰

Before moving on from Murray's assessment of the situation, and assuming its accuracy and impartiality, one wonders how longer some – if not many - evangelicals will feel able to be described by that name in its full traditional sense. Certainly, if *liberal evangelical* is not too much of a misnomer, it may be that such a title best describes those, whom Murray judges to have departed from historic evangelicalism.

Nevertheless, Bebbington's 'quadrilateral' is generally useful and apparently becoming widely acceptable to evangelicals, albeit Stott notes how others have added to it.⁴¹ In his analysis of *conversionism*, Bebbington deals with the related issues of timing (gradual or sudden), means (the part played by the Holy Spirit and the human will), baptism (the dilemma of Anglican evangelicals over baptismal regeneration) and assurance.⁴² Certainly, this last feature, assurance, has been a significant aspect of Christian doctrine especially since the Protestant Reformation, and has become a dogma firmly resisted by the Roman Catholic Church, as it made clear in the Council of Trent.⁴³ In the context of this present study, an observer could be excused for seeing a link between the insistence of many evangelicals on the doctrine of assurance of personal salvation and on that of eternal conscious punishment; for if one is confident of one's own heavenly destiny, it becomes easier to believe in the everlasting punishment of those finally rejected. Such assurance is not the only area where evangelical Christians exhibit an attitude of certainty.

⁴⁰ This omission is all the more noticeable in that on pp. 145-6 he makes a detailed doctrinal assessment of the 1995 report of the Doctrine Commission of the Church of England, *The Mystery of Salvation*, which adopts a conditionalist/annihilationist stance.

⁴¹ Stott, *Evangelical Truth*, *op. cit.* 154n.

⁴² *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, *op. cit.*, pp. 6-10; and pp. 42-50, which deal more fully with assurance.

⁴³ See e.g. McGrath's *Reformation Thought*, *op. cit.* p. 117f and Joel Beeke's doctoral thesis *The Quest for Full Assurance – the legacy of Calvin and his successors*, Edinburgh, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1999, pp. 19-53, where we note the Reformers' teaching that assurance is the birthright of every believer, albeit some may lack the consciousness of it. Again, Chadwick *The Victorian Church* (Part Two), *op. cit.*, p. 471 notes how evangelical piety "encouraged men to find the assurance of salvation in the belief that the converted man could never be allowed to fall from grace."

The *biblicism* noted by Bebbington is often illustrated in a simple and general acceptance of and confidence in what the Bible teaches.

However, despite this focus on evangelical scholars and leaders, I have benefitted greatly from the study of others, particularly F. D. Maurice, F. W. Farrar and William Temple, who have demonstrated that there is no shame in being unable to pontificate with ‘systematic’ certainty in an area of doctrine, where we should move with reluctance, compassion and sensitivity.

The literature of this period is vast and one does not pretend to have examined most of what has been written. Indeed, to have attempted to use more works than I have would have made this exercise unwieldy and would have turned it into a book catalogue or omnibus review! However, I feel reasonably confident that sufficient has been studied to present an accurate picture of the way the argument has gone in the church generally and with respect to evangelical Christians.

In addition to the doctrine of eternal punishment itself, the associated issues of the ‘wider hope’, the final number of the saved and the prospects of those who have never had a proper chance to respond to the Gospel challenge will be addressed. As I hope to demonstrate, it is easier to stick with a traditional harsh view of hell, if one is confident that, in the end, it is the destination of the minority.

Shortly after embarking on this research, I discovered that the Evangelical Alliance had already initiated a study of their own on the doctrine of hell, which should be published early in 2000 [by Paternoster Press].⁴⁴

Note : the term *evangelical* will be used in the lower case.

⁴⁴ I was sent (25.8.99), for my comments, a copy of the draft report of 'The Nature of Hell', which has been produced by the ACUTE working group. As this first draft is not for quotation etc., I can only note at this time that the study has been quite comprehensive, broadly from a traditionalist stance albeit sympathetic to the conditionalist view. Reference to T.R. Birks is rather brief, and in my opinion too inclined to understand his teaching as 'restorationist'. This has strengthened my feeling of justification in 'majoring' on Birks as I have done.

Chapter 1 : THE VICTORIAN DEBATE : EVERLASTING PUNISHMENT OR ETERNAL HOPE ?

The purpose of this chapter will be to examine the development of the doctrine of final judgement mainly in the Victorian age, broadly noting the trend towards a kinder view of hell. This will also have the advantage of setting the scene for a more detailed appraisal of the somewhat novel and controversial approach of T. R. Birks. To achieve this, it will be necessary to review the doctrines of Conditional Immortality (or Annihilationism) and Universalism (or Restorationism)¹, theories conflicting with each other and with the orthodox doctrine of eternal punishment. Bearing in mind that one of our principal concerns is the reaction of conventional or evangelical Christians to developments of this nature, the chapter will close with a brief look at W. G. T. Shedd's, *The Doctrine of Endless Punishment*, which has become an evangelical classic on this subject.

Geoffrey Rowell is not exaggerating, so it would seem, when he claims that :

. . . there were few issues which figured more prominently in the nineteenth-century theological debate than those of the everlasting punishment of the wicked and the immortality of the soul . . . There can be no doubt that the doctrine of everlasting punishment was a major concern for Christians for the greater part of the nineteenth century.²

Again, after noting the assertion that the preaching of eternal punishment was behind the success of the eighteenth century Evangelical Revival, A. G. Secrett proceeds :

A second proposition, also based on emotional rather than scientific grounds, is that a doctrine held by the Wesleys and Whitefield and Toplady, and later by Spurgeon and many other honoured preachers, is sacrosanct, and outside the scope of discussion. This proposition is difficult to sustain in the presence of the fact

¹ Hereafter to be referred to in *lowercase*.

² Geoffrey Rowell, *Hell And The Victorians*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1974, pp. 1 & 3. This chapter of the thesis will draw substantially upon this useful study. Rowell, now Bishop of Basingstoke and Emeritus Fellow of Keble College, Oxford, was a member of The Doctrine Commission of the Church of England, which published *The Mystery of Salvation* in 1995 (which inclines towards a view of the annihilation of those who ultimately reject God).

that in the nineteenth century, when a lively interest was re-awakened in eschatological study, a number of equally eminent, learned and faithful Evangelical leaders and accredited teachers, among them Archbishop Whateley, Canon Henry Constable, Canon Hay Aitken, Rev. Edward White, Dr. R.W. Dale, Dr. J.W. Thirtle and Dr. R. F. Weymouth, bravely challenged and repudiated this same doctrine as unscriptural.³

Secrett's statement is an indication – if one is needed - that the re-examination of this doctrine in the last century was not the work of an insignificant minority of irresponsible thinkers splashing about, so to speak, in the sea of heterodoxy; but rather the serious enterprise of men of learning and orthodoxy, many of whom were of recognised evangelical standing.

That such a preoccupation was intense and widespread is clearly reflected in the vast abundance of works on this doctrine in this period. Edward Fudge, for instance, notes that when Ezra Abbot published *The Literature of the Doctrine of a Future Life* in 1880, which was an annotated bibliography on eternal punishment and immortality, he listed no less than 4977 titles!⁴

Causes of this wind of change

A doctrinal literary phenomenon of this magnitude indicates that something was stirring in this area of Christian teaching and conviction in an unprecedented way – and reasons are not hard to find. Leroy Edwin Froom, in his monumental and encyclopaedic work on the history of conditionalism, contends that the French Revolution's attack on the Roman Catholic church had encouraged a bold re-examination of its dogmas, including those of

³ A.G. Secrett, *The Roman Catholic Doctrine of Hell in the Light of History and Holy Scripture*, n.d., Acton, Words of Life, p. 7. The author of this small but significant booklet I presume to be the man of that name frequently referred to in the biography of Dr. D. M. Lloyd-Jones, and described as a deacon of Westminster Chapel London (having joined in 1941) and as a great friend of Dr. Lloyd-Jones. See Iain Murray, *D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones*, Edinburgh, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1990, Vol. 2, p. 101, etc. In the course of this thesis we will have occasion more than once to note that, though a traditionalist as far as this doctrine is concerned, Dr. Lloyd-Jones was a great friend of certain individuals, who happened to be exponents of conditionalism.

⁴ Edward Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes*, Houston, Providential Press, 1982, p. 396. (L.E. Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers*, Washington, D.C., Review and Herald, 1966, Vol. II, p. 488 referring to the same work, mentions *5,300 books and pamphlets*. Is he wrong or did Fudge not include the pamphlets?)

purgatory and eternal punishment.⁵ This was accompanied, he continues, by a renewed interest in the related issue of the Millennium, producing more than a hundred books on eschatology in the first four decades of the century and consolidating interest in the final destiny of man, as the focus concentrated on the end-times.⁶

Rowell considers the Secularist attack on the *brutalizing* affect of the traditional doctrine of hell as another significant factor, along with the challenge being posed by the promotion of evolution; the latter, for example, undermining the assumption of a soul and its immortality.⁷ Another source of such doubt he suggests is the fact that there were more clergy working then in unsalubrious urban situations; and that the over-familiarity with death because of poverty, overcrowding and disease played an obvious part in the increasing objection to the traditional horrific picture of damnation.⁸ Such frequent confrontation with bereavement, we may note in anticipation of later remarks on Farrar, was a chief reason for revulsion against the hell of the popular imagination:

In the ordinary course of parochial work I had stood by the death-beds of men and women which had left on my mind an indelible impression. I had become aware that the minds of many of the living were hopelessly harassed and – I can use no other word – devastated by the horror with which they brooded over the fate of the dead. The happiness of their lives was shattered, the peace of their souls destroyed, not by the sense of earthly bereavement, but by the terrible belief that brother, or son, or wife, or husband had passed away with physical anguish and physical torment, endless and beyond all utterance excruciating.⁹

Similarly, the recent Doctrine Commission of the Church of England, noting the decline in the western world over the past two hundred years of a belief in eternal torment, states that amongst the many reasons for this has been :

. . . the moral protest from both within and without the Christian faith against a religion of fear, and a growing sense that the picture of a God who consigns

⁵ *ibid* p. 249.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 250f.

⁷ Rowell, *Hell*, pp. 2 & 4.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁹ Alun Chalfont, *Montgomery Of Alamein* [Farrar's maternal grandfather], London, Weidenfield and Nicholson, 1976, p. 20f.

millions to eternal torment was far removed from the revelation of God's love in Christ.¹⁰

In an age of such suffering with the ravages of cholera epidemics, etc., decimating the populace, often found in squalor and irreligion, belief in further, indeed eternal, post-mortem torment must have been intolerable for the sensitive Christian mind seeking to know a God of love. It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that those who retained the orthodox view of hell were harsh and lacking in compassion. Hugh McLeod points out that the resurgence of the power of the doctrine of hell in the first half of the nineteenth century was not accompanied by a lack of interest in human welfare. On the contrary, those involved in the revival of evangelical religion (which promoted a firm doctrine of hell) were also in the vanguard of social reform.¹¹ A sustained example of this throughout the Victorian period is the Christian humanitarianism of George Muller, of the Muller's Homes, Bristol, fame. A pioneer of the Plymouth Brethren movement, which held strictly to the orthodox position on hell, he dedicated himself to the relief of orphans, many of whom were in that plight because of the cholera epidemic.¹²

One of the characteristics of the progress of civilisation is growth in a sense of justice and fair play, something no doubt accelerated at this time by the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. In this context we note another explanation of Rowell for the attack upon hell in the Victorian era:

Quite apart from the difficulties of reconciling an impersonal, retributive hell with the personal God of love of the Christian Gospel, many became uneasy about a doctrine which was so clearly retributive in an age whose understanding of punishment was increasingly influenced by the theories of Bentham and the Utilitarians, with their emphasis on deterrence and reformation.¹³

¹⁰ *The Mystery of Salvation*, 1995, 2nd impression 1996, London, Church House Publishing, p. 199.

¹¹ Hugh McLeod, *Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City*, London, Croom Helm, 1974, p. 224.

¹² *Autobiography of George Muller*, Compiled by Fred Bergin, 3rd Ed., London, J. Nisbet, 1914, pp. 59 & 81.

¹³ Rowell, *Hell*, p. 13.

Indeed, the leading conditionalist of the time, Edward White, acknowledged the success of Benthamite penology as the reason for the challenge upon orthodox eschatology.¹⁴

Again, there was the reaction to the *eschatology of debased Calvinism*, which limited hope to the few. The missionary movement played a significant part in relaxing such exclusivism and in widening the scope of the Gospel.¹⁵ Yet, for Rowell it was the more personal understanding of Christianity which perhaps proved to be the most significant factor in nineteenth century shifts in eschatology. Significantly it :

. . . represented the recovery of an emphasis on the existential elements of religion, and sharpened the protest against an eschatology which was conceived as the end-term of a mechanical process.¹⁶

The relevance of this assertion we note particularly in connection with F. D. Maurice, whose view of salvation and eternity will engage our attention later as we seek to prepare the ground for an evaluation of T. R. Birks.

Whatever the relative merits of the various causes put forward to explain the ferment of debate characterising the nineteenth century obsession with the final judgement, one thing is certain, that as time wore on the earlier dogmatism gave way to a decreased emphasis on punishment and hell in many circles. However, this was not always acceptable even to those who had come to accept a kinder or more rational understanding of the matter. Rowell notes the alarm of [the conditionalist] Gladstone over the neglect of the doctrine of the final judgement;¹⁷ and, surprisingly, Maurice lamented the half-hearted way in which it was being preached in his day!¹⁸

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 13, where he cites White's *Life in Christ*, London, Elliott Stock, 1878 ed., p. 501.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.16.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁸ F.D. Maurice, *Theological Essays*, London, James Clarke, 1957 ed., p. 321; albeit he is advocating a more existential doctrine.

Regarding historical features of the controversy, Rowell considers the period 1830-1880 to be critical.¹⁹ Likewise, for McLeod, while the earlier part of the century saw a strengthening of the traditional doctrine, the second half saw *the decline of hell*.²⁰ Also, he sees the 1870s as significant, in that hell was attacked more openly by those such as F. W. Farrar, to whom '*respectable*' people would listen;²¹ just as Rowell affirms that it was not until that decade that *conditionalism made a major impact on theological debate in England*.²²

Conditional Immortality : growth and consolidation

Froom does not see the conflicting views about the last judgement and its sequel so much as a dilemma as a *theological trilemma*. Affirming conditionalism to be the correct biblical teaching, he sees the doctrine of the soul's immortality with the concomitant of eternal conscious punishment as a later intrusion into Christian thought. Influenced by Platonism, this trend emerged with the second century apologist Athenagoras and was later sharpened by Tertullian and finally consolidated by Augustine;²³ so that by A.D. 600 this dogma had become the teaching of the church. Origen, the younger contemporary of Tertullian, added the third dimension – i.e universalism - in the third century.²⁴ Such a position is the theological setting also of the nineteenth century with the traditional Augustinian view still in the ascendancy and with conditionalism and universalism seen as resurgent heresies trying the soundness and patience of the church.

¹⁹ Rowell, *Hell*, p. 17.

²⁰ McLeod, *Class and Religion*, p. 224.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

²² Rowell, *Hell*, p. 193.

²³ Alan Richardson comments, "We find Augustine devoting a distressing amount of space in *The City of God* to proving that the fire of hell is something physical or quasi-physical. The Scholastics distinguished two elements in the pains of hell, *poena damni* and *poena sensus*, which was some sort of external agent of torment." *A Dictionary of Christian Theology*, ed. Alan Richardson, London, SCM, 1969. P. 151. For a full account of Augustine's teaching see *The City of God*, ed. R.V.G. Tasker, London, Everyman Library, 1957 print. In Book XXI, ch. IX, p. 331, he discusses the interpretation of the *fire* and *worm* (Is. 66:24=Mk. 9:43-48), which he considers to relate to bodily and mental pain. In ch. XVII, p. 339, he dismisses the view of Origen and others that the pains of hell are not eternal and will give way eventually to the joys of heaven. The *Enchiridion* is another source of information on Augustine's view of eternal conscious torment, especially chs. CXI & CXII, in which he teaches that there will be two distinct kingdoms after the resurrection, one Christ's and the other the devil's. See *The Works of Aurelius Augustine*, ed. Marcus Dods, Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1873, p. 253f.

²⁴ Froom, *Conditionalist Faith*, Vol. I, pp. 523-528.

In a similar way, Edward White seeks to demonstrate that the original gospel message, which, he claims, includes the doctrine of life or immortality alone in Christ, was soon corrupted in the sub-apostolic and ante-Nicene periods of the early Church. Acknowledging the excellent work (in this area of historical theology) of, contemporary fellow conditionalists particularly Constable, Denniston and especially Professor Hudson of Cambridge, America, he reviews the teaching in this context of the early fathers.²⁵ Compared with Froom, Constable and the others, White's examination of this period is concise. Ignatius and Justin Martyr are cited as advocates of life only in Christ²⁶; and then Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, is quoted at length and with confidence, because of his link with the apostolic era through Polycarp, one of the so-called Apostolic fathers. Irenaeus is held up as a consistent exponent of this doctrine; and his famous work, *Against Heresies*, is extensively quoted from the Second Book. Worth noting here is the manner in which Irenaeus limits spiritual life to the believer :

The prophetic Spirit speaks of Him as the Father of all, granting perseverance of being to all eternity unto those who are saved. *For life is not from ourselves, or from our nature, but it is given or bestowed according to the grace of God;* and therefore he who preserves this gift of life and returns thanks to him who bestows it, he shall receive "length of days" for ever and ever. But he who rejects it, and proves unthankful to his Maker for creating him, and will not know Him who bestows it, *he deprives himself of the gift of duration to all eternity.*²⁷

After briefly citing Theophilus of Antioch, he quotes Arnobius, the fourth century African author at length.²⁸ Surprisingly, in view of the witnesses cited above, The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, considers Arnobius to have been virtually the only representative of conditional immortality in the early church !²⁹ White closes his citation

²⁵ E. White, *Life in Christ*, London, Elliot Stock, 1878 (3rd ed.), p. 417f.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 418f.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 420.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 422/3. That Arnobius was a thorough-going conditionalist is evident also from the following account of his doctrine of the soul : *It cannot . . . be immortal (i.e. absolutely and per se); it outlives the body, but depends wholly on the gift of God for eternal duration. After death there awaits the evil[sic.] a second death, a Gehenna of unquenchable fire, in which gradually they are consumed and annihilated.*

Wace and Piercy, *A Dictionary of Christian Biography*, Peabody, Massachusetts, Hendrickson, 1994, p. 50.

²⁹ F.L. Cross, London, OUP, first edn., 1963 (reprint), p. 325.

of supporters of conditionalism with a lengthy quotation from Athanasius; although he feels obliged to point out that he was inconsistent in affirming that God would immortalise his enemies for “an ‘eternal death’ of conscious suffering”, in which inconsistency he is compared to the famous Isaac Watts.³⁰

Fudge, noting the extent of the revival of conditionalism in White’s day, claims that it *swept across national, linguistic and denominational lines*.³¹ Froom, with his characteristic excitement for the story of conditionalism notes :

As we step over the threshold into the nineteenth century we find the spread of Conditionalist proponents increasing . . . the Conditionalist movement began to assume the semblance of a definitely rising tide . . . A remarkable revival of Early Church Conditionalism was undeniably under way. And scholarship was much in evidence.³²

The considerable and useful research represented by this two-volume work, by this Seventh Day Adventist scholar of no mean erudition, on conditionalism has been acknowledged and applied by evangelical scholars,³³ albeit David Powys is aware of Froom’s tendency to claim support for conditionalism too readily.³⁴ At this point we ought to note, in view of our indebtedness to him, that Froom confesses to be *a conservative, evangelical Protestant*.³⁵ Also, because of the inclination, already noted, to use the label rather gratuitously, his definition of conditionalism should be freely quoted :

Conditionalism is the Christian doctrine that immortality, or everlasting life, is offered to man only upon God’s terms and *conditions*. *Immortal-Soulism*, on the

³⁰ *Life in Christ*, pp. 423-425.

³¹ Fudge, *The Fire*, p. 401.

³² Froom, *Conditionalist Faith*, Vol. II, p. 247f.

³³ Note particularly the use made by, Fudge, *The Fire*; John Wenham, *The Goodness of God*, London, IVP, 1974 (and new edition, *The Enigma of Evil*, Guildford, Eagle, 1994), his paper, The Case for Conditional Immortality, in N. Cameron, *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, Carlisle, Paternoster, 1992, *Facing Hell*, Carlisle, Paternoster, 1998; D. J. Powys’ paper, The Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Debates about Hell and Universalism, in Cameron’s *Universalism*. Also, Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones acknowledged this work as a *magnificent . . . volume* and his earlier work, *Prophetic Faith*, as *incomparably the best work on the subject*: see inside flap of *Conditionalist Faith*, Vol. I.

³⁴ See his paper, The Nineteenth and Twentieth century Debates . . . , p. 105n.

³⁵ Froom, *Conditionalist Faith*, Vol. I, p. 18.

other hand, holds that man was created with a soul, which has a separate existence from the body, and that it is indefeasibly immortal. Conditionalists believe that the man who does not accept God's conditions for life will be ultimately deprived of life, totally destroyed. . . that at the death that meets all mankind, good and bad alike, man rests in the grave until the resurrection, when all men will be raised, some to life everlasting and some to receive their punishment. During the interim they believe man is unconscious of the passing of time and knows nothing of events occurring on earth. Immortal-Soulists believe that at death man goes to some place of conscious existence.³⁶

Froom's definition, however, becomes too broad as the book progresses. Later he cites Luther and Tyndale as conditionalists³⁷; yet, while they taught soul-sleep, chiefly as a protest and against the doctrine of purgatory,³⁸ they held to the traditional doctrine of eternal punishment. On the contrary, avowed conditionalists of the nineteenth century, while agreeing on the ultimate extinction of the wicked, differed when it came to the survival of the soul after death. Rowell notes the considerable differences between conditionalists, when it came to the intermediate state.³⁹ Consequently, as used in this exercise, conditionalism will be used to describe conditional immortality (annihilationism), the view of the after-life uniting those who deny everlasting torment, regardless of their convictions about the soul (whatever we conceive that to be) immediately after death.

Like Froom, Rowell sees the growth of conditionalism in the nineteenth century as a significant movement; and his treatment of it is thorough.⁴⁰ Likewise, David Powys' contribution at the Fourth Edinburgh Conference in Christian Dogmatics, 1991, in which he majors on the nineteenth century, acknowledges the importance of conditionalism as part of the debate.⁴¹ Yet, surprisingly, in view of the subject of his book, *The Church in an Age of Revolution*, Vidler, covering the same period, ignores it. The reference to R.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 19f.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 64f & 88f.

³⁸ As a matter of interest, if not significance, Luther, came to recognise the affinity between his evangelical doctrine and that of John Huss (Jan Hus), and became known as the 'Saxon Hus', albeit Hus continued to believe in the doctrine of purgatory. See, for example, W.A. Elwell ed., Hus, Jan, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Carlisle, Paternoster, 1995, p. 538.

³⁹ Rowell, *Hell*, p. 200.

⁴⁰ He devotes a full chapter, IX. Survival Of The Fittest, pp. 180-207, in *Hell*.

Whately, one of the earliest advocates of conditionalism, makes no mention of that fact.⁴² However, our later attention to the Birks controversy will reveal how seriously mainstream evangelicals regarded the growing ‘menace’ of conditionalism; and if only for this consideration, we ought to have some understanding of its growth and impact in this period.

Significant exponents of conditionalism in the nineteenth century

We might start chronologically, in our review of nineteenth century conditionalism, with Richard Whately, whose book, *A View of the Scripture Revelations Concerning a Future State* (1829), clearly identified him as a conditionalist; but without in any way jeopardising his future – he was later appointed as Anglican archbishop of Dublin. His views were clearly conditionalist, affirming post-mortem unconsciousness pending the resurrection in addition to the conviction that immortality is received only in Christ.⁴³ Yet, Rowell finds it curious that Whately should be claimed by the conditionalists as a *precursor* to the movement; and puts it down to his stress on soul-sleep and the resurrection of the body.⁴⁴ Froom, on the other hand, has no hesitation in ascribing full-blown views to him: final extinction of the wicked in addition to the points mentioned.⁴⁵ Fudge, also, describes him as a *thoroughgoing conditionalist*.⁴⁶

The enthusiasm shown by the likes of twentieth century evangelicals such as Froom and Fudge for the phenomenal growth of nineteenth century conditionalism was not shared by the mainstream evangelicals of the time. Indeed, *Evangelical Christendom* lamented the fact that conditionalism was not just growing in support, but that it was being espoused by men of evangelical convictions, some of whom had left the Evangelical

⁴¹ See his paper in Cameron’s *Universalism*, pp. 106-113.

⁴² Alec R. Vidler, *The Church in an Age of Revolution*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1961, p. 40. (References to R.W. Dale and Gladstone also make no mention of their conditionalist views.)

⁴³ Froom, *Conditionalist Faith*, Vol.II, pp. 261-265.

⁴⁴ Rowell, *Hell*, p. 182.

⁴⁵ Froom, *Conditionalist Faith*, Vol. II, p. 264, where he quotes Whately’s *A View of the Scripture Revelations Concerning a Future State*, 4th ed., Philadelphia, Lindsay & Blakiston, 1860, pp. 183, 184.

⁴⁶ Fudge, *The Fire*, p. 401.

Alliance as a result of their new beliefs.⁴⁷ To this party of the Church belonged Edward White, considered to be the leading exponent of conditionalism of his day.⁴⁸ Denominationally, he was a Congregationalist, something that Rowell finds significant, arguing that it was among the Congregationalists that this doctrine took its firmest hold, because of its loose organization and its tolerance of doctrinal differences as well as its general Calvinist theology.⁴⁹

Edward White (1819-98) is regarded by Froom as the *pre-eminent champion* of conditionalism and the one chiefly responsible for giving conditionalism a respected place and for taking it out of the realm of heresy.⁵⁰ This was not achieved at once nor without opposition. His great and historic accomplishment was the publication of the book, *Life In Christ*, in 1846.⁵¹ It was the substance of lectures delivered the previous year in Hereford, where he was a pastor. The sub-title sums up his thesis :

Immortality Is The Peculiar Privilege Of The Regenerate.

Fundamentally, his convictions were those of Whately, although unlike him he did not teach soul-sleep; for him, survival of the soul was linked with the new dispensation and the immortality given through Christ.⁵² In his quest for the truth, he was helped to accept conditionalism through reading James Fontaine's *Eternal Punishment Proved to be not Suffering but Privation, and Immortality dependent on Spiritual Regeneration*, which had been published in 1817. This helped him to resolve his deep anxieties caused by the profoundly disturbing Calvinistic doctrine of eternal punishment, which he had been brought up to believe, and to appreciate the difference between the Hebraic unitary view

⁴⁷ *Evangelical Christendom* (a monthly chronicle of the E.A.), Vol. XXIV, 1870, p. 33.

⁴⁸ Froom, *Conditionalist Faith*, Vol. II, p. 329 claims that White was *intensely evangelical* and that he assisted in the inquiry room during the Moody evangelistic campaign [1873?].

⁴⁹ Rowell, *Hell*, p. 182. Regarding this last point it is interesting to note Rowell's explanation that the Calvinist doctrine of divine decrees possibly made it easier to accept immortality as dependent on God's election.

⁵⁰ Froom, *Conditionalist Faith*, Vol. II, p. 322.

⁵¹ London, Jackson and Walford.

⁵² Rowell, *Hell*, p. 200.

of man and the Greek dual conception of body-soul.⁵³ Another figure who helped him in his search was John Foster, a writer and former Baptist minister. In the early 1840s they corresponded on the doctrine of final punishment : a correspondence noted chiefly for Foster's widely publicised letter of September 24, 1841, *Letter . . . to a Young Minister [White] on the Duration of Future Punishment*. Froom claims Foster as a conditionalist; but Rowell seems to be more discerning when he describes him as having a tendency towards universalism at the same time as being sympathetic to White's position, without endorsing it.⁵⁴

Although his teaching was deemed to be heretical, White was not forced to leave his church or ministry, and he remained in Hereford until 1851; and according to Rowell he did not leave because of any difficulties caused by his conditionalism but because he had come to accept believer's baptism.⁵⁵ However, his removal to London, where he established a new ministry for himself in Hawley Road, Kentish Town, in 1852, seems to have helped him to consolidate his position and to widen his influence. This was also accompanied by an impressive increasing circle of friends and sympathisers, among whom were R. W. Dale, R. F. Weymouth, Emmanuel Petavel of Switzerland, Harriet Beecher Stowe, W. E. Gladstone, the politician, all fellow conditionalists and others.⁵⁶

By the 1870s, a decade which Rowell notes was *generally marked by severe questioning of established orthodox doctrine*,⁵⁷ White's *Life In Christ* teaching was enjoying the triumph of tolerance. Two revised editions of his book appeared in 1875 and 1878 respectively, indicating his return to the public discussion of the issue. He had prepared the way earlier in 1870 with his contribution in the *Christian World* to the discussion with Dr. Angus and Andrew Jukes; an event which Rowell considers to have been the start of 'The Life in Christ' controversy; and in this championing of conditionalism, he was

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 185-7; Froom, *Conditionalist Faith*, Vol. II, p. 324.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 318f; Rowell, *Hell*, p.188.

⁵⁵ Rowell, *Hell*, p. 188.

⁵⁶ Froom, *Conditionalist Faith*, Vol. II, p. 328; John Morley, *The Life Of William Ewart Gladstone*, London, Macmillan, 1905, Vol. I, p. 768.

⁵⁷ Rowell, *Hell*, p. 196.

careful to point out his aversion to the use of the term annihilation, which confused the issue because of its unfortunate connotations in the philosophical context of the impossibility of the abolition of substance.⁵⁸

Consistent with the cardinal tenets of conditional immortality he stressed the final physical resurrection of mankind, which he saw to be parallel to that of Christ, himself; and to necessitate the wicked in actual physical punishment pending their final end.⁵⁹ Again, in this post-Darwin period he was able to make use of the evolutionary hypothesis mainly by demonstrating that the affinity between man and the 'mortal' animal kingdom helped to discount the traditional view of the natural immortality of the soul. And borrowing the idea of the *survival of the fittest*, he stressed that the Bible shows it is not the strongest but those who are fit by laying hold of Christ who will ultimately survive. Far from being a materialistic view of man and salvation this was the truly biblical way to encourage faith in Christ, without any need to resort to metaphysical disputes about the nature of man and without relying on the terrors of eternal punishment.⁶⁰ Regarding this latter point, White had earlier addressed the problem of the heathen, attacking the apparent brutality of popular missionary theology and proposing conditionalism as a more God-honouring alternative.⁶¹ This did not assume a weaker understanding of divine justice and anger. Against the Benthamite stress on the preventive and reformatory aspects of punishment, White taught the propriety of retribution, albeit it was not the apparently disproportionate version of the traditionalist.⁶²

Comment [R1]:

Further evidence of the 'rehabilitation' of White and of the respectability of his beliefs is found in the confidence and esteem of his fellow Congregationalists : in 1886 he was again elected chairman of the London Congregational Union and in the following year chairman of the Congregational Union of England and Wales; and many other honours

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 196. (See also Froom, *op. cit.*, p. 328.)

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 190-1.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 199.

are catalogued by Froom.⁶³ Of course, he did not succeed in annulling the conventional approach to hell; but he did help to establish conditional immortality as a proper biblical alternative acceptable to men and women of undoubted sincerity of faith and scholarship - evangelical and otherwise.

The more positive response of the 1870s,⁶⁴ however, was not the result of White's efforts alone, despite his pre-eminence in the stand for conditionalism. The confluence of other earlier expositions of the doctrine with his own had helped to demonstrate that this was no passing fad or eccentricity. One such fellow advocate was Henry Dobney (1809-84), a Baptist pastor at Maidstone. Like White he had suffered much mental agony over final punishment before settling for conditionalism.⁶⁵ He is noted for his *On The Scripture Doctrine of Future Punishment* (1846) and for his letter to the archbishop of Canterbury (1864), protesting against his pastoral letter affirming everlasting punishment.⁶⁶ His book, maintaining human mortality, soul-sleep and the eventual destruction of the wicked, ran through several British and American editions. However, the significance of his contribution to the debate is somewhat called into question by Rowell's note that in later life he seems to have become a universalist.⁶⁷ F. W. Grant, on the other hand, referring to the same development notes that Dobney followed Henry Dunn's "school of opinion . . . which unites the ideas of annihilation and restoration."⁶⁸

According to Froom, Henry Dunn (1801-1878) was one of the first to come to the defence of White and Dobney in their attempts to promote conditionalism.⁶⁹ A lay theologian, he was for some time the secretary of the British and Foreign School Society and editor of the *Interpreter*. Froom emphasises Dunn's conditionalism and claims he "was not a

⁶³ Froom, *Conditionalist Faith*, Vol. II, pp. 328-330.

⁶⁴ Other features of the thrust forward of conditionalism in the 1870s were the *epochal* 1876 London Breakfast Conference on conditional immortality, in the Cannon Street Hotel, at which two of the speakers were Constable and Leask; and the formation of the Conditional Immortality Association in 1878, which owed much to Leask's influence. *Op. cit.*, Froom p. 383. See below for further reference.

⁶⁵ Rowell, *Hell*, p. 183.

⁶⁶ Froom, *op. cit.*, p. 321.

⁶⁷ Rowell, *op. cit.*, 185n.

⁶⁸ Grant *Facts and Theories as to a Future State*, *op. cit.*, p. 16f.

⁶⁹ Froom, *op. cit.* p. 335f.

Universalist”, although he leaves one wondering when he goes on to say Dunn “believed in the provision of restoration for the race, but only in the salvation of the *reclaimed individual*.”⁷⁰ F. W. Grant is clearer and more explicit in his description of Dunn’s views as a uniting of annihilation and restoration [universalism]; and he calls him the “founder” of this position.⁷¹ Grant evidently considers Dunn’s views of sufficient importance or danger to devote a significant section to the exposition and refutation of them.⁷² Grant agrees with Dunn when he advocates “the pre-millennial coming of the Lord”. Yet, he rejects his idea of a “general resurrection” after Christ’s return [as opposed to the two-stage resurrection of the redeemed and lost respectively], when Christ will be preached again to the “wicked”, those remaining finally obstinate being consigned to “the lake of fire and annihilation”.⁷³ Later he comments:

Mr Dunn’s theory is a compound of two apparently dissimilar things, annihilationism and restorationism. It diminishes the former to the least possible degree, reserving it for some obstinate transgressors only.⁷⁴

Grant argues that Dunn’s view rests on incorrect exposition of biblical passages dealing with ideas of future restoration. The hope of a second chance or probation has never drawn many evangelical supporters because of its speculative optimism and its apparent inherent danger of weakening missionary zeal.⁷⁵

C. F. Hudson (1821-1867), according to Fromm the most important and scholarly of the Americans involved in this development, was dismissed from his pastorate for preaching conditionalism.⁷⁶ This gave him more time for further research and in 1857 he published, *Debt and Grace, as related to the Doctrine of a Future Life*. The book is a masterly evaluation of the support for conditionalism from the Apostolic Fathers right up to

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* p. 336.

⁷¹ F.W. Grant, *Facts and Theories as to a Future State*, *op. cit.* p. 16.

⁷² *Ibid.* pp. 381-397.

⁷³ *Ibid.* p. 17.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* p. 382.

⁷⁵ A useful orthodox discussion of ‘second probation’ [and other issues relating to final punishment] can be found in Loraine Boettner’s *Immortality*, Philadelphia, The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1962, pp. 104-108.

nineteenth century exponents such as Whately, Dobney, White, etc. His monumental *Critical Greek Concordance*, according to Froom, was endorsed by Westcott, Lightfoot and others and was an invaluable help to the propagation of conditionalism.⁷⁷ Rowell also considers his contribution to be extremely significant in terms of its influence on English conditionalists, its theodicy and the fact that, appearing before *Origin of Species*, it did not use evolutionary principles to commend conditionalism.⁷⁸ Concerning theodicy, he explained convincingly that the traditional doctrine had created the problem of eternal evil; and that attempts to justify eternal hell, because the lost continue to sin there, supported dualism. Because man is finite, God's demands upon him in terms of righteousness and punishment must also be finite in order to be just; a requirement which conditionalism satisfied.⁷⁹ Of course, everyone who seeks to take matters of faith seriously and thoughtfully is a theodicean, whatever stance is taken in this 'theological trilemma'. Yet, it would seem that the conditionalists have the edge in that for them the second death is the end of all sin and evil; whereas, the traditionalists have to accept the eternity of sin in hell, and the universalists have to rely on the hope that finally everyone will turn away from evil to God. But this is to anticipate our later remarks on Birks and Blocher.

Hudson was but one of a growing number of Americans proposing conditionalist views with a fervour equal to that of their British allies, albeit according to Grant, he accepted (before his death) Dunn's combination of annihilation and restoration (cf. Dobney).⁸⁰ The opposition was also strong – understandable in the light of the continuing influence of traditionalist exponents such as Jonathan Edwards, renowned in this context for his terrifying sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God", preached at Enfield on July 8th, 1741.⁸¹ One of the most aggressive attacks came in the form of, *The Future Life (Defence of the Orthodox View by Eminent American Scholars)* [anon.], in which eternal

⁷⁶ Froom, *op. cit.*, 479.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 481.

⁷⁸ Rowell, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

⁷⁹ See Rowell, *Hell*, pp. 193-4, where he cites *Debt and Grace*, Boston, 1858, 2nd ed., pp. 60, 74.

⁸⁰ F. W. Grant *op. cit.* p. 17.

⁸¹ For an exposition of Edwards' literal and uncompromisingly fierce doctrine see John Gerstner, *Jonathan Edwards on Heaven and Hell*, Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1980.

punishment is strongly maintained, with essays against Farrar and Henry Ward Beecher.⁸² The latter espoused conditionalist beliefs in later years,⁸³ and like Hudson he was a Congregationalist, albeit he did not experience Hudson's rejection. To quote Beecher :

I doubt whether in the days of the Old Testament, or in the Jewish mind at the time of our Saviour, the sharp, metaphysically accurate idea of time and duration existed. I believe that what they meant by eternal was a vague and nebulous period of time, and that it was not used in a sharp, scientific sense, but in a poetic, or rather in a generalizing sense; just as we say a hundred when we only mean many, or as we say forever when we simply mean long periods of time.⁸⁴

Another impressive advocate of conditionalism was Henry Constable (1816-1891), who was ordained in 1850 by Richard Whately.⁸⁵ In this connection, he flourished at a time of great conditionalist activity in the 1860's.⁸⁶ He published in 1868 his, *Duration and Nature of Future Punishment*, which became another authority on the subject. He was able to make use of evolutionary ideas, using the analogy that as lower forms pass away (proved by fossils) so higher forms will become extinct because of sin. However, we need to remember that the roots of conditionalism were theological rather than scientific.⁸⁷ Like White he disclaimed the term annihilation, claiming that it was not used by conditionalists, being attributed to them by their opponents; destruction being the proper biblical term. However, he did not share White's view of the intermediate state; and he upset other conditionalists by an article in the conditionalist journal, *Rainbow*, which taught that the dead know nothing until the resurrection.⁸⁸ This is one of the difficult

⁸² This is a rare work, the ref. here being to the 2nd edn., 1878, London, Dickinson.

⁸³ Froom, *op. cit.*, p. 508f.

⁸⁴ From an interview reported in the *New York Herald*, Jan. 20, 1878.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 337-354.

⁸⁶ In 1863, the champion of Dobney and White, Henry Dunn, (the sec. of the British and Foreign Schools Society) published his *The Destiny of the Human Race*, in which he advocated a millenarian version of conditionalism. W. Leask's journal, the *Rainbow*, appeared in 1864 and soon became a platform virtually of conditionalist views; and in 1866, J. B. Heard's scholarly study of biblical anthropology, *The Tripartite Nature of Man*. See Rowell p. 195.

⁸⁷ At this point it is important to note Rowell's remarks on p. 180 of *Hell* about the connection between evolution and conditionalism. He is careful to point out that the Darwinian theory with its emphasis on man's development from lower forms and the consequent challenge to the idea of an immortal soul should not make us assume that conditional immortality arose out of Darwinism, despite the fact that many scientists adopted conditionalism.

⁸⁸ Froom, *op. cit.*, p 338. Froom notes on the next page that the editor, Dr. William Leask, soon adopted Constable's view.

areas for conditionalists. The view, that the soul ‘sleeps’ – the *psychopannychia* rejected by Calvin - adopted by Whately, Constable and others would appear to be thoroughly consistent with the basic conditionalist tenet of the soul’s mortality. (Yet, this understanding of intermediate post-mortem existence was hard to reconcile with biblical passages which seem to teach the conscious survival of the soul.⁸⁹) Baldwin Brown, whose criticism of conditionalism we shall note presently, attacked the teaching of those other conditionalists, who claimed that the soul survived death without being immortal, as less credible than the immortality of the soul.⁹⁰

A significant development took place in 1878 with the formation of the Conditional Immortality Association, a prestigious society provided with speakers such as Constable, Weymouth, etc. Holding an annual conference (spread geographically over twenty-six English cities, during the first fifty years) it encouraged the promotion and consolidation of its teachings, an object helped also by its periodicals, which were successively, the *Bible Standard* (1878-1889), *The Faith* (1889-1892), *The Life and Advent Journal* (1892-1893), and *Words of Life* (from 1897).⁹¹ For the record, the Conditional Immortality Association is now the Resurrection Fellowship and the *Words of Life* is now the *Resurrection Magazine*.⁹²

Two other luminaries of the conditionalist cause of this period were the well-loved Congregationalist preacher, theologian and educational reformer Robert W. Dale and the politician W. E. Gladstone. Dale (1829-95) stood for *progressive, but in fundamentals orthodox, Evangelicalism* and he is probably best known for his book, *The Atonement*

⁸⁹ Classic passages are the calling up of Samuel by the medium of Endor, I Sam. 28:3-15; the appearance of Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration, Mark 9:2-13; Jesus’ confounding of the Sadducees’ rejection of an after-life, Mark 12:18-27; the promise to the dying thief, Luke 23:43; and Paul’s assertions that freedom from the body takes us into the presence of Christ, II Cor. 5:1-8 & Phil. 1:21. Basil Atkinson, another advocate of soul-sleep, attempts to explain these in *Life and Immortality*, privately published n.d., pp. 33, 53, but not very convincingly in my opinion. Like Froom, Whately, Constable, etc. Atkinson sees post-mortem unconsciousness as a linchpin of conditionalism.

⁹⁰ Rowell, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

⁹¹ Froom *op. cit.*, pp. 451-459

⁹² *Resurrection Magazine* is published by the Pastor’s Library Foundation (for the Resurrection Fellowship in America and the United Kingdom), P.O. Box, 353, Sterling, VA, 20167, USA. In the U.K. contact may be made through Dr. C. Tulloch, 18A Young Street, Peebles, Scotland, EH45 8JX.

published in 1875, the year after the announcement of his conversion to conditionalism. He was a strong champion of conditional immortality; and Rowell classifies him as belonging to the *theological and systematic form* of conditionalism, along with White, Petavel, Joseph Parker and many others. Although Rowell, at the beginning and conclusion of his study on hell and the Victorians, cites Gladstone, he does not refer to his conditionalist convictions, despite his inclusion of three M.P.s⁹³ he lists amongst the supporters of conditionalism. This is somewhat surprising since he quotes Gladstone's, *Studies subsidiary to the works of Bishop Butler*, in which these views are expressed.⁹⁴

Once again, we are in debt to Froom for a thorough examination of Gladstone's views on this subject, as expressed in the above book.⁹⁵ When Gladstone, a first-class classical scholar as well as a distinguished politician, first adopted conditionalism is not clear. However, in his book published in 1896 there is no doubt of his thoroughgoing and systematic convictions about the soul, future judgement, etc. He blames Origen for introducing the error of the natural immortality of the soul into Christian thought⁹⁶ and considers the classical doctrine of eternal punishment, which prevailed from Augustine onwards, to be 'an horrible decretum.'⁹⁷ As for his 'connections' it is significant to note that the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* claims him as a member of the evangelical wing of the Anglican party, along with Lord Shaftesbury⁹⁸; yet, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* is a little more reserved, recognising his evangelical upbringing but indicating that he combined the tenets of his evangelical background with High Church doctrines; and it also acknowledges his conditionalist beliefs.⁹⁹ Also of some interest or curiosity here is the fact that he was held in great esteem by the great evangelical Baptist

⁹³ Rowell, *Hell*, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 3 & 212.

⁹⁵ Froom, *op. cit.*, 627-37, where he carefully analyses Gladstone's, *Studies Subsidiary to the Works of Bishop Butler*, Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1896, pp. 630-636, etc.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 631.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 633.

⁹⁸ *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Ed. W.A. Elwell, Carlisle, Paternoster, 1984 (11th print.), p. 380.

⁹⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 561f.

pastor, C. H. Spurgeon, who was renowned for his fierce and uncompromising preaching on eternal punishment.¹⁰⁰

The volume of literature, individuals and movements involved in the story of nineteenth century conditionalism is vast; and one is inclined, at this point, to echo the writer of the New Testament letter to the Hebrews, when he wrote, “And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of [and add] *David Thom, J.F.B. Tinling, etc., . . .*”¹⁰¹ However, sufficient representatives, hopefully, have been dealt with to demonstrate the prestigious and eloquent challenge it gave to the traditional view.

Opposition to conditionalism

Attractive, logical and biblical it may have seemed to many seeking an alternative to orthodox eternal misery, it left others unpersuaded and scornful. For example, the protagonist of traditionalism, F. W. Grant, considered annihilationism suspect partly because its supporters were so mixed, ranging from “Trinitarianism down to the lowest depths of Socinian and materialistic infidelity”; and he noted that the Christadelphians and the followers of C. T. Russell (now Jehovah’s Witnesses) also subscribed to what he saw as error.¹⁰² This argument is still used to discredit conditionalism; but the fact that new religious movements or so-called cults hold to the final extinction of the lost should not be used as an argument, as far as the traditionalist evangelical Protestant is concerned, any more than the necessity to reject eternal conscious punishment because it is a fundamental tenet of Roman Catholicism and Islam.

Similarly, another critic, the Congregationalist Baldwin Brown, author of *The First Principles of Ecclesiastical Truth* (1871) and *The Doctrine of Annihilation in the light of*

¹⁰⁰ John Morley, *Life of Gladstone*, London, Macmillan, 1922, Vol. I, p. 906, Vol. II, p. 139, albeit one is not clear as to the first emergence of these views in Gladstone. For a full account of Spurgeon’s beliefs in this context see, Charles Spurgeon, *When Christ Returns*, New Kensington, USA, Whitaker House, 1997, pp. 7-40.

¹⁰¹ See Froom, *Conditionalist Faith*, Vol. II, pp. 402, 538 & 742 for extensive lists of names. The NT ref. is Hebs. 11:32.

the Gospel of Love (1875), considered its associations with evolutionary thinking something of a disqualification of conditionalism in that its contention that man was like the animals in his mortality helped the cause of atheism.¹⁰³ Further, while he shared the conditionalist aversion to the doctrine of eternal torment he objected to the exclusivism of conditionalism. Its insistence that immortality was conditional, the hope only of the saved he understood to be Calvinism in another dress; and he was averse to the narrowness of Calvinism as he was to the traditional idea of hell. Like F. D. Maurice (and Rowell describes him as “the leading exponent of Mauricean theology”¹⁰⁴), Brown espoused a wider view of God’s love than that associated with traditional Augustinianism or Calvinism. He saw the weakening of Calvinism in the nineteenth century as the result of the emergence of a universalistic conception of God’s plans and of the influence of utilitarianism, which emphasised the greatest good of the greatest number.¹⁰⁵

Rowell is insistent on seeing conditionalism as essentially in the Calvinistic tradition. From, on the other hand, portrays Calvin as its greatest enemy. His first theological work, was *Psychopannychia* (1534)¹⁰⁶, a sustained attack upon the notion of soul sleep; and the unfortunate Michael Servetus, in whose execution Calvin was involved, included conditional immortality amongst his heresies.¹⁰⁷ It is that feature of Calvinism, which limits salvation to those who believe and undergo a change of nature, which Rowell emphasises here. Yet, it may be argued, if I am not oversimplifying Rowell, that this aspect of regeneration and salvation is common to the Methodists and Salvationists, in that while they oppose the tenets of Calvinism, they would concur in limiting eternal life and salvation to those who respond to the gospel and are changed. Nevertheless, Rowell

¹⁰² F.W. Grant, *Facts and Theories as to a Future State*, *op. cit.*, pp. 7f, 11; and 2nd edn. 1885, 578f. Grant, who had emigrated to America as a youth, was a passionate defender of the orthodox doctrine and was greatly disturbed by the “current denials of eternal punishment” on both sides of the Atlantic.

¹⁰³ Rowell, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.201.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 201.

¹⁰⁶ This assumes, incidentally, that Calvin’s first book, *Commentary on Seneca’s Treatise ‘De Clementia’*, (1532), was not theological as such. *Psychopannychia* was directed at the Anabaptists, whose break with the catholic tradition of the Church, put them as far as he was concerned outside the true church and without salvation. Luther (another enemy of anabaptism), on the other hand, accepted soul-sleep, as already noted.

¹⁰⁷ From, *op. cit.*, 112-125.

makes a most significant observation in connection with the provenance of conditionalism :

The adherents of systematic conditionalism were almost entirely to be found within the Augustinian-Calvinist tradition, and placed a high value on the verbal inspiration of the Bible . . . there seem to have been no High Anglican conditionalists. The reason for this is probably to be found in the fact that they already had their own ways of modifying the rigours of eternal punishment, through the advocacy of purgatory. Likewise, Broad Churchmen moved towards universalism, rather than towards the elaborate theories of conditionalism, though they were capable of adopting evolutionary language in much the same way as conditionalists.¹⁰⁸

One further advocate of conditionalism could be mentioned before leaving this topic and in anticipation of the next section. William H. M. Hay Aitken (1841-1927), listed by Secrett among the evangelical ‘celebrities’ supporting the doctrine,¹⁰⁹ is reminiscent of F. D. Maurice in his emphasis on the need to positively accept the love of God in preference to the more negative idea of averting his wrath, and in his definition of salvation in terms of freedom from sin primarily and only in a secondary sense as escape from its consequences. His views were first circulated privately in 1883 for the consideration of his Council of the Church Parochial Mission Society, which had become concerned about his views; and then more openly in the same year in the columns of *Word and Work*, a leading evangelical journal, where he defended a worker dismissed by the Church Missionary Society for holding conditionalist views. Aitken was to suffer opposition for his ‘coming out’, so to speak; yet, it did not prevent his appointment as canon of Norwich Cathedral in 1908.¹¹⁰

Universalism : latent and explicit.

Baldwin Brown’s Mauricean theology is a reminder that there was another branch of the movement against the severity of the traditional teaching on hell, tentatively proposed or hinted at by great thinkers like F. D. Maurice and F. W. Farrar and explicitly declared by

¹⁰⁸ Rowell, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

¹⁰⁹ *Op. cit.*, A.G. Secrett, *The Roman Catholic Doctrine*.

¹¹⁰ *Op. cit.*, Froom, pp. 372-378.

S. Cox's *Salvator Mundi*, for example. Brown saw himself as a universalist, but in the sense of having the *hope* that all would eventually come to accept God; he was against the idea of a divine decree imposing salvation.¹¹¹ Like Maurice, his optimism lay in the expectation of human freedom responding authentically to divine love. Here we would contrast the more certain universalism of the present-century J. A. T. Robinson, in his *In the End God*, in which he understands God to condition us to ultimately yield to him.¹¹²

Turning to F. D. Maurice and his *Theological Essays*, in his own right and in anticipation of our detailed examination of the eschatology of T. R. Birks, his successor at Cambridge, we need to be aware of both the depths and the obscurities of his theological thought, which are notoriously difficult to understand. Alec Vidler warns that his contemporaries found him difficult to understand and that, in consequence, contradictory things were said about his teaching – a theology hard to understand because it could not be classified easily.¹¹³ Likewise, Don Cupitt, in his excellent study in Maurice's eschatology, quips that "expounding Maurice is like getting lost in a maze" and quotes O. Pfleiderer's remark that the theology of Maurice is "more complicated than that of any other theologian."¹¹⁴ Edward Carpenter in his introduction to Maurice's *Theological Essays* has to admit the obscurity of parts of the Essays and explains it as the lack of the literary skill one finds in John Henry Newman; something which Maurice tried to remedy in the second edition.¹¹⁵ Carpenter is talking about Maurice's style. Yet, it is more than clarity of expression that is needed to plumb the depths of his ideas! We will not get far in trying to understand Maurice if we try to quantify, neatly package or systematize his thinking. Indeed, Carpenter goes on to note :

. . . Maurice uniformly endeavours to keep close to, indeed to build upon, common human experience. He had a horror of systems – the systematizer, he

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

¹¹² J.A.T. Robinson, *In the End God*, London, 1950, 119-123, as quoted by T. Hart, 'Universalism :Two Distinct Types', in Cameron's, *Universalism, op. cit.*, p. 21f.

¹¹³ Alec R. Vidler, *The Church in an Age of Revolution*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1961, p. 84.

¹¹⁴ Don Cupitt, *The Language of Eschatology : F.D. Maurice's Treatment of Heaven and Hell*, in the *Anglican Theological Review* 54, no. 4, October, 1972, pp. 313 & 316.

¹¹⁵ F.D. Maurice, *Theological Essays*, London, James Clarke, 1957 edn. (with introduction by E. F. Carpenter), p. 9.

thought was 'of the devil' – and his starting point is always the response which men must necessarily make to the world in which they live.¹¹⁶

Cupitt also refers to Maurice's aversion to systematic thought, but points out that the "coherence of his writings is the consistency of the man himself."¹¹⁷ Clearly then, we will search in vain if, adopting the logical and orderly approach of the systematic theologian, we look for a handy digest or ready-reckoner of Maurice's theology. Particularly is this the case when we attempt to understand his eschatology. It could be claimed that to ask – in a crudely simplistic manner – whether Maurice believed in heaven and hell is like a fundamentalist Protestant asking if the Pope is a Christian (a question once put to me as a teacher).

Doubtless, the enigmatic and paradoxical character of Maurice's thought and his difficult style may well have been largely responsible for his dismissal from King's College. W. E. Gladstone, who had known him well in his Oxford days,¹¹⁸ acknowledged as much in his account of the proceedings that led to the historic sacking of Maurice. In a letter to Lord Lyttelton, October 29, 1853, Gladstone, who was a member of the council of K. C. at the time, regretted what had taken place. He did not support the dismissal and had argued that Maurice be given more time to explain his ideas. He admitted that there were things in the notorious last essay, which neither he nor the council could 'reconcile' [understand] and that alone should have at least deferred judgement.¹¹⁹ In a later letter, which referred back to this sad episode, he confessed that he was one "ill able to master books of an abstract character."¹²⁰ Without labouring the point, it ought to be said that the harsh treatment received by Maurice at the hands of the University council, may have betrayed not only a lack of understanding but a fear or anger which often accompanies ignorance of the unknown. In this connection, it may be significant that the majority of those who

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹¹⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 305.

¹¹⁸ John Morley, *Life of Gladstone*, London, Macmillan, Vol. I, 1905, p. 54.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 454f.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 168n. The occasion of the letter [see p166f] was Gladstone's 'apology' to Dr. Hampden (now a bishop), who had been condemned for alleged heresy in 1836, while a professor at Oxford. Gladstone regrets that he was in accord with the majority against him, despite his actual absence. Clearly, as he grew older Gladstone became wiser – or at least more tolerant of the views of others!

condemned Maurice (on the College Council) were laymen¹²¹ - perhaps they lacked the appreciation that in the creative world of the university great minds are bound to be speculative and innovative, and that the professional hazard of the the Christian minister and teacher is that he is bound to think; and, consequently, may go too far in his wrestling with the problems associated with something as troublesome as theodicy.

The starting point, then, for any consideration of F. D. Maurice's teaching on the 'last things' must be his *Theological Essays*. Published in 1853, the book caused something of a storm, mainly because of his views on eschatology, in particular his definition of eternal life and eternal death. In this connection, the key Essay is the concluding essay, *On Eternal Life and Eternal Death*; but the one *On the Resurrection of the Son of God, from Death, the Grave, and Hell* and the book's postscript on the Athanasian Creed are also relevant to our enquiry. The sad sequel to the book's circulation, his dismissal from King's College, London, where he had been made Professor of English Literature in 1840 and the first Professor of Theology in 1846, is perhaps an indication of the pedestrianism of thought of his detractors, who failed to understand his ideas or at least failed to appreciate that he was not so much an innovator but as one seeking the true biblical teaching on these issues. Certainly, his teaching on eternal life and death is really no more – if sympathetically approached – than the *realized* eschatology, which we can find in the Johannine writings. As in John¹²² so in Maurice eternal life is essentially a living relationship with God, whom one can know in Christ. To be ignorant of such a God of love is to be in a state of death and loss. Heaven is to be with God; hell is to be without him, and this is eternal punishment.¹²³ So far, this is a valid exposition of New Testament teaching. However, Maurice becomes controversial in his strict and uncompromising definition of *eternal*. For him the true biblical sense of the word must be governed by our understanding of God, himself. To explain *eternal* without reference to God is to miss its real meaning.¹²⁴ Understood in this way, the word has nothing to do with time as such and must not be defined in negatives such as endlessness, etc. Eternal life is a quality of

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 454.

¹²² See e.g. John 17:3 & I John 5:12.

¹²³ See Carpenter's edn. *Op. cit.* pp. 306-7.

life, the life of one in fellowship with God. To think of it in terms of duration or quantity is to debase it. Cupitt's penetrating analysis sheds much light on Maurice's originality here :

Maurice's position . . . seems to be this: the term "eternal" has nothing to do with duration. It is an attribute of God. Eternal life is God's mode of life, which he communicates to those whom he brings into fellowship with himself. Maurice deprecates any attempt to *define* eternal life; it should be felt, lived, and preached. But if a definition were to be attempted, it should contain no reference to the future, or indeed any other tense, except the biblical *Now*. Such a reference would be thoroughly misleading. An adequate phenomenological description of the state of eternal life enjoyed by believers, however, would include a reference to their hope of the future consummation of this state in another world.¹²⁵

Of course, there need be no contradiction with a future enjoyment of that which in itself is existential rather than temporal. If this seems too subtle or ambiguous, there is clarification in the later note on the Athanasian Creed :

I say that I have been forced into the belief of an Eternal world or kingdom, which is about us, in which we are living, which has nothing to do with time, by prayers. These common prayers which I offer up with peasants, and women, and children, have taught me that there is an Eternal Life which is emphatically a present life (not according to a doctrine which I have listened to lately with astonishment, alike for its logic and theology – a *future* life begun in the *present*); and that this Eternal Life consists in the knowledge of God; and that the loss of the knowledge of God is the loss of it.¹²⁶

Although he does not deny an 'after-life'¹²⁷, as we might call it, his eschatology is essentially *realized*. His earlier Essay *On The Resurrection of the Son of God, from death, the Grave, and Hell* makes it clear that not only eternal life, but the resurrection of believers, the last trump, etc. are seen as present realities rather than things to be expected

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 305f.

¹²⁵ Don Cupitt, *The Language of Eschatology*, *op. cit.* p. 309. Cupitt has just quoted Maurice's *The World* [sic.] "*Eternal*" and *the Punishment of the Wicked* (Fifth Thousand, Cambridge, 1854), p.36, where Maurice brings in a future dimension by saying, ". . . I never doubted that eternal life is the blessing which we are to desire in a future world; which we are to hope for there in its fullness."

¹²⁶ *Theological Essays*, *Op. cit.*, p. 326.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 133-5 and Cupitt *Op. cit.* p. 311.

at some far distant time or 'eschaton'.¹²⁸ His reluctance to anchor hope in the future as opposed to the present is well motivated by his distaste for any soteriology which is inspired by the expectation of rewards and punishments. God is to be known and loved for his own sake not for any selfish interest. In a sense, then, the future aspect of life with God is 'accidental' or 'incidental' to the eternal life which is divorced from time. In this context, Cupitt contrasts him with Paley, for whom the Christian experience starts with our focus on the final judgement, and compares him more favourably with Richard Whately the conditionalist, for whom one starts with the Gospel and then moves on to the hope of immortality.¹²⁹ Again, Cupitt makes much of Maurice's antagonism to what Cupitt describes as "Old Bailey Theology", which seeks to frighten people to righteousness more by the prospect of punishment than by the loss of God's loving fellowship. Noting Whately's claim that the belief in immortality was not general to mankind he goes on:

Maurice, though, thought that the fear of death and what might lie beyond it *were* universal to men. The Old Bailey theology openly reinforced these primeval fears. It built on them. But Maurice goes along with Whately in putting the Gospel of God's love first, and then finds that it banishes fear. The fundamental axiom is the message that God is a holy and loving Father, who calls men into an eternal communion with himself. This exalts them to a region where death has lost its sting, and fears of what may lie beyond it can no longer make them afraid.¹³⁰

As for the question, then, does Maurice believe in hell, the answer can be positive if we can move away from what some might regard as crude literalism; if we remember that his theology is not systematic; if we are able to understand and accept that hell or eternal death is a state of separation from God as eternal life is fellowship with him; if we appreciate his agnosticism about the possibility of the impenitent permanently excluding themselves from God's love. With respect to this last point, while Maurice is not a

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 127-133.

¹²⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 310f. Cupitt illustrates the point with the analogy of the misuse of university education when only the fear of final examinations encourage study.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 311.

universalist as such;¹³¹ he seems to *nurse* the hope that perhaps after all no one will slip beyond God's love :

I ask no one to pronounce, for I dare not pronounce myself, what are the possibilities of resistance in a human will to the loving will of God. There are times when they seem to me - thinking of myself more than of others - almost infinite. But I know that there is something which must be infinite. I am obliged to believe in an abyss of love which is deeper than the abyss of death: I dare not lose faith in that love. I sink into death, eternal death, if I do. I must feel that this love is compassing the universe. More about it I cannot know. But God knows. I leave myself and all to him.¹³²

Before closing his Essay, *On Eternal Life and Eternal Death*, he tilts at the then current intolerant insistence in some quarters [a reference no doubt to the introduction of the article on eternal punishment by the Evangelical Alliance in 1846] upon belief in endless punishment. Further, he earnestly reminds his brethren, especially the clergy, that when Jesus warned his hearers to escape the damnation of hell, he was speaking to the religious men, the religious leaders; and that, in contrast, his message to the publicans and sinners was about the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. He warns, therefore, against spiritual pride, which is devilish and belongs in the deepest hell; and condemns the corruption of Christ's preaching method to the common folk by replacing it with hellish threats.¹³³ Before we get confused by the elasticity of Maurice's mind, we ought to remind ourselves that :

. . . for Maurice, the primary use of the language of eschatology is not descriptive, but hortatory.¹³⁴

Still on the question of language, Maurice's understanding of the word *eternal* may be accurate and useful theologically, but what about its roots? While Cupitt is confident that Maurice's doctrines have much support in the 'historic Christian tradition', he is not so convinced about his use of the word 'eternal'; and he has to state that etymology here is

¹³¹ Rowell *Op. cit.*, p. 81. He says that Maurice looked anew at the doctrine of hell "refusing to endorse either a rigorist position, or an easy universalism."

¹³² *Theological Essays*, p. 323.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 324. A similar warning or claim is made by David Pawson in his book *The Road To Hell*, London H. & S., 1996 ed., pp. 48-53, where he maintains that the message of hell-fire was preached by Jesus to his followers and the religious leaders rather than to the common folk.

¹³⁴ Cupitt, *Op. cit.*, p. 307.

not on Maurice's side.¹³⁵ Going on to explain that the basic sense in Greek (*aionios*) and Latin (*aeternus*) is of an everlasting existence, Cupitt suggests we use the word *sempiternal* with reference to that which endures for ever in this sense, perhaps to avoid confusion with Maurice's understanding of *eternal* as timeless. Further, he stresses the need to understand that, in his use of this and other terms, Maurice is talking in moral rather than philosophical terms; a factor which made dialogue between Maurice and philosophers like Mansel difficult. Because of his unconcern for the philosophical or metaphysical implications of his use of *eternal*, Maurice could happily conceive of people living in time and in the divine eternity simultaneously.¹³⁶ Of course, in the debate about the nature and extent of eternal punishment, which has called upon etymology as much as theology, there have been many attempts from both sides to settle the matter with the definitive use of key Greek and Hebrew terms, notably *eternal*.¹³⁷

Again, Cupitt is not happy with the way Maurice has insisted on giving the word 'eternal' the same value, whether applied to life or death.¹³⁸ It appears that in his concern for 'symmetry' or consistency and in his aversion to the traditional doctrine of hell, Maurice has forgotten that :

Eternal death is not a mode of God's being in which men may participate, in the way that eternal life is.¹³⁹

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 314.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 315f.

¹³⁷ F.W. Farrar's *Eternal Hope*, Macmillan, London, 1892 ed., has an *excursus* on the word *aionios*, pp. 197-202, in which he writes significantly, and no doubt with Maurice in mind, "It is not worth while once more to discuss its meaning when it has been so ably proved by so many writers that there is *no authority whatever for rendering it 'everlasting,'* and when even those who, like Dr. Pusey, are such earnest defenders of the doctrine of an endless hell, yet admit that the word only means 'endless within the sphere of its own existence' . . ." Edward Fudge, in an excellent account of the various attempts historically to explain *eternal/aionios*, considers that non-traditionalist writers (such as Maurice and Farrar) who reject any temporal sense in the word have overreacted as much as traditionalist writers who deny any qualitative sense. See pp. 38 and 49, *op. cit.*

¹³⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 310, "On the other hand, Maurice very rashly insisted (because of his concern to deny the endlessness and futurity of Hell-punishments) that the word eternal bears the same meaning in the two phrases, 'eternal life' and 'eternal death'. Obviously it does not, any more than 'perfectly' bears the same meaning in the two phrases 'perfectly beautiful' and 'perfectly hideous'.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.310.

As already indicated, it is not easy to categorise the elusive brilliance and innovativeness of Maurice's thinking; and it would be naïve to attempt to do so, particularly in conventional terms. With Froom's *trilemma* in mind, we can at least conclude that Maurice was certainly not a traditionalist and, on the surface at least, appeared to reject conditionalism and universalism! However, for convenience – if not because of confusion – we might cautiously describe him as inclining in the direction of the larger hope of universalism, not in any dogmatic sense,¹⁴⁰ but as an expression of the ultimate victory of divine goodness, albeit in a radically different way to that of T. R. Birks. Indeed, Tennyson, a champion of this larger hope, encouraged Maurice after his dismissal from King's College by dedicating a poem to him.¹⁴¹ Another significant dedication to Maurice at this time was the *Village Sermons* (1853), by bishop Colenso of Natal, who also published, *Ten weeks in Natal* (1855) and *Commentary on Romans* (1861), which also dealt with his views on this topic. Colenso's experience as a missionary had forced him, too, to adopt a less orthodox view of final punishment. He wondered how Christians could be so comfortable if they really believed that millions of the ignorant heathen were destined for eternal hell; and he considered the traditional doctrine to be a hindrance to successful preaching of the Gospel.¹⁴²

This *hope* concerning the possibility of the eventual salvation of all was something Maurice shared with S. T. Coleridge,¹⁴³ who is considered one of the great influences upon him.¹⁴⁴ Coleridge had an effect also on more than one of the contributors of the notorious *Essays and Reviews*, published in 1860.¹⁴⁵ According to Alec Vidler, this book, which he sees as an attempt to commend critical and historical study of the Bible to the Church of England (issues which had already engaged German minds for 50 years), caused the greatest of the many religious crises of the nineteenth century.¹⁴⁶ The book

¹⁴⁰ Rowell, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 88f. Tennyson's view can be seen in *In Memoriam* LIV & LV, which can be found in *In Memoriam Maud, Other Poems*, Everyman, London, 1996 reprint, p. 103f.

¹⁴² Rowell, p. 117f.

¹⁴³ Rowell, p. 67.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 62; Vidler *op. cit.*, p. 83f.

¹⁴⁵ Vidler, pp. 83 & 124.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 123 & 125.

was conceived and edited by Henry Bristow Wilson, a former Oxford tutor, who was joined by six other contributors in assembling seven essays of explosive potential. Among them were celebrated names such as Baden Powell; and Frederick Temple (father of William Temple), Head Master of Rugby School, who later withdrew his essay from future editions, when he was made bishop of Exeter,¹⁴⁷ because of the extremities of some of the other contributors. This attempt of the 'broad' Church to liberalise attitudes to Scripture, soon met with the combined hostility of the Evangelicals and the Tractarians, representing the opposite ends of the conservative spectrum. Although the book generally fell into disfavour, it was the essays of Wilson, on *The National Church*, and Rowland Williams of Lampeter, on *Bunsen's Biblical Researches*, which earned the most opprobrium; the former being seen as an attack on the doctrine of eternal punishment (and by implication on Scripture itself) and the latter on the inspiration of the Bible. The outraged clergy were obliged to take action; and as convocation was unable (on procedural grounds) to condemn the book as such, they settled for the prosecution of Wilson and Williams. In 1862 they were tried and condemned for heresy by the Court of Arches; but in 1864 were acquitted by the Privy Council. Referring to this reversal, someone remarked with the now famous words that the Lord Chancellor "dismissed Hell with costs, and took away from orthodox members of the Church of England their last hope of everlasting damnation."¹⁴⁸ From comments that since the deletion of the Article on "the mysterious question of the eternity of final punishment" (in 1553) from the original Forty-two Articles of the Anglican Church, the question of eternal punishment had not come up for test, officially, until this case in 1862-64.¹⁴⁹

As in the case of Maurice, it would appear unfair to charge Wilson with dogmatic heresy as such. At least, by today's standards, we seem to be dealing not so much with a doctrinal iconoclast, to coin a phrase, but with a mind seeking to *challenge* the traditional view, in the interests of a more acceptable and compassionate understanding of God in his

¹⁴⁷ This appointment was one of Gladstone's earlier preferments. While Gladstone was averse to some of the *Essays* he found nothing objectionable in Temple's: at least he 'thought it of little value, but did not perceive that it was mischievous'. See Morley's *Life of Gladstone*, Vol. II, *op. cit.*, p. 39f.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

¹⁴⁹ From, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 394f.

dealings with mankind. He was troubled by the narrowness of the Calvinistic view of salvation, and sought to widen the embrace of God's love with respect to the heathen and unbaptized children. We note his hope in such all-embracing compassion:

Moreover, to our great comfort, there have been preserved to us the words of the Lord Jesus himself, declaring that the conditions of men in another world will be determined by their moral characters in this, and not by their hereditary or traditional creeds; and both many words and the practice of the great Apostle Paul, within the range which was given him, tend to the same result. He has been thought even to make an allusion to the Buddhist *Dharmma*, or law, when he said, 'When the gentiles which have not the law do by nature the things contained in the law, these having not the law are a law unto themselves, which show the work of the law written in their hearts,' &c. (Rom. i 14, 15.).¹⁵⁰

Again, pointing to our growing knowledge of the vast multitudes abroad, and the challenge to think positively of their destiny – even if outside of Christ - he asks :

In what relation does the Gospel stand to these millions? Is there any trace on the face of its records that it even contemplated their existence? We are told, that to know and believe in Jesus Christ is in some sense necessary to salvation. It has not been given to these. Are they – will they be, hereafter, the worse off for their ignorance? As to abstruse points of doctrine concerning the Divine Nature itself, those subjects may be thought to lie beyond the range of our faculties . . . As to the necessity of faith in a Saviour to these peoples, when they could never have had it, no one, upon reflection, can believe in any such thing – doubtless they will be equitably dealt with.

And, again :

If, indeed, we are at liberty to believe, that all shall be equitably dealt with according to their opportunities, whether they have heard or not of the name of Jesus, then we can acknowledge the case of the Christian and non-Christian populations to be one of difference of advantages.¹⁵¹

Such extracts suffice to demonstrate the underlying motivation of theodicy and compassion; and to make us wonder how much real difference there is – on this point -

¹⁵⁰ *Essays and Reviews*, London, John W. Parker, 2nd edn., 1860, p. 157.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 153 & 154.

between him and say, a modern evangelical exponent of the doctrine such as Michael Green.¹⁵²

Turning to F. W. Farrar and his controversial *Eternal Hope* (1878), we find ourselves once again listening in on a mind wrestling compassionately and humbly with the problem of eternal punishment but without presuming to reach dogmatic certainties. The book in question consists mainly of the famous five sermons he delivered at Westminster Abbey (where he had become canon in 1876) towards the end of 1877.¹⁵³ It was the third sermon, “ ‘Hell’ – What It Is Not” (Nov. 11), which caused something of a stir almost immediately in Britain and America. Misrepresentations, such as he did not believe in judgement and retribution, obliged Farrar to go to press and clear the air.¹⁵⁴ His opinions (or tentative views as we might think of them) on this doctrine are found in the sermon itself and in the long explanatory Preface.¹⁵⁵ The sermon is a passionate and convincing attack on the popular view of hell and an appeal for a more humane and God-honouring alternative. In his eloquent rejection of the merciless and cruel common preaching on damnation he gives vivid examples of horrific and crude accounts of everlasting punishment.¹⁵⁶ The only consolation he can find in the face of such unbearable horror is the fact that :

. . . happily the thoughts and hearts of men are often far gentler and nobler than the formulae of their creeds; and custom and tradition prevent even the greatest from facing the full meaning and consequences of the words they use.¹⁵⁷

Part of the problem, he feels, is in the misuse of Scripture : ‘proof-texting’ we might call it now. There is a tyranny, he argues, in the dogmatic use of texts to the neglect of the

¹⁵² In *The Truth of God Incarnate*, London, H. & S., 1977, Green advocates the same charitable view of God’s dealings with those who are ignorant of the Gospel. See, e.g., p. 118f.

¹⁵³ The title-page announces them as having been preached in November and December 1877, yet the footnotes at the start of each sermon indicate that they were delivered in October and November.

¹⁵⁴ F.W. Farrar, *Eternal Hope*, London, Macmillan, 1892 rep., p. xixf.

¹⁵⁵ His views on this subject can also be found in , *Mercy and Judgement : A few Last Words on Christian Eschatology with Reference to Dr. Pusey’s “What Is of Faith?”* London Macmillan, 1881; and “Present-Day Beliefs on Future Retribution” in *That Unknown Country*.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 55-63. Cp. His refs. to Jonathan Edwards and Spurgeon, p. lixf.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

broader sense and context. In connection, with this has been the failure to appreciate that some words and phrases are metaphor, imagery and poetry, and are not to be made the foundation of doctrine.¹⁵⁸ But if people must appeal to texts, he continues, then let it be a correct translation of words which underlies them. He goes as far as advocating that the words, *damnation*, *everlasting* and *hell* ought to be omitted from the English Bible as they do not represent the intended meaning of the originals. Such an incorrect rendering has reinforced the unacceptable presentation of judgement, which he so strongly deprecates.¹⁵⁹ Confidently, then, he is able to affirm :

Thus then, finding nothing in Scripture or anywhere to prove that the fate of every man is, at death, irrevocably determined, I shake off the hideous incubus of atrocious conceptions – I mean those conceptions of unimaginable horror and physical excruciation endlessly prolonged – attached by popular ignorance and false theology to the doctrine of future retribution.¹⁶⁰

As for what hell might represent, Farrar disclaims the ‘spreading doctrine’ of Conditional Immortality¹⁶¹; he cannot accept the conventional idea of Purgatory; and he cannot preach the certainty of Universalism.¹⁶² With such a statement, it would seem almost impossible to classify Farrar’s position ! However, despite his inability to affirm universalism dogmatically, he is clearly being drawn in that direction, which is in line with an element of Maurice’s eschatology and which seems reminiscent of the position of James Baldwin Brown. Having confessed his inability to ‘preach the certainty of Universalism’, he goes on to record the notable advocates of it in the early and modern church : Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Clement of Alexandria, Gregory of Nazianzus, Justin Martyr, Erskine of Linlathen, etc. He claims that even Irenaeus, Athanasius, Jerome, Ambrose and

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 73-77. Examples on p. 75 of the errors arising through the ‘ignorant tyranny of isolated texts’ are : “Gin-drinking has been defended out of Timothy, and slavery has made a stronghold out of Philemon.” !

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 77-81. We have already seen that he shares the Mauricean view of *eternal/aionios*; and as for *damnation* the substitution of ‘condemnation’ would be more accurate. *Hell* is used for *Tartarus*, *Hades* and *Gehenna*; and he strongly maintains that these did not convey to the early Greeks and Jews the notion of everlasting hellish suffering of popular Christian preaching.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 82f.

¹⁶¹ Although Froom admits that Farrar is not a conditionalist as such, he devotes a modest section to him, mainly because he had “turned completely away from the Eternal Torment postulate.” *Op. cit.*, pp. 404-412.

¹⁶² Farrar, *Eternal Hope*, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

Augustine, himself, respected the doctrine even though they rejected it. He hints that in striking out the Forty-second Article, that ‘All men shall not be saved’, the Reformers may have had sympathies in this direction.¹⁶³ In the Preface after protesting that the statements being circulated that he “denied the existence of hell” or “denounced the doctrine of eternal punishment” are ‘perversions’ of his teaching, he adds a footnote in which he shows his support for

Mr. Clemance, in whose little book I find much with which I can agree, argues that future punishment may *end*, but that the ending is unrevealed. While, therefore, he would not teach that it *must* end, neither can he teach that it will *not*. . . . I would go a little further than Mr. Clemance in expressing a distinct *hope*, and I do not think that he gives due weight to the doctrine of the restoration of all things.¹⁶⁴

Further in the Preface, he assents to the doctrine of hell insofar as it has to do with holiness, retribution on impenitent sin, etc. However, there are four elements of the popular doctrine he cannot accept :

- Physical torments or material agonies of eternal punishment;
- The supposition of its necessarily endless duration;
- That it is for the mass of mankind;
- That it is an irreversible doom for all who die in sin.¹⁶⁵

Clearly, his is not a hopeless view of the final judgement; and even in the ‘notorious’ sermon itself he offers encouragement to those of his congregation, who might not get right with God before death ! This is certainly reminiscent of some kind of purgatory. And it needs to be pointed out, that while Farrar could not accept the Roman Catholic systematic or dogmatic teaching on purgatory, the idea behind it of a process of purification and preparation for heaven he could countenance.¹⁶⁶ Most relevant here is R.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 84f.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. xxix.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, xxxif.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.xxvf.

J. Bauckham's comment on the essence of this larger hope for mankind (particularly in the light of evolutionary ideology) :

Common to almost all versions of the 'wider hope' was the belief that death was not the decisive break which traditional orthodoxy had taught. Repentance, conversion, moral progress are still possible after death. This widespread belief was certainly influenced by the common nineteenth-century faith in evolutionary progress. *Hell – or a modified version of purgatory* – could be understood in this context as the pain and suffering necessary to moral growth. [italics mine]¹⁶⁷

On this issue, Farrar's views of post-mortem probation are in line with those of E. H. Plumptre,¹⁶⁸ brother-in-law of F. D. Maurice and Dean of Wells, 1881-91, and author of *The Spirits in Prison and other studies on the Life after Death*, 1884. In 1871 he corresponded with John Henry Newman, the Tractarian who became a Roman Catholic in 1845. The occasion was a sermon Plumptre had preached in St. Paul's (on the 30 April that year) in which he argued that since the majority of people are neither wholly good or wholly evil, they are capable of change after death : i.e. that purgatory would provide a fresh opportunity for salvation. Newman rejected that hope arguing that it would be unacceptable to the Roman Catholic Church to see Purgatory as more than the purification of those who had died in faith¹⁶⁹

In conclusion, I think it fair to say, that in his view the absence of any definite revelation, Farrar would not presume to declare the certainty of universal restoration; but, that in his desire for a second probation and a larger hope for mankind, he had a strong hope that ultimately all would be well. If we had to label him, we could speak of him as a crypto-universalist or incipient universalist. Perhaps one could suggest that given time and a more liberal climate, no doubt Farrar would have declared himself more clearly. Indeed,

¹⁶⁷ R.J. Bauckham, *Universalism: a historical survey*, Themelios, 4(2), 1979, p. 51. As quoted by Powys, *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, *op. cit.*, p. 126. How closely relevant this is to Farrar, I am not sure, but Bauckham goes on to make the significant point that evolutionary progress was the new context for nineteenth century universalism as the Platonic cycle of emanation and return was for universalists of earlier centuries. Earlier, we noted the evolutionary influence behind some of the later conditionalists; and later we shall consider how this influenced B.B. Warfield's optimism about those who will finally be saved.

¹⁶⁸ Farrar's *Eternal Hope* is dedicated to the Rev. E. H. Plumptre, D.D.

E. B. Pusey the Tractarian, who wrote against, Farrar's views, accused him of teaching universalism, despite his [Farrar's] denial that he was a universalist.¹⁷⁰ Incidentally, in this reply to Farrar, Pusey also seeks to clear up a couple of misunderstandings concerning his own beliefs : that concerning the number of the lost, he never intended to be dogmatic but to insist on our absolute ignorance of it; and while he believes in actual eternal fire, in contrast to Farrar's rejection of material agonies, he is tolerant of others who believe in hell but are unable to accept this literal aspect of it.¹⁷¹ In anticipation of the views of T. R. Birks, H. Blocher and others on the final end to evil, we note in Pusey's book the implication of the continuation of evil in hell, when he says :

We can scarcely imagine an existence for a single hour with no one to love, no one to love us, with no love from God or man, nothing but hate.¹⁷²

Another strong assault on Farrar's views came quickly from America in the form of *The Future Life* (Defence of the Orthodox View by Eminent American Scholars) in 1878.¹⁷³ Fiercely championing the traditional stance, it contains a number of essays supporting the doctrine of endless punishment and others attacking Farrar and H. Ward Beecher. Also from America came F. W. Grant's criticism of Farrar. His detailed examination of Farrar's position understands that to be "the doctrine of 'final restitution' (in the universalist sense, of course)".¹⁷⁴

In his biography of Field-Marshal Bernard Montgomery, the maternal grandson of Farrar, Alun Chalfont provides further interest and illumination as he compares the boldness of *Eternal Hope* with the individualism of the famous soldier :

¹⁶⁹ Rowell, *op. cit.*, p. 173f. Newman was committed to eternal punishment as an essential Christian doctrine. For a brief summary of his views on this see Rowell p. 162.

¹⁷⁰ E.B. Pusey, *What Is of Faith as to Everlasting Punishment?* Oxford, James Parker, 1880 – in the 'advertisement' to the third edition. (Farrar replied to Pusey in his *Mercy and Judgement*, 1881 cited above).

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. vi & ix. David Powys in *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, *op. cit.*, p. 127 says, "Pusey, it seems, was happy to defend a doctrine of everlasting punishment because he was confident that it would apply to very few."

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 3f.

¹⁷³ Second Edition, London, Dickinson, 1878. See earlier citation. Was one of the contributors W. G. T. Shedd ? See closing section of this chapter.

But the overwhelming impact of his [Farrar's] teaching was unmistakable. It could be best summed up by the folklore slogan of the slums : 'It's all right . . . Farrar says there's no 'ell.' From all over the Christian world, from Ceylon and Norway and America, poured in a tidal wave of correspondence amounting to a collective sigh of relief. The authorities did not like it, but they had the sense not to rebuke him publicly. The ensuing controversy was decorous. But Farrar cannot have made many friends in high places; and there is every reason to suppose he was right in believing that his unorthodoxy cost him a bishopric [and I have failed to find any interest of Gladstone in the matter!]. Certainly, he had, among other offences, committed the crime for which a later establishment would not forgive his grandson – that of stealing their thunder by stepping out of line and appealing directly to the masses.¹⁷⁵

Stronger universalism

A more definite and confident statement about the ultimate salvation of all is found in the champions of explicit universalism such as Andrew Jukes and Samuel Cox. Jukes had left the Anglican Church for the Plymouth Brethren,¹⁷⁶ but was obliged to return when he started to advocate universalism. In his book, *The Second Death and the Restitution of All Things*, 1867, which has been ably assessed by Agar Beet, of the Wesleyan College Richmond and the Western Theological Institution, he faces up to the Scripture texts which seem to assert the final ruin of the lost as well as those which seem to offer them final hope. The key to unlocking the mystery of this tension is, according to Jukes, to be found in the very texts which seem to offer no hope. Destruction, then is the way of salvation; so that just as God saves men through the death of Christ, the second death of the lost, who are cast into the lake of fire will lead to their eventual salvation. This is coupled with the claim that the will of God is to use the first-born from the dead to save

¹⁷⁴ *Facts and theories as to a Future State*, 1879, p. 415f.

¹⁷⁵ Alun Chalfont, *Montgomery of Alamein*, London, 1976, p. 21f.

¹⁷⁶ See Roy Coad, *A History of the Brethren Movement*, Exeter, Paternoster Press, 1976, 2nd (paperback) ed., pp. 79-80 for a discussion of Jukes' involvement with the Brethren, where Coad tells us that the Anglican clergyman, 'the mystical Andrew Jukes', formed a congregation, which was soon linked with the Brethren and was visited by J.N. Darby, the Brethren pioneer (p. 79); and referring to Jukes' book, *The Second Death and the Restitution of All Things*, Coad adds, ". . . he denied the doctrine of eternal punishment and finally alienated himself from the Brethren, who were fiercely orthodox on this point following the earlier debates within their churches." (p. 80) Interestingly if not significantly, the Paternoster Press associated formerly with Brethren publications now also publishes works which take a broader stance on this doctrine of eternal punishment : e.g. the reprint of Fudge's conditionalist treatise, *The Fire That*

and bless the later-born (in a kind of priestly ministry beyond the grave) and that it is also his plan to work out through subsequent successive ages the salvation of those condemned on the last day.¹⁷⁷ Rowell describes Jukes' theology as idiosyncratic and claims that it has 'a somewhat Gnostic flavour'.¹⁷⁸

The teaching of Dr. Samuel Cox¹⁷⁹ is more straightforward and can be found in his book, *Salvator Mundi* (1877) and in his booklet, *The Larger Hope* (1883). His conviction is that all will be ultimately saved and that this rests on Scripture and on our instinctive moral sense; so that, if we draw a conclusion from Scripture which conflicts with our conscience, our interpretation of Scripture must be wrong.¹⁸⁰ His appeal to Scripture does not include the Old Testament (because it belongs to an earlier covenant), Revelation and the parabolic language of the Gospels (because of the difficulty of interpreting figurative language doctrinally); and, to the regret of Beet, many of the key passages dealing with the destruction of the wicked are ignored.¹⁸¹ Central to Cox's view is the claim that final punishment is remedial as well as retributive; but Beet objects with the observation that reformation is not always present in human punishment and that we do not have the right to claim it is in the design of God's punishment of those, who have rejected Christ.¹⁸² One of the key elements of Cox's teaching is the eventual collapse of all human resistance to God's will; but Beet advocates what he believes to be a more realistic view of man's ability to effectively resist God.¹⁸³ Like his contemporary, Farrar, Cox examines

Consumes, *op. cit.*, 1994, the original edition (1982) of which carried a Foreword by the distinguished Brethren scholar, F.F. Bruce, and N. Cameron's *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, *op. cit.*

¹⁷⁷ Agar Beet, *The Last Things*, London, H. & S., 1897, pp. 282-285. Beet commends Jukes for rebuking the over-statements of popular theology, but does not think he has proved his point; and regrets that he has omitted *reference to the passages which compare the doom of the lost to the destruction of vegetable matter by fire*.

¹⁷⁸ Rowell, *Hell*, *op. cit.*, pp. 129-131, where he gives an illuminating and succinct account of Jukes' strange views.

¹⁷⁹ He was the minister of Mansfield Road Baptist Church, Nottingham, where he gave the series of lectures later published as *Salvator Mundi*. His congregation was happy with his views; but *The Expositor*, which he edited for ten years demanded that he 'toe the line'; but he refused and resigned. See Rowell *op. cit.*, pp. 131-133 and Beet *op. cit.*, p. 286.

¹⁸⁰ Beet, *op. cit.*, p. 287f. Beet agrees with respecting the authority of conscience but warns against putting too much reliance on it, in this connection, because of the distorting influence of personal feelings.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 287/9.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 288f.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 288.

the words *damnation*, *hell*, *eternal* and claims that they do not have the meaning sometimes attached to them. Curiously and without good foundation it would appear, he understands the words *eternal* and *everlasting* in different senses, albeit both are renderings of *aiōnios* and [in an echo of Maurice] he understands *eternal* to be spiritual and divine.¹⁸⁴ Another key conviction in his system concerns Christ's words concerning the impenitence of Chorazin and Bethsaida and the lack of opportunity (for active repentance) of Tyre and Sidon (Matthew 11: 20-22). Beet argues that Cox's insistence, that a second post-mortem probation after death must be available to redress this earthly imbalance, fails to appreciate the fairness in God's justice plainly seen in Romans 2:12-16, where we read of God's justice according to the light received. Beet's words at this point are worth noting:

. . . inequality of advantage affords no presumption of a future probation. The argument of Dr. Cox is valid only against those who teach that none will be received into the city of God except those who on earth have definitely and consciously accepted the salvation offered by Christ.¹⁸⁵

Comment [R2]:

A hesitant attempt to defend the traditional view

As for Beet, himself, his contribution to the debate is well worth evaluating in its own right, as we conclude this chapter with attempts to maintain the orthodox view. In *The Last Things* (1897), he is able to look back on the various attempts to grapple with this doctrine. As we have already noted, he is unable to assent to the theory of universalism because of its lack of biblical evidence. However, he does appear more sympathetic to the other challenge to traditional orthodoxy, conditional immortality. In Lecture XVI, The Immortality of the Soul, he is clearly conditionalist insofar as he rejects the traditional

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 290. Cp. Jukes' *aeonial* transliteration, which emphasises the relation to *age/ages* (a temporal significance indicating a period of time with a unity of its own). Jukes also, like Maurice and Cox, gives it a higher sense : eternal life is that which has to do with a Saviour, part of a remedial plan. Similarly, the conditionalist Bible translator, R. F. Weymouth, renders the word 'of the ages' and explains that the word *aeonian* signifies 'belonging to the age(s)' rather than 'during'. See his note on ch. 18:8 – *New Testament in Modern Speech*, James Clarke, London, 1916.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 291.

doctrine of the [innate] immortality of the soul as a *mistaken supposition*.¹⁸⁶ Again, in his assessment of S. D. F. Salmond's, *The Christian Doctrine of Immortality* (1895), he is impatient with what he sees as Salmond's inferior treatment of the conditionalist position. Although Salmond is not very explicit about his own position on this issue, it would appear to Beet that he holds the doctrine of the endless suffering of the lost, largely because of his examination and rejection of universalism and conditionalism.¹⁸⁷ Yet, according to Beet, this appraisal is not too impartial; for Salmond appears to accord more status to universalism (e.g. describing universalism as a *doctrine* and conditional immortality as a *dogma*); and he has not shown that annihilation is contradicted in the Bible.¹⁸⁸ However, he is happy to note that Salmond is in close agreement with his views on the question of the immortality of the soul.¹⁸⁹ Of course, Beet's conditionalism is only definite as far as this view of the innate nature of the soul. Beyond that he is more negative or cautious. In his examination of the views of Petavel he writes :

He asserts correctly that the Bible never teaches the essential permanence of the human soul, and that in the New Testament life beyond the grave is always reserved for the righteous. From this he incorrectly infers that the lost will ultimately sink into unconsciousness. He thus falls into the common fallacy of accepting lack of proof as proof to the contrary. In this volume I have endeavoured to show that the writers of the New Testament, while using language which asserts or implies that some will be finally shut out from the glory of heaven, do not define in unmistakable language what their fate will be. This alternative position, which is certainly worthy of consideration, Dr. Petavel ignores.¹⁹⁰

The apparent contradiction here, in assenting to life only for the righteous after death while denying that the lost will ultimately sink into unconsciousness, is resolved by noting his earlier distinction :

We have also seen that life is more than existence; and that therefore the absence of life does not necessarily imply non-existence.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁶ Beet, *op. cit.*, p. 200.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 281.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 280-282.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 279.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 304f.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

Beet's position then appears somewhat agnostic; a reservation he feels to be true to Scripture. Continuing the above quotation, he goes on :

Thus fail all proofs that the Bible teaches the ultimate extinction of the wicked. On the other hand, this theory is not explicitly contradicted in the Bible. For, although its writers frequently assert and imply still more frequently, the actual suffering of the lost, and their final exclusion from heaven, they stop short of asserting in so many words that these sufferings will be endless.¹⁹²

Perhaps it was this ambiguity that prompted Beet's censure by the Methodist Conference of 1902; and made Petavel feel sure that Beet was only a *half-step* from becoming a thorough conditionalist.¹⁹³ Whether he was an incipient conditionalist, as Farrar and even Maurice were latent universalists, it is hard to say! What can be said with certainty is that there were many honest Christian thinkers with compassionate hearts in the nineteenth century who were condemned or criticised for propagating heresy, when in reality they were just tentatively searching (and in the Bible at that) for a kinder view of hell. No doubt for the traditionalist this is too kind a verdict.

Classic evangelical defence of the traditional view

In November 1885 W. G. T. Shedd published his response to the strenuous attack being made on the doctrine of Eternal Retribution. It came between the two editions [1879 & 1889] of F. W. Grant's *Facts and Theories as to a Future State*, which we have already discovered to be an uncompromising defence of the traditional approach. Again, it came ten years before S. D. F. Salmond's celebrated *Christian Doctrine of Immortality*¹⁹⁴, which defended orthodoxy albeit in a somewhat less decisive manner.¹⁹⁵ Shedd's book, *The Doctrine of Endless Punishment*, is a much-expanded version of a contribution he

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 216.

¹⁹³ Froom, Vol. 2, *op. cit.*, 464f.

¹⁹⁴ Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1895.

¹⁹⁵ Froom, *op. cit.* p. 443, claims that Dr. Salmond maintained a neutral position on the question of annihilation, while Edward Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes*, 2nd edn. Cumbria, Paternoster Press, 1994, p. 23 says that Salmond "comes out in the end against the annihilation of the wicked".

made earlier in the year to the 'North American Review'. Shedd has been described as the greatest systematic theologian (in the American Calvinistic tradition), after Charles Hodge, between the Civil War and the the First World War. He was greatly influenced by Plato, Kant and Coleridge; and in 1853 (interestingly, the year of the *Theological Essays* of F. D. Maurice – another who was in debt to Coleridge) he published an edition of the complete works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge.¹⁹⁶ The work on eternal punishment, representing the 'reformed' view of the doctrine, examines its history and discusses in fine detail the biblical and rational arguments for it.

Shedd is not impressed by Farrar's book :

In Scripture, there is no such thing as *eternal hope*. Hope is a characteristic of earth and time only. ... Canon Farrar's phrase "eternal hope" is derived from Pandora's box, not from the Bible.¹⁹⁷

His argument is based on reason and Scripture, and with respect to the latter it "turns principally upon the meaning of Sheol and Hades, and of the adjective [*aionios*]"¹⁹⁸ Shedd is quite firm in his contention that Sheol/Hades is equivalent to Gehennah, which he argues is the view of the Reformers, and rules out the whole idea of an intermediate state, Purgatory, etc.¹⁹⁹ There is no second probation; neither is there any possibility of post-mortem change or penitence, the wicked continuing in their eternal rebellion against God.²⁰⁰ There is no final victory over evil [as we will discover in the teaching of T. R. Birks and others]. Indeed, this persistence in sin *ad infinitum*, which is aggravated by

¹⁹⁶ *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Ed. W.A. Elwell, Carlisle, Paternoster, 1995 reprint, p. 1010.

¹⁹⁷ W.G.T. Shedd, *The Doctrine of Endless Punishment*, Edinburgh, Banner of Truth edition, 1986, p. 143.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. iv.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. iv, 19f. He also recognises a second aspect to the meaning of *Sheol*, i.e. the grave to which all go; however, it is only the body which goes there, where it awaits the final resurrection. Shedd claims that this view of the afterlife pending the final judgement is that of the Reformers (p. 20); yet, Herman Bavinck of the Dutch Reformed tradition distinguishes clearly between *Sheol* and *Gehennah*: see his *The Last Things*, Carlisle/Grand Rapids, Paternoster /Baker Books, 1996, pp. 36-37. Bavinck's somewhat curious view is that, although the saved and the lost are both in *Hades*, the saved "enjoy a provisional bliss with Christ in heaven", while the lost are in torment – but a torment which is "not yet identical with Gehennah" (p. 37).

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 151f.

God's righteous punishment, necessitates that punishment to be unending.²⁰¹ Further, eternal punishment follows from the fact that sin itself has an eternal quality because it is against God, Himself; and that it needed the stupendous self-sacrifice of the Eternal Trinity to provide a vicarious atonement for such eternal sin – such a sacrifice being unnecessary if sin relates to time only.²⁰²

On the question of *eternal*, Shedd has a useful section on the interpretation of *aionios*. Helpfully, he distinguishes two senses of *aion* (age), one denoting the present finite age and the other the future endless age. For example, Philemon is called an everlasting (*aionios*) servant in that his servitude was for this present age, just as the mountains are called everlasting – co-terminous with this world. This understood, it becomes easier to appreciate the word in its everlastingness in the appropriate context.²⁰³

Regarding the purpose and effect of such eternal punishment, for him there is neither the reformatory influence we noted in Samuel Cox nor any hint of the acquiescence in God's righteous judgement, which we are about to consider in T. R. Birks. In this connection his view is plain and harsh :

But the Divine tribunal, in the last great day, is invariably just, because it is *neither reformatory, nor protective*. In eternity, the sinner is so hardened as to be incorrigible, and heaven is impregnable. Hell, therefore, is not a penitentiary. It is righteous retribution, pure and simple, unmodified by considerations either of utility to the criminal, or of safety to the universe.²⁰⁴

Shedd insists not only on the absolute necessity of eternal punishment but on the necessity to *believe* in it. Only those who believe in and fear hell will escape it; and to

²⁰¹ p. 151.

²⁰² p. 152-3.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 84f. "If, therefore, the punishment of the wicked occurs in the *present* aeon, it is aeonian in the sense of temporal; but if it occurs in the *future* aeon, it is aeonian in the sense of endless. The adjective takes its meaning from its noun."

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

question the doctrine of endless punishment is to undermine the atonement, for the latter stands or falls logically with the former.²⁰⁵

However, there is a kinder facet of Shedd's doctrine. In his consideration of the final number of those who will be saved, B. B. Warfield is encouraged by Shedd's confidence, shared by Charles Hodge²⁰⁶ and Robert L. Dabney, that those ultimately saved will be a considerable number; albeit he is not as happy about Shedd's connection of this truth with "the erroneous opinion that men may be saved apart from the Gospel."²⁰⁷ Like Pusey, then, Shedd can afford a strong²⁰⁸ view of hell if, in mitigation, he believes its eventual occupants will be few.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. vi & 153.

²⁰⁶ The reference is to the well-quoted words of Hodge, which virtually close his great work: ". . . the number of the finally lost in comparison with the whole number of the saved will be very inconsiderable . . .". Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, James Clark, London, 1960 ed., Vol. III, p. 879f.

²⁰⁷ Benjamin B. Warfield, *Biblical and Theological Studies*, Philadelphia, The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1952, p. 350 & n. The ref. (that many will be saved) is to Shedd's *Dogmatic Theology*, Vol. II, p. 712; and that to being saved apart from the preaching of the Gospel is to Vol. I, p. 437.

²⁰⁸ A.H. Strong, a leading American Baptist theologian towards the end of the nineteenth century, wrote: "The North American Review engaged Dr. Shedd to write an article vindicating eternal punishment, and also engaged Henry Ward Beecher to answer it. The proof sheets of Dr. Shedd's article were sent to Mr. Beecher, whereupon he telegraphed from Denver to the Review: 'Cancel engagement, Shedd is too much for me. I half believe in eternal punishment now myself. Get somebody else.' The article in reply was never written, and Dr. Shedd remained unanswered." A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, London, 1970, p. 1052f.

Chapter 2.

T. R. BIRKS : (1). VICTORY: HELL WITHOUT EVIL

A novel attempt to make eternal punishment palatable

The doctrinal confusion of the time or ‘the chaos’, as Hugh McLeod heads his discussion of the Victorian uncertainties about traditional Christian teaching,¹ was offered some sort of solution, as far as eternal punishment was concerned, in the form of T. R. Birks’, *The Victory of Divine Goodness*.² To some extent a compromise between the traditional harsh view and restorationism (universalism) Birks’ view preserved the eternal nature of final punishment but purged it of the necessity for evil to endure. Essentially, Birks approached the problem of hell in the context of theodicy. However, because he sought to make the judgement of God more acceptable in an age of scepticism about such things, he became the victim of orthodox impatience with any attempt to modify basic doctrine; and a number of the leaders of the Evangelical Alliance censured him.

One’s interest in Birks was first aroused by the account of his views, and his subsequent persecution for them, in Geoffrey Rowell’s comprehensive study, *Hell And The Victorians*.³ However, attempts to acquire Birks’ *The Victory of Divine Goodness* for a fuller and first-hand examination of his views proved frustrating and protracted. Help was not available from the British Library, the Evangelical Library, other specialist libraries or even the archives of the Evangelical Alliance. It was only after much persistence that a copy was found in Cambridge University. It has been somewhat surprising to discover the general ignorance of this character among evangelicals, even those associated with the Evangelical Alliance, in which Birks once enjoyed a reputation of some distinction. Surprisingly, not even the exhaustive study of Leroy Edwin Froom⁴ nor David Powys’

¹ *Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City*, *op. cit.* p. 214f.

² *The Victory of Divine Goodness*, Rivingtons, London, Oxford and Cambridge, 1867.

³ G. Rowell, *Hell And The Victorians*, *op. cit.* pp. 123f

⁴ L.E. Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers*, *op. cit.*

detailed examination of the nineteenth century debate about hell⁵ has any reference to him. However, Bebbington's history of modern Evangelicalism in Britain does have a few useful references to him; but he is surely not accurate when he numbers Birks among "those eminent Evangelicals in the Established Church who have departed from belief in everlasting retribution for the lost", as I hope to make clear.⁶ Kessler's study of the Evangelical Alliance in Britain briefly records the troubled episode caused by Birks' book; but here again there could have been more depth and accuracy.⁷ For, as I hope to prove, Birks is an original and seminal thinker, and worthy of more recognition, if only because of the motivation behind his controversial views.

Historical background

Before examining the relevant teaching of Birks and the reaction to it, it would be helpful to note the events of 1845-46 relating to the origin of the Evangelical Alliance and to the introduction of the doctrine of eternal punishment into its basis of belief. This vital stage in the history of evangelicalism, which has been well documented, has been given a detailed examination by Kessler⁸, and the sequence of key events is not too difficult to trace.

The effective inspiration of the emergence of the Evangelical Alliance can be found in the suggestion of Dr. Patton of New York in 1845 that there should be "the calling of a convention in London of delegates from all the evangelical churches"; this suggestion being in the form of a letter included in "Essays on Christian Union", published by

⁵ D.J. Powys, *The Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Debates about Hell and Universalism*, in N. Cameron's *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, Carlisle, Paternoster, 1992, pp. 93-138.

⁶ D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, London, Routledge, 1989, p. 145.

⁷ J.B.A. Kessler, *A Study of the Evangelical Alliance in Great Britain*, Oosterbaan & Le Cointre N.V. – Goes, Netherlands, 1968. In the account of the coverage of the dispute in *Evangelical Christendom* p. 66 he wrongly gives the date of the original editorial as January, 1868 instead of February, 1870.

⁸ Of primary significance to him are the relevant conference reports, *Conference on Christian Union; being a Narrative of the Proceedings of the Meetings held in Liverpool, October 1845*, (1845), London, James Nisbet and *Proceedings of the Conference held at Freemasons' Hall, London 1846*, (1847), London, Partridge and Oakley. He also uses Dr. J.W. Massie, *The Evangelical Alliance, its Origins and Development*, London, 1847 and Dr. David King's paper, *The Religious Condition of Christendom*, London 1851.

Scottish evangelicals at the time in their pursuit of Christian unity.⁹ It was envisaged that the document, which would be issued to call this meeting, would lift up “a standard against Papal and Prelatical arrogance and assumption” and would embody “the great essential doctrines” common to consistent Protestants.¹⁰ However, while it was agreed by the Scottish evangelicals that such a venture should be pursued, it was suggested by the Rev. Dr. David King of Glasgow “that a smaller preliminary meeting was needed to form the doctrinal basis.”¹¹

This and the further suggestion that this preliminary meeting should be held in Liverpool was accepted by the interested Scottish churches, who appointed deputies for the meeting and issued a circular to the churches in England, Wales and Ireland inviting them also to send delegates to Liverpool. This historic preparatory conference was held during October 1-3, 1845, at the Medical Hall in Liverpool, when 216 leaders representing 20 denominations were present.¹² Evidently, the conference sought to be constructive from the start; for while Dr. King’s letter of invitation (urging the need to stand against “Popery and Puseyism”) was read out and later appended to the conference report, it was not adopted. Again, despite the tone of his letter of invitation, Dr. King chaired the opening meeting of the conference stressing that the keynote he must strike was love, later adding that “Christian union would be the first object of the Alliance and not controversy.”¹³

⁹ Kessler, *op. cit.* pp. 20-22.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 22f.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 25. Despite the positive stance taken at the conference, misconception lingered in the minds of some due to the wording of King’s letter of invitation and to the fact that Sir Culling Eardley Smith, leader of the anti-Maynooth movement [anti-Catholic], had accepted the invitation to attend the conference. Kessler observes that Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones was also prey to this misunderstanding, when he suggested at the Alliance’s National Assembly in 1966 that the E.A. had been formed in the first place as a reaction against John Henry Newman and others seceding to Rome. Kessler is at pains to stress that the Alliance did not start as an opposition movement. See p. 25f. Alan D. Gilbert, on the other hand, maintains that the Alliance was “launched primarily as an anti-Catholic movement during the agitation surrounding the Maynooth Grant . . .”. See A.D. Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England*, London, Longman, 1976, p. 169.

Of the issues needing to be resolved at this conference, one's chief concern is with the question of the beliefs, which were to be included in the doctrinal basis. This matter was dealt with by a sub-committee, with Dr. R.S. Candlish as its reporter. Much to the rapturous approval of the assembly, the committee reached unanimity within the time allotted to it, and eight points of doctrine were put to those gathered. These were:

1. The divine inspiration, authority and sufficiency of Holy Scripture.
2. The unity of the Godhead, and the Trinity of Persons therein.
3. The utter depravity of human nature in consequence of the fall.
4. The incarnation of the Son of God and His work of atonement for sinners of mankind.
5. The justification of the sinner by faith alone.
6. The work of the Holy Spirit in the regeneration and sanctification of the sinner.
7. The right and duty of private judgment in the interpretation of Holy Scripture.
8. The divine institution of the Christian ministry and the authority and perpetuity of the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.¹⁴

Candlish explained that this was not meant to be a creed but a "general statement". In the discussion which followed, some concern was expressed that the last article might exclude groups such as the Quakers and the Plymouth Brethren; but it was felt in response that the opening of the Alliance meetings with prayer would exclude the Quakers anyway and that this clause need not exclude the Brethren. The statement of faith was then adopted without alteration, apart from the change of "regeneration" to "conversion" in the sixth article.¹⁵

The name, 'Evangelical Alliance', was adopted in the final session of the conference; and it was agreed that the provisional committee should meet in Birmingham in January and April, prior to the great London conference.¹⁶

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 28. [They are found on p. 33 of the conference report, *Conference on Christian Union. Narrative of the Proceedings of the Meeting held in Liverpool, October 1845*", London 1845.]

¹⁵ Kessler, *op. cit.* p. 28f.

The remarkable display of the harmony of truth and love so evident at the Liverpool conference was not to exist intact for too long. At the second meeting of the provisional committee in April 1846 the doctrinal basis had to be re-examined in the light of objections that had arisen. However, the criticism that Sabbath observance had been omitted only encouraged the provisional committee to endorse the Liverpool decision to include it under the “practical aims” of the Alliance.¹⁷ More serious was the unease felt by some that the doctrinal basis implied a distinction between essential and non-essential truth. To satisfy this disquiet, the committee added a supplementary clause to the doctrinal basis pointing out that truths which had been omitted were not necessarily unimportant and that the basis was not to be regarded as a kind of definitive statement for the testing of brothers in Christ.¹⁸ Commenting on the composition and purpose of the doctrinal basis, Kessler insists that it was not meant to be taken as a summary of the fundamental truth of the gospel, but – and here he quotes Dr. J.W. Massie – only as a “basis for the Evangelical Alliance” simply providing the “prominent characteristics of the designation evangelical”; and he sees the omission of the doctrine of the second coming of Christ as support for Massie’s view.¹⁹

For our purposes, the most significant doctrinal issue considered at this preparatory stage was that of eternal punishment. The provisional committee met again on August 13 1846 to sort out some remaining problems before the great inaugural conference, which was to take place the following week. First, the Scottish members of the committee were anxious that the kingship of Christ should not be neglected; and to allay this concern the fourth article was augmented with the words, “and His mediatorial intercession and reign”.²⁰ Further, the American representatives were eager to have something included about life after death; and this led to the addition of a ninth article:

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.31, where he quotes Dr. J.W. Massie, *The Evangelical Alliance, its Origin and Development*, London, 1847, p. 357.

²⁰ Kessler, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

9. The immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body, the judgement of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ, with the eternal blessedness of the righteous and the eternal punishment of the wicked.²¹

Some years later the monthly chronicle of the Evangelical Alliance, *Evangelical Christendom*, recalled (in defence of Birks) that this article was not in the original basis and that it was added “at the pressing instance of American brethren” because of two errors prevalent in Germany and America namely, annihilation and ultimate restoration [or conditional immortality and universalism].²²

The great inaugural or founding conference of the Evangelical Alliance began at the Freemasons’ Hall, Great Queen Street, London on August 19, 1846. Eight-hundred Christians from fifty denominations were present, 84% from Britain, 10% from America and 6% from various European countries. They came in their capacity as individuals albeit some would have been backed financially by their churches. Sir Culling Eardley Smith [leader of the anti-Maynooth committee] was elected chairman of the conference; and he echoed the tone of the preparatory Liverpool conference by stressing the need to combine truth and love.²³ The first two resolutions stressed unity in Christ, without seeking to remove denominational structures; albeit, Dr. King was bold enough to express the hope that this could lead to organic union later.²⁴ In the afternoon session of the second day it was proposed that the conference should form the Evangelical Alliance. This was passed unanimously; and the doxology was sung, the delegates standing and shaking hands.²⁵

The third morning began a difficult and threatening phase of the conference, when the doctrinal statement was being considered. Unfortunately, prior to this conference the provisional committee had sought fit to add an introductory clause: “that the parties

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

²² *Evangelical Christendom*, vol. XXIV, William John Johnson, London, Feb. 1, 1870, p. 33.

²³ Kessler, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 36-9

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

composing the Alliance shall be such persons only as hold and maintain what are usually understood to be evangelical views, in regard to the matters of doctrine understated.”²⁶ As Kessler observes, this addition vitally affected the purpose of the doctrinal statement. Originally it had been designed simply as a “rallying call” to those interested in the Evangelical Alliance; now it was being used in a limiting way, restricting membership to those who could agree with all its details. Despite the unease felt, Edward Bickersteth, the father-in-law of T.R. Birks, proposed acceptance of the doctrinal basis; and claimed that it was a summary of the most vital truths and that it was his “creed”.²⁷ (Bickersteth had not been present, due to illness, at the second meeting, at Birmingham, when the provisional committee was seeking to express the feeling that the doctrinal basis was not a test or instrument of exclusion.) However, Bickersteth did concede that there were Christians who did not believe everything in the statement, implying that not all the doctrines were essential for salvation.²⁸

As the discussion developed it became clear that the majority present wanted the doctrinal basis to be as small as possible and to allow the inclusion of the greatest number of members possible; and in this connection the additions to the original Liverpool formula were criticised not for their content but for the fact that they lengthened the original statement. Kessler bemoans the fact that continued discussion to achieve a clearer theological understanding of the basis was discouraged; for he feels that such further discussion would have made clear the provisional nature of the basis, preventing some seeing it as an “absolute standard” or test.²⁹ Again, probably such clarification of the meaning and purpose of the basis would have made the later attack upon Birks’ views less likely.

On the evening of the fifth day, the doctrinal basis (including the introductory and supplementary clauses) was accepted unanimously and unaltered, apart from a change in the order of the articles. (This is when the ninth article, on the afterlife and eternal

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 39–40.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

punishment, would have become the eighth.) At this manifestation of unity, Edward Bickersteth's joy was ecstatic, and spontaneously he led the assembly in praise and worship.³⁰

T.R. Birks, himself, made a notable contribution on the seventh day of the conference when [almost prophetically considering the later controversy surrounding him] he proposed the resolution that the "great object" of the Alliance was to aid the unity existing among true disciples of Christ and to discourage strife and division.³¹ However, a couple of days later the conference was to take a dramatic turn, which effectively was to contradict this spirit of love and harmony.

On the ninth day, as delegates were becoming weary, with some ready to leave, a discussion had started about a proposed international conference in New York in 1849, when the Rev. J.H. Hinton, a Baptist minister from London, who was a leader of the anti-slavery movement, "proposed an amendment barring all slaveholders from the oecumenical Alliance".³² The reaction was understandable, if most unfortunate, in that the American delegates did not take too kindly to what was being seen as a general measure of censure being forced on them by the British; and the conference was prolonged by four days of vigorous debate, which filled 180 closely printed pages of the conference report.³³ A sub-committee was appointed and it reported back, strongly condemning slavery, which consolidated the attitude of the British contingent and also seemed to satisfy the Americans. However, the latter reconsidered their position and the debate was reopened - somewhat inconclusively. Kessler, regrets that this part of the conference has too often been passed over too briefly, considering the way it reveals the difficulties in the way of Christian unity.³⁴ However, suffice it say (so that we do not stray too far into another doctrinal or moral area) that the inability of the two sides to agree on

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 43.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.43.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

this matter, obliged the conference to abandon the idea of an ecumenical or world Alliance. Instead, it adopted the British suggestion of loosely linked national organisations, which were not responsible for each other's actions. The membership of the Evangelical Alliance proper would be limited to those present at the London conference (none of whom were slaveholders³⁵); and these founding members would set up seven regional organisations in Great Britain, U.S.A., Belgium, France and French Switzerland, North Germany, Canada, and the West Indies. The British members of the Alliance met again in November that year in Manchester to establish the British Organisation.³⁶

Later, during the controversy surrounding his book, *The Victory of Divine Goodness*, Birks stressed that he was a founding member of the Evangelical Alliance as well as of its British Organisation, a privilege lacked by his detractors, Baxter and Matheson, who were members only of the latter.³⁷ As we will continue to discover as we leave this summary of the historical background, Birks was a character of some significance in the origin and continuing story of the Evangelical Alliance.

* * * * *

Thomas Rawson Birks (M.A., Cantab.,1837)³⁸ was the incumbent of Holy Trinity, Cambridge where Charles Simeon had been vicar from 1782-1833), when he published his controversial book. Geoffrey Rowell notes that the young Gerard Manley Hopkins described him in 1864 as “almost the only learned Evangelical going”³⁹; and indeed he was to succeed F. D. Maurice as professor of Moral Philosophy in Cambridge, in 1872. In 1861 he wrote *The Bible and Modern Thought*, described by Bebbington as “a single-handed riposte” to the notorious *Essays and Reviews*, published the previous year.⁴⁰ His links in the fraternity of evangelicals were also strong, being the son-in-law of Edward

³⁵ Albeit, at least one of the American churches represented at the conference admitted slaveholders to its membership. See Kessler p. 43.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 46-48.

³⁷ *Evangelical Christendom*, April 1, 1870, p. 106.

³⁸ *Crockford's Clerical Directory*, London, 1868. (It lists 24 of Birks' publications.)

³⁹ G. Rowell, *Hell* p. 123f.

⁴⁰ See Bebbington's *Evangelicalism* . . . p. 140.

Bickersteth, a distinguished academic and cleric and a founder of the Evangelical Alliance in 1846, and brother-in-law of Edward Henry Bickersteth, poet and future bishop of Exeter, who shared his views. (See below.) Setting him and his book in the context of the concern engendered by his book, the evangelical periodical, *Evangelical Christendom*, granted him the highest of accolades :

. . . a very distinguished member of the Alliance, the Rev. T. R. Birks, for nineteen years Honorary Secretary of the British Organisation [of the E.A.], and having an extensive Evangelical connection and high reputation, published a book which has proved the occasion for no small disturbance and controversy. [It later describes him as] . . . a member of the University of Cambridge of considerable distinction, and as a preacher is generally assigned by public opinion to the Evangelical party in the Church of England.⁴¹

Considering the historical context, we note that Birks' book appeared not long after Darwin's controversial *The Origin of Species*, 1859. Bebbington assures us that Birks repudiated the theory of evolution, which he saw as "rejecting a Guiding Intelligence."⁴² Yet, in his account of the dispute, which rocked the Evangelical Alliance, Kessler seems to imply that Birks was influenced by the idea of development, and that his theory had to do with "the possibility of a development in the life after death."⁴³

"The Victory of Divine Goodness"

In the Preface, Birks introduces *The Victory of Divine Goodness* as a sequel to his earlier works *Difficulties of Belief* and the *Ways of God* (which were published in 1855 and 1863 respectively). The book is in three parts :

- I. LETTERS TO AN INQUIRER ON VARIOUS DOCTRINES OF SCRIPTURE;
- II. NOTES ON COLERIDGE'S CONFESSIONS OF AN INQUIRING SPIRIT;
- III. THOUGHTS ON THE NATURE OF THE ATONEMENT AND OF ETERNAL JUDGMENT.

In the Preface he explains that the Letters to an Inquirer were written seven years earlier to a 'gentleman of rank', who had written to him on 'several topics which had caused him

⁴¹ *Evangelical Christendom*, Vol. XXIV, 1870, pp. 33 & 99.

⁴² See Bebbington's *Evangelicalism* . . . p. 142.

⁴³ See Kessler's *Evangelical Alliance*, p. 67.

either perplexity or distress'.⁴⁴ He goes on to make clear that the reason for his delay in publishing them has been the sensitive and controversial nature of the subject of the fifth letter (*viz.* eternal punishment):

On that solemn topic it is dangerous to speak, when Scripture, on the surface at least, appears to keep silence.⁴⁵

However, he feels that the time has now come to make his views known openly:

The subject has of late been revived, and has acquired new prominence among the theological and ecclesiastical controversies of the present day. Any contribution, in a reverent and cautious spirit, to the guidance and relief of perplexed minds, is now more seasonable than ever.⁴⁶

He is, of course, referring to the considerable volume of thought and literature devoted to this topic in the second half of the nineteenth century; and which has already been dealt with in the previous chapter. Significantly, he says also on the same page that these views he is about to publicise have been in his mind for the past thirty years.

Before examining *Letter V, On Future Punishment*, a look at the earlier letters will reveal much about the direction of his thinking related to other aspects of theodicy. In *Letter III, The History Of The Flood*, he deals with the problem of the fate of those lost in the Deluge. He rejects the usual idea of a second probation, but he does not see their situation as necessarily hopeless. Accepting the possibility that many of those who drowned repented *before* they finally perished, he claims that I Peter 3: 18-20 would support the hope that Jesus presented them with the Gospel of forgiveness, between His death and resurrection: that those who had so repented might gain eternal salvation, despite losing the salvation afforded by the ark. Although I Peter refers specifically to those lost at the time of the Flood, Birks is prepared to see this posthumous offer of salvation extended to all since Adam, who expressed some kind of secret repentance before they finally

⁴⁴ *The Victory* p.v.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. vi.

expired, e.g. the Egyptian host lost in the returning waters and the Canaanite armies.⁴⁷ Yet, we must not assume too readily that such ideas reflect an inability to face up to the demands of a holy and just God. On page 27 he sees no room for any “sickly sentimentalism” in these matters; and in Letter IV, The Canaanites, when tackling the moral problem of their destruction, he defends the actions of God and argues that the more we grow in holiness the more we appreciate “the ways and counsels of the Holy One”.⁴⁸

It is in Letter V, On Future Punishment, that he begins to express his ideas: views which may well appear idiosyncratic, albeit they offer an attractive alternative to the horrific nature of the traditional view – at least to those searching for a more rational and compassionate understanding of the final judgement. He starts by facing up to the inherent tension in the problem. Answering his inquirer he writes :

“Nothing,” you remark, and I agree with the statement, “can be more positively laid down by our Lord, than that the reward of heaven and the punishment of hell are eternal . . .” On the other hand, a perfect love seems to imply a sincere desire for the happiness of every conscious and intelligent creature, and a perfect victory of Almighty love that this desire should not fail through the strength of evil, but be at length fulfilled . . .⁴⁹

Fundamentally, he shares the traditional thinking that the Bible teaches that final punishment is eternal. He is hardly unorthodox, either, when he speaks of the *perfect love* and the *perfect victory* of God. Before going on to share his thoughts on approaching this problem, he reminds his correspondent that his mind has been greatly exercised by this for many years; however, he has received light on the matter, and this he now wishes to impart, yet :

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. vi. Powys notes such a hope in *post-mortem opportunities* in the conditionalist Edward White (*Life in Christ*, 1846), see Cameron’s *Universalism*, p.128.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 27-31.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

. . . without daring, by unauthorized guesswork, to tamper with the entire truthfulness of the solemn messages of God.⁵⁰

Clearly, then, he does not consider his contribution to the amelioration of the doctrine to be speculative or innovative.

Enumerating the steps in his argument, he starts by pointing out that our being is both personal and individual and also relative or federal. So, for example, “in Adam all die” but “the soul that sinneth, it shall die”, too.⁵¹ Secondly, in those who are not completely selfish there is the capacity for personal joy and sorrow and the ability to share objectively in the experiences of others and in *external and objective truth*. There are the two aspects of happiness: personal and federal.⁵² Thirdly, and here Birks quotes a number of biblical texts (but without references), when it comes to the issue of eternal judgement, it is on the personal basis that we are sentenced; and this allows for “unequal degrees of punishment and bliss.”⁵³

Originality of Birks

It is the fourth stage of his thesis which indicates the novelty of his approach:

4. Let us now suppose that these statements of Scripture on the eternal contrast between the righteous and the wicked, the saved and the lost, however true, and however solemn, are not the whole truth, but that there is a further objective or federal element, common alike to both, which is nowhere in the Bible, in set terms, explicitly revealed. Let us suppose that the future condition of the lost will combine, with the utmost personal humiliation, shame, and anguish, the passive contemplation of a ransomed universe, and of all the innumerable varieties of blessedness enjoyed by unfallen spirits, and the ransomed people of God; such a contemplation as would be fitted, in its own nature, to raise the soul into a trance of holy adoration in the presence of infinite and unsearchable Goodness. If this were true, still there are weighty reasons why this aspect of God’s purpose should not be early revealed. That love, which is the source of all the Divine messages, may be the reason why the All-wise refuses to unveil a part of the truth, which, even in clearing His character from the blasphemies by which it is now assailed,

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 43f.

might, through the perverseness of sinful hearts, deaden the conscience, paralyze the will, and obscure the momentous contrast between the results of present obedience and disobedience, so as to defeat one main object of all Divine revelation.⁵⁴

That his theory is “nowhere in the Bible in set terms, explicitly revealed”⁵⁵ must have disturbed his fellow evangelicals, committed to the completeness of the revelation of divine truth in Scripture. For many, this admission would weaken the appeal of the rest of the argument: any hint of *eisegesis* quickly loses the sympathy of those who see unadulterated Scripture as our sole doctrinal authority. Above, we noted how Birks was careful to stress that he would not dare to tamper with biblical truth, yet here he could be accused of that error. However, granted that he is not dealing with Scripture in a cavalier or bigoted manner and that he is searching for a genuine solution to the vexed question of unending conscious damnation, there is much that is challenging and moving in the originality of what follows. It is a most noble and intriguing sentiment that the damned in hell will, despite their shame and misery, go through eternity not cursing God but dwelling on his holiness and goodness. Moreover, Birks anticipates the objection that such a truth should have been so hidden, by noting that, despite the opportunity afforded by this ‘truth’ to clear God’s name of any charge of cruelty, he (God) has not unveiled it so far to prevent sinners abusing it and losing their respect for his righteous judgement. He goes on to say that this refusal of God to make this knowledge easily available will be acknowledged one day as “the most wonderful illustration of God’s love”⁵⁶, who will not weaken the terrors of the lost, and thus encourage false hope (in those in this present world, who need to be saved). Birks seems more concerned about the glory of God than he is about the hopelessness of the lost: theodicy not sentimentalism is his chief motivation:

The willingness of the Most High to remain exposed for ages to all the blasphemies hurled against Him because of these solemn threatenings, may be

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

found to add a crowning excellence and beauty to the perfect manifestation of His redeeming love.⁵⁷

His fifth point opens by defending his view despite the silence of Scripture, which, he feels, does not disprove its truth. On the contrary, the implicit teaching of the Bible is against the popular notion⁵⁸ that “lost souls are their own mutual tormentors, and given up to Satan to be tormented by him forever.”⁵⁹ Birks is adamantly opposed to any idea of Satan’s power continuing after the judgement. In my view, he rightly sees this as a kind of dualism, which perpetuates the power of evil:

To assume the perpetual continuance of active malice and permitted blasphemies, is to ascribe to God a dominion shared for ever with the powers of evil.⁶⁰

This is the heart of Birks’ theory. Its value lies in its attempt to address boldly the full requirements of sound theodicy and to demonstrate that the highest view of God is not consistent with the ongoing existence (and triumph) of evil. Of course, this does not mean the end of Satan, for Birks does not support conditionalism/annihilationism in any form. Evil will cease; but Satan, like the rest of God’s fallen and impenitent creatures, will go on through eternity, not in enmity against God but, as with all the lost, acknowledging the ultimate justice of God :

. . . the descriptions of that final doom imply the utter prostration and entire repression of all actings of the rebellious will under the immediate display of Infinite Holiness.⁶¹

Satan’s remorse and acquiescence in the justice of God is dealt with more fully in **E. H. Bickersteth’s, *Yesterday, To-Day and For Ever***, which vividly portrays his pathetic acquiescence in his eternal fate. (See below.)

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 47. Such thinking he affirms has “in the words of the Article . . . no warranty of Scripture, but is plainly repugnant to the word of God.” The Article in question appears to be no. XXII, on Purgatory. However, Birks’ concern here is much wider than Purgatory; so we may assume he is borrowing the strong wording to denounce the similar notions relating to eternal punishment.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* p. 47

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.47.

The next stage of the argument is crucial to our ability to grasp how the lost, condemned to unending suffering, can acquiesce in rather than be sinfully angry at the justice of God.⁶²

Now if the doom of lost souls involves an *unwilling* [italics mine] acknowledgement of God's justice in their own sentence, must it not also imply a compulsory but real perception of all other attributes of the Almighty? Must not the contemplation of infinite wisdom and love, however solemn the punishment and the compulsion by which alone it is made possible for those who have despised their day of grace, be still, in its own nature, unutterably blessed.⁶³

That the acceptance of their final lot is not repentance on the part of the lost is clearly implied in their unwillingness and in the compulsion of God. This we will develop below. Further, and here reason, imagination and compassion are stretched to the limit, this response or state of the lost will be *unutterably blessed*. If we may be allowed to see some aspect of happiness in the word blessed, then we are confronted with the daring notion of the eternally damned experiencing something positive emotionally or mentally. Even if we cannot elevate this blessedness to anything resembling happiness, at least we may accept that the experience of the damned is not wasted⁶⁴ - if only because they are engaged indirectly, albeit under compulsion, in glorifying God; and this after all is the chief end of man. Another startling but crucial element in Birks' theory follows.

The personal loss and ruin may be complete and irreparable, the anguish intense, the shame and sorrow dreadful, the humiliation infinite and irreversible. Yet out of its depth there may arise such a passive but real view of the joys of a ransomed universe, and the unveiled perfections of the Godhead, as to fulfil, even here, in a strange, mysterious way, the predicted office of the Redeemer of souls, and to swallow up death in victory.⁶⁵

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁶² P. 48 really gives us the crux of Birks' theory.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁶⁴ We shall note this idea of the loss of hell not being waste, when we examine the views of Henri Blocher : *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, p. 311.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

This contemplation of the *joys of a ransomed universe* and the *unveiled perfections of the Godhead* recall what we noted earlier about the *relative* or *federal* aspect of our character, which is able to sympathise with the joys of others and to contemplate external and objective truth.⁶⁶ In a sense, we may argue that this capacity to see beyond ourselves is a vicarious blessedness, which we associate normally with a renewed nature, and which also reminds us of the selfless altruism of Moses and the apostle Paul, both of whom were prepared to forfeit their own personal salvation in the wider interests of the people of God.⁶⁷ However, we need to remember the tension we find here in Birks between a real acquiescence in the perfect ways of God and his salvation of the redeemed, and the divine coercion, which makes this attitude possible.

Another key issue here is *the predicted office of the Redeemer of souls*, which Birks cryptically sees fulfilled *even here* (i.e. in hell). This intriguing idea we will examine in detail when we come to the final section of the book.

Letters VI and VII deal with The State Of The Departed and Mutual Recognition, respectively. He is more interested in the final resurrection of the body than in the immortality of the soul. Abstract speculation on the nature of the soul he considers to be unprofitable. Instead, we ought to concentrate on resurrection, which is more certain and which he describes as the “great revealed hope of the Gospel”.⁶⁸ While he is positive that there is an intermediate state, he is not too certain about the finer points:

“Is it one of perfect consciousness? Will the righteous, at once, be perfectly happy, and the unrighteous entirely wretched? Does the idea of a sleep of the soul involve a denial of the resurrection, and do the departed saints at once recognize and hold intercourse with each other?”⁶⁹

He repudiates the common assumption in religious circles that the righteous go at once to heaven, when they die. He finds no support for this at all in the Bible. Concerning how

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁶⁷ *Exodus 32:32 & Romans 9:3.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

aware or conscious the departed are in this intermediate state he is somewhat agnostic and reserved. He is even prepared to accept that post-mortem experiences might differ; and that, depending on the sovereignty of God, the consciousness of some might be exceedingly dim or virtually non-existent, while that of others might be bright and clear. He quotes David and Paul, without references, to underline this contrast :

David pleads for life in the words, “In death there is no remembrance of Thee; in the grave who shall give Thee thanks?” while St. Paul has “a desire to depart, and be with Christ, which is far better.”⁷⁰

His reluctance to develop this aspect of death and its sequel may be due in part to the implied aversion to purgatory, which we noted above; and in line with this he goes on to suggest :

Why may we not believe that separated spirits, according to their previous state, or the sovereign pleasure of God, may, some of them, be in a state so exclusive of all activity, as to be equivalent to “perishing” (1 Cor. xv. 18), if no awakening were to follow; and others in such joyous consciousness of the love of Christ, as to be far better than their ripest experience, while dwelling in the mortal body . . .
71

However vague this view of the intermediate state, it leaves no room for any form of purgatory. This needs to be remembered in the context of Birks’ attempt to mitigate the terrors of hell. Augustine, C. S. Lewis and others can afford to have a strong view of the torments of hell, when they have a purgatory to relieve some of the horrors of the traditional doctrine !

As for the question of *mutual recognition* after death, Birks feels that this would be a “distraction and humiliation” while “the work of redemption is still incomplete.”⁷² This he does not imagine in terms of a purgatorial experience but rather as an undistracted

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 56f.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 60.

resting in the fellowship of the Lord. Speaking of the *spirits of the just* he goes on to describe their interim purpose as:

. . . their abiding in one unbroken trance of communion with the Lord. It may be well for them to remain undisturbed by lower fellowship, till their spiritual faculties, often so unripe when they leave the body, are strengthened and made ripe to endure the brightness of the judgment day and of the kingdom of God.⁷³

Although this time will be one of strengthening and ripening for the saints, it is a far cry from the purifying pains of purgatory, which are in a different context to that of quiet fellowship with the Lord.

He completes this Letter VII by addressing the inquirer's hope "that ultimately all created beings will be pardoned".⁷⁴ Such pardon, he reckons cannot be *the cessation of vindictive malice* of God because such malice does not exist.⁷⁵ Again, it cannot mean the admission into God's presence of the unholy in an unchanged state as this is an *inherent impossibility*. Further, he is unable to accept that God will effect a sudden change in the impenitent after death, which the Gospel and the Spirit did not accomplish in this life. Finally, it is vain to think in terms of God's mercy removing the distinction between the saved and the lost, as this would make God out to be a liar in view of the many warnings given to sinners in this life.⁷⁶ However, he does not want to leave an entirely hopeless picture as :

. . . the infliction of just punishment is not the whole of God's purpose towards the lost.⁷⁷

For, as he has already made clear earlier in the fifth letter, condemned sinners can find some hope even in their eternal loss. So he adds here that:

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

. . . there will, even in the depth of that ruin, be such a display of the unchangeable love of the Holy Creator to all the creatures of His hand, such depths of compassion to the self-ruined, as, without reversing their doom, may send a thrill of wondrous consolation through the abyss of what else would be unmingled woe and despair . . . the sure victory of good over evil, and the mingling of mercy with judgment in the perfections of the Most high.⁷⁸

Section III. THOUGHTS ON THE NATURE OF THE ATONEMENT AND OF ETERNAL JUDGMENT

takes us a great step forward in understanding how Birks can maintain such a positive and hopeful frame of mind when considering the eternal future of the lost. In the first part of this final section headed, THE NATURE AND EFFECTS OF THE ATONEMENT, he asks a number of pertinent questions, of which three, which are virtually rhetorical, point us clearly to where his thinking tends with respect to the atonement: *Did our Lord bear the sins of the saved only, or of all mankind? What are the results of the sacrifice itself, and what are those which depend on the faith and repentance of the sinner? Is all punishment of those for whom an atonement has been made illegal and unjust?*⁷⁹ He sees no limitation to the atonement; and with copious Bible references, e.g. 2 Cor. v. 19, “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself”, he seeks to establish that the extent of the atonement is universal, and, that while there are texts which claim that Christ died for *his sheep or the Church*, there are none which state that he died for his sheep or the Church *only*; while on the other hand there are many which claim that he died for all.⁸⁰ (This bold assertion alone would have been guaranteed to alienate him from the Calvinistic fraternity, as indeed we will note later in Candlish’s attack upon him.) He also finds support for this in Article XXXI, the summary of the Creed, in the Catechism, and in the Communion prayer and thanksgiving.⁸¹

The next step in his theory of the atonement deals with the question of whether the sinner, whose sins have been atoned for, can still perish. If people are still lost despite the inclusiveness of the atonement, then :

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 148-9.

. . . must we not lower its efficacy, and admit that, in many cases, Christ has died in vain?⁸²

He avoids this conclusion by arguing that, while the sin of the world has indeed been borne by Christ, it is only in one of its two aspects that sin can be transferred. Sin is both a *debt* and a *disease* and :

It is a transgression of the divine law, without and above the sinner. It is a transgression, also, against the health and life of the spirit within. Each view of it is equally Scriptural, equally important. The debt needs a ransom, the disease a cure. If sin were only a disease, there would be much room for sympathy, none for substitution. Atonement and propitiation would be wholly out of place . . . If sin were only a debt, substitution would be a complete Gospel, and all for whom an atonement was made would be heirs of salvation, because of that substitution alone. Those for whom Christ died would be saved, even before they believe.⁸³

He goes on to clarify this point with the illustration of a workman unable to work because of a serious illness and who finds himself consequently in debt, which he is unable to pay. His predicament requires both a physician to heal him and a benefactor to clear his debt. The crux of the illustration helps us to grasp Birks' view of the atonement in relation to this dual nature of sin :

The medicine would not pay the debt, nor the payment heal the disease; and still the payment and the first step in the cure would be linked inseparably in one work of love.⁸⁴

The next significant step in his development of the atonement is to relate these two aspects of sin respectively to the Law and the Gospel, the Old Covenant and the New. The Law deals in a condemnatory manner exposing sin and making plain that death is its outcome. It deals *objectively* with sin and, while making no provision for repentance, it

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 150f.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 151f.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

does allow the transference of guilt to a substitute, in a divinely sanctioned manner.⁸⁵ In contrast, the Gospel deals *subjectively*; and provides not only the ransom for the debt or guilt but also the medicine for the sickness.

The third part of this section deals with the state of mankind before God apart from the Atonement. Because of sin and the debt incurred, mankind is under the curse of the Law, which is death. Here we need to enumerate carefully the features of death in Birks' thinking at this juncture as they form the key to his theory on death and punishment :

- It is the same as that threatened in Paradise, and which entered through Adam's sin;
- It is a contrast to the second death (and when *one is inflicted the other is abolished*): "And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire" Re. xx. 14);
- It is not the mere act of dying, for it is ascribed to the soul even when separated from the body;
- It is temporal only because of *a mighty work of redemption alone* : but for God's intervention it would be everlasting;
- It applies to the whole man body and soul. Its work with reference to the body is a *sign and sacrament* [illustration ?] of its work respecting the soul: just as death causes a parting between the body and its soul-life so it separates the soul from God; and just as the soul-less body becomes subject to corruption, decay, etc., so the soul apart from God would be left to itself to sink into all manner evil and unrestrained degradation and :

Sin would thus become, under the name of death, a "finished" evil, its own ever-growing torment, and the soul sink deeper in an abyss of hopeless misery.⁸⁶

It is now that we are beginning to appreciate the full relevance to our enquiry of Birks' somewhat novel and involved theory of the Atonement! He goes on to distinguish carefully between the first and second deaths. Clearly, his object is to demonstrate that there is something more constructive and less hopeless about the second death, the lake of

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 154-5.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 157. (See pp. 156-7 for the description of death.)

fire, than there is with the first death, the curse of the law. A full account of the contrast is merited here:

One is “the lake of fire”, solemn indeed and most awful, yet bounded in its range, shut in by firm land on every side. The other is “the deep,” the abyss, “the bottomless pit,” evil reigning, rioting, growing, deepening without limit and without end, in its fatal descent, farther and farther, from light, happiness, and heaven. By the sentence of the law, fulfilled without atonement or redemption, mankind, once fallen, would be shut out from God’s presence, and sink and sink, and sink for ever in this abyss of hopeless and endless ruin. There would have been, through ages without end, the awful reality of a God-dishonouring, God-hating, God-blaspheming, self-tormenting universe. Such death is the wages of sin
...⁸⁷

Without confusing the issue, at this point we need to note something of a tension in Birks’ system. It was noted earlier, in his discussion of the intermediate state, that his account of the post-mortem experience of the departed is not simple but somewhat ambiguous. To some degree his view even approaches soul-sleep. This could encourage us to assume that the horrors of the suffering of the first death and sequel will be missed, especially since Birks speaks so passionately of the victory of the atonement, with respect to the first death. However, we need to recall first his reluctance to develop his ideas on this intermediate state, and secondly the fact that this ultimate victory over the first death (and all that is associated with it) will not be until the resurrection of mankind. Later, when examining Bickersteth’s epic, we shall discover a clearer view of this intermediate state.

In the next part of his theory, which now addresses more directly the nature of the Atonement, Birks deals with the curse Christ endured for us. As the Lamb of God taking away the sin of the world, sin was ascribed to him as *one vast collective whole*;⁸⁸ and in this act of substitution he bore the curse, the first death. God’s holiness and justice were dealt with once for all. Incidentally, he sees no value in trying to explain it *by a law of mechanical compensation* by claiming that the sufferings of Christ for a few days and

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 157f.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

nights exactly equalled those of mankind.⁸⁹ He now boldly and vividly describes exactly what Christ's vicarious suffering entailed. He endured the curse of the law, death, without the removal of its sting and, as the cry of dereliction showed, he was separated from God. Suffering the pains of death he was subjected to the lowest abasement of shame and sorrow; and descended to the *deep of Sheol*, where he endured the bitterness of darkness and separation. Indeed:

He endured the deep, fathomed its dark abyss, and endured the worst extreme of separation from His Heavenly Father . . .⁹⁰

Thus he exhausted the curse of the law and reconciled the world to God. This he did for all. Yet, the removal of the curse of the first death does not mean automatic full salvation for all.

The curse and condemnation of the Law is done away in the cross of Christ. The condemnation of the Gospel alone remains.⁹¹

Here he is referring to the need of an extra work: the regeneration of the sinful nature, which is the inner saving and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. This is not directly connected with the Atonement, albeit, there is an indirect or moral association, in the sense that the death of Christ prepares the way for and is the incentive for this response of repentance and faith. It is not Christ as substitute but Christ in his incarnation, glorious resurrection and ascension, i.e. as *Federal Head of mankind, and more especially of the Church*, who relates to us in this second aspect of salvation, and who, thereby, removes this *curse of the Gospel*.⁹² Later he underlines this further :

The curse of the Law can be removed by the Atonement alone, believed or disbelieved. The curse of the Gospel, the moral guiltiness of present rebellion, the sore sickness and disease of indwelling sin, can be removed by repentance and faith alone, and in no other way. Here substitution can have no place. Each must

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 158-9.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.160.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 163.

repent for himself. Each must believe for himself . . . To bear the burdens of others is the law of Christ, which finds its highest fulfilment in his atoning sacrifice alone. But this work of the Redeemer in our stead must be followed by a work of the Holy Spirit within us, in which the spirit of man is a fellow-worker . . .

⁹³

Birks' contention that only the debt of sin and not its disease is directly affected by the atonement could be questioned, incidentally, in the light of the later Pentecostal claim that there is "healing in the atonement".⁹⁴ Admittedly, though, it may well be that we are dealing with two different aspects of soteriology. Anyway, this is a small issue compared with the greater objections that some would make about the universal atonement, and others about the lack of efficacy of the atonement regarding the more *subjective* side of sin.

If not in soteriology, certainly in phraseology, Birks has well anticipated that great classic on the atonement, *Christus Victor*.⁹⁵ Certainly, they both share a high view of the triumphant work of Christ on the cross. However, because our present concern is eschatology rather than soteriology, we cannot offer here a fuller critique of Birks' theory of the atonement.

In the second part of this final section, which is headed, ON ETERNAL JUDGMENT, Birks begins by noting the close link in Scripture between the atonement and the coming judgment. He continues with the remark that the comments on this subject in previous letters need to be developed. Before doing this he brings up the *double perplexity* which troubles every thoughtful person, *viz.* the problem of how multitudes can be lost if Christ died for all and that of the everlasting misery of creatures made by a God of love. Out of these arises another question concerning the nature of the first death abolished by Christ and the second, which lasts for ever.⁹⁶

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.165.

⁹⁴ In line with *Isaiah 53:4 /Matthew 8:17*.

⁹⁵ Gustaf Aulen, London, SPCK, 1931.

⁹⁶ *The Victory* p.167.

In reiterating the full blessings of those who believe and obey the Gospel and the *other effects* which apply to all, he amplifies this by saying that this good purpose of God centred in the *spotless Lamb* explains all the gifts of God bestowed on sinful mankind since the beginning of time.⁹⁷ He is saying in effect that God would not be showering the world in his providential generosity, if his ultimate purpose would be the ‘wasting’ of the finally impenitent.

Next he stresses the biblical truth that, because of Christ’s redeeming work, there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust. (Paul’s words in I Corinthians ch. 15 that as all die in Adam, so all will live in Christ he applies universally.)⁹⁸ But temporal blessings and future resurrection are not the only benefits arising from the atonement, even for those who will die in their sins; and Birks repeats the conviction that, because Christ has abolished *death, which is God’s last enemy* all will be spared *self-tormenting wickedness, unrestrained by the hand of God*, etc.⁹⁹

He now gives a more detailed account of his theory, which is an emphatic rejection of any dualistic notion that the lost will continue to exist in a state of death characterised by ongoing evil.

For God “is not the God of the dead, but of the living,” and the reign of death would imply the awful fact of an empire of evil, rivalling both in extent and continuance the dominion of the living God, the God of love.¹⁰⁰

This aspect of Birks’ teaching shows the depth of his thinking as a champion of divine goodness. Certainly, the concept of evil continuing without end and of lost sinners in hell getting diabolically worse and worse does little or nothing to enhance the glory of God! However, he does not wish to lessen the sinfulness of sin nor the awfulness of hell; and again he warns against tampering with the word of God on this matter. Scripture is

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

⁹⁸ This will be considered more fully later, when looking at F. W. Grant’s critique.

⁹⁹ P. 169. Again, we shall note later Grant’s rejection of the idea that the first death is God’s enemy.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

solemn and fearful on this subject; and he gives what must be his strongest account of the terrors of God's judgement:

“Their worm,” our Lord tells us repeatedly, “dieth not, and their fire is not quenched.” They rise to “shame and everlasting contempt.” . . . God is to be feared, because He “is able to destroy both body and soul in hell.” They suffer the vengeance of eternal fire.” They “are tormented in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb,” and “the smoke of the torment goeth up for ever and ever.” Even the Gospel itself is defined by the Baptist and St. Paul, as a message of deliverance from the “wrath to come.”¹⁰¹

Such remarks show that, broadly speaking at least, Birks' teaching is in keeping with that of traditional evangelical doctrine and preaching. However, it is what he appears to read into Scripture, which could alienate him from fellow Bible-centred Christians. Nevertheless, he again defends his views and continues to claim that they are *secretly implied* in Scripture; and explains its silence on this matter as being for the good of those, who might otherwise see little need for repentance.¹⁰² Safeguarding himself from the charge of presumptuousness in revealing what God has kept veiled hitherto for the benefit of mankind, he comes up with a somewhat curious argument. He claims that people have a better grasp of God's goodness than they do of the truth and authority of his word; and, if what they read in Scripture about God's final judgement does not seem to fit in with what [instinctively?] they feel about his goodness, then they are likely to reject his word. Uncovering and propagating this fuller and hidden truth will protect or rehabilitate the authority of the Bible. In this context, no harm could follow the disclosure of a fuller picture, that there is mercy even in the judgement of God.¹⁰³ *Evangelical Christendom* frowned on this gratuitous assumption of private revelation wondering if his “subjective individual experience” was to replace the “objective truth to the Evangelical clergy.”¹⁰⁴ Incidentally, Birks' contemporary, John Henry Newman, has been criticised for a similar tendency by the twentieth century evangelical leader, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones.¹⁰⁵ Again, the nineteenth century Baptist preacher, C. H. Spurgeon, appears to follow the same

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 172.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.175.

¹⁰⁴ *E.C.*, Vol. XXIV, p. 168.

apparent aberration in his explanation of, “The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him” (*Psalms* 25:1):

It is the righteous that is God’s friend, it is to him that God is joined in a loving familiarity, it is to him that God revealeth his secret, telling him what misery and torments he hath reserved for them who by wickedness flourish in this world.¹⁰⁶

Birks is even more innovative and daring when he claims that the saved in glory will acquiesce eternally in the doom of the lost (the complement of what he said earlier), not with hardened hearts but in sympathy with the goodness of God, who has so condemned them. Indeed, this will serve to safeguard them against any act of apostasy, to which they could be drawn after years, countless years, in glory, when they might forget the consequence of sin and rebellion.¹⁰⁷ This suggestion of the potential rebellion in heaven of the redeemed is as startling as it is apparently unique – albeit, a similar view has been recently expressed by Clark Pinnock, at a conference entitled, *A Theology for Revival*, in London in late November 1997. Pinnock an evangelical and Professor of Theology at McMaster Divinity College, Ontario, made some astonishing statements, perhaps reminiscent of aspects of ‘process theology’, that since God can and does relate to humans, he must be in time; that it is still uncertain as to who would triumph in the end – God or Satan, good or evil; that purgatory may be possible and that we may be able to fall away from God’s grace even in heaven; and that the final defeat of evil or of God depends heavily on our co-operation.¹⁰⁸

As far as the issues of evil, divine sovereignty and dualism are concerned, Birks’ theology and theodicy are more in line with orthodoxy, than are Pinnock’s, especially when we understand that the possibility of a heavenly mutiny by the saints is only hypothetical for Birks: their constant musing on the plight of the lost is designed to ensure this.

¹⁰⁵ D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Knowing The Times*, Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 1989, p. 341.

¹⁰⁶ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, Vol. I, London, Passmore and Alabaster, 1871 (2d Ed.), p. 462, where he quotes Michael Jermin.

¹⁰⁷ *The Victory* p.179 & p. 184.

¹⁰⁸ For a full account of Pinnock’s conference address see the article by Daniel Hill in *Evangelicals Now*, Jan. 1998.

A further insight into his reasoning about the eternal ‘welfare’ of the lost is given by his remarks about God’s perpetual concern for those he has made:¹⁰⁹

Even while He punishes guilty rebels, He cannot cease to honour in them the workmanship of His own hands.

Whereas, as we have noted above, the first death is the enemy of God, the second death is *a work of God*, who therein displays both his love and his *holy anger against every sinner*.¹¹⁰ The real predicament lies in our ability to maintain the tension between such love and the exercise of righteousness in everlasting punishment. He insists, however, that they can co-exist:

It may be a deep mystery how the Divine love can possibly reveal itself, where Divine righteousness has to be displayed for ever in a sentence of everlasting shame and punishment. But if righteousness and grace co-exist for ever in the infinite perfections of the Most High, their exercise may co-exist for ever in His dealings even with those whose guilt requires that righteousness should assume the form of irreversible and lasting punishment.¹¹¹

He returns to the more positive aspect of his theory and develops earlier points about the universality of Christ’s redeeming work and “life-restoring resurrection”,¹¹² so that as all died in Adam all are made alive in Christ : there is to be a “federal recovery” as there has been a “federal ruin”.¹¹³ As negative and ruinous is the eternal misery of the second death, the redemptive work of Christ will be positive in its application to all.

Thus the judgment itself on the lost is based on a present work of redemption, which they share with the saved; and on a victory over death, wrought by Christ, and by the power of His atonement and resurrection. Their bodies are first restored

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 185f.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 188.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

completely from the ruin of the grave, and the dominion of death, so far, is wholly abolished.¹¹⁴

A somewhat cryptic remark, which follows, helps us to advance our grasp of the inherent duality in God's relationship with the lost :

The lesson of the Law is thus repeated by the Gospel in a deeply mysterious form. The wicked will be punished for his wickedness by the righteous Judge, but his brotherhood with the Judge will be eternally revealed by the resurrection which precedes the judgment.¹¹⁵

We are not far now from talking about the lost as if, in some sense, they are saved! Indeed, Birks goes on to use this very vocabulary. And, when he asks *Is there a sense in which they [the lost] may be saved . . .?*,¹¹⁶ he is affirmative and claims :

- They will be saved from bodily corruption;
- They will be saved from the curse of hopeless vanity, from the first death;
- They will be saved from the abyss, unfathomable in its depth and darkness;

And:

Will they not also be saved from that utter, hopeless misery, where no ray of light or comfort breaks in on the solitude of everlasting despair? Will they not be saved, in a strange, mysterious sense, when the depth of their unchangeable shame and sorrow finds beneath it a still lower depth of Divine compassion, and the creature, in its most forlorn estate, is shut in by the vision of surpassing and infinite love?¹¹⁷

In this glorious paradox even the unending misery of the lost has some hope because it has not escaped the love of God. In defence of Birks at this point we may apply, syllogistically, the argument that if there is nowhere where God is not, and if that God is essentially love, then even in eternal damnation there is no hiding from him or his caring of his creatures. When the Psalmist says that he cannot get away from God even if he

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 188f.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

makes his bed in “hell”, he is alluding to the same truth, albeit he is speaking of *Sheol* rather than *Gehenna*..¹¹⁸

Birks’ reluctance to see the lost parted from God is reminiscent of *separation anxiety*. In line with this we note again his remarks about the ‘comfortable’ spatial finitude, as we might describe it, of the second death or lake of fire, despite its eternity, contrasted with the awfulness of the abyss without limit, which is the first death. As noted earlier :

One is “the lake of fire,” solemn indeed and most awful, yet bounded in its range, shut in by firm land on every side. The other is “the deep,” the abyss, “the bottomless pit,” evil reigning, growing, deepening without limit and without end, in its fatal descent, farther and farther, from light, happiness, and heaven.¹¹⁹

He concludes his book with a reference to the words of Jesus to the *guilty traitor* :

“Good were it for that man if he had not been born.”¹²⁰

He stresses that the original word is *kalon* and not *agathon* and that the loss of the damned is that of their honour rather than the inner ability to perceive divine goodness. (At least this is what he appears to be saying in this curious if not obscure passage!)¹²¹

His conclusion of this point is a fitting conclusion to the work as a whole :

And still, out of the depths of their shame there may dawn such a vision of the perfect goodness of the most high, such a discovery of the wisdom, holiness, and love which have borne with a world of rebels, such strange and vast unfoldings of

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 191f.

¹¹⁸ *Psalm* 139:8.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 194 (ref. to Mark 14:21, A.V.)

¹²¹ Curiously, Blocher also addresses this issue (referring to the parallel in Mt. 26:24). See *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, *op. cit.*, p. 311. Unlike Birks, he focuses on the difference between *creation* and *birth* (rather than *kalon* and *agathon*); but as with Birks one is not left a lot wiser! Blocher notes that Buis quotes the verse against annihilation. Hodge, whose use of this saying (in the context of Mt. 18:5 & 6) is the clearest, uses it against universalism. See C. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, London, James Clarke, 1960 edn., p. 877.

victorious goodness through the ages to come, as may become a message of real mercy to those who abide for ever under the solemn sentence of the Most High.¹²²

“Difficulties of Belief”

In 1876 Birks published these ideas again in the second edition of *Difficulties of Belief*.¹²³ In the preface he explains that nearly one half of the *Victory of Divine Goodness*, published ten years earlier, contained notes on Coleridge’s Confessions, which had no proper unity with the rest. Also, he points out that the letters to his correspondent were too fragmentary. He is, therefore, including in this revised work only the two essays on the Atonement and Eternal Judgment, *somewhat revised*. He is also prefixing a brief summary of the biblical evidence for the doctrine and giving some examples of some of the current attacks on it.¹²⁴ Actually, the subject matter taken over from *Victory* occupies the concluding four chapters, XI-XIV, headed respectively, On The Nature Of The Atonement, On Eternal Judgment, Objections And Explanations, On Eternal Judgment Concluded. This is a more readable presentation; and in some ways avoids the stigma, which some attached to the previous work. However, there are no substantial or significant differences as far as doctrine is concerned. The section on the atonement is exactly the same as that in the *Victory*. The chapters concerned with eternal judgement, however, have been noticeably revised in form. Yet, there is no evidence of recanting or phasing out the idiosyncracies, which made his earlier work objectionable to some and controversial.

One striking addition to his former account of his views concerns the *wider truth of redeeming grace*, which appears to be his version of the ‘larger hope’. He affirms :

The church of the first-born, the mystic bride of Christ, does not sum up and exhaust all the fruits of redeeming love. In the glory of that church the truth of electing grace will be manifested for ever. But a wider truth of redeeming grace will also be seen in successive generations of redeemed men, the subjects of

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 195.

¹²³ T.R. Birks, *Difficulties of Belief*, 2nd ed., London, Macmillan, 1876.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. x.

Christ's kingdom, over whom He will reign with his Church in that new earth, where righteousness is to dwell for ever. . . Thus the number of the elect church may be far less than of the souls that are condemned in the judgment, but the number of the saved who walk in the light of the celestial city may be vastly greater, and continually increase without end.¹²⁵

Evidently, this optimism, based on the idea that the Church is less than the Kingdom of God, did not conflict with his complementary view of the unending punishment of the lost; although it must have helped him again to accept the lot of those finally and irretrievably condemned. Of course, it was put into print some years after the controversy with the Executive Council of the Evangelical Alliance, which we consider next. No doubt the extension of divine mercy to those outside the Church as such could have fuelled the controversy further! However, it did not seem to have bothered F. W. Grant, whose critique of Birks follows in the next chapter.

Essential to Birks' doctrine of hell is the presence of God. For him eternal punishment is not separation from God. Here we may briefly note the virtually opposite ways in which orthodox subscribers to the doctrine of hell understand this. Briefly anticipating later individuals in the development of this doctrine, we think, e.g., of Kendall S. Harmon, a recent champion of orthodoxy and opponent of conditionalism, who understands personal exclusion, complete separation from God, to be one of the key concepts in coming to terms with the Christian view of hell.¹²⁶ Tony Gray goes as far as to suggest that Harmon's position might provide a *third way* in the traditionalist/conditionalist debate.¹²⁷ This is something we hope to probe when considering the contribution of the twentieth century to the progress of this doctrine.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 215f.

¹²⁶ K. S. Harmon, 'The Case against Conditionalism', in N. M. de S. Cameron, *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, *op. cit.* pp. 193-224.

¹²⁷ Tony Gray, 'The Nature of Hell', in K. E. Brower and M. W. Elliott, *The Reader Must Understand* (Leicester, Apollos, 1997) p. 240f.

Chapter 3. T. R. BIRKS : (2). “This Painful Yet Interesting Controversy”

The influence of this bold theory and reactions to it.

The somewhat peculiar and eccentric theory of Birks and the lack of references to him, especially in the present century, might encourage us to imagine that his views had little or no impact upon his day, and that further attention to him is not required. However, his ideas did not die with him; and, although he makes no acknowledgement of Birks' original thinking on this matter, Henri Blocher, an ascendant star in current evangelicalism, has proposed a basically similar theory.¹ (This is for later and fuller appraisal.) Furthermore, in his own day, Birks' doctrinal novelty became something of a *cause celebre*, which gained him some painful notoriety in evangelical circles, particularly in that of the Evangelical Alliance.

In order to investigate this controversy, I was obliged to visit the London headquarters of the Evangelical Alliance, where I was given access to the relevant original documents. Searching through the hand-written records of the minutes of the Executive Council [of the E.A.] and through the back copies of *Evangelical Christendom* proved as fascinating as it was rewarding.

T. R. Birks became the Honorary Secretary of the newly-formed Evangelical Alliance in November, 1850, replacing his father-in-law, the late Edward Bickersteth.² In this post he enjoyed great esteem and appreciation for over nineteen years: that is, until an objection to his book, *The Victory of Divine Goodness*, was made in the meeting of the Executive Council, 10th May, 1869. At that meeting, a letter of Mr. R.C.L. Bevan, the Treasurer, who was unable to attend (because of Birks ?), was read out, in which he complained about Birks' book, pointing out that it was incompatible with the 8th Article of the

¹ H. Blocher, 'Everlasting Punishment and the Problem of Evil', in N. Cameron, *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, *op. cit.* pp. 304-312.

² *Evangelical Alliance Executive Council Minutes*, Vol. I, pp. 203-205. These original hand-written documents may be consulted in the E.A. archives in its London offices.

Evangelical Alliance's basis of belief, and "that he could not conscientiously continue in the Alliance with Mr. Birks". [This article prescribed everlasting punishment, its full form being, *The Immortality of the Soul, the Resurrection of the Body, the judgement of the World by our Lord Jesus Christ, with the Eternal Blessedness of the Righteous, and the Eternal Punishment of the Wicked.*] After some discussion, a resolution was passed indicating respect for Mr. Bevan's concern, but pointing out that the Council did not feel able to question Birks on this matter because he continued to *avow his adhesion* to the 8th Article. They hoped, therefore, that Mr. Bevan would leave the matter there. (The seriousness of the Council is reflected by the fact that they arranged for a deputation to be sent to Bevan to convey their feelings.)³

Unfortunately for Birks, the matter did not stop there. At the Derby Conference of 25th November, 1869, the controversy started to gain momentum. Another letter of Bevan (dated Nov. 22, 1869) was read out, in which he threatened to refuse to stand for re-election and that he and his son would leave the Alliance, if no action were to be taken against Birks or if his views were to be considered reconcilable with the 8th Article. Straight after, Birks read out a copy of his letter that had been already been put before the Council (on October 1, 1869) about his intended retirement from office (the letter, we later discover to have been written the previous July.⁴) Birks then proceeded to read out another letter, announcing his resignation of his post, which he had held for the past nineteen years. He expressed his gratitude to the Council for its esteem for and confidence in him, and for their acceptance of his claim that his allegiance to the *Basic Principles* of the Alliance had not changed. His resignation, he said, was necessitated by the fact that his office had become *an occasion of strife*. Clearly, he was concerned to maintain a spirit of unity, even though he was not able to modify his views. However, he was not going to take this lying down, so to speak, and his declaration of resignation was followed by a

³ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 5-7.

⁴ *Evangelical Christendom* (monthly chronicle of the EA), Vol. XXIV, 1870 (published by William John Johnson, London and kept at EA offices, London), p. 104. In Birks' letter to Dr. Blackwood, he refers to this letter as motivated by the desire to keep the peace; and that while he was withdrawing his name for re-election as Hon. Sec., he was reserving his rights as a member of the original Alliance and the British Organisation.

passionate six-point tirade against his detractors, in which he accused them of wielding undue influence because of their wealth and of being in danger of turning the Alliance into *an illegal and tyrannical body* and of imperilling its usefulness and even its very existence. As he continued, he warned of the possibility of the Alliance being turned into an Inquisition, undermining the second article on the right and duty of private judgement. The summary of doctrine was being turned into an oppressive creed; and the fundamental law that members must not be made to compromise their views on secondary issues was being forgotten.⁵ A resolution was passed expressing regret that anything should have happened to disturb the long and intimate relationship between Mr. Bevan and the Council, indicating that feelings were hardening towards Birks. It was resolved also to refer the matter to the newly-appointed Council that they might be *speciallly summoned to meet in London to take into their consideration the whole question.*⁶

The Special Meeting was held on Wednesday, January 12, 1870. It was something of a formidable gathering with thirty four Council members present, notably (for future reference) Messrs. Robert Baxter, R. C. L. Bevan, H. M. Matheson and Dr. Blackwood. We might invest the proceedings with even greater awe, if we noted that three Generals were also present! Dr. Candlish, who also played a significant part in the controversy later, was not there.⁷ After the customary formalities, letters received on this subject were read, notably one from E. H. Bickersteth, a Council member, but who was not present [a significant and deliberate absence ?]. The subject for the day was introduced by Robert Baxter, who, first read further relevant correspondence from Council members, and then proposed his resolution. This was direct and urged the Council that, in view of the basis of membership of the Alliance and of the requirement to accept Article 8 (i.e. *what are actually understood to be evangelical views with regard to the eternal punishment of the wicked*)⁸, it could not recognise as consistent with this any teaching that *there will be mercy in some form or other extended to the souls under the solemn sentence of eternal*

⁵ *EA Ex, Coun. Mins.*, Vol. II, pp. 34-38; the six points of Birks' denunciation of his opponents being recorded on pp. 36-37.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.37f.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

judgment: the view of the Rev. T. R. Birks, who not only holds this but accuses those who hold the traditional view of representing God as absolutely merciless and of infinite malice and of speaking of creation as an act of cruelty and of asserting the absolute & entire mercilessness of God's dealings with the greater part of all past generations of mankind, etc.⁹ (The severity of these words of Birks were to be sharply rebuked a few months later in *Evangelical Christendom*.¹⁰) Because of this, Baxter went on to claim that Birks' views did not comply with Article 8, and that he *cannot any longer be deemed a member* (i.e. of the Alliance).¹¹ This uncompromising contribution of Baxter was to prove pivotal in the progress of the controversy. After various amendments, discussion, etc. it was resolved to adjourn the meeting to 16th February.

Before the adjourned meeting another ordinary meeting of the Council took place on January 26, 1870, at which an amendment of the previous meeting was inserted. It was proposed by C. D. Marston and expressed satisfaction at the resignation of Birks, considering the great pain caused by him and considering the then current attacks being made on the Scriptures as God's revelation. It also reaffirmed the solemn obligation of members to hold fast to the articles as these rested on God's word.¹² Also of significance was the reading of a letter of Dr. J. S. Blackwood (dated Jan. 17, 1870), in which he rejected the offer of Birks' vacant post. His reasons were that he could not follow the course being pursued by certain brethren in the matter, who did not seem to be acting in love; that he regretted the way the Executive Council was becoming a *tribunal*; and that, without endorsing his views, he was prepared to accept Birks' assurances that he did adhere to the principles of the Alliance.¹³ We shall note below his steadfast loyalty to the right of Birks to differ on secondary aspects of doctrine, albeit he did become concerned as to where such ideas might lead.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 51f.

¹⁰ *E.C.*, Vol. XXIV, p. 167, where such words are considered abhorrent and where he is described as "no Lilliputian sinner himself in polemics".

¹¹ *E.A. Ex. Coun. Mins.* P.52.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 52f.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 53-55, where a full printed copy of Blackwood's letter is included on p. 54f.

The Adjourned Special Meeting actually took place on **February 25th, 1870** (not 16th as earlier planned). There was a good attendance of Council members, among whom again were Bevan, Blackwood, Baxter and Matheson; and this time E. H. Bickersteth was not missing. After the customary formalities, the meeting began to take a course quite different to that of the original Special Meeting. A resolution was passed to remove Marston's amendment, included at the previous meeting. Dr. Blackwood read a letter from Birks (dated Feb. 22) and one from Dr. Candlish. No details were given of these letters, but a full account of Birks' letter to Blackwood is found in *Evangelical Christendom*, March 1, 1870. Some knowledge of its contents may well help us to appreciate the mood of the Council at this meeting. Birks wrote that had he known (before publishing the book) the pain it would have caused, he would have resigned his office but not his membership. Further, he defended himself by claiming that the strife did not arise through forcing his views on others but by replying frankly to one who enquired after his views and who had not read his book. (The reference here is to Mr. Bevan; and we shall deal with it more fully, when we consider the origin of the dispute in greater detail). He also lamented the reaction of the Council to him and the fact that the matter had been left pending for almost a year. He claimed that, like others, his desire was to follow the truth in love; and affirmed his high regard for the endurance of the Alliance, albeit Christian liberty meant more to him. Certainly, his conscience was clear in this matter.¹⁴ Next, Mr. Baxter explained that his resolution at the Jan. 12 meeting (Special Meeting) had been withdrawn.

The tide continued to turn in Birks' favour with the rejection of the resolution put forward by Mr. H. M. Matheson. In it he argued for a firm adhesion to Article 8, claiming that it was originally framed to counter the unscriptural teachings of annihilation and universal restoration then current and that, although Birks' *novel opinions* were not being considered at that time, they were just as incompatible with it.¹⁵ Again, like Baxter's earlier resolution this was to prove pivotal in the developing crisis. However, a more moderate resolution put by R. A. Macfie, M.P., was accepted. This simply claimed that

¹⁴ See *Evangelical Christendom* Vol. XXIV, 1870, pp. 69-70 for a full copy of this important letter.

the Council need not reaffirm Article 8, albeit they could if necessary; and that *declining or omitting action in the painful business* did not imply agreement with or unconcern for the opinions under consideration. They should also remember the rule of the Alliance that members are *declared free from complicity in such cases*: i.e. the solidarity of the Alliance did not mean that everyone had to, by virtue of association, share in the error of any member.¹⁶

The next significant stage in the ‘political’ or conciliar history of this controversy is the dramatic meeting of March 30, 1870, when a letter of Mr. R. C. L. Bevan announcing the resignation of himself and sixteen others was read out. They were disturbed by the rejection of H. M. Matheson’s resolution, with whose sentiments they were in agreement; and they maintained *that a great opportunity has been lost for vindicating the Scriptural character of the Basis of the Alliance*. Their withdrawal would remain *until the General Body shall think fit to overrule the decision of the Council and adhere to the Doctrinal Basis*.¹⁷ Among the names of the seceders, significant for our purposes, were Messrs. R.C.L. Bevan, Robert Baxter, Hugh M. Matheson and Dr. Robert Candlish. After the moving and seconding of the letter, the Council resolved that the *Document* (letter) be referred to a Committee of six persons to advise the Council on the next step. Two of the members of this committee were the Rev. E. H. Bickersteth and Dr. Blackwood.¹⁸

The committee prepared a ‘minute’ (for submission to the Council), in which it pointed out that of the sixteen members who resigned two of the signatories were not members of the Council when they signed the letter of resignation, nor were they such when they voted at the meeting on February 25 (Adjourned Special Meeting). One of these was Bevan’s son. Of the remaining fourteen eight had never attended any of the meetings

¹⁵ *E.A. Exec. Coun. Mins.* Vol. II, pp. 58-59.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 59f.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 68. See also *Evangelical Christendom* Vol. XXIV, 1870, p.198 for a full copy of Bevan’s letter and for an explanatory note by Dr. Candlish giving his reasons for secession. While he could not support expelling a member or agree to a vote of censure, etc., he could not see how as a Christian and a man of honour he could remain in the Alliance, if he held Mr. Birks’ opinions. If he had been present at the meeting

when the matter under dispute had been under discussion. The minute goes on to affirm that the Doctrinal Basis was sufficient as it stood, when adopted conscientiously. As for Birks, it accepted his honour and truthfulness and his declaration that he rejected the errors of annihilation and universal restoration, which Article 8 was *framed to meet*. It stressed also that the Council would not assume legal powers not assigned to it. At a meeting of the Council, May 11th, 1870, the submission of the committee was discussed fully and entered into the minutes. A letter was sent by the Council to the seceders on May 25, taking a conciliatory line and expressing the hope that this secession would be of short duration.¹⁹

As a sad footnote to this *cruel blow* dealt to the Alliance by the dissension, Kessler adds that no annual conferences were held in 1870 or 1872; and that for the years 1871-1874 the annual reports were either not produced or appeared in a very reduced form.²⁰ He reckons that the root of the organisational or procedural aspect of the dispute was the inflexibility of the doctrinal basis, which ought to be *completely reformulated from time to time* to meet *important changes* in the intellectual context.²¹

It is worth noting, in passing, that the Birks episode in the history of the Evangelical Alliance came shortly after the withdrawal from it of the celebrated prince of preachers, C. H. Spurgeon. After the publication of his great or infamous sermon against baptismal regeneration, preached June 5, 1864, he was obliged to leave the Alliance the following year. He was given the option of retracting his harsh language or resigning his membership. However, he rejoined not long afterwards and remained a member of the Council until his death in 1892, speaking on many occasions at meetings arranged in connection with the E.A., notably to do with the 'Downgrade Controversy'. Significantly, he adopted, with certain alterations and additions, the E.A. basis of belief, encouraged in

of the 25 Feb., he would have voted for the rejected motion, which he considered "temperate, wise and faithful".

¹⁹ *Evangelical Christendom* Vol. XXIV, 1870, p.199.

²⁰ J.B.A. Kessler, *A Study of the Evangelical Alliance in Great Britain*, Oosterbaan & Le Cointre N.V. – Goes, Netherlands, 1968, p. 69.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 68f.

this by the example of other churches.²² As already noted above (in the 19c. background), Spurgeon was a fierce champion of the traditional doctrine of eternal punishment.

The Role of E. H. Bickersteth

Before leaving the treatment of Birks by the Executive Council and looking at the dispute in a wider context, it needs to be said that the part played by E. H. Bickersteth is somewhat curious. Edward Henry Bickersteth (1825-1906), a gifted individual and later to become bishop of Exeter, is best known these days perhaps for his hymns.²³ He was the son of Edward Bickersteth, one of the founders of the Evangelical Alliance to be succeeded by Birks, his son-in-law, as Honorary Secretary. Edward Henry Bickersteth was, then, the brother-in-law of T. R. Birks. While we have noted above his involvement in the controversy as a member of the Executive Council, we have been unable to detect any overt endorsement of Birks' views by him either in the Council minutes or in the monthly journal, *Evangelical Christendom*. This apparent silence is difficult to reconcile with what is known of Bickersteth's views on this subject from other sources. Such views were identical to those of Birks.

F. W. Grant, whose critique follows below, reckoned that the views of Birks had found an *expositor and popular poet* in Bickersteth, just as the *Restorationists* had found one in the poet laureate of the day.²⁴ Grant was referring to Bickersteth's *Yesterday, To-Day and For Ever* (A poem in Twelve Books), the first edition coming out in 1866 the year before Birks' *The Victory of Divine Goodness*. As a religious epic, it is reminiscent of Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. Rowell numbers it among the poems on

²² *C.H. Spurgeon Autobiography, Vol. II*, Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 1983, pp. 55-58; and E.H. Broadbent, *The Pilgrim Church*, London, Pickering & Inglis, 1935, p. 391f.

²³ E.G. *Peace, perfect peace, in this dark world of sin . . .*, the sixth verse of which is significant in this context: *Peace, perfect peace, death shadowing us and ours? / Jesus has vanquished death and all its powers.*

²⁴ F.W. Grant, *Facts and Theories as to a Future State*, London, Alfred Holness, 1889 2nd ed. (1st ed. 1879), p.17. The poet laureate was Tennyson and the allusion must be to his 'larger hope' in his epic "In Memoriam A.H.H.", LV.

the future life, which influenced the thought of the nineteenth century; others being Tennyson's *In Memoriam* (1850), Newman's *Dream of Gerontius* (1865), Pollok's *The Course of Time* (1827), etc. Yet, I feel he is unfair to call it a "rambling work"; and I would challenge his claim that it hints at annihilation as a way of overcoming the problem of hell. Also, referring to him as simply Edward Bickersteth instead of Edward Henry Bickersteth creates some confusion, especially as he clearly distinguishes between them in the index!²⁵ E. H. Plumptre also noted this link between the views of Birks and Bickersteth.²⁶ Significantly, in the 'Note to the Third Edition', January 1869 (at the height of the controversy), which was included in the eleventh edition (the only edition I have to hand), Bickersteth expressed his gratitude for the way his book had been received in England and America.²⁷ Despite the priority in the appearance of his book, he was considered by Grant to be the exponent of Birks; and this seems to be supported by the fact that in, the subsequent controversy, it was not Bickersteth but Birks who was harangued.

Birks' theory is paralleled identically in *Yesterday* . . . particularly in Book XI. Bickersteth, too, writes of the suppression of sin and evil in the finally lost :

The outbreaks of the rebel will were quell'd,/ The quick activities of sin were
crush'd./ No word of wrathful blasphemy was heard,/ No violence was wrought;
but order rose/ From that profound confusion unconfused,/ Order and forced
submission . . ./ Now were the works of Satan brought to nought;/ His vast
conspiracy destroy'd for ever; / Pride, the first fatal lure, abased for ever; /Hell's
transient eminence destroy'd for ever . . .²⁸

The complete suppression and control over evil is finally accomplished; and the downfall of Satan is seen in his pathetic awareness that he is finally vanquished, and rightly so, and that he must submit to God and acknowledge his goodness, justice and love :

²⁵ Rowell, *Hell*, p. 6.

²⁶ E.H. Plumptre, *The Spirits In Prison and other studies on the Life After Death*, London, 1885, p. 232.

²⁷ E.H. Bickersteth, *Yesterday, To-day and For Ever*, London, Rivingtons, 1878.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 357f.

For ever lost : this is the second death : / Meet end for me who whisper'd in the ear / Of fragile man, Ye shall not die. / . . .The Lord is righteous; I have sinn'd and die. / Lost, lost : nor could I crave it otherwise. / . . . Goodness has hung these chains around my limbs. / O God, I bow for ever at Thy feet, / The only Potentate, the only Lord. / . . .Only thus fetter'd can we safely gaze / On that the final victory of love, / Virtue and goodness triumphing, and grace . . . / Thus only to the prisoners of despair / Can Mercy, which is infinite, vouchsafe / Far glimpses of the beauty' of holiness, / Albeit a beauty which can never clothe / Ourselves, the heirs of everlasting wrath. / . . . Lost, lost : our doom is irreversible: / Power, justice, mercy, love have seal'd us here. / Glory to God who sitteth on the throne, / And to the Lamb for ever and for ever. / The voice was hush'd a moment : then a deep / Low murmur, like a hoarse resounding surge, / Rose from the universal lake of fire; / No tongue was mute, no damned spirit but swell'd / That multitudinous tide of awful praise, / "Glory to God who sitteth on the throne, / And to the Lamb for ever and for ever."²⁹

Another line of novel thought shared by Bickersteth and Birks is that of the need for the continuing vigilance of those in heaven. Book XII, *The Many Mansions*, considers the bliss of the redeemed in glory. However, this is no life of complacent ease and carelessness. To keep them from a dangerous contentment, which quickly forgets the past, God frequently reminds them of the result of rebellion :

Nor seldom He, who strengthen'd human sight, / As with angelic telescope, to read / The wonders of the highest firmament, / Would bid them gaze into the awful Deep / Couching beneath; and there they saw the lost / For ever bound under His dreadful Eye / Who is eternal and consuming fire, / There in the outer darkness. And the view / So wrought in them, that perfect self-distrust / With pity not unmix'd and tender tears, / Lean'd ever on their God for perfect strength.³⁰

One of the finest appraisals of Bickersteth's views has been given in E. E. Holmes', *Immortality*. Like Bickersteth, Holmes is convinced that :

Eternal Punishment must be consistent with a God of love . . .³¹

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 359-361.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 381; cf. *The Victory*, p. 184.

³¹ E.E. Holmes, *Immortality*, London, Longmans, 1908, p.285.

and in support of his teaching, which he holds to be scriptural, that we should be able to acknowledge God's mercy even to the lost, he refers extensively to Bickersteth, *late Bishop of Exeter*. For example, he quotes :

. . . there is room . . . for the display towards these crushed and humbled ones, ruined and lost as they are, of that everlasting mercy . . . [and rejecting the common idea of eternal punishment] Such is often the baseless assumption of those who think that they honour God's word by depicting Hell as a place where sinners grow worse and worse, corrupting and being corrupted, alike the victims and the sport of devils.³²

In line with both Bickersteth and Birks, he understands hell in terms of the searing presence of divine holiness :

And surely S. John's vision tells the same story. He sees the condemned 'tormented in the presence of the Lamb,' not by his absence. Such absence would be no torment at all to those who had lived without Him all their lives. The presence of the Lamb is the punishment of the lost . . . But this 'presence' is not for them the sight of the Beatific Vision . . . Though not outside the government of the city, they are, to continue the metaphor, outside the Celestial City itself . . .³³

Again, echoing the theodicy of Bickersteth :

. . . we can see no Scriptural warrant whatever for the view of those who depict Hell as a scene of eternal rebellion and defiant blasphemy.³⁴

Concerning the intermediate state, we have already noted Birks' hesitation. However, in contrast, Bickersteth gives a full and graphic account of it in Book II, *The Paradise of the Blessed Dead*, and in Book III, *The Prison of the Lost*. In *hades* the blessed await in Paradise the final consummation of their salvation, while the lost suffer their transitional torment in anticipation of the final judgement. The most hellish nether regions, *that profound abyss*, being the reserve of the rebellious spirits.³⁵

³² *Ibid.*, p. 286, where he cites Bickersteth's, *Primary Visitation Charge*, p.286f (Date, etc. ?)

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 287.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 289.

*The Coverage of the Controversy in “Evangelical Christendom”*³⁶

This resource is indispensable for getting a clear and detailed picture of both the intrigue and the doctrinal niceties bound up in what it describes as “this painful, yet interesting controversy.”³⁷ It first refers to the issue in its February edition of 1870 (not January 1868 as Kessler notes – see above). Here it broaches the subject cautiously and constructively by pointing out that the theological basis of the E.A. is not to be understood as a creed and that the article on everlasting punishment was not even in the original basis worked out in Liverpool in 1845; and that it was added in the following year only at the instigation of American and German brethren concerned about the errors of annihilation and final restoration (of all).³⁸ However, it goes on to regret the tampering with the doctrine which has been going on since 1846, especially by ministers of the evangelical fraternity; one member of the Alliance withdrawing because of his acceptance of annihilation. Birks is referred to as a *distinguished member of the Alliance*; and it stresses his insistence on his allegiance to the Alliance and to its basis despite the attack upon him of Mr. R. Baxter, who has argued that his (Birks’) belief in eternal punishment is nullified by his hypothesis and speculations.³⁹

A personal and authentic account of the origin of the controversy is given (in the April 1870 edition) in the letter of Birks to his friend on the Council, Dr. Blackwood.⁴⁰ In this long and detailed letter, written March 16, 1870, Birks breaks his self-imposed silence, which he claims to have kept for a whole year pending some sort of final decision by the Council. Having received a copy of the resolution passed at the meeting of February 25, he is emboldened to speak up and explain himself. He starts by tracing the dispute back not to the actual publication of his book but to a request two years later, when Mr. Bevan, who had not seen the book, wrote to him (Dec. ’68) for an assurance that he had not modified his views on eternal punishment. To save Bevan the trouble of reading the book

³⁵ *Yesterday, To-Day and For Ever*, p. 104f.

³⁶ Founded in 1847, Dr. Steane was the editor. See Kessler p 52 for an appreciation of this periodical.

³⁷ *Evangelical Christendom*, (A Monthly Chronicle of the E.A.), Vol. XXIV, 1870, London, William John Johnson, p. 34.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 104-107.

,⁴¹ he sent him two letters setting out his position. Bevan, however, abused this trust and proceeded, on the basis of these letters to try and get him expelled from the Alliance. The following month saw the involvement of his other opponent, Mr. Baxter, who wrote to him showing him copies of extracts of these letters and accusing him of *Satanic delusions*.⁴² By July (1869) he could see that the hostility had spread; and it was then that he wrote his original letter withdrawing his name from re-election. He goes on to deplore the unjust and unChristian way Baxter and company dealt with him, lamenting the harm therein both to evangelicalism and to the Alliance.⁴³ Concerning the constitutional issues, he affirms that the course of action adopted by the Council has been wrong: instead, and in keeping with the rule of Christ, he ought to have been approached privately.⁴⁴ With reference to his allegiance to Article 8 he writes :

My view of the Basis, from the hour I took part in its adoption, and voted in a division for the Article on which I am now accused, is that every member is pledged to the affirmation of the doctrines named so far as they are named, and no further. . . .My assertion of the eighth article, from the hour when I voted for its introduction to the present day, has never varied, but been plain, clear, and full.⁴⁵

The rest of the letter need not detain us apart from his clarification of the point that the Council is simply the Annual Executive (*the grandchild*) of the Annual Conference (*the child*), the Conference is that of the British Organisation alone which has received the Basis from the Alliance (*the parent*), to which it is subordinate – and that he is a member of the founding Constituent Body of the Alliance (consisting of nine hundred members). The attempts of Baxter and Matheson, who are not members of that original body, to censure or expel him, who is one, do not make sense !⁴⁶

⁴¹ Indeed, at the conference at Derby, Nov. 25, 1869, Bevan wrongly referred to it as *The Triumph* [sic.] of *Divine Goodness*. See Ex. Coun. Mins. Vol. II, p. 34.

⁴² *Evangelical Christendom*, p. 104.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 104-105.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 105f. The quotation given at this point, "If thy brother offend against thee, tell him his fault between him and thee alone." is of course the well known fundamental of church discipline in Matthew 18:15.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

In its coverage of the dispute during the period February-July 1870, *Evangelical Christendom* addresses the dispute wisely and with moderation, and while it never endorses Birks' novel opinions about everlasting judgement it concedes that he holds to the basic doctrine; and even generously assumes that, if he had received fair and calm criticism, he would have modified or corrected his views in line with the norm.⁴⁷ Lamenting the way the Council appears to be arrogating to itself dictatorial powers, it reminds its readers :

We cannot, however, but observe with sadness, and deprecate the course of action attempted in this instance. No great success has ever attended the condemnation of books by any corporation – whether Popes, Councils, Convocations, or committees; and of all conceivable bodies the Executive Council of the Alliance is, perhaps, the worst qualified and the least authorised to act as a Church Court, or to imitate the Holy Inquisition.⁴⁸

(If ecclesiology, particularly church discipline, was the main subject of our study, the role and behaviour of the Council, would have made an interesting further development.) Again in keeping with its reasonable assessment of the whole affair it takes a scathing view of the part played by another evangelical Christian periodical, the *Weekly Review*, accusing it of misunderstanding and misrepresenting Birks by charging him with teaching *the ultimate restoration of the wicked, and even of the Satanic spirits of darkness.*⁴⁹ Such bad journalism, which caused so much mischief, is later severely criticised in its next edition by one of its readers, Dr. David Brown, but only mildly admonished by Mr. Hugh M. Matheson (its proprietor, apparently)⁵⁰. Significantly, it was the rejection of Matheson's resolution at the Adjourned Special Meeting three weeks earlier which precipitated the later secession from the Council. Assessing Matheson's long letter in his journal, *Evangelical Christendom* takes a poor view of his lack of discretion in referring so openly to Council business. As for Matheson's analysis of Birks' thesis, it considers his condemnation to greatly exceed that of Drs. Candlish and Blackwood.⁵¹ Blackwood,

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 100, where the ref. is to the *Weekly Review* edn. of March 5.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.101.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 101f.

we ought to mention here, was critical of the apparent trend of Birks' theory, although he championed his cause in general terms:

To some of us it appears, and we hope without being heretical, that your notion of what we deem two contradictory activities of the Divine Being must issue in universal restoration, and looks rather like that doctrine inchoate.

It is well you should know this distinctly for your guidance and ours; as also, that we suspect a principle lurking here which affects the Redemption scheme in several points of great and fundamental importance. I could not close my present letter without intimating so much, lest the position I have taken in the Alliance Council should be misinterpreted.⁵²

Unlike other contenders in the dispute, Blackwood adopted the Christian approach that Birks later advocated, i.e. of personal and private questioning or criticism.⁵³

However, it is not until its June edition that *Evangelical Christendom* comprehensively addresses Birks' theory and it does so with considerable thoroughness and perception of the implications. The precise context of the article, appropriately headed *The Atonement And The Judgment*, is Dr. Candlish's critique, in a lecture to the students of Free Church New College Edinburgh, of Birks' ideas in *The Victory of Divine Goodness* and Birks' reply to it.⁵⁴ Candlish's lecture later appeared in the *British and Foreign Evangelical Review* and was subsequently printed as a pamphlet, *Tendencies in Connexion with the Doctrine of Future Punishment*.⁵⁵ This definitive critique (in terms of *Evangelical Christendom's* coverage of the dispute) begins by noting Candlish's complaint that the logic of Birks' theory must lead to the doctrine of universal restoration; and that it cannot hold with a true understanding of the atonement and justifying faith. This objection, it claims, reflects the old charge that the doctrine of general redemption encourages that of universal restoration.⁵⁶ Birks' reply is then noted, in which he claims that the controversy is really between the position of the Church of Scotland and that of the Church of

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 71, the ref. being to Blackwood's letter, Feb. 23, 1870.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 105f.

⁵⁴ *The Atonement and the Judgment: A Reply to Dr. Candlish's Inaugural Lecture; with a Brief Statement of Facts in Connexion with the Evangelical Alliance*, T. R. Birks, London, Rivingtons, no date.

⁵⁵ *Evangelical Christendom.*, p. 161. No dates given of the lecture or subsequent publications of it.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 161..

England, with the former resting on the Westminster Confession and the latter on its articles. Generally, the position of Anglicans, he continues, is to maintain the balance between the doctrine of election (Article 17) and general redemption. Again, it points out, we have here the old conflict between those who claim that Christ died *sufficiently* for all but *efficiently* only for believers, and those (such as Birks) who maintain that sufficiency and efficiency cannot be separated in this context⁵⁷. (Clearly, as we have already noted in reviewing Birks' book, he is emphatic that Christ died for all; and on this is based his theory of the lost being saved from the first death and its awful consequences.) In his reply to Candlish's criticism, Birks is portraying himself as a champion of good traditional Anglican doctrine; and claims that attacks on his teaching by universalists and annihilationists on the one hand or critics of universal atonement on the other are not aimed at him alone but at the sound and scriptural teaching of his church.⁵⁸

It is with Birks' reply (to Candlish's accusation) :

You think that my views of judgment to come involve a moral paradox of contradictory feelings existing in the same men for ever.⁵⁹

that the article leads us to an examination of [what it considers to be] the essential error in Birks' thesis, and the one which so upset certain members of the Council, *viz.* that the finally lost could experience the mercy of God. This it sees as fundamentally psychological rather than theological; and in this connection it rebukes him for substituting Candlish's original word *novel* by his word *moral*, which obscures the real issue.⁶⁰ Birks' contention that the lost can experience the dual emotions of unending misery and happiness is challenged as psychologically untenable. Again, this problem is not eased by his insistence that this so-called happiness is *federal*⁶¹. *Evangelical Christendom* here seeks to demonstrate the psychological truth that the emotion of

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 162f.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

happiness must be in essence personal. Even if one is happy for others or by contemplating their joys, one's experience of that happiness is personal. Going on to describe this aspect of Birks' theory as the *key-note* and *corner-stone* it admits its scepticism about this idea of such contradictory emotions co-existing in the same person; and it sums up his belief as:

the co-existence in their souls of utter irreversible anguish, shame, sorrow, and humiliation, with, nevertheless, some consolation derived from the compulsory contemplation of infinite wisdom and love.⁶²

Candlish's objection that such a state of mind could be the result only of *superhuman virtue* or of the *regenerating influence of the Holy Spirit* is met by Birks' reminder that this is the result of divine compulsion alone.⁶³ Plumptre had the same difficulty with Birks' optimism, arguing that such a response of the lost would amount to repentance, and would imply that there is more virtue in those rejoicing in the blessedness of others, with whom they cannot share, than in those *who contemplate the torments of the lost with an undisturbed complacency*.⁶⁴ *Evangelical Christendom* finds Birks' belief that the Holy Spirit will work on the lost but short of renewing them *psychologically untenable* and a *gratuitous assumption*.⁶⁵ It concedes that Birks was seeking to bring divine benevolence to bear on the judgment of the lost; but unable to join with those who see such goodness in annihilation or restoration, he resorted to his own novel idea. Nevertheless, it claims that language would have to change its basic meaning before intelligent people could agree with such thinking, albeit it acknowledges his insistence that he has not come to Scripture for support for his preconceived ideas.⁶⁶

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 165.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

⁶⁴ E. H. Plumptre, *The Spirits in Prison and other Studies on the Life After Death*, London, 1885, p. 233f. However, as noted above in *The Victory* p. 184, such contemplation is not with complacency but with thankful awe and self-distrust.

⁶⁵ *EC* p. 165.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

The closing pages of this thorough assessment of the theory and the man boldly finds the root of the whole problem in Birks' struggle to reconcile in his mind such apparently contradictory truths as divine love and everlasting punishment. Indeed, Birks himself admitted that the inner conflict caused by this would have killed him but for the intervention of *further light* on the subject, which came not by bringing his own ideas to Scripture for confirmation but by the study of prophecy.⁶⁷ Relief had to be obtained for his deeply troubled mind; but, we are told, this he could not find in unscriptural annihilation or restoration nor in scepticism, not even in *childlike faith*.⁶⁸ Basically, then, the ultimate cause of the problem, according to *Evangelical Christendom*, has been Birks' lack of humble acceptance of the *engrafted word*; either, because he did not really accept the truth of Scripture at this point, or because he preferred his own 'idolatrous' thinking :

Did, then, the truth of eternal punishment of the wicked work agony, and tend thus to death, must it not have had that effect either because it was not truly believed, or because being believed it smote some idol of the mind? Was that idol a fanciful and unscriptural conception of the divine being?⁶⁹

Interestingly, on this question of idolatrous misconceptions and the doctrine of eternal punishment, we might cite, in support of Birks, Farrar's later lament :

The teaching of Jonathan Edwards, of Father Furniss, of Mr. Spurgeon, seemed to me to represent God as a Moloch for all except an infinitesimal fraction of the human race.⁷⁰

In conclusion, then, he is taken to task by this fair and penetrating analysis of his views for a rather opinionated position, in which he goes as far as accusing his detractors in his own church of being *suicidal*, in that they were depriving themselves of the only real way of defending their doctrine !

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 167. Compare the mental anguish of Dobney and White.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

⁷⁰ Quoted by L.E. Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers*, Vol. II, *op. cit.* p. 406.

But that clergymen and laymen and religious journalists of my own church should be found to take part in such suicidal attacks upon me for unfolding reverently a view of things to come, *which alone* in the presence of subtle, infidel opponents and theological extremes makes their own subscriptions consistent and logically tenable, does awaken in me feelings of wonder and sorrow.⁷¹

At this point we detect some understandable exasperation in *Evangelical Christendom*, which hitherto has tended to support his sincerity and freedom, without approving his subtler convictions. The answer, it urges, is for Birks to extricate himself by humble admission of his error. This is essential, for his views are no encouragement to the good; and the encouragement they offer the wicked is by attenuating the wrath of God.

Good men object that it can afford no ground of virtuous motive to the good, while it may abate the terrors of the Lord to the wicked, contrary to the author's own intention and views. Meanwhile, he has travelled into a labyrinth of difficulties, out of which we fear the road must for him lie through the Valley of Humiliation. Would to God that he could find an exodus through the Valley of Humility.⁷²

Considering his contribution to this area of difficult doctrine as a sensitive soul motivated by compassion and Christian theodicy, such a verdict seems a little harsh, particularly from our present advantage of seeing the reappearance of this thinking, notably in Henri Blocher.

Birks and F. D. Maurice

E. H. Plumptre, who noted the close affinity between the views of Birks and Bickersteth, also asserted that there is considerable verbal identity between *The Victory of Divine*

⁷¹ *EC* p. 168.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 168.

Goodness and Maurice's *Theological Essays*, almost hinting at plagiarism.⁷³ Certainly, both men were deeply disturbed by the traditional expression of eternal punishment; and both suffered persecution for their views on it, Maurice losing his professorship at King's College, London, soon after publishing them in 1853.⁷⁴ Again, it was Birks who succeeded Maurice in the chair of moral philosophy at Cambridge not long after the controversy in the Evangelical Alliance over his views. Both were men of compassion, that of Maurice famously finding expression in the formation of the Christian Socialist Movement, with Charles Kingsley and J. M. F. Ludlow. However, Plumptre seems to go too far in perceiving such depth of verbal similarity between these two, which, if we correctly understand him, would impugn Birks' originality of thought. Maurice's work in question is, of course, his book, *Theological Essays* and particularly its chapter, "Eternal Life and Eternal Death", already examined in the previous chapter. It is not my purpose to provide a comparative textual criticism of the two books in question, although it must be said that I have been unable to establish the level of affinity suggested by Plumptre. One of the few links noticed, though, is Maurice's use of expressions such as the *abyss* and *bottomless pit*; as in the following extract :

I am obliged to believe in an abyss of love which is deeper than the abyss of death; I dare not lose faith in that love. I sink into death, eternal death, if I do.⁷⁵

Yet, even here, while the general sentiment about the depth of God's love is in keeping with the thinking of Birks, the use of the term *abyss* is not. This is clearer from an earlier reference where he alludes to *the abyss of death, that second death*, which we must fear; whereas, for Birks such an abyss belongs to the first death, from which all have been redeemed.⁷⁶ However, pursuit of such verbal links will not be as illuminating as a general comparison of their respective eschatologies. Here we will see quite clearly the divergence of thought. Birks' theory rests on a strictly orthodox understanding of the word eternal and of its future dimension. In no way does he attempt to mitigate the pains

⁷³ E.H. Plumptre, *The Spirits In Prison*, *op. cit.* For a full account of his reference to Birks see pp. 229-234.

⁷⁴ Plumptre, chaplain at the college, protested when Maurice was forced to resign. See Froom, *Conditionalist Faith*, II, p. 396.

⁷⁵ F.D. Maurice, *Theological Essays*, 1957 ed., *op. cit.* p. 323.

of hell by redefining our concept of eternity. For Maurice, on the other hand, interpreting *aionios* in terms of time and duration is to miss its essential meaning, as we have already seen.

Some further insight into Maurice's thinking, incidentally, may be obtained from a comparison with the way *aionios* is translated by his younger contemporary, R. F. Weymouth. In his New Testament translation he usually renders the word, *of the ages*; albeit, he translates "eternal punishment" / *krimatos aioniou* in Hebrews 6:2 as *the last judgment*, but with the telling footnote that this may be present or future.⁷⁷ Birks stood by the traditional doctrine of eternal punishment and constantly affirmed his confession of it. Maurice, on the other hand, regretted the oppressive insistence on it by the Evangelical Alliance, and disagreed with the argument that it was necessary to ward off universalism and the associated relaxation of moral standards.⁷⁸

Such considerations and the fact, noted above, that throughout the dispute with the leaders of the Alliance, Birks, and he alone, was charged with the innovation of his controversial ideas consolidate our conviction that, despite the priority of *Yesterday, To-Day and For Ever* and *Theological Essays*, he was a truly original thinker. We are not being too presumptuous we hope, therefore, in dismissing or at least challenging Plumtre's hint or insinuation.

F. W. Grant's Critique of Birks

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 322; cf. *The Victory*, e.g. p. 157.

⁷⁷ R.F. Weymouth, *New Testament in Modern Speech*, London, James Clarke, Edn. 3, 1909, p. 609, where he adds, "Lit. *the judgment of the Ages*. Judgment may be pronounced, and carried into effect, in the present life (Matt. vii. 2; Luke xxiii. 40); or both the pronouncement and the carrying out may be deferred.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pages 304, 321 and 324.

F. W. Grant's *Facts And Theories As To A Future State*,⁷⁹ would appear to be unique in the detailed attention given to Birks' ideas. This book, the telling sub-title of which is, 'The Scripture Doctrine Considered with reference to Current Denials of Eternal Punishment', contains a substantial section on Birks' theory. It gives some help in understanding his thought and why it proved so unacceptable to many Christians of the time, despite some laboured and obscure passages.

He accepts, despite his sub-title, that Birks does not deny eternal punishment, but he accuses him of reducing it to a minimum; and as we noted earlier, he saw Bickersteth as his poetic expositor.⁸⁰ Grant acknowledges *The Victory of Divine Goodness*, but indicates that his examination is based on its republication in a revised form in the second edition of *Difficulties of Belief* (although there are no substantial changes, as indicated earlier).⁸¹ He agrees completely with his stand against the doctrines of annihilation and universal restoration, and with his assertion that the second death is not the reign of Satan and that his power to trouble God's people will come to an end.⁸² However, he cannot accept Birks' marked contrast between the first and second deaths; as far as he is concerned, God has appointed both so that there is no justification for giving the first death the character of moral evil. Indeed, he protests, the parable of the rich man in *hades* portrays the first death in terms of the second.⁸³ Neither is he persuaded of any real character change in either Satan or the lost, although he agrees that the second death will not perpetuate active rebellion against God. Perceptively, he argues that to claim any such change on the part of the damned will lead to restoration :

⁷⁹ Our refs. Are to the Second Edition [which is generally fuller than the first edition of 1879, albeit the treatment of Birks is the same] London, Alfred Holness, 1889, in the preface of which he alludes with great concern to Spurgeon's secession from the Baptist Union because of the "decline of orthodoxy upon the subject of eternal punishment along with other fundamental truths" and to the conditionalist Dr. Joseph Parker (of City Temple London) claiming in Boston that "not one leading Congregational minister in England, as far as he knew, preached now the eternal retribution of sin in the world to come, but rather a Gospel of hope."

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 431. (*Difficulties of Belief*, 2nd Ed., Cambridge, Macmillan, 1876.)

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 431.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 432-3.

Were it so, it would naturally seem that universalism must be the true view; for if the *hearts* of all were subject, *eternal* punishment would be a monstrosity; for it is not based upon the infinite guilt already contracted, but on the *persistency of moral character*. “He that is unjust, let him be unjust still, and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still.” [Rev. xxii. 11.]⁸⁴

Thus we are brought to the central problem with Birks’ theory. It leaves unresolved the fundamental tension between real repentance and some form of character change and it begs the question that if God can bring about any change in a person, why can he not reform or regenerate him? However, he is quite happy with Birks’ proposition that the *doom of the lost will be the object of acquiescence* of the angels and the redeemed in heaven.⁸⁵ Yet, as for the claim that God will accord some measure of respect or honour even to the lost, as his creatures, Grant thinks that this goes beyond what we can reasonably say.⁸⁶ A similar uncertainty is evident in his consideration of Birks’ contention that there is mercy shown to the lost even in their eternal judgment in the lake of fire, where God’s mercy can be seen in their judgement as *a divine medicine for the diseases of the soul* and in their being spared the *abyss, bottomless pit* of the first death. And with theodicy in mind, Grant notes that :

be it mercy to the lost or not, it is assuredly mercy to the unfallen and redeemed, that evil should be repressed.⁸⁷

However, radical error he finds in Birks’ teaching that even in the resurrection of the lost to their shame and everlasting contempt there is a work of redemption and the effect of Christ’s atonement. Grant objects strongly and asserts that while the resurrection to judgement is indeed a work of Christ it cannot be claimed as a work of redemption or result of the atonement. He rejects, therefore, the suggestion of *contrasted elements* in the resurrection of judgement. And in his conclusion of his analysis of Birks’ theory up to this point, while he concurs in the view of the final *enforced* subjection of the wicked to God without any further active rebellion on their part; in the need for this from the point

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 434.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 434.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 434f.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 435f.

of view of righteousness and mercy; and in the possibility of mercy being shown to the lost, he is completely unconvinced that such punishment is in any sense a *redemptive* or restorative process.⁸⁸

Grant then considers Birks' claim that, when we look beneath the surface of the New Testament and combine its direct and indirect teaching, we can get further light on this subject. In this connection, Birks has maintained that Scripture directly teaches that it is upon our *personal* conduct in this life that we will be judged; yet, he has felt justified claiming that Scripture allows us also to understand a *federal* aspect to that judgement. Because of solidarity with Christ even the lost share in his redemption.⁸⁹ Grant charges him with what we might call eisegesis. Salvation and judgement are opposites; and Birks has no right to make up for scriptural deficiencies by offering some saving hope to the lost.⁹⁰ As for the teaching that guilty pride will be *abolished out of the moral universe* in the fire of the second death, by the *ever-enduring strokes of divine judgment*, Grant is somewhat confused by an abolition which needs constant 'striking' to be maintained.⁹¹

Once again Grant turns to the matter of the resurrection of the dead and considers more deeply the assertion that both the lost as much as the saved have a proper share in the final resurrection, the only difference being the opposite destinations after it. He is far from happy with the insufficient distinction being made by Birks between the resurrection of judgement and the resurrection of life. Further, he criticises his use of I Corinthians 15, the key biblical text on the Christian hope of the ultimate resurrection of mankind. He accuses Birks of applying what Paul promises to believers to all of mankind and relating the finally lost to Christ in an improper way:

It is impossible to make Christ in any sense the "first-fruits" of the lost.⁹²

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 436-437. N.B. The second half of p. 437 contains a useful summary of Grant's critique so far.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* p. 438.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 438-9.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 439.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 441.

Arguing that the relevant part of the chapter (vv. 20f) is to do with the hope of the saints only, he quotes another contemporary, Henry Constable, the conditionalist in support of his claim that the reference to being made alive in Christ applies to believers only.⁹³ Other biblical texts are cited. Perhaps, it needs to be pointed out in passing, that while Paul here does indeed seem to be speaking exclusively of the hope for the saved, elsewhere he affirms clearly the resurrection of the *just and the unjust* (Acts 24:15), and it could be easy to read that into this present passage. Be that as it may, Grant is clear about the correct terms here :

Thus although the wicked will surely rise, the apostle will not call that “quickenings” or “life-giving,” which is not the resurrection *of life*. And we are doubly told that “all in Christ” are not all *men* universally. [Is the wrong word italicised here?]⁹⁴

The lost are neither raised in life nor in victory:

They are brought forth by His power to judgment. Judgment, and not grace, claims their resurrection. It may display *His* victory over death, but is in nowise *theirs*. It is not a *life*-resurrection but a *judgment*-resurrection.⁹⁵

Grant next considers the teaching about the dissolution of the body following physical death and its typifying of the deeper curse resting on the soul separated from God; and the claim that following the resurrection, death and what it typifies will be gone. Unfortunately, the argument and style of this part of the critique (pages 443-447) appears laboured and unnecessarily too involved. If we find the argument difficult to follow completely, it may be because Grant himself may not have fully understood Birks at this point! At least he says, albeit rhetorically perhaps :

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 441. See also Froom, *Conditionalist Faith*, Vol. II, p. 343 where he refers to Constable’s view (in *Duration and Nature of Future Punishment*, 1868) that the resurrection of the wicked does not involve an immortalizing change; they are raised in a sinful state in order to be punished. The Pauline “we shall all be changed” does not include the lost.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 441.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 442.

I should be happy could I conceive the possibility of having mistaken his meaning.⁹⁶

He asks then about the significance of the biblical figure *where their worm dieth not*, the very figure of death and corruption. Birks applies it to the intermediate state only; but Grant protests that it applies to Gehenna expressly.⁹⁷ He goes on to challenge the idea that the soul of the lost is further from the presence of God in the first death than in the second (hell). He cites the rich man in *hades*; quotes Psalm 139 (*If I make my bed in 'sheol', behold, Thou art there*), and the Preacher (*The spirit shall return to God who gave it*), to disprove Birks. For Grant, actual distance from God is something moral and not local :

Is distance from God simple locality, or moral condition rather ? If the latter be at least the essential part, will *resurrection* bring the lost soul in any measure back to God, as it should if type and antitype are to correspond synchronically ?⁹⁸

Grant is scathing of the assertion that eternal punishment as such will be lighter [than what would have been the punishment of the post-mortem, intermediate experience, had Christ not died for all]. To clarify this point he has to probe further Birks' doctrine of the atonement and his view of the death, due to the curse of the law, to which we are all subject. He objects to the way Birks speaks of the death of the soul as well as the body; and argues that it is better to speak of the soul being in a death state, which is the state of separation.⁹⁹ It is this first death that seems to be the main sticking point, so to speak, in Grant's understanding and acceptance of Birks at this stage. The problem is compounded by the way Birks understands the *abyss*, applying it to the first death rather than to the second, as Grant understands its use in *Revelation*.¹⁰⁰ He rejects Birks' understanding and application of the term *abyss*; and cannot accept its relation to the first death. Again, he

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 447.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 443.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 443.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 444.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 447.

claims its use in connection with Christ's post-mortem experience to be quite inappropriate.¹⁰¹

Without clouding a rather involved feature of the problem with Birks' thanatology, we need to recall that in Birks' system the horrors of the *abyss* are temporary; and that his views on the intermediate state are not clear and straightforward and could even imply some kind of soul-sleep or unconsciousness for the lost – or for some of them at least. For him the intermediate state is relatively unimportant, the accent being put on our hope of the resurrection of the body.¹⁰² (Perhaps here we should avoid seeking that kind of 'systematic' neatness or harmony, anathema to such as Maurice and Farrar, and unhelpful in this kind of doctrinal enquiry. Possibly, Grant was guilty of this.¹⁰³) Before we leave Grant we need to evaluate his approach to the question of evil in the context of everlasting punishment.

In his theodicy there is no inconsistency in maintaining the continuation of evil despite the essential nature of God and his saving purposes. This is because God is not the author of evil :

For the continuance of evil God cannot be held responsible, save by an argument which throws on Him equally the responsibility of its present existence. It is easy to assume that God could will it out of existence at any moment if He pleased, but then we must needs assume that he *willed it into* existence. Mr. Birks has well shown how much of the darkness which involves the subject proceeds from crude thoughts of omnipotence in this way.¹⁰⁴

At this point he is agreeing with Birks that it abuses the idea of divine omnipotence to see it exercised in annihilating the wicked as a way of solving the problem of evil. Other divine attributes are involved, too, in his management of his creation. Evidently, he does not feel that the idea of the continuance of sin detracts from or compromises the power or goodness of God. Again he notes :

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 447f.

¹⁰² *The Victory*, pp. 54-57.

¹⁰³ An example of this tendency may be Powys' charts in Cameron's *Universalism*, pp. 137/8.

The eternity of sin is the real basis of the eternity of punishment. If in this life God has with any spent all available resources in vain for their deliverance, so that He should Himself have to say “it is impossible to renew them,” what less than “eternal fire” can be the award of those of whom He has had to say, “he that is unjust let him be unjust still; and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still”.¹⁰⁵

Accepting innate immortality and ultimate impenitence on the part of the wicked, he has to see eternal punishment as a logical necessity. However, he does not see hell as a place of unbridled and growing wickedness.

But while sin in act will be thus restrained by punishment, he that is unjust will not be less unjust, nor he that is filthy less filthy. Restraint is not reformation. The eternal state is one fixed absolutely and bounded on all sides, as Mr. Birks suggests with probable truth a “*lake of fire*” may intimate.

We do not accept then the teaching that the punishment of hell is inflicted for the sins of hell.¹⁰⁶

It is clear that his view is close to that of Birks. Yet, as already noted, he cannot share that optimism which sees the lost so constrained and acquiescing in the judgement of God, that evil is virtually non-existent. Once again we are at the tantalising brink of Birks’ theory, where the suppression of evil is so great as to make its total destruction so logical that restoration or annihilation seem to be demanded.

“*Lux Mundi*” and R. L. Ottley

Rowell notes that there is little to do with eschatology in *Lux Mundi*, the celebrated attempt to address intellectual and moral problems in a modern light; and what there is we find in R. L. Ottley’s discussion of Christian ethics.¹⁰⁷ Pursuit of this reference has led to the discovery that Ottley’s view of eternal judgement is remarkably in line with that of

¹⁰⁴ *Facts and Theories*, p. 469.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 471.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 472.

¹⁰⁷ G. Rowell, *Hell And The Victorians*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1974, p. 114.

Birks, although there is no acknowledgement of any dependence.¹⁰⁸ He has a more distinct view of the intermediate state, purgatorial in character :

We find warrant for the belief in an intermediate state in which imperfect character may be developed, ignorance enlightened, sin chastened, desire purified.¹⁰⁹

Holding to a traditional understanding of it he does not see its issue in universalism, and has to accept that there will be those beyond ultimate salvation:

And yet we are assured that the consequences of action and choice abide, and are eternal in their issue; and we know that impenitence must finally, and under awful conditions, separate the soul from God. But we have not enough for a coherent system. All that we can affirm is that the victory of Good seems to demand the preservation of all that has not wilfully set itself in antagonism to Divine Love. . . Man's power of choice implies the possibility of a sinful state admitting neither of repentance nor remedy . . .¹¹⁰

There may be a hint here of Birks, albeit unwittingly. Any such echo, however, becomes stronger in Ottley's confidence that even in the state of final separation from God, there will not be that disorder or rebellion traditionally associated with hell :

So again, Scripture does not expressly teach that the lost will for ever be in a state of defiance and rebellion. Even in the awful state of final severance from the Divine presence there is room for assent, order, acceptance of penalty; and so far, *evil*, in the sense of the will antagonistic to God's righteous Law- may have ceased to exist. Truth will have prevailed; and all orders of intelligent creatures will render it homage. The final issue will be seen, and the justice confessed, of all those 'ways' of God which are 'unsearchable and past finding out'. In a word, there will be a complete manifestation of supreme Holiness and Love . . .¹¹¹

The influence of Birks seems inescapable here. One advance on Birks' theory, however, is the belief that those who were too ignorant or disadvantaged in this life to accept God, will receive help or ministry in the next life from his people :

¹⁰⁸ *Lux Mundi*, Ed. Charles Gore, 1889. The refs. here are to 2nd edn., London, John Murray, 1889.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 515.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 515 & 516.

We cannot think that helpless ignorance, or inevitable poverty of character will finally sever a human soul from God. Analogy suggests that there will be scope in a future dispensation for the healing ministries, and inventive service of love.¹¹²

Whether Ottley owed anything to Birks or Bickersteth or whether he came to such views independently, he was certainly one with them in spirit; seeking to mitigate what were being seen more increasingly at the time as the harshness and pointlessness of traditional eternal punishment. Like them, too, his concern was not simply to promote a kinder picture of hell, but to avoid any diminishing of the sovereignty and unrivalled power of God, which seem threatened by the eternal persistence of evil.

Assessment

The strength of Birks' action was his boldness and ability to question and modify traditional doctrine without destroying it: after all he wrote and said, he still maintained the basic biblical teaching of eternal punishment. Despite the protestations of his critics, he was not mischievously tampering with sacred writ but approaching it with imagination and compassion to make it more acceptable in an increasingly hostile environment. His weakness, if we may venture to pronounce a verdict, was to leave unresolved the paradox of a change of attitude in the lost without its leading to repentance. His detractors and friends were quick to point out that the logical extension of this must be universalism, an alternative to traditional doctrine he strenuously resisted, along with conditional immortality or annihilationism. However, in the context of the on-going debate amongst evangelicals and in retrospect, Birks might well have been advised to adopt conditional immortality as the only acceptable way forward out of this dilemma. It is significant that the most respected and distinguished honorary vice-president of the Evangelical Alliance today, the Rev. Dr. John Stott, is all but convinced that the eventual annihilation of the wicked is the proper understanding of this troublesome aspect of Christian teaching.¹¹³ In

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 515.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 515. Rowell sees this as a social view of heaven, p. 114 of his work.

¹¹³ David L. Edwards & John Stott, *Essentials*, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1988, pp. 320f.

this conviction he is not alone, and is even surpassed by various other evangelicals, including other members of the Evangelical Alliance. Fittingly; and of no small interest, its committee on doctrine, *ACUTE*, has just completed its study of the doctrine of hell.

However, before leaving the nineteenth century and its treatment of Birks, let Salmond remind us of the essence of Birks' unique contribution to theological thought :

Some who regard the triumph of the Divine love as necessary, but to whom the ingathering of all erring souls seems too great a hope, take refuge in the idea that the final position of the condemned will be one of acquiescence in their own condemnation.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ S.D.F. Salmond, *The Christian Doctrine of Immortality*, Edinburgh, T.&T. Clark, 1895, p. 665. A footnote identifies Birks. In the same year, incidentally, appeared Francis J. Hall's, *The Doctrine of the Church and of Last Things*, London, Mowbray, 1915, edn., in which we discern a sentiment similar to that of Birks, when we read on p. 117: "His mercy is over all His works, and without reducing our belief in the penal aspects of hell, we can think that there will always be enough good in every creature's life to make it worth living. We may be sure that hell is at least the best place possible for those who are sent there. The heaven of the faithful could only be an unendurable hell for those unprepared for it."

Chapter 4: Twentieth Century Developments Particularly the Consolidation of Conditional Immortality among Evangelicals.

As we move into the twentieth century, we are confronted by the same three options of universalism, conditional immortality and eternal torment, albeit, as far as Christians of an evangelical or conservative inclination are concerned, positions have polarised mainly around either the traditional view or conditionalism. In broad terms, nothing of striking originality seems to have emerged, despite the abundance of books, pamphlets, articles, etc. on the doctrine. Nevertheless, there are some interesting and even surprising developments when it comes to the alignments of the contenders involved in the debate.

The pull towards universalism

A convenient name to bridge the two centuries is that of Benjamin B. Warfield (1851-1921), described as the “last of the great conservative theologians who defended Calvinistic orthodoxy from the chair of theology at Princeton Seminary (where Charles Hodge taught from 1822-1878).”¹ Numbered among the so-called ‘fundamentalists’ at the beginning of this century², he was, nevertheless, free from the science-phobia and obscurantism sometimes associated with them: his subscription to the theory of evolution being an example of such intellectual independence.³ As far as our doctrine is concerned, he is impressively bold and large-hearted when it comes to the situation of the lost. As Craig comments:

It should not be supposed that in his estimation Calvinistic particularism involves parsimony in salvation.⁴

¹ *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, *op. cit.*, p. 1156.

² John Stott, *Evangelical Truth*, Leicester, IVP, 1999, p. 20f acknowledges Warfield’s part in this fundamentalist movement; but he goes on to insist that the great majority of evangelical Christians (especially European) would now repudiate the ‘fundamentalist’ label. Another famous fundamentalist at this time was Sir Robert Anderson, who wrote *Human Destiny : After Death – What?*, Glasgow, Pickering and Inglis, 1913 (8th ed.), in which he examines the contribution of the 19c. and deals critically with *Eternal Hope, Salvator Mundi*, life in Christ, annihilation and conditional immortality.

³ *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, *op. cit.*, p. 1156; and *Biblical and Theological Studies*, Benjamin B. Warfield, Ed. S.G. Craig, *op. cit.*, p. xii & n., where we note that despite his ‘outgrowing’ Darwinism he still held to the evolutionary principle as a kind of adjunct to creation.

⁴ *Biblical and Theological Studies*, *op. cit.*, p. xxx.

It is in the chapter, “Are They Few That Be Saved” (in his *Biblical and Theological Studies*), that we find a succinct account of Warfield’s rejection of the established dogma of the *paucitas salvandorum*⁵ in favour of a more generous estimate of the number finally saved. He seeks to establish his claim, that only comparatively few will be lost, by a bold re-appraisal of the three relevant classical statements of Jesus (the *dicta probantia* as he calls them), Lk. 13:23; Mat. 7:13-14; & 22:14, which are used traditionally to teach that few will be saved. In general terms, he protests that these verses do not form an adequate basis for the conclusion that is too often based upon them; and that their purpose is “rather ethical impression than prophetic disclosure”.⁶ Concerning the saying in Luke, Warfield claims that the context about the grain of mustard seed and the leaven rules out any interpretation that would understand it to mean that few will be saved; for the emphasis is on small beginnings rather than a small ending.⁷ Similarly, the saying in Matthew about the broad and narrow ways ought not to be pressed to present the final picture, but should be understood instead as a warning about how difficult following the right way is *now*. This is only a figure; and in other situations and at other times the scenario could be reversed.⁸ Likewise, “Many are called, but few are chosen” (Mt. 22:14) must be interpreted in its context of the parable of the royal marriage feast. Whether these words are taken to belong to Jesus or to the king in the story, the point is the same: they are not an absolute or definitive statement about the final state of the lost but a more relative or historical comment related to the rejection of Jesus by those living *then*.⁹

Warfield pursues the idea of small beginnings by boldly affirming that the Church is still in its early or ‘primitive’ stage of development; so that even present-day indications of the response to Christ must not weaken our hope about the ultimate triumph of God’s saving

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 334.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 337-8.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 338f.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 340-344.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 344-346.

plan.¹⁰ He certainly has a large and generous vision about the eventual outcome of human history :

. . . the number of the saved shall in the end be not small but large, and not merely absolutely but comparatively large; that, to speak plainly, it shall embrace the immensely greater part of the human race.¹¹

In support of this view he cites Alvah Hovey, Charles Hodge, Robert L. Dabney and W. G. T. Shedd. With full and evident approval and enthusiasm, he quotes Dabney, whose boundless zeal for the salvation of the world sounds almost universalistic :

. . . ultimately the vast majority of the whole mass of humanity, including all generations, will be actually redeemed by Christ . . . There is to be a time, blessed be God, when literally all the then world will be saved by Christ, when the world will be finally, completely and wholly lifted by Christ out of the gulf, to sink no more.¹²

Of course, neither those cited nor Warfield, himself, can be claimed as universalists as such, despite their large vision for God's ultimate saving purposes. However, Craig points out that while Warfield did not go as far as some Calvinists in actually teaching universal salvation, he did teach 'eschatological universalism' or 'racial salvation'.¹³ As to what exactly this means, perhaps a good explanatory analogy is that used by Warfield's contemporary, the Dutch theologian and statesman Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) : comparing mankind to a tree, the elect are as the tree or 'stem', while those finally lost will be only as the leaves or twigs broken off, so that what is finally saved is the essential part of humanity. However, Warfield does not go along with the qualification that Kuyper makes that the tree eventually will be less in mass than the branches broken off for burning.¹⁴

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 348f.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 349.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 349-50.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. xxxf.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 335-7.

As for the motivation or inspiration of Warfield's hope, in addition to his compassionate grasp of God's love, which I think we can safely assume, there is the question of his post-millennialism and his evolutionary sympathies: a golden age must be an age of blessing and growth and if man develops within the plan of God that must be progress upwards. Further, although his 'eschatological universalism' is not exactly the universalistic *hope* of Farrar, he shared his large-hearted view of divine mercy. Whether Warfield was aware of it or not, Farrar also addressed the problem of the number of the saved, preaching the week after his controversial sermon on hell, on the text, "Are There Few That Be Saved", in which he humbly and wisely pointed out that Jesus did not answer the question as such. Yet, a conservative thinker like Warfield would not have been able to share the post-mortem dimension of Farrar's optimism.

However, this extension of mercy after death is not entirely foreign to thinkers from the evangelical mould as we have already noted in the case of Henry Dunn. The modern radical evangelical, Nigel Wright, also affirms this in his proposal of post-mortem evangelism.¹⁵ Wright is bold in his promotion of 'a kinder, gentler damnation' and of the larger hope, "that God in Christ has ways of reaching people which the Church does not have and does not know"¹⁶; and appears to support also the idea of conditional immortality.¹⁷

Another contemporary of Warfield, Herman Bavinck (1854-1921), who succeeded Kuyper at the Free University of Amsterdam (founded by Kuyper), addresses the same question of the number of the saved along similar lines. In his detailed study on eschatology, *The Last Things*, he approaches the issue of 'The Wideness of God's Mercy' with an honesty and compassion, perhaps somewhere between Warfield and Kuyper :

Directly important to us is only that we have no need to know the number of the elect. In any case, it is a fact that in Reformed theology the number of the elect need not, for any reason or in any respect, be deemed smaller than in any other

¹⁵ Nigel Wright, *The Radical Evangelical*, London, SPCK, 1996, p. 97.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

theology. In fact, at bottom the Reformed confessions are more magnanimous and broader in outlook than any other Christian confession. It locates the ultimate and most profound source of salvation solely in God's good pleasure, in his eternal compassion . . .¹⁸

In his introduction to Bavinck's book, the editor, John Bolt, alluding to the answer in Bavinck's teaching to hypothetical universalism and conditional immortality, speaks of 'contemporary evangelicals flirting with both views.' Indeed, our brief study of these champions of Reformed theology illustrates the subtle potential for a universalistic view of God's saving plan even in the stronghold of biblical orthodoxy. Perhaps, therefore, it is not too surprising that the evangelical Fourth Edinburgh Conference on Christian Dogmatics in 1991 devoted so much attention to the question of universalism. Trevor Hart, a systematic theologian at Aberdeen University, dealt with the two main and distinct types of universalism, pluralistic and Christian, represented by John Hick and John A. T. Robinson, respectively.¹⁹ Frederick W. Norris, professor of Christian Doctrine at Emmanuel school of Religion, Tennessee, addressing the universalism of Origen and Maximus, questioned the traditional understanding of Origen in this area. Pointing out that the problem with him is that he did not leave a single treatise on universalism and hell, unlike the *Retractions* of Augustine, Norris expressed confidence, nevertheless, that Origen's universalism has been overstated and that we cannot say much more than that the "universal aspect of salvation for Origen was the call, not the result".²⁰ Professor Daniel A. du Toit of S. Africa examined the *descensus* (descent of Christ into 'hell') and its potential for universalism, particularly in the thinking of the early Church. His conclusion is that, despite the fact that the *descensus* could have been so easily exploited in this connection, the early Christians never used it in this way.²¹

¹⁸ Herman Bavinck, *The Last Things*, op. cit., p. 166.

¹⁹ N. Cameron (editor), *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, Carlisle, Paternoster, 1992, pp. 1-34. On p. 21f is an interesting account of Robinson's 'kerygmatic hell' (perhaps reminiscent of Maurice), which is real enough as an alternative to choosing Christ; albeit, through the persuasive mercy of God all will be enabled eventually to choose Christ.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 35-72, esp. p. 61. It would appear from this learned address of Norris that the actual views of Origen have been distorted by the impatience of his readers to *systematise* his thoughts too neatly – something detested, as we have seen, by the likes of Maurice and Farrar.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 73-92.

John Colwell's Reflections on Barth's Denial of 'Universalism' is reminiscent of Pusey's accusation that Farrar was a universalist despite his insistence to the contrary. As Colwell pointed out at the conference :

. . . while Barth consistently rejects universalism as a doctrine, he certainly does not reject the possibility that all men and women may ultimately be saved.²²

Barth refused to be a dogmatic or systematic universalist because insistence on that would undermine the freedom and sovereignty of God. God works primarily through grace and to presume on his love would limit God to acting on external necessity.²³ As we can observe by now, Barth is in a long line of tradition of hopeful agnosticism, as we may describe it, regarding the ultimate end of God's saving purposes.

Also in 1991, before the Edinburgh Conference, appeared Ajith Fernando's, *Crucial Questions About Hell*, a book warmly commended by another speaker at that conference, Henri Blocher.²⁴ The book is a sequel to or a development of Fernando's master's thesis on universalism²⁵ and it covers the whole range of issues bound up in this doctrine. In the section on universalism he briefly refers to the doctrine of absolute predestination of Schleiermacher, which led to his rejection of the double predestination of the Calvinists and his adoption of the conviction that all will be saved; and he also notes that while Barth himself refused to take that final step to universalism many of his followers did, and he blames him for providing a 'a big impetus to the movement towards universalism within the church'.²⁶ To digress slightly but usefully, like Bavinck, Fernando is able to handle these issues in the wider context of comparative religion; and one of his reasons for the rejection of annihilationism is that it weakens Christian evangelism directed at

²² *Ibid.*, p. 140.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 141f.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 292.

²⁵ Ajith Fernando, *Crucial Questions About Hell*, Eastbourne, Kingsway Publications, 1993 reprint, p. 13f. Clearly, Fernando is regarded highly especially by evangelicals taking the traditional view on this doctrine. The strong and passionate Foreword to the book by the redoubtable champion of evangelical orthodoxy, J.I. Packer, is proof of this as is the fact that Fernando was one of the speakers the famous evangelical Convention at Keswick in 1999 (*Evangelicals Now*, July, 1999, p. 2).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.

Buddhists. For, it could be argued,²⁷ there is little point in converting to Christ (if fear of hell is the motivation), if the alternative to rejecting him is similar to the Buddhist destiny of *Nirvana*.

Another example of the interest in or even sympathy for universalism as far as evangelical Christians are concerned may be provided by some correspondence I have had with Roger T. Forster of Ichthus Christian Fellowship. Quite openly in a letter (8.12.97) responding to my enquiry about his views on this doctrine, he shared that, while he leans to a position of conditional immortality, he instructs his 'trainees' in all the main arguments allowing them to "make up their minds about eternal conscious torment, conditional immortality, and universalism." Like John Stott, another prominent evangelical inclined to conditionalism, Forster is an honorary vice president of the Evangelical Alliance.²⁸

Christians wrestling with the problem of theodicy and eternal punishment but who cannot go as far as full-blown universalism often find relief, then, either in the magnanimous 'accounting' of the likes of Warfield or even in the more venturesome conviction that there may be salvation outside the Church. Again at the Fourth Edinburgh Conference already mentioned, a crucial paper was presented by Paul Helm, professor of the Philosophy of Religion, King's College London, entitled 'Are They Few That Be Saved?' Addressing the issues of particularism and exclusivism, he starts with John Hick's syncretistic or pluralistic universalism which demands a shift of Copernican significance from the Christocentric to the theocentric. Yet, while Helm concedes that we need not insist on the exclusivism of any one religion we must insist, he urges, on the exclusiveness of Christ.²⁹ Turning to key evangelical figures who have attempted to deal with the problem of particularism, while accepting without question the exclusive claims of the Gospel, he looks at the views of B. B. Warfield and W. G. T. Shedd, also shared by Charles Hodge, on what can be called 'Calvinistic universalism'. Warfield's position

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 43f.

²⁸ Roger Forster's teaching on this can be found in *Eternal Destiny Heaven and Hell*, 1994, Ichthus Media Services Ltd., 107-113 Stanstead Road, London, SE23 1HH, albeit it does not claim to be 'a comprehensive enquiry nor a definitive statement'.

²⁹ *Universalism, op. cit.*, pp. 260-264.

we have examined above, and we need add only that Helm is not convinced by Warfield's arguments and he insists that the burden of proof rests on those who hold that most men and women will be saved; also, Helm suspects that the inspiration of Warfield's views is his post-millennial eschatology.³⁰

Noting how "some Calvinists, perhaps in response to the pull of universalism, have felt the need to soften the exclusivism of the Christian faith", Helm next turns to Shedd's view of salvation outside the Church or special revelation as such.³¹ We have already mentioned this, and Warfield's rejection of it, at the end of the previous chapter. Quoting freely from Shedd's *Dogmatic Theology* (1888), Helm demonstrates how Shedd can see God's saving work outside conventional church or missionary activity. Describing the essence of Shedd's conviction that "God the Holy Spirit is able to produce the disposition of faith in an intelligent adult who has never heard of Christ", he quotes :

It is evident that the Holy Ghost, by an immediate operation can, if he pleased, produce such a disposition and frame of mind in a pagan, without employing as he commonly does the preaching of the written word. . . . it is not indeed improbable that some individuals in these unenlightened countries, may belong to the secret election of grace, and the habit of faith be wrought in them [in the second part of this quotation, Shedd is in turn quoting Zanchius].³²

Helm observes that in addition to the Reformed theologian, Zanchius, the Second Helvetic Confession (1566) and Richard Baxter [Puritan], Shedd could have cited Zwingli, too, in support of his contention.³³ Helm, who is clearly sympathetic to this aspect of the wider hope, helpfully refers to coming to Christ in knowledge as *transparent exclusivism* while *opaque exclusivism* describes the situation of those who unwittingly know and worship the true God.³⁴ Appreciating that such a daring extension of divine mercy might not meet with general approval, he considers the expected objections, which we could sum up in the general complaint that such a claim would attenuate the

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 274.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 269f.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 270f, where he quotes from Shedd's *Dogmatic Theology*, Vol. I, 1888, p. 437.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 271f.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 278.

uniqueness of the Gospel.³⁵ Helm brings the two issues of particularism and exclusivism together in a thoughtful and cautious conclusion :

If such cases of saving faith in the absence of special revelation, cases of opaque exclusivism, do occur, they qualify, though in a quite marginal way, the exclusivism of the Christian faith. For they provide instances not of people being saved apart from Christ, but of being saved by Christ apart from the knowledge of Christ. Whether they qualify the particularism of the faith in a significant way, and give us reason for thinking that a majority of humankind will be saved, depends upon how many such cases there are. In the nature of things the answer to that question is, at present, known only to God.³⁶

In answer, then, to the question of the number of the finally saved Helm like Farrar is agnostic; but in view of his challenge to Warfield he appears to lack Farrar's optimism.

A kinder 'hell' and the missionary imperative

In his assessment of Shedd's hope for mankind, Helm quotes John Stott as a contender for this wider view of salvation; for the conviction that as in the Old Testament even now men and women can benefit from Christ's work despite their lacking knowledge of him.³⁷ This reference to Stott we may take as a 'literary' bridge between the promulgation of this more generous view of final judgement found in Shedd for example, and the present century. One of the most daring and articulate exponents of this doctrine is Nigel Wright, whose kinder view of damnation we have already noted. In line with what Helm has said above about the possibility of being saved apart from the knowledge of Christ, Wright draws an important distinction between the *ontological* and *epistemological* dimensions of the efficacy of Christ's saving work: being in Christ without explicit knowledge of him.³⁸ Despite his radical approach to salvation and hell, he stresses that he is not advocating a pluralist stance or the parity of all religions :

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 279f.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 281.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 277.

³⁸ Nigel Wright, *The Radical Evangelical*, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

. . . Jesus Christ also acts beyond the boundaries of the covenant people not *through* the world religions as such but *despite* them.³⁹

Lesslie Newbigin in his penetrating contribution to the science of missiology, *The Finality of Christ* (1969), is even more radical and searching than Wright. While maintaining the uniqueness of Christ and the Gospel, he does not consider it essential even for converts to Christ today to join the Christian Church as such. It must be remembered, of course, that he writes out of his profound experience as a Christian bishop in Madras, not as a systematic or theoretical soteriologist or eschatologist. He cites, sympathetically, the case of Robert de Nobili's Brahman converts, who were not incorporated into the Portuguese mission church, which caused, unfortunately, some offence to his critics and may have given the appearance of a religious apartheid.⁴⁰ As for the narrower issue of personal salvation, Newbigin is perhaps somewhat paradoxical in that while he believes in the need for repentance, faith etc., he is impatient with the 'modern' one-sided stress on conversion as personal escape from hell:

The nineteenth century stressed one side of this tension [i.e. between the call to all nations to be saved on the one hand and on the other the fact that in reality only an exemplary few begin to enter into the community of the Church]. It tended to be obsessed by the thought that all those who had not made that personal commitment were everlastingly damned. Missions were a heroic struggle to stem that appalling avalanche.⁴¹

His ideas in this book, originally given as the Lyman Beecher Lectures at Yale 1966, are not always easy to harmonise with one another; this and the general flavour of his theology seem reminiscent of Maurice in that there appears to be no interest in easy answers or neat systematic eschatology; his main concern is for a more mature and a less self-centred approach to following Christ in a world which desperately needs him. He concludes :

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁴⁰ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Finality of Christ*, London, SCM, 1969, p. 105. Compare the modern phenomenon of 'Messianic Jews', Jews converted to Christ but remaining outside the mainstream of Christianity.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

To claim finality for Jesus Christ is not to assert that the majority of men will some day be Christians, or to assert that all others will be damned. It is to claim that commitment to him is the way in which men can become truly aligned to the ultimate end for which all things were made.⁴²

The popular modern evangelical scholar, Michael Green, makes use of Newbigin's approach when he answers John Hick's universalism and claim that as far as Christians are concerned there is no salvation without going through explicit Christianity.⁴³ Green quotes Newbigin, when he challenges Hick and makes it clear that insistence on the finality of Christ for salvation does not imply "the only doorway to eternal life is the Christian faith."⁴⁴ Green seeks to defend the Christian faith from some of the misunderstandings which offend the likes of Hick, who would turn to pluralism as a relief from its apparent merciless exclusivism :

So to maintain with the writer of Acts (whose 'primitive' Christology so appeals to Dr. Hick) that "there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (4.12) does not mean that no man can be saved unless he has heard of Jesus : it does mean that Jesus is the only saviour of men.⁴⁵

What seems to be another attempt to make the 'final' statistics less horrific is the somewhat curious proposal in J. Sidlow Baxter's, *The Other Side of Death* (1987). Baxter, a popular evangelical preacher and author, claims that not all the finally lost will be relegated to *gehenna/the lake of fire*. His view is connected with his understanding of the 'book of life',⁴⁶ which he takes to mean the record of *all* human life.⁴⁷ He accepts that

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 115.

⁴³ *The Truth of God Incarnate*, ed. Michael Green, London, H & S, 1977, p. 118 which is a reply to John Hick and co. in *The Myth of God Incarnate*.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 118. A similar view can be found in C.S. Lewis' last book of the Narnia Chronicles, *The Last Battle* (1956), London, Lions, 1990 print., pp. 154-5, where Aslan accepts Emeth (avowed loyal follower of Tash, the devil) because his noble qualities of loyalty, truth, etc. indicate that he is really a follower of Aslan: "Therefore, if any man swear by Tash and keep his oath for the oath's sake, it is by me that has truly sworn, though he know it not and it is I who reward him. And if any man do a cruelty in my name, then, though he says the name Aslan, it is Tash whom he serves and by Tash his deed is accepted."

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

⁴⁶ See *Revelation* 20:7-15 for the relevant biblical background.

⁴⁷ The orthodox evangelical view is that the book of life is "the roster of believers", as F.F. Bruce describes it. See his article on the 'Book of Life', *New Bible Dictionary*, 2nd edn., J.D. Douglas ed., Leicester, IVP, 1982, p.146f.

those blotted out from the book of life will be consigned to *gehenna*; but, in a somewhat idiosyncratic and confusing way, he does not believe that all the lost will be blotted out from that book. Albeit, only those in the book of life who are “that elect communion of souls which the New Testament calls ‘the Church’ will share “that highest heaven” with Christ. Those finally rejected but not condemned to *gehenna* will be punished in varying degrees according to their deeds. However, Baxter warns that this is not to be seen as a second chance; and he is not prepared to speculate as to what will exactly become of the lost who are not relegated to *gehenna*.⁴⁸

Mission, evangelism and the wider hope

Newbigin’s words on the obsession with and motivation provided by eternal damnation, characteristic of the nineteenth century, should not be snatched out of context to discredit the heroic missionary enterprise of that period. The expansion of the Christian faith at that time was closely associated with the sacrificial dedication of missionary pioneers, who were profoundly moved to action by the thought of the masses of perishing heathen. James Hudson Taylor founded the China Inland Mission in 1865, humanly speaking, through an overwhelming conviction about the doom of the unevangelised millions in that great land.⁴⁹ Some years later, James Fraser (of Lisuland fame), gave up a promising career in engineering to go to China in 1908, again conscious of the appalling spiritual need and danger of those outside of Christ.⁵⁰ The same passion for the lost characterised the ministry of William Booth, who founded the Salvation Army in 1865, the year Taylor founded the CIM. His famous saying that twenty four hours in hell would do his trainee

⁴⁸ J. Sidlow Baxter, *The Other Side of Death*, Wheaton, Tyndale House, 1987, p. 40f.

⁴⁹ Roger Steer *J. Hudson Taylor : A Man In Christ*, Singapore, OMF, 1990 on p. 173 records Taylor’s distress while attending a Christian convention in England : “. . . unable to bear the sight of a congregation of a thousand Christian people rejoicing in their own security, while millions were perishing for lack of knowledge, I wandered out on the sands alone, in great spiritual agony . . .”

⁵⁰ Mrs. Howard Taylor, *Behind The Ranges, Fraser of Lisuland*, London, OMF Books, 1973 ed., on p. 22 we read of his disgust that Christians are negligent of their duty while the unevangelised “are being left in millions to perish.”

recruits more good than his Training College is typical of his fiery zeal!⁵¹ Even the Christian universalist or conditionalist must acknowledge the depth of compassion and sincerity that motivated such apostles of the historic faith and the permanent value of what they achieved, even though they might not share their view of the nature of final judgement.

The encompassing liberality of Newbigin and Green may encourage the sensitive mind disturbed by the thought of billions now and throughout history outside of Christ. However, for the traditional view their way seems too broad. No doubt there are many prepared to make the Gospel known and to leave the rest with God. Others, and not surprisingly they represent the modern missionary movement, feel that a sharper outlook is necessary however unacceptable it might appear to compassionate human instinct. Such a firm and uncompromising line is taken, for example, by Dick Hillis, 'missionary to the Orient', who went to China with the China Inland Mission in 1933. In his short but disturbing book on this subject, he sees the missionary imperative reinforced by his failure to see in the Scriptures any "evidence of salvation apart from Christ."⁵² An even harder line is taken by Dick Dowsett. Commissioned to write a book, by Overseas Missionary Fellowship (formerly China Inland Mission), "on the very controversial and highly important issue of eternal judgement",⁵³ Dowsett pulls no punches as he fiercely advocates that there is no hope whatsoever for any outside of Christ, for those who have not consciously responded in faith to him. The kind of teaching we find in Newbigin and Green he would dismiss as "special pleading" which robs us of the incentive to get down to the task of reaching the lost.⁵⁴ He believes, no doubt, that he is championing the biblical cause of the purity of the Gospel or Christian exclusivism, when he unequivocally affirms, after drawing a sharp distinction between the salvation of the 'saints' of the Old Testament era and the need now for explicit faith in Christ :

⁵¹ *Eternity*, Ed. W.E. Allen, Belfast, The Revival Movement, no date p. 21.

⁵² Dick Hillis, *Are The Heathen Really Lost?* Chicago, Moody Press, 1961, p. 58.

⁵³ Dick Dowsett *God, that's not Fair*, Carlisle, Paternoster (for OM Publishing), 1982, in Foreword by Martin Goldsmith.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

. . . it is not surprising that there is not the remotest hint in the New Testament of any way that people might be saved without personally putting their trust in Jesus and in Him alone.⁵⁵

Similarly, the British evangelist, John Blanchard, is dismissive of the notion that there can be salvation without hearing about Christ. In his lengthy and well-documented treatise on the defence of the traditional view of hell, he cannot go along with the missiologist (and Principal of the London Bible College at the time of the publication of his views), Peter Cotterell nor with the Canadian conditionalist Clark H. Pinnock in the expression of the hope we noted in Michael Green.⁵⁶ Of course, Blanchard writes as an evangelist; and like the conservative missionary he sees the softening of judgement and hell as weakening the impact of the appeal of the Gospel to lost sinners.⁵⁷ However, it would be wrong to presume, therefore, that only those with a robust orthodox belief in hell (as eternal conscious punishment) can have a genuine evangelistic or missionary zeal. This will be obvious as we consider some of the great champions of conditionalism.

The growth and consolidation of Conditional Immortality

Another kind of bridge between nineteenth and twentieth century developments in this doctrine may be found in the figure of the renowned and beloved Archbishop William Temple, 1881-1944, (Son of Frederick Temple of *Essays and Reviews*), who has been “commonly adjudged one of the greatest church leaders of the twentieth century and possibly the most gifted teacher ever to fill the See of Canterbury . . . Of massive intellectual and spiritual power . . .”⁵⁸ In the discerning and compassionate tradition of

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 38. His argument for the O.T. characters being in a different position to mankind after Christ rests on Paul’s words to the Athenians, “The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent . . .” (Acts 17:30), which seems to artificially limit God’s saving power.

⁵⁶ John Blanchard, *Whatever Happened To Hell?*, Darlington, Evangelical Press, 1993p. 111f.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 291f, *et al.*

⁵⁸ *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, op. cit.*, p. 1071.

Maurice and Farrar, when it comes to future punishment, his writings also reveal conditionalist sympathies. His ideas on this are comprehensively expounded in his article, *The Idea of Immortality in Relation to Religion and Ethics*, in *The Congregational Quarterly*, 1932, repeated in his Gifford Lectures, 1932-34.⁵⁹ Eternal torment is flatly rejected as “it offends against the deepest Christian sentiments.”⁶⁰ While he is happy about the growing conviction “that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ cannot be conceived as inflicting on any soul that He has made unending torment” he is disturbed by the moral indifference that this has engendered in too many.⁶¹ In the light of this he stresses that the desire for personal immortality as such should be subordinate to moral convictions and to a real love for God. Self-interest whether in the fear of hell or the desire for life after death is to be discouraged.⁶²

His definition of immortality is conditionalist; and with scholarly conviction he demonstrates, with a brief exegesis of Plato’s *Phaedo*, *Republic* and *Phaedrus*, how the doctrine of inherent immortality crept into Christian thought and writing through Platonic influence. Although the New Testament may relapse occasionally into the Hellenistic point of view,

. . . its prevailing doctrine, as I think, is that God alone is immortal, being in His own Nature eternal; and that He offers immortality to men not universally but conditionally.⁶³

Again, speaking of the word eternal he claims that it

. . . has primary reference to the quality of the age to come and not to its infinity. The word that strictly means “eternal” is not frequent in the New Testament, but it does occur, so that we must not treat the commoner word as though it alone had been available, and when a vital issue turns on the distinction it is fair to lay some

⁵⁹Published as *Nature Man and God*, Macmillan, London, 1934 in ch. XVIII, Moral and Religious Conditions of Eternal Life.

⁶⁰ *The Congregational Quarterly*, January 1932, p. 11.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 12f.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

stress upon it. And after all, annihilation is an everlasting punishment though it is not unending torment.⁶⁴

Clearly, this is supporting conditional immortality – and Froom acknowledges this.⁶⁵ Albeit, Temple believes that every personality survives bodily death (cp. Edward White's position).⁶⁶ However, as the article concludes we can see a tension in Temple's thinking between the possibility of the sinner holding out against God and ending up in perdition (annihilation) and his growing hope (which is seen later in J. A. T. Robinson's Christian universalism) that God's persuasive love will, in the end, be victorious :

There is, therefore, no necessary contradiction in principle between asserting the full measure of human freedom and believing that in the end the Grace of God will win its way with every human heart.⁶⁷

While we can recognise here the universalistic hope of Farrar, etc., the significant or even unique difference is that, in the event of the failure of universalism, we have, so to speak, the safety net of annihilationism. Also of significance is that Temple's teaching on this subject seems to have played a part in the 'conversion' to thorough-going conditionalism of the well-known Baptist evangelical William Scroggie. A popular speaker at the evangelical Keswick Convention and pastor at Spurgeon's Metropolitan Tabernacle London (1938-1944), Scroggie corresponded with and received visits from LeRoy Edwin Froom in the 1940s and 50s up to his death; and it was through Froom that Scroggie came to appreciate the views of Temple and others on this topic. Towards the end of his life he became convinced, telling Froom that he could be quoted freely as "being a believer in Conditionalism".⁶⁸

Yet, without question, the most influential name in the development of British conditionalism in twentieth century mainstream evangelicalism is that of Basil F. C.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁶⁵ Froom, *Conditionalist Faith*, Vol. II, *op. cit.*, pp. 747-757. Froom reckons on p. 757 that Temple never changed his view.

⁶⁶ Temple, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁶⁸ Froom, *Conditionalist Faith*, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, 908-11 & 934.

Atkinson of Cambridge. His conviction that there is life only in Christ in no way weakened his concern for those outside of Christ or diluted his spiritual devotion. He was Under-Librarian at the University Library (1925-1960) and a scholar of some distinction (a double First in the Classical tripos and a Ph.D. in linguistic work); yet, his contribution to student life was more than academic. A ‘man of prayer’, as Pollock describes him, he was a loyal and valued member and adviser of the Christian Union (C.I.C.C.U.)⁶⁹ and displayed great vigilance in its welfare and in its outreach to the uncommitted, and proved to be a tower of strength and wisdom in the pre- and post-war decades.⁷⁰ Oliver Barclay’s account of him, however, is not quite so generous and a little mixed: describing Atkinson as a staunch pacifist (who had been in prison during the First World War for such views) and as a strong N. T. Greek scholar, he also refers to him as an eccentric bachelor, who was “a linguist rather than a theologian or a doctrinally deep thinker.”⁷¹

In his account of the conditionalism of this renowned Bible expositor, Froom refers to Atkinson’s ‘excellent’ commentary on the book of Genesis in which innate immortality is refuted and annihilation affirmed.⁷² Yet, Froom had published before Atkinson’s *Life and Immortality*, the best and most comprehensive source of his [Atkinson’s] conditionalist teaching. Atkinson had to publish this privately, no doubt because of its explicit conditionalism (for which the main body of evangelicals were not ready): no date is attached, but John Wenham reckons that it was in the mid sixties.⁷³ The book, of which the sub-title is *An Examination of the Nature and Meaning of Life and Death as they are revealed in the Scriptures*, is an exhaustive and meticulous examination of all the relevant words in the original Hebrew and Greek (in transliteration). Atkinson is a thorough and consistent conditionalist – unlike, for example, Edward White and Harold Guillebaud

⁶⁹ J.C. Pollock, *A Cambridge Movement*, London, John Murray, 1953, p. 220. Could Pollock be referring to Atkinson’s conditionalist thinking, when he writes here “. . . his Bible expositions influenced generations in the colleges . . . though his frankness and strong views did not always commend him to his fellow senior members”?

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 243f, 249, 258, 260.

⁷¹ Oliver Barclay, *Evangelicalism in Britain, 1935-1995*, Leicester, IVP, 1997, p. 26f.

⁷² Froom’s *Conditionalist Faith*, Vol II, *op. cit.*, pp. 881-88, 1015f, where ref. is made to Atkinson’s *The Pocket Commentary of The Bible*, The Book of Genesis, Part One and Two, London, Henry E. Walter, 1954, especially p. 181 (on Gen. 19: 24), where eternal fire is seen as completely consuming.

(whom we shall consider next), who hold to some kind of conscious existence immediately after death. His position is clearly and concisely laid out in the opening paragraph of the introduction :

In this book I seek to prove that throughout the Bible the terms “life” and “death” are used and to be understood in their natural, normal and elemental meaning. If we allow this to be so, we find that man instead of being bipartite is a unity, that death is a period of unconsciousness brought to an end by resurrection, that the second coming of the Lord in glory and a glorious resurrection and rapture are the only but assured hope of the believer, and that the doom of all unrepentant sinners together with the devil, evil angels, sin and death and evil of all kinds is complete extinction and destruction out of the creation of God.⁷⁴

Atkinson’s anthropology is ‘unitary’ in that body and soul are a unit in life and death, so that the immortality of the soul is meaningless. Life beyond death is bound up with the final resurrection, which will be the experience of the just and unjust, albeit there may well be an interval between the resurrection of the two groups respectively.⁷⁵ His word-study of biblical anthropology centres around the Hebrew *nephesh* (soul), *ruach*, *n’shamah* (spirit) and the Greek *psyche* (soul) and *pneumatōs* (spirit) and concludes that the body and soul die together and that the spirit/breath returns to God. A detailed appraisal of Atkinson’s understanding of these terms would unbalance our study at this point; and the same holds for his intricate examination of the Hebrew/Greek terms for death, *maveth/thanatos* and the words for hell, *sheol*, *hades* and *Gehenna*. Indeed, it would take a biblical linguist of no mean stature to judge the competence and accuracy of Atkinson’s research!⁷⁶ Atkinson’s immense and seminal influence in this doctrinal area is seen in his impact on another early conditionalist of this century, Harold Guillebaud, archdeacon, missionary, Bible translator and author of the classic, *Why The Cross?* (1937).

⁷³ John W. Wenham, *The goodness of God*, London, IVP, 1974, p. 40. (This is now published as *The Enigma of Evil*, Guildford, Eagle, 1994.)

⁷⁴ Basil F.C. Atkinson, *Life and Immortality*, n.d., p. iii.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁷⁶ The only place where I feel able to question Atkinson’s thesis is in his treatment of the story of the so-called Witch of Endor (I Sam. 28). I find his attempt to explain away the re-appearance of the late Samuel as a demonic impersonation (in order to sustain his teaching of post-mortem unconsciousness) unconvincing.

Guillebaud's views on this subject are stated in his book, *The Righteous Judge* 1964, the sub-title of which is A study of the Biblical Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment. As in the case of Atkinson's book, it had to be published privately, despite the fact that the Inter-Varsity Fellowship had already published his book on the Cross and another, *Some Moral Difficulties of the Bible* (1941). In his Foreword to *The Righteous Judge*, Atkinson claims that if more Christian leaders were convinced of the doctrine Guillebaud expounds they would preach more openly on the neglected subject of God's judgement. Froom has been fortunate to have access to the manuscript of the book [1940] containing a Foreword by Mrs. Guillebaud in which is given an account of how the book came to be written and how her husband re-examined his beliefs on eternal punishment, when he discovered that the well-known evangelical scholar Basil Atkinson believed in the ultimate destruction of the unrepentant.⁷⁷ As with Atkinson, Guillebaud's adoption of conditionalist views did not weaken his evangelistic concern as was shown by his continuing involvement in Ruanda.

The Righteous Judge is a compact and, in my view, convincing account of Guillebaud's new understanding of Scripture; and like Atkinson his discussion of the issues involved is firmly linked to the biblical text at every point. The book is in two parts : *What does the Bible teach?* and *Objections answered?* The first part deals with key topics such as the immortality of the soul, the continuation of evil, the word *eternal*, unequal opportunities, the teaching of the Bible⁷⁸, and universalism. In his consideration of objections from the traditional side he gives a needed warning about the tyranny of tradition:

⁷⁷ Froom, *op. cit.*, p. 804f. Apparently both Guillebaud and his wife had been troubled by the traditional doctrine for some time, but it was Mrs. Guillebaud who first embraced conditionalism after a sermon on annihilation in Cambridge. Later she was joined in her view by her husband after his discovery of Atkinson's views. At the time, Guillebaud was working on his book *Some Moral Difficulties of the Bible*, which was to have included a final chapter on everlasting punishment but which he was not able to address to his satisfaction (see Fudge, *op. cit.*, p. 35 first ed., p. 9 2nd ed.). This was set aside for the writing of *The Righteous Judge*, which in turn was completed en route to the mission field in Ruanda.

⁷⁸ *The Righteous Judge*, privately published, 1964, Ch. V, pp. 20-27, carefully examines the 'four excepted passages', Mt. 18:34, 35; Mk. 9:43-48; Rev. 14:10,11; 20:10, which the orthodox view considers decisive.

But we Evangelicals, who criticize the Roman Church for putting tradition on a level with the Bible, must be very careful that we ourselves do not unwittingly fall into the same snare. Every Evangelical, we are sure, would agree in theory with this proposition: but the mind naturally tends to be suspicious of an interpretation of Scripture which clashes with a traditional belief held by saintly men of God for centuries past.⁷⁹

Such an attitude of fear and reluctance to question ‘received’ tradition was, no doubt, responsible for the barriers confronting Atkinson and Guillebaud in the propagation of their views. However, by the time Atkinson’s greatest ‘disciple’,⁸⁰ John Wenham, was ready to go to print the evangelical climate had become more favourable to this challenge to the orthodox view. Wenham took the opportunity to give a full and explicit account of his spiritual and doctrinal pilgrimage in this subject at the Fourth Edinburgh Conference on Christian Dogmatics, 1991, at which he delivered his lecture on The Case For Conditional Immortality.⁸¹ He learnt the doctrine of conditional immortality from Basil Atkinson around 1934; but when he left Cambridge in 1938 he was restrained and reserved in his propagation of his developing views until he joined the staff at the evangelical Tyndale Hall, Bristol (around 1953), where he taught conditionalism with more confidence.⁸² The ‘crisis point’ was in 1973, when, after some initial reluctance, the Inter-Varsity Press agreed to publish his *The Goodness of God*, which includes a chapter on hell commending conditional immortality as a serious alternative to the traditional view. This Wenham saw as a great step forward considering the difficulties Atkinson and Guillebaud had met.⁸³

Significantly, around this time The Evangelical Alliance must have been sensitive to the way in which things had been developing, and between 1967 and 1970 revised its articles

As with other conditionalist attempts to explain these difficult texts, Guillebaud’s is persuasive as long as one is prepared to appreciate the metaphorical facet of much of Jesus’ teaching.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.46.

⁸⁰ Another who would look to Atkinson as his mentor in this matter is Roger T. Forster. In his *Eternal Destiny, Heaven and Hell*, *op. cit.*, p. 20, he speaks of Atkinson as “the spiritual father figure of my Cambridge days”.

⁸¹ N. Cameron, *Universalism*, pp. 161-191. The same account can be found in Wenham’s autobiography, *facing hell*, Carlisle, Paternoster, 1998, pp. 230-257; while pp. 258f give his assessment of some of the contributors at the Edinburgh symposium.

⁸² *Universalism*, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

of faith. Such a change still maintains the *eternal consequences* of sin but does not explicitly require belief in eternal punishment. This, of course, allows conditionalists to be conscientious members of the E.A.⁸⁴

The Goodness of God (and its second edition *The Enigma of Evil*) proved to be crucial in the rapid growth of conditionalism. Making public the hitherto restricted views of Atkinson and Guillebaud,⁸⁵ and backed by a leading evangelical publishing house it gave respect and credence to this alternative to everlasting torment, which had been troublesome to many thoughtful Christians. Wenham's presentation of the case for conditionalism is clear and certainly not lacking in conviction, albeit he does not call for the immediate abandonment of the traditional view, for "traditional orthodoxy" is "not to be surrendered lightly".⁸⁶ This might help to explain the success of the book; for suspicious minds of an orthodox persuasion may have their fears somewhat calmed when the reader is warned against relinquishing his orthodox heritage with five caveats, the third of which notes that the modern revival of conditionalism was pioneered by Socinians and Arians and that it is an important element in the teaching of Jehovah's Witnesses and Christadelphians.⁸⁷ Playing 'devil's advocate', so to speak, Wenham – at this stage in his grasp of things - does not want any significant shift to conditionalism, which is not based on a considered re-evaluation of the biblical evidence. The book is essentially an attempt to grapple with theodicy, and honestly examines the moral problems associated with biblical religion. In such a context the real nature of the problem of hell becomes clear. Wenham certainly does not exploit or abuse his opportunity: his views are expressed with some caution and restraint.

By 1991 and the Fourth Edinburgh Conference of Christian Dogmatics, Wenham has become much bolder and more open in expressing himself. After a thorough presentation

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 163f.

⁸⁴ This is discussed more fully in the Conclusion.

⁸⁵ *The Goodness of God*, p. 40 mentions the valuable works of Atkinson and Guillebaud and notes in the bottom margin that they may be obtained from the Rev. B.L. Bateson of Chard, Somerset. Froom's massive contribution is also introduced.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp 37 &. 41.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 37f.

of the case for conditional immortality and an examination of the objections to it, he concludes by reaching a crescendo of passionate affirmation:

I have thought about this subject for more than fifty years and for more than fifty years I have believed the Bible to teach the ultimate destruction of the lost, but I have hesitated to declare myself in print . . . Now I feel that the time has come when I must declare my mind honestly. I believe that endless torment is a hideous and unscriptural doctrine which has been a terrible burden on the mind of the church for many centuries and a terrible blot on her presentation of the gospel. I should be happy if, before I die, I could help in sweeping it away. Most of all I should rejoice to see a number of theologians (including some of the very first water) joining Fudge in researching this great topic in all its ramifications.⁸⁸

The reference to Fudge reminds us that the conditionalist debate has been productive on both sides of the Atlantic, his book, *The Fire That Consumes*,⁸⁹ worthy of being considered the most definitive and authoritative current work on the subject. Earlier in his address,⁹⁰ Wenham says that he has been waiting since 1973, the publication of *The Goodness of God*, for an orthodox response to the works of Atkinson, Guillebaud and Fudge. To his knowledge there have been four serious attempts to answer them :

- The Banner of Truth reprint in 1986 of W.G.T. Shedd's, *The Doctrine of Endless Punishment* (1885);
- Paul Helm's, *The Last Things: Death, Judgement, Heaven and Hell*, 1989;
- John Gerstner's, *Repent or Perish*, 1990;
- J. I. Packer's Leon Morris Lecture, *The Problem of Eternal Punishment*, published in 1990.

Wenham refers to them as *four serious* attempts; but it needs to be remembered that in general terms the literature of this period is considerable with respect to the traditional view and its conditionalist challenge. Indeed, at the Edinburgh Conference itself there

⁸⁸ Cameron's *Universalism*, *op. cit.* p. 190f.

⁸⁹ Houston, Providential Press, 1982, with a Foreword by F.F. Bruce, albeit he confesses to being neither a traditionalist nor a conditionalist, his views being in line with those of C.S. Lewis. A second edition came out in 1994 published in Carlisle by Paternoster Press, with a new Foreword by John Wenham in addition to that of F.F. Bruce. This new edition is able to respond to new developments and to attacks upon his book such as that of Kendall Harmon (a doctoral student of Geoffrey Rowell), who gave the paper at Edinburgh on The Case Against Conditionalism.

⁹⁰ Cameron's *Universalism*, p. 164f.

was a strong attack on conditionalism and its contemporary evangelical supporters by Kendall S. Harmon, who advocated that part of the answer to the problem of eternal punishment is in “the neglected image of eschatological personal exclusion”.⁹¹

Other advocates of conditionalism

However before looking in more detail at these and other attempts to re-affirm the conventional view, we need to note the contribution of some others to the consolidation of conditionalism, notably, John Stott, P. E. Hughes and Michael Green. The well-known conditionalist sympathies of John R. W. Stott (1921-), the doyen of the evangelical scene today, are found in his liberal-evangelical dialogue with David Edwards, published as *Essentials* in 1988. His approach to the subject is firm and compassionate :

I want to repudiate with all the vehemence of which I am capable the glibness, what almost appears to be the glee, the *Schadenfreude*, with which some Evangelicals speak about hell. It is a horrible sickness of mind and spirit. Instead, since on the day of judgement, when some will be condemned, there is going to be ‘weeping and gnashing of teeth’ . . . should we not already begin to weep at the very prospect?⁹²

Yet, while he treats the subject of hell seriously, his careful examination of the relevant biblical terms and texts lead him in the direction of annihilation of the impenitent.⁹³ At one point, however, Stott seems to lack his characteristic accuracy and distinguishes between annihilation and conditional immortality in a way that would be unacceptable to biblical conditionalists. For him, conditional immortality means that only the saved survive death, while for the ‘annihilationist’ the whole of mankind will survive and be

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 219f. His emphasis was to be taken up later by Tony Gray at a later conference on eschatology – see below.

⁹² David L. Edwards, John Stott, *Essentials*, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1988, 1990 print p. 312f.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, e.g., p.315f, where his understanding of the Greek verb *apollumi* (to destroy) is that it indicates ‘an extinction of being’, which interpretation is possible if we accept that the immortality of the soul is not a biblical concept but Greek.

resurrected', the impenitent for judgement and annihilation.⁹⁴ Concluding this part of the debate, Stott admits his uncertainty:

I do not dogmatise about the position to which I have come. I hold it tentatively. But I do plead for frank dialogue among Evangelicals on the basis of Scripture. I also believe that the ultimate annihilation of the wicked should at least be accepted as a legitimate, biblically founded alternative to their eternal conscious torment.⁹⁵

We find the same cautious approach in his discussion of the question of those who will go to hell. He points out that neither the Lausanne Covenant nor the Keele statement said anything about the final destiny of those who have never heard of Christ or of those who have never had a reasonable opportunity.⁹⁶ Again, he mentions the suggestion of Sir Norman Anderson, another evangelical scholar and 'statesman', that those who have never heard of Christ, will be saved on the 'basis' of Christ's death because of their penitent attitude – which is, of course the firm conviction of Michael Green and others. However, while Stott is attracted by Anderson's view, he feels that 'the most Christian stance is to remain agnostic'; and he points out that, when Jesus was asked if few were going to be saved, he refused to answer.⁹⁷

Another evangelical Anglican who has joined this debate, but with more certainty than Stott, is Philip Edgecumbe Hughes, whose *The True Image*, was published a year after *Essentials*. Wenham, who replaced Hughes as vice-principal of Tyndale Hall Bristol in the early 50s, contrasts Hughes' firmness of conviction about conditionalism with the

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 316. See Froom's classical definition, *Conditionalist Faith*, Vol. I, *op. cit.*, p. 19f. Russ Magaw, in his review of Stott's argument, points out this confusion; but he in turn adds to the confusion by claiming that Stott is confounding conditional immortality with universalism! See his book review in *The Restitution Herald*, (conditionalist organ of the Church of God, USA), August/September 1989. Wenham, finds Stott's way of distinguishing annihilationism and conditional immortality, 'somewhat confusing' (*Universalism*, *op. cit.*, 166n). Kendall Harmon also notes this confusion (*Universalism*, *op. cit.* p. 198n) claiming, correctly in my opinion, that Stott errs through 'failing to distinguish between conditionalist uniresurrectionists and conditional eventual extinctionists, thereby identifying all conditionalists with the Jehovah's Witness' position.

⁹⁵ *Essentials*, *op. cit.*, p. 320.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 320.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 326-7.

hesitation or agnosticism of Stott and F. F. Bruce.⁹⁸ *The True Image* is a substantial and closely argued work exploring the mutual relationship between anthropology and Christology, with a view to demonstrating that Christ is the True Image, the pattern of our original creation and of our transformation. The merit of the book is reflected in the tribute it contains from another doyen of evangelicalism, J. I. Packer, despite his differing views on eternal punishment. Despite, or because of, his Calvinistic convictions, Hughes has to take issue with Calvin over the immortality of the soul. Although he agrees with Calvin's rejection of soul-sleep [in his *Psychopannychia*] and his affirmation of the conscious survival of the soul after death,⁹⁹ he rejects his doctrine of the immortality of the soul as being unbiblical and having a Platonic ring to it.¹⁰⁰ In connection with its influence on the doctrine of everlasting punishment, he adds :

It has also commonly been argued either *a priori* that the immortality of the soul demands the everlasting punishment of the wicked as well as the everlasting blessedness of the redeemed, or *a posteriori* that the endless punishment of the wicked as well as the endless blessedness of the redeemed demands the immortality of the soul.¹⁰¹

And speaking as a convinced conditionalist he affirms :

The immortality which was potentially ours at creation and was forfeited in the fall is now ours in Christ, in whom we are created anew and brought to our true destiny.¹⁰²

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is a paradigm of the ultimate destruction of all sin and wickedness and the purging of God's creation all defilement.¹⁰³ Death and destruction, therefore, are understood logically. Consequently, he finds Augustine's view (in his *City of God*) of everlasting punishment as death everlastingly endured to be

⁹⁸ *Facing Hell, op. cit.*, p. 233. (In *Universalism, op. cit.*, p. 166, Wenham records that Stott told him that that he preferred to describe himself as an agnostic in this matter, which, he told Wenham, was the position of F.F. Bruce).

⁹⁹ P.E. Hughes, *The True Image*, Grand Rapids/Leicester, Eerdmans/Inter-Varsity Press, 1989, pp. 393-397.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 398-400.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 400.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 401.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 402.

flawed.¹⁰⁴ However, he charitably concedes that Augustine's harsh view was motivated by his need to refute universalism, just as Jonathan Edwards' insistence on the endless misery of the damned was inspired by his passionate concern to drive people away from hell to God's mercy and salvation.¹⁰⁵ The problem he has with Augustine's view of everlasting death is compounded by Augustine's belief in literal hell-fire, introducing a change into the meaning of death to sustain his literal ideas of such torment. Hughes' description of the apparently more logical if not compassionate alternative is worth full quotation :

First of all, because *life* and *death* are radically antithetical to each other, the qualifying adjective *eternal* or *everlasting* needs to be understood in a manner appropriate to each other respectively. Everlasting life is existence that continues without end, and everlasting death is destruction without end, that is destruction without recall, the destruction of obliteration. Both life and death hereafter will be everlasting in the sense that both will be *irreversible*: from that life there can be no relapse into death, and from that death there can be no return to life. The awful negation and the absolute finality of the second death are unmistakably conveyed by its description as 'the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord' (2 Thess. 1:9).¹⁰⁶

Continuing with a carefully Bible-based argument he insists that sin and its consequences are foreign to God's original purpose; and that the new creation demands their elimination. He has to take issue again with Augustine's teaching in *Enchiridion III* that there will be two eternal kingdoms, Christ's and the devil's. Divine victory cannot tolerate any place for a second kingdom of darkness.¹⁰⁷ In the light of biblical teaching and in the interests of theodicy, it is difficult to understand how a Christian teacher of Augustine's stature could maintain such a position. As for the criticism often levelled at his own position, Hughes rejects the common objection that annihilation would mean

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 403.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 403/404.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 405.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 405-6. The edition of the *Enchiridion* cited above (in ch.1) positions this ref. differently (in ch. CXI), *The Works of Aurelius Augustine*, op. cit., p. 253.

sinner getting off lightly, with a reminder of ‘that dreadful day’ and ‘indescribable terror’ the Bible says awaits the wicked and impenitent.¹⁰⁸

Hughes is described by Wenham as a fine scholar.¹⁰⁹ Likewise, Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, of Westminster Chapel fame, wrote to him in 1945 :

Of all the young men I have met in all my contacts with evangelicals you are not only the only one who can write but you are the only one who has a theological mind. And above all, it is so perfectly balanced and controlled by your over-ruling devotion to our Lord and your passion to serve him.¹¹⁰

Without labouring the point, this esteem for Hughes by Lloyd-Jones is all the more interesting – if not significant – because of the traditional views on eternal judgement held by Lloyd-Jones. At this point it would be a useful and logical diversion to consider the views of this somewhat unique and internationally influential leader of Nonconformist evangelicalism, Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. In his renowned Friday night sessions at Westminster Chapel on biblical doctrine, Eschatology and the Church were covered during the 1952-1955 period. Regarding the immortality of the soul, he sees it not as an inherent characteristic but the gift of God, who alone is immortal essentially.¹¹¹ His treatment of conditionalism is fairly standard, claiming that the conditionalist use of terms such as *destruction*, *perish* and *death* goes against the general drift of Scripture.¹¹² As for the word *eternal*, while he admits that it sometimes refers to an age, he insists that the best Greek scholars agree that no stronger word could be used to express the idea of endlessness.¹¹³ Again, at an international conference of evangelical students in Austria in 1971, his definition of a true evangelical involved the assertion that such a one :

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 406-7.

¹⁰⁹ *Facing Hell*, *op. cit.*, p. 141. Other indications of his scholarship are his contributions to the *New Bible Dictionary* (1st & 2nd eds.), IVP, 1962, 1982 and *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, *op. cit.*

¹¹⁰ Iain H. Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones*, vol. II, Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 1990, p. 130. There are copious refs. in the book to the close friendship between the two men, Hughes being described as an ‘old friend’ at least three times (pp. 715, 739, 745); and they frequently corresponded.

¹¹¹ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Church and the Last Things*, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1998, p. 64f. He also acknowledges Salmond’s *The Immortality of the Soul* as one of the best books on the subject.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 72.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 73f.

. . . believes in hell, eternal punishment; and he is concerned about those men dying in spiritual darkness about him.¹¹⁴

Incidentally, while his view of eternal judgement is quite conventional, his view of the ultimate bliss of the redeemed may appear to some to be idiosyncratic in that it understands that the eternal state of the believer will not be “in the heavens, in the air, in some vague, nebulous spiritual condition” but “on the glorified earth under the new heavens”- heaven in the eternal sense will be “heaven on earth”.¹¹⁵

The year following Hughes', *The True Image*, there appeared Michael Green's *Evangelism Through The Local Church*, a book soon acclaimed – inside and outside the Anglican church, at home and abroad – as a great achievement and an indispensable resource for all engaged in evangelism. Green, who had been rector at St. Aldate's Oxford and then Professor of Evangelism at Regent College, Vancouver, was the Archbishop of Canterbury's Adviser on evangelism at the time. As already noted above, he played a significant part in the defence of Nicene orthodoxy when he edited and contributed to *The Truth of God Incarnate* in 1977, in which he took a generous stance regarding the fate of those ignorant of the Gospel. This view he repeats in *Evangelism Through The Local Church* claiming that “it validates the justice and mercy of God”; and he denies that such a hope cuts the “missionary nerve”.¹¹⁶ As for the question of eternal punishment, he rejects conscious unending torment as firmly as its opposite, universalism; and boldly asserts that the God connected with such a doctrine “is not the person revealed in Scripture as utterly just and utterly loving”.¹¹⁷ While he feels it right to speak of hell and eternal ruin, he understands these in terms of conditional immortality or annihilation, which, he is confident, fit in better with the biblical terms and evidence.¹¹⁸ Green's attention to this topic in this weighty book is concise and persuasive; and thus he shows by example how this difficult problem does not have to be laboured or to detract from the

¹¹⁴ D.M. Lloyd-Jones, *Knowing The Times*, Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 1989, p. 335.

¹¹⁵ D.M. Lloyd-Jones, *Romans* (Ch. 8. 17-19 : The Final Perseverance of the Saints), Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 1975, p.88f.

¹¹⁶ Michael Green, *Evangelism Through The Local Church*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, (1990), 1993 edn. pp. 70-76.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

urgency of evangelism. Incidentally, he is addressing the problems of eternal punishment and the fate of those who have never heard the Gospel, in the context of evangelism in a multi-faith society. So when he says :

Christians, therefore, should reject the doctrine of conscious unending torment *for those who have never heard the gospel* [italics mine] just as firmly as they reject universalism.¹¹⁹

he must not be understood to mean that the matter is different in the case of those who *have* heard and not accepted; for in his explanation of terms like *destruction*, *immortality* and *eternal* he clearly intends their use in a comprehensive manner.¹²⁰

When we consider the growing attraction of conditional immortality and the consequent backlash, it is virtual *déjà vu* as we recall the situation of the second half of the nineteenth century. However, there is a significant difference in the fact that a considerable number of evangelicals have affirmed boldly their belief in or strong sympathy for this view. This steady consolidation of evangelical conviction in the ultimate extinction of the unredeemed is made all the more obvious by the volume and nature of the reaction by traditionalist evangelicals.

Reaction against conditionalism

Perhaps the most savage attack on this departure from orthodoxy has been made by John Gerstner's *Repent or Perish*.¹²¹ Gerstner makes a fierce onslaught on the great names among modern evangelicals for their rejection of the uncompromising traditional view; and in the context of our interest in Birks, etc. he makes the significant comment :

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 69f.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 70. The words I have italicised appear also at the beginning of his digression on eternal punishment, on p. 69. A similar ambiguity is on p. 70 where he writes that "the devil, the beast and the false prophet, who are not individuals at all, but principles of evil, which will be totally annihilated"; for, it is unlikely that his Bible-based doctrine would deny the personality of the devil.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

¹²¹ John Gerstner, *Repent or Perish*, Ligonier PA 15658, Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1990.

Since punishment itself never produces repentance, justice requires it to go on forever.¹²²

The ferocity of Gerstner's approach to what has been going on among evangelicals both sides of the Atlantic, is understandable in the light of his earlier work *Jonathan Edwards on Heaven and Hell*, 1980, in which he makes much use of Edwards' famous sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God", 1741. Gerstner understands Edwards to preach that this world in conflagration after the resurrection and day of judgement will be hell; and that God's presence will be the real torment of hell.¹²³ There will be degrees of torment according to the number of sins; and according to Gerstner this is one of the reasons Edwards preached hell to children and pleaded with them for their conversion.¹²⁴ Clearly, Gerstner shares this severe view of hell; and he is impatient or disappointed, to say the least, with A. H. Strong's description of hell, which he feels tones it down too much and betrays the teaching of Jesus and Jonathan Edwards!¹²⁵ The gloom of such a presentation is not relieved by any hope of a large harvest of the redeemed. Gerstner contrasts the view of Strong, Shedd and Hodge, who stress that the lost will be few (the latter two arguing that the lost compare in number as the inmates of a prison to the general community) with that of Edwards.¹²⁶

A more acceptable protagonist contending for the traditional view is the renowned J. I. Packer, whose Leon Morris¹²⁷ Lecture, 1990, like Gerstner's book, is one of the four serious attempts (according to Wenham) to respond to the challenge of contemporary conditionalism. Packer affirms that Jesus and the apostles taught eternal punishment; albeit, they were drawing on a stock of ideas already present in the inter-testamental

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 61f.

¹²³ John Gerstner, *Jonathan Edwards on Heaven and Hell*, Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1980, pp. 60, 93.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 61f.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 91f, the ref. being to Strong's Systematic Theology, Judson Press, 1917, p. 1035.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

¹²⁷ Leon Morris' own teaching on the subject can be found in his article "Eternal Punishment", in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, *op. cit.*, p. 369f, in which he holds to the traditional view, rejecting universalism and conditional immortality, albeit he does not attempt to speculate as to what eternal punishment might be.

literature of Judaism.¹²⁸ He rejects universalism and annihilationism/conditional immortality (clarifying the point that ‘biblical conditionalists’ believe in eventual annihilation rather than immediate annihilation), and laments the drift of evangelicals such as Wenham, Fudge, Hughes and Stott to conditionalism.¹²⁹ He considers such a view to be weakening for a number of reasons (e.g. lack of zeal for soul-winning) and hopes that the trend will soon be reversed.¹³⁰ His tone is measured and moderate; and he advises his audience that he is going to avoid certain words, albeit biblical, because they can be misconstrued – e.g. instead of ‘torment’ he is going to use the somewhat awkward phrase ‘divinely executed retributive process’.¹³¹ He warns against trying to imagine what hell is like; and, in this connection, he regrets the lurid word-pictures of Dante, Edwards and C. H. Spurgeon.¹³² A harsher kind of tone, however, is adopted by Packer in his Foreword to Ajith Fernando’s *Crucial Questions About Hell* :

During this century some Bible-believers have shifted their ground with regard to the assertion of hell. At one time, evangelical Protestants stoutly maintained the unending agony of those who leave this world without Christ against all suggestions of universal salvation or the post-mortem annihilation of the godless, and they enforced the missionary imperative from the viewpoint of such as Hudson Taylor and Amy Carmichael, namely that all need to hear of Christ because without him all are lost. Today, however, universalism, the doctrine of a finally empty hell, is rampant, and so are theories of salvation through non-Christian religions and of unbelievers being finally snuffed out. . . . Swimming against the stream can be hard, and being put on the defensive can cause failure of nerve. Yet the teaching of Scripture stands.¹³³

The penultimate sentence indicates the strength of the opposition that has grown against the conventional view. Again, in his Foreword to John Blanchard’s *Whatever Happened To Hell?*, Packer speaks, somewhat uncharitably, of :

¹²⁸ J.I.Packer, *The Problem of Eternal Punishment*, (The Leon Morris Lecture for the Evangelical Alliance, 31 August, 1990), Orthos, Disley, Cheshire, p. 6.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 7 & 8.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹³³ Fernando’s *Crucial Questions about Hell*, *op. cit.*, p. 10f.

. . . the same ‘less terrible’ view that Spurgeon opposed in the era of late-Victorian sentimentalism, namely conditional immortality or annihilationism, is getting renewed exposure through the advocacy of some well-respected evangelical veterans.¹³⁴

The Reformed publishers Banner of Truth Trust have played a significant part in seeking to re-instate the traditional view. We have already noted the contribution of W. G. T. Shedd’s *The Doctrine of Endless Punishment*, first published in 1885 and that its republication in 1986 is seen by Wenham as another of the four serious attempts (up to 1991) to deal with contemporary conditionalism. Another such attempt (according to Wenham¹³⁵) is that of Paul Helm in *The Last Things : Death, Judgement, Heaven and Hell*, 1989, also published by the Banner of Truth. Wenham is disappointed with this as with the other three ‘serious attempts’. He regrets that Helm gives no references for his view about conditionalism and that he wrongly sees it as immediate extinction without any prospect of judgement.¹³⁶

Another contender for the traditional Reformed position has been Eryl Davies, a leading influence in the Evangelical Movement of Wales¹³⁷ and Principal of its Theological College in Bridgend. His persistent attempts to guard the strict orthodox view came at significant times in the contemporary debate, appearing in the form of *The Wrath of God*, 1984 and *Condemned For Ever*, 1987. In the former, which is based on addresses he gave at the annual ministers’ conference of the Evangelical Movement of Wales, Bala 1981, he echoes Edwards in claiming that “God makes hell and He is hell . . .”.¹³⁸ Its sequel is no less severe, warning that “the Bible pulls no punches; it says that hell is an awful place

¹³⁴ John Blanchard, *Whatever Happened To Hell*, Darlington, Evangelical Press, 1993.

¹³⁵ *Universalism, op. cit.*, p. 165.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 165, where the ref. is to Paul Helm’s *The Last Things: Death, Judgement, Heaven and Hell*, Edinburgh, Banner of Truth Trust, 1989, p. 117. Helm’s treatment of annihilationism is astonishingly brief and inaccurate – in contrast to his fellow symposiast at Edinburgh, K. Harmon. Helm seems to understand it in terms of the Jehovah’s Witness teaching on this subject!

¹³⁷ The EMW has been represented on the ACUTE Steering Group dealing with the doctrine of hell. Incidentally, it may be claimed that Clause 3 of its 1955 Constitution (*The unbelieving will be condemned by Him to hell, where eternally they will be punished for their sins under the righteous judgment of God.*) does not have to imply *conscious* torment.

¹³⁸ Eryl Davies, *The Wrath of God*, Bridgend, Evangelical Press of Wales, 1984, p. 51.

and infinitely more dreadful than a Hiroshima or a nuclear war”; and that such misery will be unending with no hope of annihilation.¹³⁹

Wenham : the sequel

The monumental contribution of John Wenham to the cause of conditional immortality has been recognised recently by Professor E. Earle Ellis (of the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas). At the third Tyndale Fellowship Triennial Conference, on Eschatology in the Bible and Theology, held in 1997 at Swanwick, Derbyshire, his address, New Testament Teaching on Hell, a thorough exposition and able defence of conditionalism, is dedicated to the memory of the late Wenham. Reminiscent also of Basil Atkinson, he affirms that the Bible throughout represents “individual personality as a complex and totally mortal monism”, leaving no room for the “anthropological dualism” which is at the root of innate immortality.¹⁴⁰ The critical response to this by Peter Head (of Oak Hill Theological College, London) briefly considers the New Testament evidence. He is confident that Jesus’ references to Gehenna, unquenchable fire and deathless worms support the traditional view of eternal punishment. He admits that Paul says little on the subject; but he finds the *Apocalypse* especially emphatic about eternal torment.¹⁴¹ Tony Gray’s response, which is also critical of Ellis, argues that a “third option” (to that of conditionalism or traditionalism) – that of Harmon’s “personal exclusion” from God’s presence - needs to be explored.¹⁴² In his discussion of “conditionalism and the justice of hell”, Gray agrees with Stott that “the experience of our emotions” must not be allowed too much influence in deciding for or against the traditional view.¹⁴³ Evidently, he considers Michael Green and Stephen Travis, both conditionalists, guilty of this, when they seem to give too much room to what might be regarded as emotional considerations, when deciding against eternal conscious

¹³⁹ Eryl Davies, *Condemned For Ever*, Welwyn, Evangelical Press, 1987, pp. 83 & 99.

¹⁴⁰ K.E. Brower & M.W. Elliott (eds.), *The Reader Must Understand*, Leicester, Apollos, 1997, p. 211.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

¹⁴² *Ibid.* p. 241.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.* p. 233f, where he refers to Stott’s [and Edwards’] *Essentials op. cit.* p. 314. The New Testament scholar, Donald Guthrie, is also cited in support; see his *New Testament Theology*, Leicester, IVP, 1981, p. 892.

punishment.¹⁴⁴ However, one wonders whether this kind of objection can be over-worked. Any valid religious experience, like any other for that matter, comprises mind, emotions and will; and a balance must be maintained. One has observed too much emphasis on the intellect at the expense of valid emotion, when addressing the doctrine in question. This, of course, is not to encourage *emotionalism*, which is an entirely different matter.

Continuing conflict and official consensus

While the twentieth century has witnessed great strides in the advancement of the conditionalist cause among leading evangelicals, the debate is far from over. However, the Anglican Church has arrived at annihilation as its official position.¹⁴⁵ Its Doctrine Commission met from 1989-1995, publishing its findings as *The Mystery of Salvation* in which a conditionalist or annihilationist position is declared, albeit allowing some room for the 'larger hope' :

Hell is not eternal torment, but it is the final and irrevocable choosing of that which is opposed to God so completely and so absolutely that the only end is total non-being. . . . Annihilation might be a truer picture of damnation than any of the traditional images of the hell of eternal torment. If God has created us with the freedom to choose, then those who make such a final choice choose against the only source of life, and they have their reward. Whether there be any who do so choose, only God knows.¹⁴⁶

As for those of other faiths, it adopts the charitable line we have noted in Lesslie Newbigin, Michael Green, etc.¹⁴⁷

Of significance to this study is the fact that a number of the members of the Commission were evangelicals; and that acknowledgement is made of the assistance of K. S. Harmon

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.* p. 234. He quotes from Green's *Evangelism Through the Local Church*, *op. cit.* p. 69, and from Travis' *Christian Hope and the Future of Man*, Leicester, IVP, 1980, p. 135.

¹⁴⁵ This is certainly how the press understood it. *The Daily Telegraph*, 11.1.96, headed its review of the book, 'We believe in Hell, says the Church (but without the flames)' and goes on to report that the Doctrine Commission says "that Hell is a state of annihilation rather than eternal torment."

¹⁴⁶ *The Mystery of Salvation*, London, Church House Publishing, (1995), second impression 1996, p. 199.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 180f, esp. p. 183.

[of Fourth Edinburgh Conference fame, a doctoral student of Geoffrey Rowell, who was also a member].¹⁴⁸

In concluding this section, it may be rhetorical to ask how far developments in the penal system have influenced the thinking of Christians with regard to the doctrine under discussion. The abolition of corporal and capital punishment has made it difficult for Christians to preach divine retribution, let alone reprobation. This appears to be reflected also in the tendency of some modern translators of the Bible to use *expiation* instead of *propitiation*,¹⁴⁹ the impersonal direction of the former term virtually erasing the notion of God's wrath. This preference for the word *expiation* is rejected by the evangelical scholar, Leon Morris, who sees no justification for it in the original Greek. In support of *propitiation*, he says that it "is a reminder that God is implacably opposed to everything that is evil, that his opposition may properly be described as 'wrath', and that this wrath is put away only by the atoning blood of Christ."¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. v, vi & xiii.

¹⁴⁹ Compare, e.g., *Romans* 3:25 in the 1611 Authorized Version (*propitiation*) and in the 1946 Revised Standard Version (*expiation*). That this appears to be more than updating language is indicated by the use of *propitiation* in the fairly recent Revised Authorized Version (1982), which is based directly on the Authorized Version. See also *I John* 2:2 & 4:10. (Both *hilasterios* in *Rom.* 3 and *hilasmos* in *I John*. are derived from *hilaskomai*, which means to appease or propitiate.)

¹⁵⁰ L. Morris, *Propitiation*, *New Bible Dictionary*, eds. J.D. Douglas *et al*, Leicester, IVP, 1982, p. 986f.

Chapter 5: HENRI BLOCHER: BIRKS REDIVIVUS?

As already noted, an important facet of the problem of the doctrine of eternal punishment is the continuation or survival of evil; and this dimension of the subject has been addressed thoroughly and seriously by liberal and conservative Christians alike, in the present century as before. The conditionalist, Harold Guillebaud, of necessity has to reject any thought of evil existing beyond the final judgement. He demonstrates the difficulty involved in the traditional view when he asks :

We do not believe that evil has existed from all eternity in the past, but can we believe that it will exist for all future eternity in hell? Will there always be an “outer darkness” outside the kingdom of God, a prison of evil co-eternal with God himself and his redeemed?¹

This aspect of theodicy has always been a source of inspiration to the conditionalist tenet that all evil will ultimately cease, while to the traditionalist it has to be something of an embarrassment or obstacle. However, in chapter 3 above, it was observed how an advocate of the orthodox position, T. R. Birks, imaginatively offered a modification of the conventional way. Yet, for his bold inventiveness he was renounced by many of his comrades in the Evangelical Alliance and accused of tampering with essential doctrine. Today, Birks’ theory would receive a much less hostile reception. And the proof of this we have in the open promulgation of the same ideas by Henri Blocher.

A major contributor at the Fourth Edinburgh Conference on Christian Dogmatics, 1991, Blocher entitled his contribution, ‘Everlasting Punishment and the Problem of Evil’. His concern is to justify the ways of God in this doctrine; and in the very first line he feels obliged to refer to another theodicean, the celebrated John Hick.² Such an interest in this question is no surprise when we recall Blocher’s earlier work, *Evil and the Cross*, in which he considers at the profoundest level the philosophical and religious implications

¹ *The Righteous Judge*, *op. cit.* p. 5.

² *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, *op. cit.*, p. 283. In his earlier work *Evil and the Cross*, Leicester, Apollos, 1994 (original French ed. 1990), p. 51, Blocher refers to Hick’s classic, *Evil and the God of Love* as “one of the most influential attempts at a theodicy in the English-speaking world”.

of the existence of evil. Having considered earlier in his book the complexities involved and the views of renowned thinkers such as Berdaev, Monod, Bonhoeffer, Kant, Tillich, Barth, Kierkegaard, etc., he comes to the conclusion that any kind of final solution can be approached only in simple trust in the light of the Cross, through which God triumphed over evil; for the answer is inscrutable and faith and a reverent agnosticism is the only Christian way forward.³ Referring to this book in his Edinburgh address, he claims that too many attempts at dealing with the problem of evil end up taking the evilness out of evil; and so :

They plead overtly for *theodicy* ; they work covertly for *kakodicy*.⁴

There can be no compromise with evil in our explanation of divine providence, and there is no room for the '*felix culpa* [blessed fault] paradox or explanation'; for the cross demonstrates the reality of evil as much as the sovereignty and goodness of God.⁵ He is adamant, then, that the cross has decisively dealt with evil :

Evil *has been* defeated. On the cross, God was in Christ triumphing over all evil; it is finished, for ever.⁶

Yet, he is equally certain that, as far as the doctrine of hell is concerned, there is no escape from orthodoxy, as transmitted by its great teachers, such as Augustine, Charles Hodge⁷ and W.G.T. Shedd [although he is not too happy about some aspects of Shedd's republished book] and as supported by Scripture.⁸ Consequently, he is dismissive of the annihilationist alternative – even as expounded by Fudge, whose work he has found full and careful but which “come[s] short of the proof needed”.⁹ Likewise, he is not convinced

³ Henri Blocher, *Evil and the Cross*, *op. cit.*, pp. 128-33.

⁴ *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, *op. cit.*, p. 285.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 285f.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 286.

⁷ For details of Hodge's position, referred to by Helm, Wenham, Powys as well as Blocher in *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, *op. cit.*, see Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. III, London, James Clarke, 1960 edn., pp. 868-880.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 286f.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 287f.

by universalism or, as he describes it, final restoration, the *apokatastasis panton*, despite being moved by Tennyson's trust in the 'larger hope'.¹⁰

Turning to traditional attempts to defend the dogma of eternal punishment, he enumerates them as: the need and right of retribution; the insistence (in line with Augustine) that such punishment does not add evil to evil but cancels it, repairing the moral order; the claim (e.g. C.S. Lewis) that it is better for the sinner than continuing in the illusion of sinful pleasure; and the view (Ajith Fernando) that it enhances God's glory and restores the goodness of his creation¹¹. As for God's love and mercy, the traditionalist tends to perceive them in the privilege of the elect but has little else to say; and Blocher adds that humble agnosticism and a sense of mystery may well be the right response as urged by John Hick.¹² He also notes A.H. Strong's argument that if God has permitted evil in history, its propriety in eternity can be assumed, and that evil after all is only "incident to a system" which is providing the greatest possible freedom and holiness for God's creatures in a universe where hell may serve as a means of warning and instruction.¹³

Comment [R3]:

Human freedom is the most popular argument among modern defenders of the orthodox dogma, making hell more a matter of human stubbornness and choice than divine imposition.¹⁴ Assuming that such freedom persists in its hatred of God, Blocher sees, as the "sharper end of the argument", the idea of such sin going on throughout eternity, so that the lost will prefer their own increasing hellish degeneration to the presence of God. Advocates of this he lists as Shedd, Strong,¹⁵ C.S. Lewis and others; Lewis going so far as to see this unbridled choice of evil as God's ultimate defeat by some of his creatures.¹⁶

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 289f. Blocher continues on p. 290f, making the important observation that since universalists (e.g. John Hick) now seem to concede that the *simple exegesis* of the N.T. is not on their side, they prefer to speak of hell more as a threat than as an actual prediction, arguing from "the existential-kerygmatic intention of the texts", a view, according to Blocher, prevailing among Roman Catholic theologians.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 292f.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 293.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 293f. Blocher's many refs. to Strong's theology are taken from the latter's *Systematic Theology*, first published in 1886, 20th printing, 1958, Philadelphia.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 295f.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 296. The fuller statement of Strong on this crucial point is: "Not only guilt, but eternal sin, demands eternal punishment. So long as moral creatures are opposed to God, they deserve punishment. Since we cannot measure the power of the depraved will to resist God, we cannot deny the possibility of

Blocher's thesis: a re-appraisal of the traditional view

Tentatively responding to the traditional view thus broadly outlined, he begins by asserting that evangelical theology must hold fast to the "retributive principle", for here he sees no problem. However, there is difficulty in trying to reconcile God's love and judgement. Blocher proceeds with caution, compassion and simple trust :

As people under the Word, we *believe* that justice and love are one in God, the same fire of holy passion. We cannot yet *see* that truth. We do not know how to reconcile the perfection of divine mercy, the bliss of the redeemed, and the torment of the lost. But we do not presume to teach the Lord lessons of love. But we know *him*. Our disarmed faith knows God, and it suffices.¹⁷

Consequently, when considering the problem of the divine permission of evil in human experience, he is scathing of Strong's trifling with tragedy in regarding sin as 'incident to the system'.¹⁸ Likewise, Strong's idea that sin is necessary for moral instruction holds little credence, for 'sinless spirits' [angels] need no such lesson, while we have the cross as sufficient proof of divine holiness and human wickedness. Again, the suggestion that there is good reason for evil permitted for time to continue thereafter, overlooks God's patience, which will come to an end in this regard.¹⁹ This is crucial to Blocher's theodicy and is distinctive of his understanding of eternal punishment, which begins now to unfold more specifically.

Blocher's thesis : sin shall be no more

endless sinning. Sin tends evermore to reproduce itself. The Scripture speaks of an 'eternal sin' (Mark 3:29). But it is just in God to visit endless sinning with endless punishment." *Op. cit.*, 1970 printing, London (Pickering & Inglis), p. 1048. Likewise, Hodge, in addition to Blocher's ref., says "So, also, we are taught that those who die in sin remain sinful forever." *Systematic Theology, op. cit.*, p. 877.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 296f. Lewis' ref. to God's defeat in this way is in his *The Problem of Pain*, London, Collins, 1964 printing, p. 115, where he boldly writes, "Finally, it is objected that the ultimate loss of a single soul means the defeat of omnipotence. And so it does. In creating beings with free will, omnipotence from the outset submits to the possibility of such defeat. What you call defeat, I call a miracle . . ."

¹⁷ *Universalism, op. cit.*, p. 298.

¹⁸ If this remark of Strong sounds insensitive, it might be balanced by the conclusion to his *Systematic Theology* (1970 ed. *Op. cit.*), "So Richard Baxter wrote, 'I preached as never sure to preach again, and as a dying man to dying men.' It was Robert McCheyne who said that the preacher ought never to speak of everlasting punishment without tears."

Again, while he agrees with Strong and others that we draw judgement upon ourselves through our misuse of freedom, he cannot accept that the biblical picture of divine wrath presents God in a passive role.²⁰ Further, he protests that many statements about human freedom in this context belittle God's sovereignty, while explaining evil as the "unavoidable risk of freedom" suggests an ultimate dualism, which tends to make evil "natural", which avoids the awfulness of evil and of hell.²¹ This is compounded when the continuance in sin is affirmed, a dogma, which Blocher claims, has no Scriptural proof.²² It is at this point that we come to the very heart of Blocher's thesis. Taking issue with Charles Hodge's explanation of hell as separation from God, the source of all *holiness*, so that the lost sinner continues in his sinfulness of necessity, he remonstrates that :

It does not take into account the complexity of 'separation'; 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. Even in life, we say that they are separated from God, 'without God in the world,' and, yet, the very energy of their sinning, at every instant, is given them of God. Hodge's logic, then, does not envisage the possibility of *another* relationship with God, in judgement, that will exclude both fellowship and active sinfulness (this relationship we shall presently call *death*; whereas 'life' is spent either in divine fellowship or in active sinfulness, in 'death' there is neither).²³

Continuing with the insistence that nowhere does Scripture support the idea of sin continuing, Blocher finds, on the contrary, evidence for his view in places such as Philippians 2:10f ("Every knee shall bow and every tongue confess . . ."). The flaw in the conventional view is the contradiction in maintaining that the lost continue in wicked rebellion, while acknowledging the justice of their condemnation.²⁴ Blocher's contention, then, is that lost sinners will confess the truth, forced to do so not in a merely outward or

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 298f.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 299f.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 300f.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 301. He maintains that those who hold this dualistic view make no attempt to cite Scriptural evidence, the exception being Strong, who uses only Mark 3:29 ('he is guilty of an eternal sin') and that erroneously!

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 302.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 302f, where he quotes from W.G.T. Shedd's, *The Doctrine of Endless Punishment*, *op. cit.*, pages 140 & 150. On pages 153f Shedd entertains no doubts concerning the continuance of sin and rebellion in

hypocritical way, but by truth itself; yet, such a part in the final ‘reconciliation’ of all things will not mean their salvation for the state of the lost will be *remorse* not repentance.²⁵ Such a view makes sense of the biblical imagery of *fire* and *worm*, which we can better understand as remorse.²⁶

Reflecting on this claim that sin shall be no more, Blocher suggests that it may find more support in the ‘older orthodoxy’ than in that of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; and he leaps over the intervening years to find some endorsement of his views in Calvin and Augustine.²⁷ Considering the close parallel his thesis has with the view of T. R. Birks, author of the controversial, *The Victory of Divine Goodness* (1867),²⁸ it seems surprising that Blocher makes no reference at all to him. However, in defence of Blocher it could be said that it cannot be assumed that even his well-read mind, which has been casting around for precedents for his view, has to be aware of such a rare work as Birks’, especially considering his continental background. Even so, if there was knowledge of Birks’ position, the fellowship of thought here is so close, that one is tempted to wonder if Blocher thought it wiser to omit reference to Birks because of the difficulties caused to the Victorian Evangelical Alliance by the publication of *The Victory of Divine Goodness*. In which case, Blocher’s prudence would leave us to speculate on the extent of Birks’ influence on his ideas on this aspect of hell.²⁹ On the other hand, if Blocher has been truly ignorant of Birks’ views, then the independence of his thought would perhaps help to rehabilitate Birks’ reputation as another original evangelical thinker; and it would, of course, add weight to his theory. Likewise, the thorough exposition of this approach by Birks could support Blocher’s expression of it. Whatever the case might be, as the title to this chapter suggests, the reappearance of Birks’ theory in Blocher’s teaching is

hell, with no hint of repentance or remorse. Indeed, “The unsubmitive, rebellious, defiant, and impenitent spirit prefers hell to heaven.” P. 154f.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 303 & 307. Blocher’s understanding of the ‘reconciliation of all things’ (Col. 1:20) avoids universalism by interpreting the event not as salvation for everyone but the restoration of God’s order, ‘divinely-ruled harmony’. As for repentance it has a *future*, while remorse only a *past*.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 304.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 304f.

²⁸ See ch. 3 above on the novel theory of Birks, the acquiescence of the lost in the justice of their deserts.

²⁹ I have failed by direct and indirect correspondence to make contact with Blocher to clarify the matter.

significant and remarkable; and of crucial importance to those wishing to pursue this somewhat kinder and apparently more logical view of eternal punishment.

Any similarities with Calvin are not so obvious; but Blocher's research here has "not met a distinct affirmation that the damned would continue sinning".³⁰ However, Blocher is more confident when it comes to Augustine. He quotes the *Enchiridion* (xxix, 111), where Augustine speaks of the division between the Two Cities and says, "The former shall have no longer any desire, the latter any ability, to sin."³¹ And Blocher feels that this inability to sin (*facultas peccandi*) logically entails agreement with God, that reconciliation found in Colossians 1:20.³² Yet, is Augustine's teaching as straightforward as this? John Hick presents another side to that given by Blocher. On the one hand, Hick compliments Augustine's *O felix culpa* [O blessed fault] theology of evil, which interprets the divine permission of evil as giving the opportunity for good to come out of evil – better than allowing no evil to exist at all. Yet, on the other hand, Hick laments the annulling of this valuable insight of Augustine by his teaching that in the case of many souls (the majority?) God will not bring the good of salvation out of the evil of sin "but that on the contrary sin will continue without end, accompanied by unending punishment."³³ However, this seems at variance with an earlier comment of Hick concerning Augustine's view of the balancing of or cancellation of sin by retribution.³⁴

The contribution of C. S. Lewis

A similar problem of ambiguity is found in C. S. Lewis' writings on hell, of which Blocher makes use – but too little perhaps, in my view. Already we have noted his reference to Lewis' ideas about the continuation of sin and rebellion in hell. Later, Lewis is cited as Blocher grapples with the nature of eternal death, which he [B.] sees in the

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 304.

³¹ Our source, Marcus Dods' edn., *op. cit.*, has this in ch. CXI, p. 253.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 304.

³³ John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, *op. cit.*, pp. 182f, where Hick is considering, 'O Felix Culpa versus Eternal Torment'. Hick's own view of post-mortem punishment (Purgatory or 'progressive sanctification') enables him to treat Jesus' warnings about hell seriously without having to accept "the dualistic notion of an eternal hell" p. 382, where he also raises the ambiguity of the Greek word *aionios* and urges that these issues ought to be interpreted in the wider context of Jesus' teaching on love and forgiveness.

light of biblical teaching as the *loss of life* but not non-existence; a state of post-mortem reality, which he describes as “ *fixity*, absolute fixity. *Rigor mortis*, *rigor secundae mortis*.”³⁵ Lewis is called upon to help him describe the paradox of this eternal hellish existence which is not life. For Lewis, quotes Blocher, “What is cast (or casts itself) into hell is not a man it is ‘remains’ .”³⁶ Strangely, Blocher does not avail himself more fully, at this point, of Lewis’ *The Problem of Pain*, which tackles head-on this question of duration and consciousness in the context of hell.

If we may digress constructively, in seeking to understand C. S. Lewis on the subject of hell, which he discusses in a number of his books, we need to be aware that “he defies classification [as a theological liberal or conservative] . . . the reason Lewis defies classification is his unsystematic approach to religious truth.”³⁷ There is a rich seam of thought and speculation in Lewis on this, as on other basic Christian doctrines; but we must read him with the willingness to come from him with an open-ended spirit of agnostic humility and not with a tidy complete and definitively systematic understanding. For him, the reality of hell starts with human freedom and persistent self-centredness, which prefers sin and its consequences to the presence of God.³⁸ Consequently, though the doctrine of hell cannot be described as *tolerable*, it is moral, despite the objections made against it.³⁹ Essentially, for him, hell in the teaching of Jesus is portrayed under the three *symbols*: punishment, destruction and privation (exclusion or banishment).⁴⁰ Of course, Lewis deviates from the traditional post-Reformation doctrine in his insistence on the need for Purgatory, albeit a Purgatory of constructive suffering and purification not the corrupted sixteenth-century version of More and Fisher.⁴¹ As for the question of duration and eternity, Lewis is not so easy to follow. On the one hand, he can say “that to be God is to enjoy an infinite present . . . that to make the life of the blessed dead strictly

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

³⁵ *Universalism*, *op. cit.* p. 308.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 309, where he cites Lewis’ *The Problem of Pain*, (1940), London, Fontana, 1964, p. 113.

³⁷ Michael J. Christenson, *C.S. Lewis on Scripture*, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1980 print., p. 41.

³⁸ *The Problem of Pain*, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 112f.

⁴¹ C.S. Lewis, *Prayer: Letters to Malcolm*, (1964), London, Collins, 1983 print., pp. 109-111.

timeless is inconsistent with the resurrection of the body.”⁴² But when he is considering the objection of the apparent disproportion between eternal damnation and transitory sin, he cautions against thinking of eternity as a mere prolongation of time; and he suggests the geometrical image of time being a line while eternity is more like a plane or a solid – fixity as supposed to mere continuity, if I have not oversimplified him.⁴³ Certainly, his further definition of duration might give comfort to the annihilationist.

But I notice that Our Lord, while stressing the terror of hell with unsparing severity usually emphasises the idea not of duration but of *finality*. Consignment to the destroying fire is usually treated as the end of the story – not as the beginning of a new story. That the lost soul is eternally fixed in its diabolical attitude we cannot doubt: but whether this eternal fixity implies endless duration – or duration at all – we cannot say. . . . We know much more about heaven than hell, for heaven is the home of humanity and therefore contains all that is implied in a glorified human life: but hell was not made for men. It is in no sense *parallel* to heaven: it is “the darkness outside”, the outer rim where being fades away into nonentity.⁴⁴

Yet, Lewis’ conviction of the ultimate triumph of evil because of the stubbornness of human wickedness⁴⁵, is totally inimical to the triumph of divine goodness as expounded by Birks and Blocher. Nevertheless, one feels the rigidity of Blocher’s thesis could benefit from some of the ‘looser’ imaginings of Lewis. Then, while he might still reject the *O felix culpa* dogma, he might find relief in *O felix ignorantia*, if we may so put it. As noted earlier, the renowned evangelical scholar, F.F. Bruce, was content to align himself with Lewis as far as this doctrine is concerned.⁴⁶

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 111.

⁴³ *The Problem of Pain*, *op. cit.*, p. 111f.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 115. If the hesitant attempt here to raise the possibility of an ‘annihilationist’ streak in Lewis (despite his earlier remark, p. 113, “people often talk as if the annihilation of the soul were intrinsically possible. In all our experience, however, the destruction of one thing means the emergence of something else.”) is countered by the ‘activities’ of the damned in Lewis’ *The Great Divorce* (London, 1997 ed.), it must be remembered that that work is a ‘fantasy’, to quote Lewis, p. ix. Lewis’ annihilationist tendencies are noted also by P. Kreeft and R. Tacelli in *Handbook of Christian Apologetics*, Crowborough, Monarch, 1995, p. 287, where they quote *The Problem of Pain*, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

⁴⁵ *Problem of Pain op. cit.* p. 115.

⁴⁶ E.Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes*, 1st edn., p. viii. Also note Stott’s comment about Bruce’s agnosticism on this subject. (*Universalism*, *op. cit.*, p. 166.)

CONCLUSION : *What more can He say . . . ?*

Some reactions to Blocher's theory

Blocher's remark that there is little support for his view in the twentieth century (as in the 19th c.) is endorsed indirectly by Wenham's short critique of him. Having heard and read Blocher's lecture he describes it as 'devout and difficult', being 'paradoxical' and owing more to the doctors of the church than to Holy Scripture.¹ Likewise, Earle Ellis, while he finds Blocher's argument (that those in hell no longer sin but are in a state of remorse) 'intriguing', he is dismissive of it and perceptively comments :

But as an Augustinian-Calvinist, Blocher should recognize that if their remorse is a 'godly sorrow' it is the product of the Holy Spirit in His work of redemption; if only a remorse that they were caught and judged, that remorse continues to be sin.²

This appears to be the essential weakness of the Birks-Blocher answer to eternal dualism: remorse without sin cannot be far from true repentance. The alternative view of conditionalists like Wenham and Ellis seems more morally logical, in that cessation of existence would be more in accordance with divine mercy than the eternal agony of remorseful beings. The value of the Birks-Blocher theory lies, positively, in its rejection of the dualism involved in the full-blown traditional view and, negatively in my opinion, in its inability to demonstrate any value in eternal remorse in preference to complete final destruction of the damned.

Neither is there support in John Blanchard's defence of the traditional view. While he agrees with Blocher's analysis of the attitude of the doomed as an acknowledgement of the lordship of Christ, and a sharing in God's abhorrence of sin and evil, being 'remorse in agreement with God', he cannot accept that there will be any fundamental change in their attitude. With startling dualism he remonstrates:

¹ J. Wenham, *facing hell*, *op. cit.*, p. 258.

Yet none of these things will change the basic situation; God and the unrepentant sinner will stand in eternal opposition to each other. God will hate the wicked with a perfect hatred, the outcome of his holiness, righteousness and justice. The wicked will hate God with a sinful hatred, the result of his corruption, depravity and vileness. There is no evidence that these attitudes will ever change.³

Similarly, the traditionalist evangelical scholar, Don Carson, commenting on Matthew 25:46, says :

. . . there is no shred of evidence in the N.T. that hell ever brings about genuine repentance. Sin continues as part of the punishment and the ground for it.⁴

Again, he writes :

What is hard to prove, but seems to me probable, is that one reason why the conscious punishment of hell is ongoing is because sin is ongoing.⁵

Pawson's original contribution

Carson makes a small reference – but significant in my view – to the contribution to the debate of the popular Bible teacher, David Pawson (in his *The Road to Hell*). He accepts that he has made an original contribution, but describes it as an “idiosyncratic interpretation” which “infers various elements of a semi-Pelagian soteriology.”⁶ Carson is referring to Pawson’s position (which is the opposite of the Calvinistic doctrine of the perseverance of the saints) that Christian believers can lose their salvation if they do not

² *The Reader Must Understand, op. cit.*, p. 216n.

³ *Whatever Happened to Hell, op. cit.*, p. 161f.

⁴ D.A. Carson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Matthew 13-28), Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1995, p. 523.

⁵ D.A. Carson, *The Gaggling of God*, Leicester, Apollos, 1996, p. 533. (Ref. is made to Stott, *Essentials, op. cit.*, p. 319, where he says “. . . but I question whether ‘eternal conscious torment’ is compatible with the biblical revelation of divine justice, unless perhaps (as has been argued) the impenitence of the lost also continues throughout eternity.”) In the last section of this book, Carson laments the growth of annihilationism among evangelicals and examines the case for conditional immortality [too briefly according to Gray, *The Reader Must Understand, op. cit.*, p. 239n], concluding, amongst other things, that “The strict dichotomy between Greek and Hebrew thought is now rightly dismissed by most scholars as far too rigid.” P. 535.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 518n.

persist in their faith and obedience.⁷ It is in the light of this possibility that Pawson stresses that :

. . . the warnings of Jesus about hell were rarely aimed at sinners; they were occasionally directed at religious hypocrites (like the Pharisees) but usually at his own disciples, particularly the twelve. This contextual fact seems to have been totally overlooked, even by those who still believe in, preach on and write about hell. Drawing attention to it is probably the unique contribution of this book to the present debate.⁸

His teaching on hell is otherwise conventional; and he is well-informed when it comes to the alternative views.⁹ He would not subscribe to Blocher's view of the absence of sin there; for Pawson, hell is a place of moral depravity, and with the absence of God and the presence of the devil and his angels there will be a polluted atmosphere of foul thoughts and deeds.¹⁰

When he considers the relevance of the doctrine of hell, he develops his original thought more fully in the contexts of evangelising unbelievers and edifying believers respectively. The preaching of Jesus and the apostles, he claims, did not feature hell prominently. And he wonders, "Is hell to motivate the evangelist rather than the evangelised?"¹¹ He is quick to point out that he is not denying that unbelievers need to be warned about the judgement of God but that there should be more balance and restraint in *preaching* about it.¹² And such restraint or care would be exercised more if the preacher was aware of his own

⁷ David Pawson, *The Road To Hell*, London, Hodder & Stoughton, (1992), 1996 edn., pp. 8, 62-3. On p. 8 there is an interesting note on correspondence between Pawson and Ajith Fernando (author of *Crucial Questions About Hell*, *op. cit.*), in which Fernando agreed with Pawson's view on the danger of falling from grace and encouraged him to persist with the intention of publishing his book. More significantly, Fernando admitted his oversight in failing to point out that most of Jesus warnings on hell were to his disciples. Such thinking, incidentally, recalls the warnings given to the Christian pilgrim by the medieval Brother of the Common Life, Thomas a Kempis: "If such slight suffering now makes you so impatient, what will Gehenna do then? You may be sure of this - you cannot have two joys. You cannot have pleasure here in this world, and afterwards reign with Christ as well." *The Imitation of Christ*, ed. London, Fount, 1996, p.67.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 6, 49, etc.

⁹ *Ibid.*, ch. 2, pp. 15-25.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 78-81.

danger and risk!¹³ As for believers, he reckons that by our Lord's example "it is more important to remind saints about hell than sinners!"¹⁴ Fear of hell has five benefits for the Christian:

1. It inspires diligence in evangelism as the fate of the lost is taken to heart;
2. It creates awe and gratitude in worship, which has become too familiar today;
3. It encourages perseverance in service : to be vigilant and faithful;
4. It is vital for obedience in holiness, that the Christian live in the realisation that sanctification as well as justification is necessary for salvation, for "without holiness no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14);
5. It helps steadfastness in persecution in that the "lesser fears" of man can be overcome by the "greater fear" of God.¹⁵

With regard to the fourth point on sanctification, he has some hard things to say elsewhere. He sees most remarriages after divorce as 'legal' adultery, which like other forms of adultery is liable to hell punishment.¹⁶ From a pastoral point of view, it may be asked if his motive to challenge the 'carelessness of saints' could be discredited by creating for them an unsettling preoccupation with divine wrath and a loss of personal assurance of salvation.

The debate could open up a further dimension in the form of another original suggestion, which could create some kind of *rapprochement* between the novel ideas of Birks and Blocher on the one hand and Pawson on the other. If, in this grey area of doctrine where we should proceed cautiously and humbly, Birks and Blocher are right in asserting that one day divine goodness will triumph over sin and evil, and Pawson is right in claiming that Christian believers, too, are in danger of hell, could we suggest a *partial synthesis* of their respective theories? When Birks and Blocher advocate that in their final state the lost will agree (in their eternal remorse) with the divine verdict, would not this be more in accord with the mentality of those who once knew the love and mercy of God (but who have since forfeited their experience of them through backsliding or apostasy)? If it be

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 81-85.

objected that such a response would be equivalent to the backslider coming home in repentance, those disturbing and difficult words of the unknown writer to the Hebrew Christians could be cited:

It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance . . .(Hebs. 6:4-6; NIV)¹⁷

This suggestion, admittedly, would not appeal to the Calvinistic soteriology of Blocher and to others confident of the ‘security of the saints’, neither does it address the question of the future of those who have never responded to Christ or repented. Again, it might undermine the compassion and tenacity of God with respect to those who venture upon the path of Christian pilgrimage. However, such speculation might reinforce the conviction of many evangelicals that there are only two possible clear alternatives: the eternal conscious punishment of the finally rebellious or their eventual annihilation. The latter has the advantage in that it deals conclusively with the problem of dualism inherent in the continuation of evil. Perhaps a final word on this is owed to John Wenham, who strove so courageously to defend the goodness of God :

If there are human beings alive suffering endless punishment, it would seem to mean that they are in endless opposition to God, that is to say, we have a doctrine of endless sinning as well as of suffering. How can this be if Christ is all in all? I plead guilty also to failing to see how God and the saints could be in perfect bliss with human beings hopelessly sinning and suffering.¹⁸

* * * * *

If the above findings show us anything, they highlight the need for less dogmatism and a little more willingness to confess our ignorance and the limitations of our understanding.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

¹⁷ Of course this is one of the classic warnings of this letter, and NT scholars are divided over whether or not they apply to genuine believers. This could be another context where the hermeneutic principle of ‘existential- kerygmatic intention’ might be relevant.

¹⁸ J. Wenham, *Facing Hell, op. cit.*, p. 256.

In an area of doctrine as sensitive and controversial as this such a response is essential if unity in fellowship and in the pursuit of truth are to be maintained. Honest agnosticism (as far as this topic goes) will do more good than the closed and narrow doctrinal system, which will accept no dissent on secondary issues and which so easily mistakes bigotry for contending for the truth. At the same time, Scripture encourages an attitude of reverent submission to the sovereignty of God, whose ways and thoughts are not ours;¹⁹ and it warns that there is a danger of trespassing into areas where revelation has not been given.²⁰

However, this ought not to mean that those with firm and settled convictions are of necessity lacking in perception or meekness. Neither should it lead to a moratorium on further study and investigation in this difficult area. On the contrary, more investigation would appear to be called for – but investigation unhindered by conventional restraints or prejudices. David Powys complains:

It would seem that much of the energy that has gone into the nineteenth and twentieth century debates about hell and universalism may have been wasted on account of the undue influence of unjustified presuppositions. The waste has arguably been compounded by the way in which the debate has been constrained by a pervasive though perverse allegiance to a questionable ‘orthodoxy’: the doctrine of immediate, unending, physical punishment.²¹

And he adds that:

. . . future constructive contributions to the debate will be made by those deeply committed to fresh, radical and unbridled examination of the biblical data.²²

Nearly sixty years earlier in 1932, William Temple wrote of a similar need :

¹⁹ *Isaiah 55:8*.

²⁰ Compare Paul’s caution against “going beyond what is written” (I Cor. 4:6) and Charles Wesley’s, “Let angel minds inquire no more.”, in his famous hymn, “And can it be that I should gain . . .”.

²¹ *Universalism*, op. cit., p. 135.

²² loc. cit.

There is a very strong case for thinking out the whole subject again in as complete independence as possible alike of medieval and of Protestant traditions.²³

A fresh look at the data, as Powys suggests, is what biblically motivated evangelicals evidently need to consider, whether this would alter or not the polarisation that is found clearly around the traditionalist and conditionalist alternatives. Perhaps another symposium (along the lines of Edinburgh 1991 or the third Triennial Tyndale Fellowship Conference at Swanwick 1997, on hell and eschatology respectively) is required. And if it is not too naïve to suggest it, the contributors need a ‘minimalist’ mentality, unencumbered with narrow doctrinal allegiances. Philosophical presuppositions or systematic theological constraints should not get in the way of honest appraisal of the relevant biblical texts in their original contexts and of words in their proper signification. The importance of sound etymology and exegesis cannot be over-stated. In the frame of mind advocated by Powys and Temple, there would appear to be plenty of scope for further work on basic words such as *eternal*, *death*, *immortality*, *destruction*, *soul*, *spirit*, etc.

Crucial to this must be an awareness that, although Jesus spoke about hell more than any other in the New Testament, such language appears to be highly metaphorical²⁴. Evidently, Jesus expected his hearers to realise this and to reflect on what he said. For example, he said quite plainly and without any explanation that no-one could be his disciple who “does not hate his own father and mother . . .” (Luke 14:26). To take this literally is to ignore the wider context of his teaching, which is so full of love and in step with the Fifth Commandment, to honour one’s parents. The same principle needs to be considered when dealing with texts which appear to affirm eternal torment. Hermeneutics and exegesis could start by ensuring that, in the interests of consistency, the same principles must be applied, for example to the “undying worm” and “unquenchable fire”

²³ *The Congregational Quarterly* 1932, op. cit., p. 13.

²⁴ In this context of interpretation and metaphorical language, the historic stand-off between Luther and Zwingli on the issue of the *Real Presence* should remind evangelicals that the best minds cannot always agree on what is literal or figurative.

as to “If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off.”²⁵ Again, the dire warnings and terrible predictions of the *Apocalypse* require the same balance of respect for divine revelation and awareness of that which is conveyed through metaphor.²⁶ In this connection attention should be paid to the advice of Colin Brown, when commenting on New Testament references to ‘eternal fire’:

In attempting to determine the meaning of such passages, attention needs to be paid to semantics and the philosophical analysis of the structure and function of language. The words “life” and “judgement” are what I. T. Ramsey called models which describe something in familiar terms which is in fact not capable of being described in a purely literal way. For although eternal can be entered into now, its future character lies hidden beyond this life.²⁷

Not far behind the literary or textual considerations is the importance of the pastoral implications of this doctrine. Dean Farrar’s compassion for his poor parishioners, tormented and devastated by their concerns for their departed loved-ones²⁸, and Pawson’s claim that hell should be preached sparingly to those not yet committed to Christ²⁹ sound a warning note concerning the potential harm in preaching without discretion on this subject. However, as already noted, some may feel that they have a legitimate vested interest in declaring an unbridled message of eternal judgement and that success in evangelism and mission depends on it.³⁰ Evangelicals *per se* are for preaching the good news; but, if the Gospel is proclaimed with what some consider Augustinian harshness and exclusiveness, it can soon become a message of joy for the few only, but eventual and

²⁵ *Mark* 9:42-48.

²⁶ In particular *Revelation* 14:9-11; 20:10.

²⁷ Colin Brown, Punishment, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown, Exeter, The Paternoster Press, 1978 (English language ed.). The same might well be applied to the terms *election/predestination*; perhaps if they, too, were viewed as ‘models’, the doctrine associated with them might not be charged with arbitrariness or unfairness.

²⁸ *Montgomery of Alamein*, op. cit., p. 20f.

²⁹ *The Road to Hell*, op. cit., pp. 45-48.

³⁰ I hope it is not mischievous to draw a parallel with the emphasis on tithing. Despite the fact that there is no clear NT doctrine of tithing (apart from a minor indirect ref. in Mt. 23:23f) the practice is encouraged – almost legalistically – in many evangelical churches; and the cynic could be excused for thinking that

inescapable despair and misery for the many. Paul Helm notes that the preacher who believes in divine revelation cannot avoid reference to hell; yet, he wisely adds:

But hell is only a *part* of the divine revelation and therefore it is not to be preached as if it were the *whole*. The trouble with the hell-fire preacher is that he preaches nothing else, he is a religious monomaniac. . .³¹

Developing these pastoral considerations a little further and turning briefly from theology to anthropology, one would imagine that the psychological dimension also needs further clarification. One of the controversial issues adding to the heat or confusion of the debate about eternal punishment has been the very nature of man. For traditionalists like F. W. Grant in the nineteenth century man's being is 'dualistic', or tripartite in the Pauline sense, as he understands him, of spirit, soul and body.³² On the other hand, 'materialists' such as B. F. C. Atkinson³³ have championed the monistic nature of man, thereby making it easier to rule out any innate immortality, and post-mortem consciousness unless in the form of a divine gift of eternal life given conditionally. This is a most involved aspect of psychology, and one where theories and misconceptions seem to abound. However, traditional and popular notions of what God has created man to be are not always conducive to arriving at clearer ideas of what is supposed to survive death; and they may need to be challenged.

Just as important but easier to comment on is that side of human personality we refer to as *emotion*. A study of this kind must essentially be objective and as logical as possible, if there is to be any hope of reaching a clearer understanding of the truth. However, of all doctrines this is the one most associated with deep feelings of pity, compassion, dread, fear, anger, disgust, injustice, etc. Yet, to express a truism, man is a creature of feeling because God so made him. Therefore, it may well be psychologically unsound as well as

preoccupation with *fear* (of hell) and *finance* (tithing) could be a form of vested manipulation, if we can coin a phrase, albeit unconsciously and well-motivated.

³¹ Paul Helm, *The Last Things*, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

³² See F.W. Grant, *Facts and Theories as to a Future State* (1st. ed.) *op. cit.* p. 29f; and *I Thessalonians* 5:23.

³³ *Life and Immortality*, *op. cit.*

impractical to approach the doctrine of eternal judgement in a purely cognitive way, as already noted at the end of chapter 4. Indeed, it may be argued further that if man is a combination of mind, feelings and will, it may be theologically acceptable as well as psychologically sound to listen to natural feeling as well as using natural intelligence, when contemplating God's plan in this awesome context of judgement. This is with the proviso, of course, that human limitations and fallibility are understood. The point one seeks to stress here is that if 'the milk of human kindness' is set aside to allow a purely cerebral assessment of the truth, a distorted picture of God may be the result. Of course, it must be readily admitted, as a study of the last one hundred and fifty years bears out, that the traditional 'hard' view of eternal punishment is held more often than not by evangelicals, who are not lacking in feeling or love for those resisting Christ, any more than advocates of a 'kinder' view. Yet, the considerations of compassion and logic seem to point away from a doctrine that demands the eternal conscious suffering of those finally lost; and conditional immortality appears a better alternative.

This recalls another aspect of the enquiry, namely the danger of darkening the biblical conception of God who is love. Farrar recoiled in horror from that presentation of final judgement, which tended to portray God in a monstrous fashion.³⁴ P. E. Hughes presents the incarnate Christ as the true expression of God and the pattern for man; and his book is aptly titled, *The True Image*; and the conditionalism so ably expressed in the book may be more in accord with the image of God as infinite in compassion than the traditional view of eternal torment.³⁵ It has not gone unnoticed that this able champion of conditionalism belongs to the *Calvinist* tradition: a stance noted historically for its unyielding defence of the traditional view of eternal punishment. His ability to hold both to conditionalism and Calvinism does more than some might appreciate for the defence of the Calvinist position. Election and reprobation are doctrines difficult enough in themselves, as John Calvin freely confessed; but to affirm the eternal conscious torment of the reprobate

³⁴ Froom's *Conditionalist Faith* Vol II, op. cit. p. 406, where he is quoted as accusing Edwards, Furniss and Spurgeon of seeming "to represent God as a Moloch". Compare Jerome Bolsec's accusation that Calvin's doctrine of double-predestination made God the author of evil and a tyrant. See *John Calvin*, T.H.L. Parker, London, Lion Publishing, 1977, p. 134f.

³⁵ P.E. Hughes, *The True Image*, op. cit. pp. 393-397.

compounds the problem. Hughes, on the other hand, has brought logic and compassion to bear on this matter, and thereby helps to guard the core of traditional Calvinistic theology as well as easing the problem for theodicy. Admittedly, the problem is much attenuated for those Calvinists, who are in sympathy with either Shedd's 'secret working of grace' or Warfield's optimistic accounting of those who will be finally saved. No doubt, even some conditionalists might be tempted to reconsider their views, if they could be persuaded that after all a small number *viz.* only the finally and obstinately rebellious, will be consigned to everlasting conscious punishment; albeit, this would not solve the theodicy question about the continuing existence of evil.

However, other Christians might reply that God is also a God of holiness and justice and that neglect of these attributes will equally distort the true image of the Holy One of Israel. Here then is a test of the strength and reality of Christian unity, especially in the evangelical fraternity. Can those, who hold fast to the traditional view, appreciate the compassion and concern for theodicy which drives others to find the answer to their anxiety in conditional immortality? Is the conditionalist willing to accept that brethren and sisters of more orthodox convictions are just as sincere in their concern for God's glory and the welfare of the lost, when they cry out that God is a "consuming fire" and that the sinner must "flee from the [eternal] wrath to come"?³⁶

The implications for the advance or witness of the Christian faith are also significant. By definition, as already noted above in the pastoral requirements, evangelicals are promoters of the gospel. If the heart of the Christian message is the *good news* of divine love and salvation, they need to guard or examine their doctrine to ensure that its *kerygma* never deviates from being essentially the proclamation of God's grace. The question stubbornly persists, then, whether or not the traditional view of eternal punishment detracts from such a presentation of infinite compassion. Contenders for the traditionalist and conditionalist views are equally committed to spreading the *evangel* in obedience to the *missionary imperative*. Yet, just as a relaxation of the traditional doctrine could be seen to

³⁶ Biblical refs., *Hebs.* 12:29, *Matt.* 3:7.

weaken such evangelism by diminishing the wrath of God, so a strict declaration of eternal torment can repulse those who recoil from what they see as disproportionate vengeance; and there is much anecdotal evidence of people turning away from the Christian message because of its traditional doctrine of eternal misery. Clearly, no view could be tolerated, which encouraged carelessness or disgust and thereby kept people from accepting the gospel. Although it could be claimed that, as far as the two positions now being considered are concerned, the arguments are finely balanced, they appear to incline more in favour of the conditionalist view, which preaches a more tolerable and proportionate view of punishment.

This is where the Evangelical Alliance can exercise a constructive role in seeking to maintain the message of such free forgiveness. It has come a long way since the Birks episode of the last century. The strongest proof of this is its bold and wise amendment of its articles of faith in 1967-70, exactly one hundred years after Birks', *The Victory of Divine Goodness*. Now, according to its doctrinal basis, it is sufficient for evangelicals to assent to sinful man being "subject to God's wrath and condemnation" and to the redemption of Christ releasing us "from the guilt and power of sin, and from its eternal consequences."³⁷ There was a time when Christians, who rejected a pre-millennialist eschatology, were shunned by others, as were those who believed God used evolution to create the world and those who believed in a 'local' Noahic Flood. The climate now is more tolerant among evangelicals and one's precise doctrine of eternal punishment should not be a test of orthodoxy. For evangelical Christians, because of their high regard for the authority and inspiration of Scripture, assent to its doctrine of eternal punishment, albeit they differ as to whether that punishment is consciously experienced. As Kessler has wisely observed in his appraisal of the Birks' episode in the story of the Evangelical Alliance,

³⁷ Not all evangelicals would agree to this. For example, the more 'reformed' body, the British Evangelical Council, which is represented on ACUTE, affirms "the blessedness of the saved and the everlasting punishment of the lost" [but even here there is room for differing views, for annihilation is an irrevocable punishment]. However, the international Christian Literature Crusade wisely states, " We believe in the resurrection of both the saved and the lost; they that are saved unto the resurrection of life and they that are lost unto the resurrection of judgement."

This shows that a doctrinal basis needs to be completely reformulated from time to time and that the real bond of Christian unity lies deeper than any formulation of the truth.³⁸

However, not everyone is happy about current trends. Don Carson has expressed his uneasiness over the way the expanding definition of evangelicalism has led to a fragmentation in “the camp” on this issue.³⁹ Earlier, we noted that for Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones the definition of evangelical ought to include belief in hell and eternal punishment.⁴⁰ However, in his recent book, *Evangelical Truth* (a personal plea for unity), John Stott distinguishes between “evangelical essentials which cannot be compromised” and the “*adiaphora* (‘matters indifferent’)”.⁴¹ The last of these doctrines of “secondary importance” on which “it is not necessary for us to insist” is “*Eschatology*: how do we understand the tribulation, the millennium, the parousia and our final destinies?”⁴²

There has been no outcry against Blocher as there should not have been one against Birks. Both men resisted what many consider the easier alternative of annihilationism as they grappled with the theodicy question within the limits of Scripture, as freely understood. The greatness of their labours in this context lies in the accomplishment of applying imagination or fresh thinking to this vexed problem without surrendering biblical truth. They demonstrated, unwittingly perhaps, the reality that Christian truth is dynamic; and that fresh interpretation does not have to mean perversion of the text. In this enterprise

³⁸ J.B.A. Kessler, *A Study of the Evangelical Alliance in Great Britain*, op. cit., p. 69.

³⁹ *The Gagging of God*, op. cit., p. 515-6.

⁴⁰ *Knowing the Times* (ch. What is an Evangelical?), op. cit., p. 335. He notes this in the context of concern for evangelism : an evangelical is concerned for the lost, heading for eternal punishment.

⁴¹ *Evangelical Truth*, Leicester, IVP, 1999, p. 141. The historical background to this important term is to be found in the ‘adiaphorists’ of the mid sixteenth century, when Melancthon and others were prepared (at the Leipzig Interim of 1548) to compromise with the Catholics over non-essentials; and the Pietist/Lutheran controversy of the following century, when the ‘adiaphoric’ orthodox Lutherans considered theatres and dances indifferent matters! See F.L. Cross, *Adiaphorists*, *Dictionary of the Christian Church*, op. cit., p. 17f.

⁴² *loc. cit.*, p. 143. On pp. 24-28, incidentally, is a useful discussion on the characteristics and types of evangelicals, in which he considers the views of Peter Beyerhaus, Gabriel Fackre, J.I. Packer, David Bebbington (whose *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* he describes as “magisterial”), etc. Nigel Wright embarks on a similar exercise in his *The Radical Evangelical*, London, 1996. See ch. 1, In Defence of Labels, where he thoroughly considers the nature of evangelicalism with detailed reference to Bebbington and Fackre.

they were not held back by undue deference to traditional thought; and in this they have given an example to be followed, whether their *view* is accepted or not.

Whatever the findings and conclusions of the Alliance's sub-group, ACUTE,⁴³ there will be no escape the fact that there has been a steady drift away from the traditional systematic doctrine by many of its members and leaders. There can be no going back, so it appears, to a more rigid orthodoxy, at least as far as the broad stream of evangelicals are concerned. However, in view of the essence of evangelicalism, any relaxation of traditional constraints will have to be, no doubt, within biblical limits. For Scripture, to the evangelical mind, ought to be sufficient as well as supreme. To draw to a close on a lyrical note :

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word !
What more can He say than to you He has said-
You, who unto Jesus for refuge have fled.⁴⁴

Indeed, what *more* can be said? Traditionalism and speculation, it would be urged, must give way to a fresh or a further unbiased examination of what has *already* been given. And, who knows, if such work is done thoroughly, many more Christians might sing William Williams' *Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah* with new understanding. At least when they come to:

Death of death, and hell's destruction . . .⁴⁵

If this sounds a little ambiguous, it has be recognised that the debate among evangelicals remains inconclusive and will continue to be so, despite one's own growing conviction that the conditionalist response to the problem of eternal punishment is gaining in credibility.

⁴³ Which should be published early 2000.

⁴⁴ 'K' in Rippon's Selection, 1787. *Christian Hymns*, Bridgend, Evangelical Movement of Wales, 1985, no. 574.

⁴⁵ William Williams, 1717-91. (Translated by Peter Williams.) *ibid.*, no.728.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abbott-Smith, G. (1960 reprint). A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament.

Edinburgh: T&T Clarke.

A Kempis, T. (1996). The Imitation of Christ. London: Fount.

Alexander, D. (1986). The Old Testament View of Life After Death. Themelios 11 (12); 41-46.

Allen, W. E. (no date). Eternity. Belfast: The Revival Movement.

Anderson, R. (1898). The Silence of God. London: Pickering and Inglis.

Anderson, R. (1913). Human Destiny: After Death - What? (8th ed.). Glasgow: Pickering and Inglis.

Atkinson, B.F.C. (no date). Life and Immortality. Obtainable from Rev R.L. Boston, Winsham Vicarage, Chard: Privately Published.

Atkinson, B.F.C. (1940). The War with Satan: an explanation of the book of Revelation. London: The Protestant Truth Society.

Aulen, G. (1931). Christus Victor. London: SPCK.

Barclay, O. (1997). Evangelicalism in Britain 1935-1995. Leicester: IVP.

Bauckham, R. (1977). Synoptic Parousia Parables and the Apocalypse. New Testament Studies 23: 162-176.

Bauckham, R. (1979). Universalism: a Historical Survey. Themelios 4 (2), 48-54.

Bauckham, R. (1983). Synoptic Parousia Parables Again. New Testament Studies 29;

129-143.

Bauckham, R. (1990). Early Jewish Visions of Hell. Journal of Theological Studies 41(2). 357-385.

Bauckham, R. (1991). The Rich Man and Lazarus: The Parable and the Parallels. New Testament Studies 37; 225-246.

Baxter, J. S. (1987). The Other Side of Death, Wheaton: Tyndale House.

Bavinck, H. (1996). The Last Things. Carlisle/Grand Rapids: Paternoster/Baker Books.

Bebbington, D. (1989). Evangelicalism in Modern Britain. London: Routledge.

Beeke, J. (1999). The Quest for Full Assurance. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust.

Beet, A. (1897). The Last Things. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

Bergin, F. (1914). Autobiography of George Muller (3rd ed.). London: J. Nisbet.

Best, G. (1985). Mid-Victorian Britain: 1851-75. London: Fontana Press.

Bickersteth, E. H. (1878). Yesterday, Today and Forever. London: Rivingtons.

Birks, T. R. (1867). The Victory of Divine Goodness. London: Rivingtons.

Birks, T. R. (1876). Difficulties of Belief (2nd ed.). London: Macmillan.

Bishop, E.F.F. (1973). A Yawning Chasm. The Evangelical Quarterly 45 (1); 3-8.

- Blanchard, J. (1993). Whatever Happened To Hell? Darlington: Evangelical Press.
- Blocher, H. (1994). Evil and The Cross. Leicester: Apollo.
- Blocher, H. (1992). Everlasting Punishment and the Problem of Evil. In N. Cameron (ed.), Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell. Carlisle: Paternoster.
- Boettner, L. (1962). Immortality. Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company.
- Bray, G. (1992). Hell: Eternal Punishment or Total Annihilation? Evangel 10 (2); 19-24.
- Broadbent, E. H. (1935). The Pilgrim Church. London: Pickering and Inglis.
- Brower, K. E., & Elliot, M. W. (1997). The Reader Must Understand. Leicester: Apollo.
- Brown, C. (1978). Punishment. In The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology (Vol. 3, pp. 98-100). Exeter: The Paternoster Press.
- Buchanan, A. (1995). Heaven and Hell. Tonbridge: Sovereign World.
- Cameron, N. (1992). Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell. Carlisle: Paternoster.
- Carson, D. A. (1995). The Expositors Bible Commentary (Matthew 13-28). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Carson, D. A. (1996). The Gagging of God. Leicester: Apollo.
- Chadwick, O. (1971 edn.). The Victorian Church (Part One). London: SCM Press.

- Chadwick, O. (1972 edn.). The Victorian Church (Part Two). London: SCM Press.
- Chalfont, A. (1976). Montgomery of Alamein. London: Weidenfield and Nicholson.
- Christenson, M. J. (1980). C.S. Lewis on Scripture. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Clark, G.K. (1973). Churchmen and the Condition of England 1832-1885. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd.
- Coad, R. (1976). A History of the Brethren Movement (2nd ed.). Exeter: Paternoster Press.
- Colson, C. & Neuhaus, R. (eds.) (1996). Evangelicals and Catholics Together. London: Hodder & Stoughton.
- Colwell, J. (1992). The Contemporaneity of the Divine Decision: Reflections on Barth's Denial of Universalism. In N. Cameron (ed.), Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell. Carlisle: Paternoster.
- Cox, J. (1982). The English Churches in a Secular Society (Lambeth 1870-1930). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cranfield, C. E. B. (1963). St. Mark: The Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary. Cambridge: Cambridge Press.
- Crockett, W.V. (1991). Wrath That Endures For Ever. Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 34 (2); 195-202.
- Cross, F. L. (ed.) (1963). The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church. London: Oxford University Press.

Cupitt, D. (1972). The Language of Eschatology: F.D Maurice's Treatment of Heaven and Hell. Anglican Theological Review, 54 (4), 305-317. (N)

Currie, R., Gilbert, A. and Horsley, L. (1977). Churches and Churchgoers: Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles since 1700. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Daniell, D. (1994). William Tyndale. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Davies, E. (1984). The Wrath of God. Bridgend: Evangelical Press of Wales.

Davies, E. (1987). Condemned Forever. Welwyn: Evangelical Press.

Derrett, J.D.M. (1973). Salted with Fire. Studies in Texts: Mark 9:42-50. Theology 76; 364-368.

Dods, M. (ed.). (1873). The Works of Aurelius Augustine. Edinburgh: T&T Clark.

Dowsett, D. (1982). God That's Not Fair. Carlisle: Paternoster/ OM Publishing.

de Leyritz, M. (2000). We're seeing God at work in France. Alpha News (April-July). London: Holy Trinity Brompton.

du Toit, D.A. (1992). Descensus and Universalism: Some Historical Patterns of Interpretation. In N. Cameron (ed.), Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell. Carlisle: Paternoster.

Edersheim, A. (1993). The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah. Peabody Massachusetts: Hendrickson.

Edwards, D. L., & Stott, J. (1988). Essentials. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

Elwell, W. A. (1984). Evangelical Dictionary of Theology. Carlisle: Paternoster.

English, D. (1992). On Mark 9:42-48. In The Message of Mark, BST: The Bible Speaks for Today (p. 171). Leicester: IVP.

Erickson, J.M. (1985). Principles, Permanence, and Future Divine Judgment: a Case Study in Theological Method. Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 28 (3); 317-325.

Fackre, G. (1983). Evangelical, Evangelicalism. In A. Richarson & R. Bowden (eds.), A New Dictionary of Christian Theology. London: SCM Press.

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

Fernando, A. (1993). Crucial Questions About Hell. Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications.

Forster, R. (1994). Eternal Destiny - Heaven and Hell. London: Ichthus Media Services Ltd.

France, R. T. (1985). Matthew. Leicester: Tyndale NTC, IVP.

France, R. T. (1994). Matthew 25: 41/46. In New Bible Commentary (4th ed., p. 938). Leicester: IVP.

Froom, L. E. (1965). The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers. Washington DC: Review and Herald.

Fudge, E. (1994). The Fire That Consumes. Carlisle: Paternoster; also 1982 ed. Houston,

Providential Press.

Fudge, E. (1984). The Final End of the Wicked. Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 27; 325-334.

Gerstner, J. (1980). Jonathan Edwards on Heaven and Hell. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

Gerstner, J. (1990). Repent or Perish. Ligonier PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications.

Gilbert, A.D. (1976). Religion and Society in Industrial England. New York: Longman.

Gore, C. (1889). Lux Mundi (2nd ed.). London: John Murray.

Grant, F. W. (1879/1889). Facts and Theories as to a Future State (1st/2nd editions.). London: Alfred Holness.

Green, M. (1977). The Truth of God Incarnate. London: Hodder & Stoughton.

Green, M. (1993). Evangelism Through The Local Church. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

Grounds, V.C. (1981). The Final State of the Wicked. Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 24; 211-220.

Guillebaud, H. (1964). The Righteous Judge. Obtainable from 'Life and Immortality' source: Privately Published.

Guthrie, D. (1981). New Testament Theology. Leicester: IVP.

Hall, F. J. (1915). The Doctrine of the Church and of Last Things. London: Mowbray.

Hanson, A. T. (1969). Heaven and Hell. In A. Richardson (ed.), A Dictionary of Christian Theology (p. 151). London: SCM.

Harmon, K. (1992). The Case Against Conditionalism: A Response to Edward William Fudge. In N. Cameron (ed.), Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell. Carlisle: Paternoster.

Harris, M.J. (1986). The New Testament View of Life After Death. Themelios 11 (2); 47-52.

Hart, T. (1992). Universalism: Two distinct Types. In N. Cameron (ed.), Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell. Carlisle: Paternoster.

Helm, P. (1989). The Last Things: Death, Judgement, Heaven and Hell. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust.

Helm, P. (1983). Universalism and the Threat of Hell. Trinity Journal 4; 35-43.

Helm, P. (1992). Are They Few That Be Saved? In N. Cameron (ed.), Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell. Carlisle: Paternoster.

Helmstadter, R.J. & Lightman, B. (eds.). (1990). Victorian Faith in Crisis. London: Macmillan.

Hendrickson, W. (1986). The Bible on the Life Hereafter. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

Hick, J. (1968). Evil and The God of Love. London: Collins/ Fontana.

- Hillis, D. (1961). Are the Heathen Really Lost? Chicago: Moody Press.
- Hodge, C. (1960). Systematic Theology (Vol. 3). London: James Clarke.
- Holmes, E. E. (1908). Immortality (2nd ed.). London: Longmans.
- Houlden, L. (1997). Liberalism: Britain. In Alister E. McGrath (ed.), Modern Christian Thought. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Howard Taylor, M. (1973). Behind The Ranges. London: OMF.
- Hoyle, F. (1963). The Nature of the Universe. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Hughes, P.E. (1977). The First Resurrection: Another Interpretation. Westminster Theological Journal XXXIX; 315-318.
- Hughes, P. E. (1989). The True Image. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/IVP.
- Innes, D.K. (1988). Hell. In J.D. Douglas (org.ed.), New Bible Dictionary (2nd ed.). Leicester: IVP.
- Jay, E. (1986). Faith and Doubt in Victorian Britain. London: Macmillan.
- Kessler, J. B. A. (1968). A Study of the Evangelical Alliance in Great Britain. N.V. Goes, Netherlands: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre.
- Kline, M.G. (1976). The First Resurrection: A Reaffirmation. Westminster Theological Journal 39; 110-119.
- Knight, F. (1998). The Nineteenth-Century Church and English Society. Cambridge:

Cambridge University Press.

Kreeft, P., & Tacelli, R. (1995). Handbook of Christian Apologetics. Crowborough: Monarch.

Lewis, C. S. (1964). The Problem of Pain. London: Collins.

Lewis, C. S. (1983). Prayer: Letters to Malcom. London: Collins.

Lewis, C. S. (1990 reprint). The Last Battle (Narnia Chronicles). London: Lions/Harper Collins.

Lewis, C. S. (1997 reprint). The Great Divorce. London: Fount/ Harper Collins.

Lloyd-Jones, D. M. (1975). Romans (Ch. 8: 17-19, The Final Perseverance of the Saints). Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust.

Lloyd-Jones, D. M. (1989). Knowing the Times. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust.

Lloyd-Jones, D. M. (1998). The Church and the Last Things. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

Lucas, J. (1995). Elijah: Anointed and Stressed. Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications.

Magaw, R. (August/September 1989). The Restitution Herald. USA: Church of God.

Marshall, I.H. (1970). Uncomfortable Words: “ VI. Fear Him Who Can Destroy Both Soul and Body in Hell (Mt. 10:28 RSV).” Expository Times 81; 276-280.

Maurice, F.D. (1957). Theological Essays. London: James Clarke.

McGrath, A.E. (1997). Hell. In Christian Theology: An Introduction (pp. 553-555). Oxford: Blackwell. (N)

McGrath, A.E. (1993). Reformation Thought: an Introduction. Oxford: Blackwell.

McLeod, H. (1974). Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City. London: Crown Helm.

McVeigh, M.J. (1985). The Fate of Those Who've Never Heard: It Depends. Evangelical Missions Quarterly 21 (4); 370-379.

Morley, J. (1905). The Life of William Ewart Gladstone. London: Macmillan.

Murray, I. (1990). D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (Vol. 2). Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust.

Murray, I. (2000). Evangelicalism Divided. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust.

Newbigin, L. (1969). The Finality of Christ. London: SCM.

Norman, E.R. (1976). Church and Society in England 1770-1970. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Norris, F.W. (1992). Universal Salvation in Origen and Maximus. In N. Cameron (ed.), Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell. Carlisle: Paternoster.

Orr, J.E. (1949). The Second Evangelical Awakening in Britain. London, Marshall, Morgan & Scott.

Packer, J. I. (1990). The Problem of Eternal Punishment: The Leon Morris Lecture for the Evangelical Alliance. Disley: Orthos.

Parker, T.H.L. (1977). John Calvin. London: Lion Publishing.

Pawson, D. (1996). The Road to Hell. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

Phillips, J. (1974). Exploring Revelation. Chicago: Moody Press.

Plumptre, E. H. (1885). The Spirits in Prison and Other Studies on The Life After Death. London.

Plummer, A. (1896). The Gospel According to Saint Luke. Edinburgh: T&T Clarke.

Pollock, J. C. (1953). A Cambridge Movement. London: John Murray.

Pusey, E. B. (1880). What is of Faith as to Everlasting Punishment? Oxford: James Parker.

Powys, D. (1992). The Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Debates about Hell and Universalism. In N. Cameron (ed.), Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell. Carlisle: Paternoster.

Powys, D. (1998). 'Hell': A Hard Look at a Hard Question. Carlisle: Paternoster.

Reardon, B.M.G. (1966). Religious Thought in the Nineteenth Century. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Richardson, A. (1958). An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament. London: SCM Press.

Richardson, A. (1969). A Dictionary of Christian Theology. London: SCM.

Rowell, G. (1974). Hell and the Victorians. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Salmond, S. D. F. (1895). The Christian Doctrine of Immortality. Edinburgh: T&T Clark.

Secrett, A. G. (no date). The Roman Catholic Doctrine of Hell in the Light of History and the Holy Scripture. Acton: Words of Life.

Seymour, C. (1997). On Choosing Hell. Religious Studies 33; 249-266.

Shedd, W. G. T. (1986 reprint). The Doctrine of Endless Punishment. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust.

Smyth, J. P. (no date). The Gospel of the Hereafter (14th ed.). London: Hodder and Stoughton.

Souter, A. (1956 reprint). Novum Testamentum Graece (Greek New Testament). Oxford: Clarendon.

Spurgeon, C. H. (1871). The Treasury of David (Vol. 1). London: Passmore and Alabaster.

Spurgeon, C. H. (1983 reprint). Autobiography. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust.

Spurgeon, C. H. (1997 reprint). When Christ Returns. New Kensington: Whitaker House.

Steer, R. (1990). J. Hudson Taylor: A Man in Christ. Singapore: OMF.

Stott, J. (1999). Evangelical Truth. Leicester: IVP.

Strong, A. H. (1970). Systematic Theology. London: Pickering and Inglis.

Symondson, A. (ed.). (1970). The Victorian Crisis of Faith. London: S.P.C.K.

Tasker, R. V. G. (ed.). (1957). Augustine's: The City of God. London: Everyman Library.

Temple, W (1932). The Idea of Immortality in Relation to Religion and Ethics, The Congregational Quarterly, January, pp 11-21.

Temple, W. (1934). Nature, Man and God. London: Macmillan.

Tennyson, A. (1996 reprint). In Memoriam, Maud and Other Poems London: Everyman.

Thomas, R.L. (1968). The Meaning of the Terms 'Life' and 'Death' in the Fourth Gospel and in Paul. Scottish Journal of Theology XXI; 199-212.

Tidball, D.J. (1994). Who Are the Evangelicals? London: Marshall Pickering.

Torrance, T.F. (1992). The Atonement. The Singularity of Christ and the Finality of the Cross: The Atonement and the Moral Order. In N. Cameron (ed.), Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell. Carlisle: Paternoster.

Travis, S. (1980). Christian Hope and the Future of Man. Leicester: IVP.

Travis, S.H. (1986). The Problem of Judgment. Themelios 11 (2); 52-57.

Vidler, A. R. (1961). The Church in an Age of Revolution. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Wace, & Piercy. (1994). A Dictionary of Christian Biography. Massachusetts: Hendrickson.

Warfield, B. B. (1952). Biblical and Theological Studies. Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company.

Wilcock, M. (1992). On Luke 16: 19-31. In The Message of Luke, BST: The Bible Speaks for Today (p. 161). Leicester: IVP.

Wenham, J. (1975). The Goodness of God. Leicester: IVP.

Wenham, J. (1992). The Case for Conditional Immortality. In N. Cameron (ed.), Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell. Carlisle: Paternoster.

Wenham, J. (1994). The Enigma of Evil. Guildford: Eagle.

Wenham, J. (1998). Facing Hell. Carlisle: Paternoster.

Weymouth, R. F. (1916). The New Testament in Modern Speech. London: James Clarke.

Whiston, W. (no date). The Works of Flavius Josephus. London: Ward, Lock and Co.

White, E. (1878). Life in Christ (3rd ed.). London: Elliot Stock.

Wilson, H. B. (ed.). (1860). Essays and Reviews. London: John W. Parker & Son.

Wolffe, J. (ed.). (1997). Religion in Victorian Britain: Vol. V Culture and Empire. Open University, Manchester University Press.

Wright, N. (1996). The Radical Evangelical. London: SPCK.

Wright, N.T. (1979). Towards a Biblical View of Universalism. Themelios 4 (2); 54-58.

References without named author.

The Blackwell Dictionary of Evangelical Biography Vol. 1. (1995). Oxford: Blackwell.

Christian Hymns. (1978). Bridgend: The Evangelical Movement of Wales.

Crockfords Clerical Directory. (1868). London.

Evangelical Alliance Executive Council Minutes (Vol. 1&2). (1869 - 1870). London: Evangelical Alliance.

Evangelical Christendom (The Monthly Chronicle of the Evangelical Alliance) (1870). (Vol. XXIV). London: William John Johnson.

Hell. In The Marshall Pickering Encyclopedia of the Bible (1990). (Vol. 1, pp. 952-955). London: Marshall Pickering.

New York Herald, (January 20th, 1878).

Pinnock and revival conference, Evangelicals Now, p. 5, (January, 1998).

The Doctrine Commission of the Church of England. (1995). The Mystery of Salvation. London: Church House Publishing.

The Future Life (Defence of the Orthodox View by Eminent American Scholars) (1878). (2nd ed.). London: Dickinson.

We believe in Hell, says the Church (but without the flames), The Daily Telegraph, (11.1.1996).