Hell without Sin – a Renewed View of a Disputed Doctrine

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Over the last thirty years there has been a growing debate in the evangelical world over the doctrine of hell.[1] This debate has led to something of an impasse between Traditionalists, who believe in a hell of unending conscious torment, and annihilationists, who believe in a hell of torment followed by the extinction of the damned.[2] I have argued elsewhere that although Annihilationism is to be rejected, it has highlighted in particular the problem of dualism in Traditionalism.[3] In this article I will propose a modified form of Traditionalism, drawing particularly on the work of the French evangelical theologian Henri Blocher,[4] which I believe is a better response to the dualism of 'classic' Traditionalism than Annihilationism and will therefore leave the doctrine more securely founded. Blocher himself expresses a modest form of this aim: 'It is possible, we suggest, to reach such a renewed understanding of the old dogma [of hell] that will relieve some of the tension.'[5]

First, I will briefly review the problem of dualism in 'classic' Traditionalism. I will then expound three interrelated elements of a modified Traditionalism: the damned do not sin; the damned are lucid; and the damned are reconciled to God in the sense of praising God for his justice while remaining in torment.[6] I will argue that the first and third elements in particular deal with the problem of dualism, the first element better than classic Traditionalism; the third element better than Annihilationism. The second element is not only an important step for establishing a less dualistic doctrine of hell, but also in establishing a truly just one.

'Classic' Traditionalism and Continuing Sin

It is a commonplace of Traditionalism that the damned continue to sin and rebel in hell. An indication of this widespread belief in the history of doctrine is the title of Leckie's chapter surveying Traditionalism, '"Everlasting Evil" (Dualistic Solution)'.[7] I could quote innumerable examples of this position, but I will briefly note one from each of the nineteenth and twentieth century debates.

Shedd argues that, 'endless punishment is rational, because of the endlessness of sin'.[8] What is particularly striking here is that Shedd assumes the endlessness of sin, and uses it as a premise for an argument for the rationality of endless punishment. Shedd also holds a dynamic conception of the state of the damned, not in the sense of the damned being able to repent, but in their decline into greater sinfulness: 'wicked will intensifies itself perpetually. Pride, left to itself, increases and never diminishes. Enmity and hatred become more and more satanic.'[9]

From the twentieth century, Carson writes—

> hell's inmates are full of sin. They hate and attract retribution, they still love only themselves and attract retribution, they are neither capable of nor desirous of repenting, and attract retribution. As dark as these reflections are, I suspect they go a long way to providing a rationale for the eternal nature of hell and its torments.[10]

Annihilationist critics have noted this tradition of the continuing sin of the damned in hell, and argued that this is a major problem since it creates an unbiblical dualism. Again, I offer one quote from many. Pinnock writes that 'A final objection to the traditional doctrine of the nature of hell is cosmological dualism...evil and rebellion continue in hell...heaven and hell go on existing alongside each other forever in everlasting cosmological dualism…'.[11]

Blocher suggests that the view of a uniform tradition of continuing sin in hell may be a distortion, and that his own position 'may be *nearer* to older orthodoxy than nineteenth and twentieth century emphases'.[12] Blocher's main witness from the tradition is Augustine.

> Speaking of the final division between the Two Cities, the two categories of people, [Augustine] writes, 'The former shall have no longer any desire, the latter any ability, to sin.'...Whether the total absence of any *facultas peccandi* amounts, for him, to agreement with God, to reconciliation in the sense of Colossians 1:20, is not clear. But we would claim that it is logically entailed: for a man to disagree with God is to sin, and to do so anew at every moment; Saint Augustine has discerned that it cannot be any more, the *facultas* [*peccandi*] is no longer there.[13]

Further, there were a number of evangelicals from the mid-nineteenth century and into the first decade of the twentieth century who questioned precisely this aspect of hell, and offered an alternative similar to Blocher's. Chief amongst these writers was Thomas Rawson Birks.[14] The only other, brief, questioning of the tradition of continuing sin in hell in the recent debate is found in Paul Helm's book *The Last Things*—

> those in hell recognise hell for what it is and the justice of their being there. Otherwise hell would be a breeding ground for further injustice and resentment, for further sin. For although hell is a place of sinners, there is no reason to think that it is a heaven for sinners, a fools' paradise....So hell is a place of pain, but not of defiance or resistance.[15]

However the continuation of sin and rebellion in hell certainly qualifies as the mainstream tradition, and the 'no sin' position is rare. The importance of the issue though is stated by Sinclair Ferguson, who writes in terms of a hell of continuing sin being 'outside': 'This is perhaps the most powerful and appealing theological argument against the orthodox doctrine: how can God be "all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28) if there is an "outside" in the final world order.'[16]

The Damned Do Not Sin

I now turn to assess the elements of a modified Traditionalism that I believe better meets the problem of dualism. There is considerable overlap between the three elements but I believe that a cumulative case is built. In each section I will draw particularly on Blocher, and add some additional arguments and clarifications. I will begin with the foundational issue of the damned ceasing to sin. Blocher writes that 'The main fact about everlasting punishment, the fate of the reprobate, is this: sin shall be no more'.[17]

Starting with the particular biblical verses used in the literature, Blocher argues from the biblical imagery of 'fire' and the 'worm of remorse'. He interprets these images metaphorically of the state of the damned in Scripture and concludes that

> This means agreement with God in his reprobation of their behaviour....The main Biblical expressions, then, may refer to the reaction of the moral creature, no longer able to sin, when he or she becomes at last *lucid*...full knowledge in self-abhorrence, condemnation, remorse.[18]

> Blocher does not explain why the damned would not be able to sin when they are lucid, but he could argue that in seeing clearly the awfulness and consequences of sin they would not be rationally able to choose to sin.[19] It could be responded that sin is never chosen rationally, and thus lucidity may not prevent further sin, but this is to overlook the purpose of the Last Judgement to force sinners to see sin for what it truly is.

Blocher notes A. H. Strong's only exegetical support for the 'continuing sin' position is his use of Mark 3.29: 'he is guilty of an eternal sin', but responds that 'it is easy to understand this word as guilt remaining, not as sin being constantly reproduced'.[20] Birks noted that there were three other passages that were quoted frequently as offering evidence for continuing sin in hell: Luke 16:23-28; Revelation 20:7-8 and 22:10-11.

Luke 16:23-28

The Parable, if it be so, of the Rich Man and Lazarus, presents Lazarus in torment in Hades after death. However, even if this scene is set in hell after the Last Judgment, rather than the intermediate state, it would seem to be evidence for the modified position since, while the Rich Man may have limited understanding, he is far from the traditional picture of the damned cursing God and hating their fellows. Blocher comments, 'the rich man's, 'Dives' attitude in the Lazarus story (Luke 16) does not resemble Shedd's picture; he seems to be quite ucid on his past behaviour, rather than submissive and regretful!'[21]

Revelation 20:7-8

The argument from both passages in Revelation is of a similar form: the current or this worldly sin of Satan and sinners serves as an analogy for the state of the damned and are therefore arguments for their continuing sin. The argument from Revelation 20:7-8 draws on an analogy between Satan and the damned: if Satan continues to sin while in prison then we might expect the damned to do so too.[22]

Revelation 22:10-11

Carson uses Revelation 20:10-1 in the recent debate and also quotes Revelation 16:21 to a similar end.

> 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....There is surely at least one passage that hints at this reality. In the last chapter of the Bible, the interpreting angel says to John, 'Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near. Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy' (Rev. 22:10-11). Of course, the primary emphasis here is on the time from 'now' until judgment: there is a kind of realized judgment, within time, that sometimes takes place. Nevertheless the parallelism is telling. If the holy and those who do right continue to be holy and to do right, in anticipation of the perfect holiness and rightness to be lived and practiced throughout all eternity, should we not also conclude that the vile continue their vileness in anticipation of the vileness they will live and practice throughout all eternity? Moreover, does not Revelation 16:21 provide a portrait of those who are being punished and who curse God?[23]

As Carson points out, these are punishments received in this life and therefore their evidential value depends on the analogy between punishment now and punishment after the Last Judgement.

In commenting on these analogies, I certainly accept that any solution to the problem of dualism needs to address the fate of Satan and the demons. However, I think that the analogies fail to convince that the permission of sin in this life will be extended into eternity, since they fail to account for the major new condition which is introduced by the Last Judgement.[24]

First, they overlook the fact that the present punishment of the demons and sinners is only provisional, and they will face further punishment after the Last Judgement, where there will be a much more far-reaching dealing with their sin and rebellion. Blocher argues for a form of this point from the idea of divine patience.

> Would it be normal for God to allow for sin to go on for ever since he allows it now? That logic appears to by-pass entirely the Biblical theme of divine patience. Is not the point that God tolerates at present what he will no longer when his patience comes to an end?[25]

Further, 'what is abnormal, incredible, is not that God should suppress sin—rather, that he should not do so immediately!....When the time of patience falls due, sin can be no more'.[26] Thus Blocher concludes that 'the main axes of the eschatological vision unfolded in Scripture, encourage us boldly to profess this assurance (that sin will end)'.[27]

Second, the radical new condition which is introduced at the Last Judgement is lucidity: the damned will be forced to face the truth about God and the truth about their sins. As I will demonstrate below, Traditionalism has accepted that this is a condition of a just punishment. Yet if the damned are lucid it makes it difficult to see how they could for example, continue in the sin of idolatry when there is no room left for such illusions. Therefore Carson would seem to be required to argue that the damned can be idolatrous now, then temporarily recognise the true God at the Last Judgement, and then revert to idolatry afterwards again. Indeed this is just what 'classic' Traditionalism does argue. However, this seems less likely than the view that the Last Judgement is the last decisive event for the damned, and the conditions established there for a just punishment remain fixed.

A similar response can be made to what Blocher claims is the chief argument for continuing sin in the literature: 'Psychological considerations on habit and hardening eclipse all other arguments.'[28] The assumption here is that without the intervention of Divine grace the damned have no power to change their habitual sinfulness which they exhibited on earth. Therefore they will continue to sin, because there has been nothing to change them or prevent them. In response I would note that the Last Judgement provides just such a moment of intervention, even if not of grace, to force people to face the truth about God and themselves.

Another set of objections to the 'no sin' thesis turn on the conditions that need to be met to be without sin. Carson, for example, asks—

> are we to imagine that the lost in hell love God with heart and soul and mind and strength, and their neighbours as themselves? If not, they are breaking the first and second commandments. Are they full of spontaneous worship and praise?[29]

However, while the damned have limitations in their ability to share the full

understanding and response of the righteous, this would only be further sin if they had the ability to acheive more and culpably failed. Thus the damned could have a limited but sinless capability to love God and neighbour, and to praise God as judge, although not as saviour.

A further step in this argument is that sin has only truly ceased if the damned have repented, since the failure to repent is itself a sin. However, I would argue that failure to repent is only a new sin if repentance remains a command of God. Yet death and the Last Judgement mark the end of the possibility of repentance, and indeed all moral change. Therefore the failure to repent is not a new sin committed by the damned.

Blocher also notes a further theological objection given by Hodge, which is drawn from the damned's alienation and separation from God. Since 'God is the source of all holiness and happiness, separation from Him is of necessity the forfeiture of all good' which entails sinfulness.[30] Blocher's own response is that—

> This reasoning, however, is not strictly conclusive. 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 they are separated from God, 'without God in the world,' and, yet, the very energy of their sinning, at every instant is given them by God. Hodge's logic, then, does not envisage the possibility of another relationship to God, in judgement, that will exclude both fellowship and active sinfulness....[31]

I would also add that Hodge's argument, as stated, achieves too much. If existence is a good, and all good is forfeited at the judgement of separation, then this would mean the loss of existence. Blocher concludes that 'the thesis of continuing sin is found nowhere in Scripture'.[32] I believe that Blocher's conclusion is correct.

The Damned are Lucid

I now turn to a second element of Blocher's thesis: that the damned will be 'lucid', by which Blocher means that they are fully aware of the justice of their punishment. It serves as a further argument for the end to sin, and a premise for the notion of 'reconciliation' which I will examine in the next section.

Blocher expounds this lucidity as the state in which '...all creatures will share in God's abhorrence; the lost will be ashamed, theirs will be the ultimate "confusion of face", as they shall be unable to escape the truth of their past actions.'[33] Again,

> ...sinners ultimately glorify God....And they know it, since they now see the truth of their lives; they see their evil works—which they now abhor—as included in God's plan, by his permissive will, and used for his purposes...their thought is fixed in the knowledge that, through their very deprivation, they glorify God and agree with him.[34]

Blocher thus argues that the damned will not remain deluded or successful in their rebellion. As evidence, I would quote again from Blocher's discussion about the biblical language of 'fire' and the 'worm of remorse'.

> The main biblical expressions, then, may refer to the reaction of the moral creature, no longer able to sin, when he or she becomes at last lucid. Then, impenitent sinners appreciate the value of their lives and see them as they are, under God's reprobation.[35]

The chief theological argument in favour of this position is, I believe, that it establishes the justice of the punishment of the damned. If retributive punishment is to be just, then the one punished must be aware and convinced that their actions are deserving of the punishment they are given. From the recent debate Blamires argues '...if punishment is effective it makes the punished one aware of why he is being punished, and what it is he is being paid for'.[36] This is an argument with a long history in the tradition. For example, Jonathan Edwards writes—

> It is agreeable both to Scripture and reason to suppose, that the wicked will be punished in such a manner, that they shall be sensible of the punishment they are under;.... They should know themselves that justice takes place upon them; that God vindicates that majesty which they despised; that God is not so despicable a being as they thought him to be.[37]

The legal principle on which this is based is stated by Aquinas: 'in every judicial hearing, the witness, the accuser, and the defendant need to be acquainted with

the matter on which judgement has to be pronounced.'[38] This argument seems to be the primary reason why classic Traditionalism also holds to the lucidity of the damned at the Last Judgement. Shedd, for example, notes—

> The sinner's own conscience will 'bear witness' and approve of the condemning sentence, 'in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ' (Rom. 2:16)....Accordingly, all the evangelical creeds say with the Westminster Larger Catechism (89) that 'the wicked, upon clear evidence and full conviction of their own consciences, shall have the just sentence of condemnation pronounced against them'.[39]

I think that this argument is correct. However, the required conditions for a just punishment remain equally valid through the length of the punishment. Thus it is necessary to extend the 'conviction of their own consciences' to the whole period of punishment, beyond the Last Judgement, and so the damned remain 'lucid' in hell. However classic Traditionalism argues that having been cast into hell the damned begin to sin and rebel. Blocher rightly objects that one cannot affirm 'both the extreme of vicious rebellion and the sinner's approval of his judgement as just…[for] Conscience would be suppressed by total sin!'[40] An illustration of this point might be someone sentenced for war crimes, who during the trial had become convinced by the evidence of the evil of their actions. However, if during their imprisonment they came to believe that, in fact, they had been right to act as they had, they would begin to view the punishment very differently, no longer as just but unjust.

A related issue is that of the sanity of the damned. Packer writes of 'The words used by theologians, on the basis of Scripture, to describe hell—...introversion to the point of idiocy…'.[41] However, idiocy also fails to meet the criteria of a just retributive punishment. Again, to offer an illustration: if someone is punished by imprisonment and accepts the justice of their sentence, but then under the strain of the punishment goes mad and begins to imagine that they are actually in a pleasurable state, it would be reasonable to conclude that the punishment was no longer experienced as retributive.[42] Therefore the damned must remain lucid of the nature of their sin and the justice of their punishment.

Of course, the damned may not have as full appreciation of their sin as the righteous, or as God himself. However, it is arguable that the damned can

comprehend the justice of their punishment in an adequate, though not necessarily total way. An analogy might be that of a child who may not understand fully why it is wrong to tell lies, but knows enough to accept that they deserve to be sent to their room for doing so.

Probably the main reason that this modified position is rejected in the tradition is that in being lucid about their sin and the justice of its punishment, the damned would thereby have fulfilled the conditions of repentance which should lead to release. This is Ellis' one criticism of Blocher's position.

> 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.[43]

Blocher responds with two steps that I think are distinct, distinguishing firstly remorse in this life and in the life to come, and secondly remorse and repentance.

> But final remorse differs from remorse as it is experienced in life: final remorse will be remorse-in-agreement with God. In life...only *repentance* agrees with God; remorse remains a twisted and truncated apprehension of the truth of one's deeds. Will not, then, final truthful remorse amount to repentance?...the deepest difference between remorse and repentance is this: repentance has a *future*, it enters the open future; remorse relates only to the *past*.[44]

Blocher goes on to develop his argument that the damned do not have any capacity for change in hell nor, therefore, the capacity to repent. Having written about the Last Judgement, Blocher asks, with reference to the damned—

> *And then*? What comes next? *Nothing*. The concept of a 'next' stage is empty and deceptive…. Now, it is death. 'Full stop' for ever and ever… [there is] no ground whatsoever for any change of the final situation.[45]

In support, Blocher also argues that—

> The language of Scripture, with its stereotyped metaphors, and in the role

> it plays, seems to insist on the durational, permanent character of the state of torment, and to exclude any later change, anything beyond the outcome of the *last* judgement.[46]

As well as ensuring the justice of their judgement, there are several other strengths to this element of modified Traditionalism. Blocher himself mentions one advantage to do with degrees of punishment.

> The model accommodates easily and economically other elements of the doctrine of everlasting punishment: not only the reference to the deeds done through the body (with the harvest metaphor), but also the diversity in degrees (few stripes, many stripes). There can be no proportion more exact to guilt than that of seeing oneself in the light of truth.[47]

Further, lucidity also serves to emphasise the *poena damni*, the pain of loss and exclusion, since the damned are now permanently aware of what it is they have lost and who they are excluded from. From this it follows that there is no 'black pleasure'[48] for them in hell. This notion thus serves to correct what Harmon rightly judges to be a weakness in the tradition: 'The one image which is so terribly neglected in the debate between conditionalists and traditionalists, and which has been inadequately considered in church history, is that of personal exclusion.'[49]

However, the greatest strength of this notion of the lucidity of the damned is that it offers a more satisfactory response to the problem of dualism than the continuing sin of 'classic' Traditionalism. C. S. Lewis offers a discussion of this issue when he considers an evil man who believes himself righteous. Lewis writes of—

> …a truly ethical demand that, sooner or late, the right should be asserted, the flag planted in this horribly rebellious soul, even if no fuller and better conquest is to follow. In a sense, it is better for the creature itself, even if it never becomes good, that it should know itself a failure, a mistake. Even mercy can hardly wish to such a man his eternal, contented continuance in such ghastly illusion. Thomas Aquinas said of suffering, as Aristotle had said of shame, that it was a thing not good in itself, but a thing which might have a certain goodness in particular circumstances. That is to say, if evil is present,

> pain at recognition of the evil, being a kind of knowledge, is relatively good; for the alternative is that the soul should be ignorant of the evil, or ignorant that the evil is contrary to its nature, 'either of which', says the philosopher, 'is *manifestly* bad'. And I think, though we tremble, we agree.[50]

I think that this argument that 'evil recognised is a good' is correct. Therefore if the damned recognise their sin, and the justice of their punishment, they achieve this relative good, and thus the dualism of 'classic' Traditionalism is reduced, and a reason provided for the continued existence of the damned. I will now develop both of these points as I turn to expound the final element of this modified Traditionalism.

The Damned are Reconciled

Bonda asks, 'How can the message that all people praise God be explained in such a way that those who are forever lost will share in it? …Blocher provides a carefully constructed answer.'[51] The third and final element of Blocher's position, as I am expounding it, is that having acknowledged their sin and the justice of God's judgement and their punishment, the damned are to that extent reconciled to God and may even praise him for his justice, while remaining in torment. Blocher writes of it being 'a kind of 'reconciliation'.[52] This notion of reconciliation builds on the previous section on lucidity: if the damned acknowledge the justice of the judge, rather than hating and cursing God, this implies some kind of affirmation of and praise for at least this aspect of God's character.

Blocher's chief argument here is from the 'universalist' texts in Scripture. Blocher follows the common argument of Annihilationists that 'classic' Traditionalism has failed to take adequate account of these passages.[53] However, whereas the annihilationists' solution is to extinguish the sinner, Blocher's solution is to extinguish the sin, while both reject Universalism. Blocher calls this 'the weightiest datum of all' because 'The theory of sin forever flourishing ignores the message of Christ's perfect victory over sin and all evil'. Blocher comments that texts such as Philippians 2:10f, 'every knee shall bow and every tongue confess,' includes the damned, and yet, 'cannot mean mere outward, hypocritical and forced agreement; what sense could there be in any outward show in the light of that Day, when all the secrets shall be exposed (Rom.2:16)'.[54] Turning to Colossians 1:20, about God reconciling all things through Christ, he comments that—

> 'Reconciliation' does not imply salvation,...it means the restoration of order, of all within God's order, 'pacification', as all are brought back into the divinely-ruled harmony. Nothing could be further removed from divine defeat and sin going on after judgement.[55]

Blocher argues that Annihilationism also suffers from what he terms the dualism of 'waste'. He comments that, unlike Annihilationism, on his position 'the existence of the lost shall not amount to a total waste, neither for the universe, nor for God, nor for themselves...'.[56] This is a version of the traditionalist argument for an unending hell from its value in contributing to the glory of God. The ACUTE report notes—

> If conditionalists recoil from eternal conscious punishment on the grounds that it seems ultimately wanton and pointless, traditionalists reply that it does have a positive aim—namely, to glorify God as a righteous Judge.[57]

Blocher has grounded this argument more securely since those who glorify God now include the damned themselves, who are not merely an object lesson.

Thus Blocher argues that his position is not only more faithful to Scripture but an improved response to the problem of evil than either Annihilationism or 'classic' Traditionalism. In his 1992 paper Blocher concludes that 'If sinners ultimately glorify God, they do reach in a paradoxical way the *telos* of all creatures as such... their thought is fixed in the knowledge that, through their very deprivation, they glorify God and agree with him'.[58]

He states this conclusion in a more developed form in an earlier article—

> [W]e can correct…inadequate ideas of eternal punishment. Scripture, for instance, never suggests the idea that it is a divine defeat, or that sin continues, that evil perpetuates itself in Gehenna. On the contrary, evil, vanquished and crushed by judgment shall no longer exist!…all human beings, without any exception, in the blaze of that Day, shall see at last in truth. They will render to God the homage he requires: a sincere Amen assenting to judgment. The ungodly shall condemn their own ungodliness, in agreement with God; they will wish for nothing else than for punishment as they will see that punishment alone can right them with

> God; the consuming desire of their conscience shall be to satisfy the divine justice. It will be good for them to glorify God in and through their judgment; they will thus fulfil, in spite of a lost life, the essential calling of all creatures—to glorify the Lord—and they will know it.[59]

Besides a small group of nineteenth century theologians, chief amongst whom was T. R. Birks, this position is very rare in the evangelical debate of the last 30 years. The one recent writer who comes close to Blocher's position here is Paul Helm.

> We are informed that before Christ the Judge every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:11). And this language implies that the impenitent will recognise the essential justice of their plight. For they too recognise Christ's Lordship, and confess him, not with love and adoration as a Saviour, but as their Lord. So hell is a place of pain, but not of defiance or resistance. It is not a demonic colony which has gained unilateral independence from God. Because there is full recognition of God's justice, God's character is vindicated, and hence glorified, even by those who in this life have defied him and suffer for it.[60]

I believe that this provides a better response to the problem of dualism than either 'classic' Traditionalism or Annihilationism. Further, this modified Traditionalism offers a more securely guarded 'greater good' argument for the continuation of the existence of the damned in their glorification of the justice of God.

Conclusion

Annihilationist arguments have served to highlight the unbiblical dualism of 'classic' Traditionalism due to the continued sin of the damned. Some of the resources for response lay within the very theological tradition which is being criticised, but they are elements that have not been brought into their proper place. Thus there is a recognition in the tradition that if the damned are to be justly punished they need to be lucid, but this has been limited to the Last Judgment. I believe that this conception should be understood as a permanent feature of the state of the damned in hell, along with the related notions of an end to sin and reconciliation. Therefore the damned come to recognise the

justice, and true awfulness, of their state. Thus this modified Traditionalism gets truth into hell, emphasises the personal nature of the punishment and, insofar as it leads to reconciliation and the glorification of God by the damned, it also establishes a purpose for hell beyond mere retribution.

In the nineteenth century debate about hell, Samuel Garratt, an honourary Canon of Norwich Cathedral, held a view similar to that which I am proposing, and stated that it was the traditional doctrine stripped of human additions.

> The Eternal Punishment of unforgiven sinners is a Scriptural doctrine, and it is best to defend it from the plausible objections which human additions to the teaching of God's Word have raised against it, by clearing them away.[61]

I believe that this modified position is just such a renewed understanding of the traditional doctrine.

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ENDNOTES

1. The publication of John Wenham's book *The Goodness of God* in 1974 is described by Eryl Davies as a 'watershed'. (Eryl Davies *An Angry God? The Biblical Doctrine of Wrath, Final Judgement and Hell* [Bryntirion: Evangelical Press of Wales, 1992], p. 10). The ACUTE (Alliance Commission on Unity and Truth amongst Evangelicals) report for the UK Evangelical Alliance notes that 'Conditionalism has attracted much greater attention within evangelical circles since 1988. In that year, the prominent evangelical statesman and writer John Stott revealed for the first time in print that he was drawn towards the idea that the impenitent will be destroyed rather than condemned to eternal conscious torment'. (ACUTE *The Nature of Hell* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000), p. 5, referring to J. R. W. Stott and D. L. Edwards *Essentials* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988), pp. 287-304; 312-29).
2. I am using Annihilationism as synonymous with Conditionalism or Conditional Immortality. Evangelical annihilationists are thus to be distinguished from those theologians who hold that the extinction of the damned occurs t the death of the body. See K. S. Harmon "The Case Against Conditionalism," in N. M. de S. Cameron (ed.), *Universalism and the Doctrine of God* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1992), pp. 196-9.
3. See my forthcoming article, "An Assessment of the Doctrinal Arguments for

Annihilationism."

4. Henri Blocher is Professor of Systematic Theology at the Faculté Libre de Théologie Evangelique in Vaux-sur-Seine, France.
5. Henri Blocher, EPPE, "Everlasting Punishment and the Problem of Evil" in Cameron (ed.), *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell* p. 285. This is Blocher's major presentation of his thesis, and all references to Blocher are from this essay unless otherwise stated. Blocher first wrote about his position in "La doctrine du châtiment éternel," *Ichthus 32* (April, 1973): 3-9. A brief account was also given in "The Scope of Redemption and Modern Theology," *The Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology*: 103. There has been very little interaction with Blocher's essay. The only references to Blocher's thesis I have found outside of reviews are three pages in J. Bonda *The One Purpose of God: An Answer to the Doctrine of Eternal Punishment* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998 [1993]), pp. 226-8, and less than a page in D. A. Carson *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Leicester: Apollos, 1996), p. 534; E. E. Ellis, "The New Testament Teaching on Hell" in (eds.), K. E. Brower and M. W. Elliott, '*The Reader Must Understand': Eschatology in Bible and Theology* (Leicester: Apollos, 1997), p. 216 and J. W. Wenham *Facing Hell: The Story of a Nobody, An Autobiography 1913-1996* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998), p. 258. However, apparently without Blocher's knowledge, he is heir of a position about which there was considerable debate and interest in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and which I will examine in a forthcoming article "Reconciliationism—a Forgotten Evangelical Doctrine of Hell."
6. I have coined the term 'Reconciliationism' to distinguish this position. However, I won't use the term in this article in order to underline that I believe it is a modified form of Traditionalism.
7. J. H. Leckie, *The World to Come and Final Destiny* (2nd edn. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1922).
8. W. G. T. Shedd, *The Doctrine of Endless Punishment* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1990 [1885]), pp. 145-6.
9. Shedd, *The Doctrine of Endless Punishment*, p. 147.
10. Carson, *The Gagging of God,* p. 533-4. See also Stott and Edwards, *Essentials,* pp. 318-9. One of the main reasons for the continuing popularity of the belief that sin continues in hell is that it permits the view that all sins are deserving of finite punishment, and thus greatly eases the problem of the justice of infinite punishment. Blocher writes that amongst traditionalists, "Here lies the strongest rationale of hell," (EPPE, p. 296). However, Blocher rightly rejects this whole strategy when he writes, 'we may observe that the thesis of sin continuing is found nowhere in Scripture. On the contrary, the punishment refers only to 'things done through the body' (2 Cor. 5:10);…' (EPPE, p. 302).
11. C. H. Pinnock "The Conditional View," in *Hell: Four Views* (ed.) W. V. Crockett

(Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1992), p. 152, 155.

12. EPPE, p. 304.
13. EPPE, p. 305. See also Leckie on Augustine in *The World To Come and Final Destiny* p. 123).
14. Birks was a founder member of the World's Evangelical Alliance, an honourary secretary of the UK Evangelical Alliance, and was successor to F. D. Maurice as Professor of Moral Philosophy at Cambridge. His most mature statement on hell canbe found in *The Difficulties of Belief* (2nd edn.), (Macmillan: London, 1876), especially pp. 217-241. This literature is hardly referred to at all by evangelicals involved in the debate about Annihilationism over the last thirty years.
15. Paul Helm, *The Last Things* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1989), p. 114.
16. S. B. Ferguson, *W. G. T. Shedd and the Doctrine of Eternal Punishment: The Evangelical Library Annual Lecture 1994* (Lewes: F. C. M. Trust, 1994), p. 13.
17. EPPE, p. 304.
18. EPPE, p. 307.
19. This is a disputed point, but Tony Gray supports the notion that a person cannot freely and rationally choose hell, once its nature is clear, where hell is understood to be a place of continuing sin. See Tony Gray "Post-Mortem Evangelism: A Response to R. R. Cook," *Tyndale Bulletin* 46/1 (1995).
20. EPPE, p. 301.
21. EPPE, p. 302. Blocher footnotes, '*Contra* Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, *op. cit.,* p. 877, or Shedd, *The Doctrine, op. cit.,* p. 104.'
22. This is Reid's chief argument, repeated several times. William Reid *Everlasting Punishment and Modern Speculation* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, 1874), pp. 104, 105, 109.
23. Carson, *The Gagging of God,* p. 533.
24. Reid explicitly denies this. William Reid *Everlasting Punishment and Modern Speculation* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, 1874), pp. 107.
25. EPPE, p. 299.
26. EPPE, p. 305.
27. EPPE, p. 304.
28. EPPE, p. 301. Blocher cites no examples, but see, for example, Shedd, *The Doctrine of Endless Punishment* pp. 149-50; A. S. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (revised ed.), (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1907), p. 1041.
29. Carson, *The Gagging of God,* p. 534.
30. Charles Hodge *Systematic Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner's and Co., 1884), p. 879. Quoted in EPPE, p. 302.
31. EPPE, p. 302. (Italics original.)
32. EPPE, p. 302.
33. EPPE, p. 307.
34. EPPE, p. 310.

35. EPPE, p. 307.
36. Harry Blamires, *Knowing the Truth about Heaven and Hell: Our Choices and Where They Lead Us* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1988), p. 32.
37. J. Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (ed.) Edward Hickman 2 vols. (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), vol. 2, p. 84.
38. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Westminster, MD.: Christian Classics, 1981 [1948]). Q 87 Art 1. Aquinas goes to great lengths to establish that the damned are able to be so acquainted with their sin.
39. Shedd, *The Doctrine of Endless Punishment,* pp. 140. See also, for example, J Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards ed Edward Hickman,* 2 vols (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), vol. 2, pp. 46, 84; C. Hodge, *Systematic Theology,* pp. 877-8; and Peter Toon, *Heaven and Hell: A Biblical and Theological Overview* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1986), p. 169.
40. EPPE, pp. 302-3.
41. J. I. Packer *Knowing Christianity* (Guildford: Eagle, 1995), p. 186.
42. Here I disagree with Chan who counters a similar argument based upon the preference of the damned: 'Pinnock and Stott may well argue that if people choose to go to hell, they could not properly be said to be punished. Can a prisoner be said to be punished if he enjoys being in prison? But this confuses the psychological state which accompanies punishment with the objectivity of the penalty itself. To be shut out of the totally real is an objective punishment, even when the shutting out is freely chosen. Reality will judge that person as existing in a pathetic state even if he may not think so'. (See Simon Chan, "The Logic of Hell: A Response to Annihilationism," *Evangelical Review of Theology 18/1* (January, 1994): 30.) I think that Chan has failed to take account of the need for lucidity for a punishment to be fully retributive.
43. Ellis, "The New Testament Teaching on Hell," p. 216, n. 79.
44. EPPE, p. 307 (Italics original).
45. EPPE, p. 308 (Italics original).
46. EPPE, p. 288. Leckie attributes a similar position to Augustine, and notes a similar response (Leckie, *The World To Come and Final Destiny,* p. 124). The final point also rules out extinction after torment, since there could be no sequence of events.
47. EPPE, p. 310.
48. C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (London: Fountain Books, 1977 [1940]), p. 114. Also, for example, Milton's representation of Satan as saying 'it is better to reign in hell than to serve in heaven' quoted favourably, for example, by Shedd, *The Doctrine of Endless Punishmen*t, p. 154.
49. K. S. Harmon, 'The Case Against Conditionalism' in *Universalism and the Doctrine of God* N. M. de S. Cameron (ed.) (Carlisle: Paternoster Press 1992,) pp. 216-17. I disagree with some of Harmon's application of this point. He goes on to argue, that

'A second aspect of hell to which personal exclusion points is that hell is God's judgment in completely giving over the sinner to himself (the 'depart').' (pp. 220-1.) However, this seems to lose the personal element just gained, and that the damned are not able to forget the true nature of God, but are constantly aware that it is this God they are excluded from.

50. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain,* p. 110, quoting Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologiae* I Iiae Q 39 Art I (italics original). Lewis is widely quoted in this evangelical debate. However this vision does not seem to be as clearly maintained in *The Great Divorce* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1945), where there does seem to be the continuation of 'ghastly illusions'. See also Harry Blamires, "The Eternal Weight of Glory," *Christianity Today* (27 May, 1991), p. 6, 9.
51. J. Bonda, *The One Purpose of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998 [1993]) pp. 227.
52. EPPE, p. 310.
53. See for example Stott, *Essentials,* p. 319.
54. EPPE, p. 303. See also, for example, Guillebaud's rejection of mere outward conformity as adequate to these passages. (H. E. Guillebaud, *The Righteous Judge: A Study of the Biblical Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment* (Taunton: The Phoenix Press, 1964), p. 6.
55. EPPE, p. 303. Bonda comments on Blocher's use of these passages, and draws a different conclusion: 'reconciliation is the restoration of peace with God through forgiveness of sins—never exclusion from fellowship with God.' (Bonda, *The One Purpose of God,* pp. 228.)
56. EPPE, p. 311.
57. ACUTE *The Nature of Hell* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000), pp. 105-106, quoting G. Bray "Hell: Eternal Punishment of Total annihilation?" *Evangel* 10/2 (Summer 1992): 23.
58. EPPE, p. 310.
59. Blocher, "The Scope of Redemption and Modern Theology," p. 103.
60. Helm, *The Last Things*, pp. 116-17 (italics mine). A contemporary example is given by O'Donovan in his booklet on capital punishment. 'He writes about the case of Gary Gilmore who preferred to be executed than use the appeal procedures. He found the idea of execution dignifying. He was fighting to be allowed to 'die like a man'. He wished his death to be, as many have wished it, an act of purpose, a joy and a triumph. It was, in its way, a religious attitude.' (Oliver O'Donovan *Measure for Measure: Justice in Punishment and the Sentence of Death* (Bramcote: Grove Books 1977), p. 21. I think that this is both a more complete punishment, and less 'dualistic,' than an analogy where the prisoner refuses to accept his sentence, as 'classic' Traditionalism holds.
61. Samuel Garratt, *Veins of Silver* or *Truths Hidden Beneath the Surface,* 2nd edn. (C. J. Thynne: London, 1904), p. xvi.