ARGUING WITH ANNIHILATIONISM: AN ASSESSMENT OF THE DOCTRINAL ARGUMENTS FOR ANNIHILATIONISM

ANDY SAVILLE, DIOCESE OF CHELMSFORD

Over the last thirty years the traditional doctrine of hell has increasingly been criticised from within evangelicalism, chiefly from the perspective of Annihilationism which has rapidly become the leading alternative.[1] Despite this challenge to the traditional view there has been little assessment of Annihilationism at the doctrinal level. In this article I want to assess the main doctrinal issues raised by Annihilationism and to argue that while it does point out a major weakness in the traditional position that requires its modification, it has significant weaknesses of its own that require its rejection.

By 'Annihilationism' I mean the doctrine that the damned are extinguished after a period of torment in hell. I will use 'Annihilationism' to cover both Annihilationism and Conditionalism (or Conditional Immortality) as they are commonly used synonymously in the literature, and even where an anthropological distinction is maintained, the ultimate end of the wicked remains the same.[2] I will use the term 'extinction' to refer to the final cessation of the existence of the damned, and I will refer to the period of suffering before extinction as 'torment'. By 'Traditionalism' I mean the doctrine that the damned in hell experience eternal conscious torment.

---

1 The ACUTE (Alliance Commission on Unity and Truth amongst Evangelicals) report for the UK Evangelical Alliance concludes, 'Conditionalism [is] a minority view, but a not insignificant one.' (ACUTE, *The Nature of Hell* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000), p. 6.)

2 For a detailed analysis of the terminology see K. S. Harmon, 'The Case Against Conditionalism' in *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron (Grand Rapids: Baker/Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1992), pp. 196-9.

The lack of study of Annihilationism at the doctrinal level was noted in the extensive nineteenth-century debate about Annihilationism,[3] and remains a feature of the recent debate, which may be dated from the publication of John Wenham's book *The Goodness of God* in 1974.[4] Kendall Harmon notes '[hell's] comparative neglect at the level of systematic analysis in recent study'.[5] The importance of the doctrinal level is recognised, for example, in Packer's judgement that 'the mainspring of Conditionalism is not exegetical but theological'.[6]

THE CHIEF DOCTRINAL ARGUMENTS

The same basic doctrinal arguments form something of a litany in the literature. Succinct summaries of the chief annihilationist arguments are provided by Travis, Pinnock and Stott from the annihilationist side;[7] Packer, Grudem, Carson and Peterson from the traditionalist side.[8] The

---

3 See for example B. B. Warfield, *Hastings Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* s.v. 'Annihilation', ed. J. Hastings (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1908-1926), p. 548, col. 2.

4 J. W. Wenham, *The Goodness of God* (Leicester: IVP, 1984). Eryl Davies describes this book 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.)

5 K. S. Harmon, *Finally Excluded From God? Some Twentieth Century Theological Explorations of the Problem of Hell and Universalism with Reference to the Historical Development of These Doctrines*. D.Phil. diss. (Oxford University, 1993), p. 21. Harmon is referring to the study of hell both within evangelicalism and beyond.

6 J. I. Packer, *God's Words* (Leicester: IVP, 1981), p. 209.

7 S. H. Travis, *Christian Hope and the Future of Man* (Leicester: IVP, 1980), pp. 134-5; *I Believe in the Second Coming of Jesus* (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1982), pp. 198-9; C. H. Pinnock, 'The Conditional View' in *Hell: Four Views,* ed. William V. Crockett (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1992), pp. 143-55. John Stott's position is a matter of some debate. For example he writes, 'Scripture is not absolutely plain... The late Professor F. F. Bruce... added: "For myself I remain agnostic". My position is similar.' (Stott, 'The Logic of Hell: A Brief Rejoinder', *Evangelical Review of Theology* 18 [1994], p. 34). In *Essentials* Stott seems to conclude with greater certainty: 'I do not dogmatise about the position to which I have come. I hold it tentatively...' (J. R. W. Stott and D. L. Edwards, *Essentials* [London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988] p. 320).

8 J. I. Packer, *The Problem of Eternal Punishment* (Cheshire: Orthos, n.d.), pp. 12-13. (The content of this booklet was originally published under the

most recent summary has been provided by the ACUTE report for the Evangelical Alliance.[9]

My own summary is that there are three main doctrinal arguments used by annihilationists in this debate. These may be stated briefly.

First, that an erroneous belief in the immortality of the soul has served as an argument for Traditionalism.

Second, that the traditionalist hell is unjust because the punishment is excessive in terms of its duration, while the annihilationist hell is a less severe punishment and therefore more just. A linked argument is that a traditionalist hell displays God as unloving.

Third, that the traditionalist hell is unbiblically dualistic, while the annihilationist hell avoids or reduces the problem. A linked argument is that a traditionalist hell would permanently limit the bliss of the saints.

I will add a fourth set of arguments from the link between hell and the atonement which, while not prominent in the debate, are significant.

One of the distinctive features of the literature is that the majority of the doctrinal arguments used by annihilationists are stated negatively, as an argument *against* Traditionalism, rather than positively as an argument *for* Annihilationism. This is because Annihilationism is usually understood to be an alternative to Traditionalism, and thus a refutation of Traditionalism is seen as a significant part of the case *for* Annihilationism. Therefore in determining annihilationist doctrinal positions it is necessary to assess their criticisms of Traditionalism, as well as direct arguments for Annihilationism.

1. The Immortality of the Soul

Travis gives this as the first of his arguments supporting Annihilationism:

The Bible does not teach that the soul is naturally immortal, but that resurrection is a gift of God. This suggests that God grants resurrection to those who love him, but those who resist him go out of existence.[10]

While this might suggest extinction at death, all evangelical annihilationists hold that there is a limited period of life after death for

---

same title in *Crux* 26/3 [September 1990]); Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester: IVP, 1994), p. 1150; D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Leicester: Apollos, 1996), pp. 518-20; R. A. Peterson, *Hell on Trial: The Case for Eternal Punishment* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 1995), pp. 162-78.

9 ACUTE, *Nature*, especially Chapter 7.

10 Travis, *Hope*, p. 134.

the damned given for the purposes of retributive punishment in hell. The argument continues that the traditional understanding of hell has been suggested and supported by the premise that humans are naturally immortal. Pinnock heads his second argument in favour of Annihilationism 'Immortality of the Soul' and he highlights this development:

> Presumably the traditional view of the nature of hell was originally constructed in the following way: People mixed up their belief in divine judgement after death (which is scriptural) with their belief in the immortality of the soul (which is unscriptural) and concluded (incorrectly) that the nature of hell must be everlasting conscious torment.[11]

One of the main theses of Froom's massive two-volume work entitled *The Conditionalist Faith of our Fathers* is that 'innate Immortal-Soulism' is the main reason for the Traditionalist view of hell.[12] In the nineteenth century Edward White, an annihilationist, wrote, 'Here, in the popular doctrine of the soul's immortality, is the *fons et origo* of a system of theological error.'[13]

While agreeing that belief in the immortality of the soul has been influential in the history of the debate in favouring Traditionalism, Fudge, an annihilationist, rightly argues that the immortality of the soul can be logically affirmed or denied by both traditionalists and annihilationists: 'In *either* case – among mortalists or immortalists – there is no reason why anthropology should govern eschatology.'[14] So for example Pinnock, who is a mortalist, acknowledges that God *could* give immortality to the wicked[15] while Stott holds to a form of the

---

[11] Pinnock, *Conditional*, pp. 148-9.

[12] LeRoy E. Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers*, 2 vols, (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1965).

[13] Edward White, *Life in Christ: a Study of the Scripture Doctrine on the Nature of Man, the Object of the Divine Incarnation, and the Conditions of Human Immortality* (3rded., London: Elliot Stock, 1878), p. 70.

[14] E. W. Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of Final Punishment* (Houston: Providential Press, 1982), p. 76. [The second edition of this book is *The Fire That Consumes: The Biblical Case for Conditional Immortality* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1994, 2nd rev. ed., Revising Editor, Peter Cousins). Since this 2nd edition is largely a condensation, with a small amount of new material added in footnotes, I will usually quote from the first edition unless stated.]

[15] Pinnock, *Conditional*, p. 149. Two traditionalists who hold precisely this view are Fernando and Pawson. (Ajith Fernando, *Crucial Questions About*

immortality of the soul and yet is open to the view that the damned are ultimately extinguished.[16] Thus immortalists can allow for the final extinction of the wicked, while mortalists can allow for the eternal preservation of the wicked. Fudge correctly summarises:

> The crucial question does not really concern man's natural mortality or immortality, therefore, for both sides concede the ultimate point to the greater sovereignty of God. The issue really becomes a matter of exegesis. Since God is *able* to preserve or destroy His human creature, what does Scripture *indicate* that He *will* do to those He finally expels to hell?[17]

Therefore this doctrinal argument is not decisive and Peterson is right when he concludes that 'This argument [about immortality] has been vastly overrated...'.[18]

2. *The Justice of Hell*

Crockett claims that this is 'the issue that bothers evangelicals *most* about the doctrine of endless conscious punishment – that an eternal punishment for temporal sins seems cruel and unfair.'[19] In fact Crockett has highlighted two distinct, but related, issues: that of fairness, or justice, and that of cruelty, where the assumption is that an unjustly severe punishment is motivated by cruelty. I will deal with each aspect in turn.

In turning to the issue of the justice of hell, there is little systematic exposition of the justice of the annihilationist position itself. Indeed it is often difficult to ascertain their position and, where it can be, there seems to be a variety of positions held.[20] In particular it is not clear if annihilationists believe that extinction is itself a finite punishment, and so less severe than Traditionalism in terms of its length, or an infinite punishment, but less severe than Traditionalism in terms of its intensity. I want to argue that on either view there are difficulties for

---

Hell (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1991), pp. 42-3; J. D. Pawson, 'God Of Love, God Of Justice', *Alpha* (Feb. 1993), p. 33.

16 Stott, *Essentials*, p. 316.

17 Fudge, *Fire*, p. 57.

18 Peterson, *Trial*, p. 177.

19 W. V. Crockett, 'Response to Clark H. Pinnock', in Crockett, *Hell: Four Views*, p. 171 [italics mine].

20 I have given a detailed exposition of the variety of positions in chapter 2 of *Arguing with Annihilationism* (Ph.D., Coventry University, 2000).

Annihilationism, but that extinction must in fact be a finite punishment. Further, some traditionalists have argued that extinction is not a punishment at all, which I will refute.

Most annihilationists in the recent debate argue that the traditionalist hell is an unjust punishment because it is excessive primarily in terms of its duration and, for some, secondarily in terms of its intensity, being too severe. Clearly this is only an argument *for* Annihilationism if the hell of Annihilationism is held to be a less severe punishment, and therefore more just. John Stott argues:

> The third argument in favour of the concept of annihilation concerns the biblical vision of *justice*.... Would there not, then, be a serious disproportion between sins consciously committed in time and torment consciously experienced throughout eternity?... no finite set of deeds that individual sinners have done could justify such an infinite sentence.[21]

Clark Pinnock uses the heading 'Justice' for the fourth of his five arguments for Annihilationism, under which he argues that:

> the traditional doctrine of the nature of hell... depicts God acting unjustly... It is too heavy a sentence and cannot be successfully defended as a just action on God's part. Sending the wicked to everlasting torment would be to treat persons worse than they could deserve.[22]

Traditionalists have also recognised that this is a common argument put forward by annihilationists. Grudem notes as the third of four arguments: 'the apparent injustice involved in the *disproportion* between sins committed in time and the punishment that is eternal'.[23] The argument is therefore not over the principle of justice as retributive[24] but over its application. So, Wenham can write: 'My problem is, not that God punishes, but that the punishment traditionally ascribed to God seems neither to square with Scripture nor to be *just*.'[25]

It is the expected conclusion from this argument that infinite punishment is excessive punishment for finite sins, that annihilationists

---

21 Stott, *Essentials*, pp. 318-19.

22 Pinnock, *Conditional*, p. 151-2.

23 Grudem, p. 1150 [italics original].

24 Travis and Pinnock are exceptions here.

25 J. W. Wenham, 'The Case for Conditional Immortality' in *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron (Grand Rapids: Baker/Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1992), p. 185 [italics original].

would hold that extinction is a finite punishment. Carson writes that 'many annihilationists [hold] that punishment must be finite because we are finite and our actions are finite'.[26] However, a surprise of the annihilationist literature is that there is no clear reference to extinction as a finite punishment. Rather, those annihilationists who address the issue seem to hold that extinction is an infinite punishment. Henry Constable, a nineteenth-century annihilationist, refers to two ways in which the punishment is infinite: '*Endless annihilation is an endless or an infinite punishment...* Annihilation, therefore, is an infinite punishment, both as it is *endless*, and as the quality of good lost is infinite...'.[27] In the recent debate, Fudge writes:

> If death is seen to be destruction without limitation (which the traditional view has not allowed), then is not penal death [extinction] *itself* an *infinite* punishment, especially if it is an eternal death which is forever irreversible?[28]

I will now examine in turn the three views that extinction is an infinite punishment, no punishment, and a finite punishment.

2.1 Extinction as an infinite punishment

Clearly if extinction is itself an infinite punishment because unending, then any annihilationist objection expressed simply in terms of the comparison between infinite punishment and finite sin is self-refuting. Therefore if annihilationists want to sustain this objection they must argue that it is not an infinite punishment *per se* which is unjustly severe, but only a certain type of infinite punishment, that is unending

---

[26] Carson, *Gagging*, p. 534, n. 52.

[27] H. Constable, *The Duration and Nature of Future Punishment.* (London: Edward Hobbs, 1886), pp. 23-4 [italics original].

[28] Fudge, *Fire*, p. 232 [italics original]. See also E. W. Fudge and R. A. Peterson, *Two Views of Hell: A Biblical and Theological Dialogue* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), pp. 192-3. Some annihilationists, such as Fudge, even argue that extinction is actually a more severe punishment than unending torment, usually drawing on analogies from this life. For example, Fudge claims that 'throughout human history men have willingly chosen the severest tortures... rather than face the final cutting off of their expected years of life' (Fudge, *Fire*, p. 198). My reading is that Fudge is making an *ad hominem* argument to counter the charge that extinction is *no* punishment by showing that the analogous punishment of execution is considered penal.

torment. However, among the difficulties of making this argument are the following:

First, the most common form of this argument uses human penal analogies, and it is widely held that execution is a more severe punishment than life imprisonment, although the comparison is less clear if the alternative is a life of torture. Further, the difficulty in arguing decisively from the analogy of capital punishment is stated by O'Donovan:

> The conventional answer, that [capital punishment] is just a little more severe than being sentenced to prison for life, is highly controversial, for... one could argue with great persuasiveness either that it is immeasurably more severe or that it is immeasurably more lenient.[29]

That said, most writers on both sides of the recent debate hold or assume that extinction is a less severe punishment than unending torment.[30]

Second, there is a long-standing theological position, traceable at least from Augustine, that existence is such an intrinsic good that the damned would prefer continued existence even in a tortured state. A modern form of this argument is made by Gerald Bray, a traditionalist: 'However bad it may be, continuing existence is a better state than total annihilation, because it preserves the dignity of the individual person.'[31]

Third, annihilationists who argue that extinction is an infinite, though less severe, punishment, face the challenge of arguing for the justice of such an infinite punishment. Yet it is hard to see how they could do this if they reject the classic traditionalist argument that sin against God, who is an infinite being, deserves infinite punishment. There are a number of other arguments, besides this 'classic' argument, which traditionalists use to justify a traditional hell, but which are not

---

[29] Oliver O'Donovan, *Measure for Measure: Justice in Punishment and the Sentence of Death* (Bramcote: Grove Books, 1977), p. 19.

[30] A sign of this assumption is seen in the widespread concern prior to the recent debate that an annihilationist hell would limit the deterrent effect on sin and the incentive to repentance by non-Christians and to evangelism by Christians. See, for example, the section 'Secrecy and Dishonesty' in D. P. Walker, *The Decline of Hell: Seventeenth-Century Discussion of Eternal Torment* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964) pp. 3-8.

[31] Gerald Bray, 'Hell: Eternal Punishment or Total Annihilation?', *Evangel* 10/2 (Summer 1992), p. 23.

obviously available to an annihilationist.[32] The two chief alternatives are that the damned continue to sin in hell and thus deserve further punishment; and that the guilt of the damned isn't satisfied by suffering and therefore always remains to be punished. However, both these arguments seem to be justifications for a continuation of torment, as Stott acknowledges with respect to the former when he writes,

> 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.[33]

Fourth, if extinction is an infinite punishment, there is the problem of justifying a finite, separate period of torment preceding it.[34] The usual response, besides arguing that this is the testimony of Scripture, is that a period of torment allows for different degrees of punishment in hell.[35] However, it remains difficult to see why the difference in finite degrees of torment don't fade into insignificance alongside an *infinite* punishment of extinction. Annihilationists could of course respond that although the period of torment and the doctrine of degrees that follow from it may seem insignificant, they are not thereby shown to be wrong.

In conclusion, if annihilationists hold that extinction is an infinite punishment because unending, they need to clarify that their argument is not against an infinite punishment *per se*, but against the severity of the infinite punishment of Traditionalism, if they are not to be self-refuting. However, once it has been admitted that both sorts of hell are infinite punishments, the objection that classic Traditionalism is too severe is hard to argue decisively, although it is widely-held opinion by both sides in the recent debate that endless torment is a more severe punishment than extinction.

However, I believe that extinction cannot be an infinite punishment, since for a punishment to be retributive it must be experienced, but

---

[32] The most extensive range of alternative justifications of endless punishment is discussed by Shedd in his third chapter entitled 'The Rational Argument' in W. G. T. Shedd, *The Doctrine of Endless Punishment* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1990 [1885], pp. 118-170.

[33] Stott, 1988, p. 319.

[34] This difficulty has been noted by several annihilationists. See, for example, Fudge, *Fire*, p. 200.

[35] See, for example, Harold Guillebaud, *The Righteous Judge: A Study of the Biblical Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment* (Taunton: The Phoenix Press, 1964), p. 65.

extinction can only be experienced in prospect, and this cannot be a complete apprehension of it in its infinite extent. I will develop this argument in the following section, in response to the charge that extinction is no punishment at all.

2.2 Extinction as no punishment

Some traditionalists argue that extinction is no punishment at all. Tidball notes it as the first objection raised against Annihilationism: 'Many [traditionalists] have to be persuaded that annihilation is punishment, since it makes hell out simply to be a state of non-existence.'[36] The argument is usually that punishment involves suffering and therefore needs to be experienced and that by this criterion extinction is not a punishment.[37] Support for this point is found in Walter Moberly's book *The Ethics of Punishment*, in a final chapter entitled 'The Conception of Eternal Punishment'. Moberly argues that after extinction 'there would be no suffering, for there would be no consciousness left to suffer... Hell then would not be a state of punishment.'[38] I think that this is correct and therefore the damned cannot be said to be punished after extinction. However, it is wrong to conclude that extinction is not a punishment at all, since the damned may be able to contemplate their coming extinction in a way analogous to that in which a criminal could contemplate their execution in this life. In this case they would be able to comprehend, though only partially, the future loss and so suffer in the present, thus meeting the criteria for punishment. However, they could not experience it as an infinite punishment in the present, since a finite mind could not fully grasp the prospect of an infinite future, and thus not experience an infinite loss.[39]

Therefore I conclude, against several traditionalists, that extinction *is* a punishment. I would also conclude, against writers on both sides, that it is not an infinite punishment. Therefore I disagree with the conclusion

---

[36] Derek Tidball, *Who are the Evangelicals?* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1994), p. 154; see also Grudem, *Systematic*, p. 1150.

[37] See, for example, J. H. Gerstner, *Repent or Perish: With a Special Reference to the Conservative Attack on Hell* (Ligonier, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1990), p. 153 and Shedd, *Doctrine*, p. 92.

[38] Walter Moberly, *The Ethics of Punishment* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), pp. 349-50.

[39] See also Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards,* rev. by Edward Hickman, 2 vols. (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), vol. 2, p. 88, II.2.

of Blomberg who argues: 'the problem of infinite punishment for finite sin is not resolved by Annihilationism: those who would cease to exist would still do so for an infinite period of time'.[40] Rather the punishment of an annihilationist hell *is* finite, a point which I now assess.

2.3 Extinction as a finite punishment

An obvious advantage of this position is that a finite punishment is clearly less severe in terms of duration than Traditionalism. However, there are also several possible criticisms.[41]

First, a number of traditionalists in the recent debate have argued that if annihilation is a finite punishment then it can be completed, and after its completion the damned should be translated to heaven. For example, Carson argues:

> One might reasonably wonder why, if people pay for their sins in hell before they are annihilated, they cannot be released into heaven, turning hell into purgatory. Alternatively, if the sins have not yet been paid for, why should they be annihilated?[42]

I think that this argument is sound for an annihilationist hell where the only penal element is the torment. However, I don't think that the argument stands if extinction is a punishment, even a finite one. If extinction is a finite punishment, the annihilationist can simply argue that it is one that has a permanent consequence which necessarily rules out any subsequent translation to heaven.

Second, an annihilationist who wants to argue that hell is a finite punishment has to refute what I call the *classic* traditionalist argument that sin against God is deserving of infinite punishment. An example from the nineteenth century is from Shedd: 'The doctrine that sin is an infinite evil and involves infinite guilt, because of its objective reference to an infinite Being, is one of the commonplaces of theology.'[43] An example from the recent debate is made by Paul Helm: 'Hell is without

---

[40] Craig Blomberg, 'Eschatology and the Church: Some New Testament Perspectives', *Themelios* 23/3 (June 1998), p. 4. See also John Blanchard, *Whatever Happened to Hell?* (Durham, Evangelical Press, 1993), p. 225; Stanley Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1994), p. 830.

[41] These would apply *a fortiori* if extinction is no punishment.

[42] Carson, *Gagging*, p. 530. See also for example Grudem, *Systematic*, p. 1151; and Blanchard, *Whatever*, p. 223.

[43] Shedd, *Doctrine*, p. 152, n. 48.

limit because the offence justly punished is committed against one of infinite, immeasurable holiness and goodness.'[44]

One response is to argue that such equating of infinities is too inexact to allow for such a definite conclusion about the nature of hell. One of the clearest statements of this comes from Blocher, a traditionalist:

> We shall excuse ourselves of all calculus of infinities, and hide behind a quotation from Charles Hodge... 'Men are apt to involve themselves in contradictions when they attempt to reason about the infinite. The word is so vague and so comprehensive, and our ideas of what it is intended to express are so inadequate, that we are soon lost when we seek to make it a guide in forming our judgements.'[45]

However, even Hodge goes on to state that 'the evil of a single sin... is in one sense an infinite evil... The guilt of sin is infinite...'[46] and the challenge for the annihilationist is to demonstrate that sin is not an infinite evil deserving of an infinite punishment.

Another response is to argue that sin against an infinite being is not worthy of an infinite punishment. Pinnock argues on the basis of the analogy of modern legal judgements:

> We do not accept inequality in judgments on the basis of the honor of the victim, as if stealing from a doctor is worse than stealing from a beggar... No judge today would calibrate the degree of punishment on a scale of the honour of the one who has been wronged.[47]

However, Pinnock's analogy breaks down because legal systems do often determine punishments according to the person wronged, even if not necessarily according to the medieval concept of honour, because people are not just private individuals but representative persons. Thus, for example, the murderer of the Queen would receive a greater punishment

---

[44] Paul Helm, *The Last Things* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1989). For the argument's place in the tradition, see D. P. Walker, *The Decline of Hell: Seventeenth-Century Discussions of Eternal Torment* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964), p. 43.

[45] Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner's and Co., 1884), p. 878, quoted by Henri Blocher, 'Everlasting Punishment and the Problem of Evil' in *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell,* ed. Nigel M. M. de S. Cameron (Grand Rapids: Baker/Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1992), p. 299. See also, for example, Fudge, *Fire*, p. 232.

[46] Hodge, *Systematic*, p. 878.

[47] Pinnock, *Conditional*, p. 152.

than the murderer of a mere citizen because the Queen is head of state and thus her murder is also an assault upon the state. By extension it could be argued that to sin against God is to commit the greatest wrong, since God is in some sense infinite. Therefore the task remains for the annihilationist to demonstrate that sin against God does not deserve an infinite punishment, as is so commonly argued in the tradition.

Several annihilationists, and some traditionalists in their summaries of Annihilationism, give a separate argument that the traditionalist hell displays God as unloving or cruel. As with many of the annihilationist arguments, it is presented as an argument *for* Annihilationism, although it is in the form of a criticism *against* Traditionalism. An example of this argument is Pinnock's third argument for annihilation which is headed 'Morality'. He writes, 'the traditional view... depicts God acting in a way that contradicts his goodness and offends our moral sense'.[48] Pinnock states the importance of this argument when he writes:

> The idea that a conscious creature should have to undergo physical and mental torture through unending time is profoundly disturbing, and the thought that this is inflicted upon them by divine decree offends my conviction about God's love. *This is probably the primary reason why people question the tradition so vehemently in the first place.*[49]

Crockett draws a similar conclusion when he comments: 'Pinnock's most powerful point [is] the moral argument.'[50]

However, for evangelicals hell only displays God as unloving or cruel if it is unjust. This point is made by Wayne Grudem:

> With respect to the argument from the love of God,... if (as Scripture abundantly testifies) it is consistent for God to punish the wicked for a certain length of time after the last judgement, then there seems to be no necessary reason why it would be inconsistent of God to inflict the same punishment for an unending period of time.[51]

---

[48] Pinnock, *Conditional*, p. 149.

[49] Pinnock, *Conditional*, p. 164 [italics mine].

[50] William Crockett, (ed.) *Hell: Four Views* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), p. 171.

[51] Grudem, *Systematic*, p. 1150. See also Packer's second annihilationist argument (*Problem*, pp. 12-13). Grudem is less persuasive when he argues that, 'the same difficulty in reconciling God's love with eternal punishment would seem to be present in reconciling God's love with the idea of divine

Grudem is not arguing here that an unending punishment *is* just, but that *if* it is just then it is consistent with the love of God for him to inflict it. Thus the issue reverts to that of the justice of any particular punishment.

In conclusion, the annihilationist hell is a finite punishment, and while many traditionalist criticisms fail, the chief issue for annihilationists is to argue that sin against God is not deserving of an infinite punishment.

3. The Dualism of Hell

The argument is commonly made by annihilationists that a traditionalist hell results in an 'unbiblical dualism'[52] of unending evil, with the further claim, often implied rather than stated, that Annihilationism avoids, or at least reduces, such dualism and thus offers a preferable doctrine of hell.

In this section I will examine two aspects of this argument which are distinct but sometimes conflated in the literature as both being aspects of continuing evil: first, the argument that traditionalism produces what I will call 'sin dualism' which is the state of some continuing to sin for eternity; second, what I will call 'suffering dualism' which is the state of some continuing to suffer for eternity. I will argue that a simple charge of suffering dualism against Traditionalism is self-refuting, since Annihilationism does not avoid it either. However, the charge of sin dualism is valid and requires a modification of Traditionalism.

3.1 Sin Dualism

Pinnock presents this argument under the heading 'Metaphysics':

> 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

---

punishment at all...'. The problem here is that some divine punishment may have other purposes, such as reformation, unlike the eternal punishment of hell.

[52] Fudge, *Fire*, p. 372, n. 18. Travis writes of 'an eternal cosmological dualism' (*Hope*, p. 135).

> cosmological dualism... Only if evil, death, devils, and the wicked go into oblivion does history issue in an unqualified victory.[53]

Stott's argument for Annihilationism is more tentative but he makes a similar point when under the heading 'Universalism' he charges Traditionalism with failing to take account of the 'universalist' texts of Scripture.

> [T]he eternal existence of the impenitent in hell would be hard to reconcile with the promises of God's final victory over evil, or with the apparently universalistic texts... These texts... lead me to ask how God can in any meaningful sense be called 'everything to everybody' while an unspecified number of people still continue in rebellion against him and under his judgement. It would be easier to hold together the awful reality of hell and the universal reign of God if hell means destruction and the impenitent are no more.[54]

Atkinson emphasises the importance of this issue:

> As long as we hold that the wicked live for ever in conscious misery in hell and especially if we hold what seems to be *the most terrible aspect of that view*, that they continue for ever to sin in hell, this word of the apostle raises grave difficulties. While sinners live and continue to sin, how can God be all in all?[55]

This issue of dualism is also recognised as a key annihilationist argument by traditionalists. Sinclair Ferguson highlights the importance of this issue when he writes that,

> This is perhaps the most powerful and appealing theological argument against the orthodox doctrine: how can God be 'all in all' (1 Corinthians 15:28) if there is an 'outside' in the final world order.[56]

---

[53] Pinnock, *Conditional*, pp. 152, 155. See also Fudge, *Fire*, p. 372, n. 18; P. E. Hughes, *The True Image: The Origin and Destiny of Man in Christ* (Leicester, IVP, 1989), p. 406.

[54] Stott, *Essentials*, p. 319.

[55] Basil F. C. Atkinson, *Life and Immortality* (Taunton: The Phoenix Press, n.d.), p. 112 [italics mine].

[56] Sinclair 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.

Such continuing sin is certainly a well-established feature of the traditional position, as is indicated by the title of Leckie's chapter surveying Traditionalism: 'Everlasting Evil (Dualistic Solution)'.[57] A typical example from the recent debate of belief in the continuation of sin is from Carson, who uses it as an argument for the continuation of punishment:

> [H]ell'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.[58]

The usual response to this charge of dualism in the tradition is that sin justly punished is a good and not an evil, as Blocher summarises: 'Together with Saint Augustine, the classical line insists that punishment, in truth, is no evil added, but the balancing *cancellation* of evil, the moral order repaired, the good vindicated.'[59] I think that this argument is successful as a response to the charge of 'suffering dualism', as I will argue below. However, it is less satisfactory when hell is considered not just a place of suffering, but a place of sin. Since sin involves rebellion against God's rule, continuing sin in hell involves the continued rejection of the very thing that the 'universalist' texts emphasise being universally acknowledged. While the classic traditionalist view argues for the external restraint of sin, so that the damned cannot spoil the cosmos any further, it does not go further and argue for the removal of sin by their inner transformation so that they acknowledge God's rule and the justice of their punishment. Where the damned continue to sin I believe the annihilationist charge of unbiblical dualism is sustained. However, a view of hell in which the damned continue to suffer in hell, but no longer sin, would respond to this charge more effectively. Such a modified Traditionalism, of a hell without the continuation of sin, has been proposed by Henri Blocher.[60]

---

[57] J. H. Leckie, *The World To Come and Final Destiny* (2nd ed., Edinburgh: T&T. Clark, 1922).

[58] Carson, *Gagging*, pp. 533-4.

[59] Blocher, *Everlasting*, p. 292 [italics original].

[60] See especially Blocher, *Everlasting*, and my exposition of this position in 'Hell Without Sin – A Renewed View of a Disputed Doctrine', *Churchman* 119/3 (Autumn 2005), pp. 243-61.

Another response, made by Donald Macleod, responds to the charge of cosmic dualism by arguing that hell is *outside* of the ordered cosmos and thus lies outside the scope of the universalist texts:

> Yet to speak of this as an eternal, cosmic, dualism is misleading. Cosmic is exactly what it is not. Cosmic (hence cosmetics) is beauty. It means ordered reality. In that sense hell is not part of the cosmos... It is Outside. Light-less. Lawless. Love-less: the place where men indulge, and suffer, the collapsed moral order which unbelief and impenitence have chosen.[61]

However, this is to reject the traditional argument that hell *is* part of the 'cosmos', the 'ordered reality', because it is a just punishment for sin and therefore not evil but a good. Therefore Macleod's argument would seem to heighten the very dualism he is trying to avoid. Further, I think that the annihilationist argument referred to by Ferguson above still stands, and that hell is to be included within the orbit of the universalist texts.

Therefore I think that annihilationists are right to conclude that this continuation of sin by the damned (and the demons) does create an unbiblical dualism. However, the solution offered by annihilationists faces at least two problems of its own.

First, Annihilationism has a temporary period of sin dualism of its own, since no annihilationist has rejected the notion that the damned continue in sin.[62] It seems that the annihilationist hell is as dualistic as the traditionalist one, at least until the last sinner is extinguished.

Second, it can be argued that Annihilationism has its own form of permanent dualism. Langton Clarke, a former professor of Divinity at Durham University, wrote in the early part of the twentieth century:

> But how is [evil] to be expelled? There is the way of Annihilation – expulsion of sin by the destruction of the sinner. But... if this were the method of cure, who would be the victor – God or sin? Would not the

---

[61] D. Macleod, 'Must we all become Annihilationists?', *Evangelicals Now* (June 1991), p. 14.

[62] This also raises the question how annihilationists would respond to the argument, made regularly by traditionalists, that continuing sin deserves continuing punishment, and that if sin never ends then neither does punishment.

> victory remain with the evil which compelled God to uncreate His own creation?[63]

Blocher writes about the 'waste' of Annihilationism and contrasts his own position in which 'the existence of the lost shall not amount to a total waste, neither for the universe, nor for God, nor for themselves....'[64] A more complete and therefore satisfactory solution would be one in which not only is there no continuing sin after the Last Judgement, but also in which the damned continue to exist and serve a purpose, recognised and accepted even by themselves. Again, I believe that the modified form of Traditionalism proposed by Henri Blocher offers just such a better alternative, and thus ameliorates the major problem annihilationists have identified with Traditionalism, which Atkinson calls 'the most terrible aspect of that view'.[65]

3.2 Suffering dualism

Occasionally annihilationists argue that the continuation of suffering is itself an evil which produces an unbiblical dualism. Thus Atkinson began his quotation above 'As long as we hold that the wicked live for ever in conscious misery in hell...'. If annihilationists argue simply that *any* suffering in hell is dualistic then it is self-refuting since the damned also suffer in an annihilationist hell. If they respond that temporary suffering is not dualistic, then this must be because suffering justly inflicted is a good. However, if it is a good for a finite period it must remain so as long as the punishment remains just. An example of this response to 'suffering dualism' is given by Helm:

> [W]hile there is pain in hell, and pain is in some sense an evil, the pain of hell is *deserved* pain. It is penal pain. If pain *per se* is an evil, then hell is the triumph of evil. But if, on the other hand, hell is a just place, because none suffer there except those who deserve to suffer, and none suffer more, nor less, than they deserve, then hell is not evil.[66]

Therefore the issue of suffering dualism collapses into the prior issue of the justice of the punishment.

---

[63] J. L. Clarke, *The Eternal Saviour-Judge* (John Murray: London, 1904), p. 109.

[64] Blocher, *Everlasting*, p. 311.

[65] Atkinson, *Life*, p. 112. See footnote 60 above.

[66] Helm, *Last*, p. 114 [italics original].

More commonly the issue of suffering arises in the argument that the sight or knowledge of the continuing suffering of the damned will diminish the blessedness of the righteous in heaven. It is the first reason Michael Green gives for his rejection of Traditionalism:

> What sort of God would he be who could rejoice eternally in heaven with the saved, while downstairs the cries of the lost made an agonising cacophony? Such a God is not the person revealed in Scripture as utterly just and utterly loving.[67]

J. I. Packer also notes this argument:

> Let us look at the biblical arguments used [by annihilationists]. They reduce to four... Fourth, it is said that the joy of heaven will be marred by knowledge that some continue under merited retribution.[68]

The response to the annihilationist argument depends upon the point they are making. If they are arguing that *unjust* suffering would diminish the bliss of heaven then traditionalists would agree with them, and the issue collapses again into the prior question of what is a just punishment for the damned.

Packer states that,

> since in heaven Christians will be like God in character, loving what he loves and taking joy in all his self-manifestation, including his justice, there is no reason to think that their joy will be impaired in this way.[69]

However, if annihilationists suggest that *any* suffering of the damned, even if just, serves to diminish the bliss of heaven, then this would rule out any period of suffering of the damned after the Last Judgement.

---

[67] Michael Green, *Evangelism Through the Local Church*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1990), p. 69. See also J. W. Wenham, 'The Case for Conditional Immortality' in *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron (Grand Rapids: Baker/Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1992), p. 189; and Fudge, *Fire*, p. 196. This argument is in sharp contrast to the common argument in the tradition that the knowledge of hell added to the bliss of the saints. This was even used as an argument against Annihilationism, since the saints would lose the blessing of contemplating the damned. See the discussion in 'The Abominable Fancy' in Walker, *Decline*, pp. 29-32.

[68] Packer, *Problem*, pp. 12-13.

[69] Packer, *Problem*, p. 18.

Conversely, if it is argued that the diminution of the bliss of the righteous is acceptable, but only for a limited period, then this raises at least two further problems.

First, the annihilationist position introduces what one might term a 'new Intermediate State' into eschatology, with a period between the Last Judgement and the extinction of the final sinner in hell. On this view there would seem to be a period of diminished bliss for the saints while those in hell continue in torment, followed by unalloyed bliss only after an unspecified period, with the extinction of the last person in hell.[70] This is to introduce a novel doctrine that is nowhere in the tradition. There is also the wider issue of whether there are such significant events after the Last Judgement. It could be argued that the notion of any event for the damned after the Last Judgement is to evade the force of it being the *last* judgement. The same problems would also seem to attach to the unending suffering of demonic beings in hell, and thus the annihilationist has to argue that Satan and his angels should be extinguished too. Pinnock argues this in the quotation above, but he is rare amongst annihilationists in acknowledging this. While I don't think that this raises any significant further doctrinal difficulties, it encourages caution in proceeding since there is almost no such claim in the tradition.[71]

Second, even if the damned are removed the memory of them would remain to diminish the bliss of heaven. An obvious response is to argue that the memory of the damned will be erased from the minds of the righteous, as P. E. Hughes does.[72] This is not an argument restricted to annihilationists, and from the traditionalist side Blanchard suggests that both God and the blessed will forget at least their own sins.

---

[70] This seems to be recognised by Guillebaud, *Righteous*, p. 6.

[71] It is also exegetically problematic: one of the strongest texts in support of a traditionalist position is Revelation 20:10 which refers to Satan and his angels. Indeed several traditionalists have used the eternal existence of Satan as an argument against Annihilationism. See for example Edwards, *Works*, vol. 2, p. 85, II.4.

[72] Hughes, *True*, p. 407. Not all annihilationists take this line: see, for example, Guillebaud, *Righteous*, p. 11. The ACUTE report notes this option, but judges that there is some biblical evidence against it (ACUTE, *Nature*, pp. 109-10).

> If we dare to use such language [from Jeremiah 31:34], God will have a mental block as far as the sins of his people are concerned. What is more, so will [the blessed], or they could not be perfectly happy.[73]

However, one difficulty with this position is to determine how one can have selective memories of one's past life on earth without recalling the existence of the damned. Further, even if the memories of the righteous were purged, there remains a permanent reminder of torment in heaven in the marks of Christ's passion that he bears in his resurrected body. Indeed the annihilationist objection I am considering here makes it difficult to see what place there can be for remembering the cross, either in heaven or now on earth, since it shows the suffering involved in the just punishment of sin.

In conclusion, I believe that the charge of dualism is correct where the damned in hell continue to sin and remain in a state of rebellion. However, the charge of dualism fails where the damned merely suffer punishment without continuing to sin and rebel against God.

4. Hell and the Atonement

Finally I turn to examine the implications of a link between the doctrine of hell and the doctrine of the atonement. The paucity of discussion of this link is highlighted by Edward Fudge: 'The literature concerning final punishment contains a number of surprises, and one of the greatest is the scant attention given to the death of Jesus Christ.'[74] The value of, and need for, further study is stated by the ACUTE report:

> questions of hell are never far from questions of soteriology – that is, the doctrine of salvation and theories of atonement. Although detailed

---

[73] Blanchard, *Whatever*, p. 180.

[74] Fudge, *Fire*, p. 215. On the annihilationist side Fudge's own discussion is a rare exception, devoting a whole chapter to the question, entitled 'Golgotha and Gehenna (Jesus' Death and the Punishment of the Lost)' (Fudge, *Fire*, Chapter 12). See also Atkinson, *Life*, p. 103. Recent traditionalist discussions of this link and its implications for the doctrine of hell are even rarer and briefer than those of annihilationists, although the most significant contribution is by Peterson, with whom this section shares its chief conclusions. (Peterson, *Trial*, pp. 213-16, and in E. W. Fudge and R. A. Peterson, *Two Views of Hell: A Biblical and Theological Dialogue* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), pp. 105-7; 174-9. See also R. A. Morey, *Death and the Afterlife* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1984), pp. 101-3; Gerstner, *Repent*, pp. 159-62.

> exploration of this link lie beyond our remit here, we believe it to be an important and fertile area for further research.[75]

The logic of the link between hell and the atonement is summarised by Morey:

> Christ took the punishment for sin which His people would have suffered... the nature of Christ's vicarious punishment will be a good indication of the nature of divine punishment of rebel sinners.[76]

The middle term in the link between the atonement and hell is thus a doctrine of vicarious punishment, usually understood by evangelicals as penal substitution. It is on the basis of this link that writers on both sides of the recent debate speak of 'Christ suffering hell'.[77]

Annihilationists make two related arguments on the basis of this link, of which I will focus on the second argument, since it alone relates directly to the validity of Annihilationism. First, negatively, Jesus did not suffer a traditionalist hell because he didn't remain eternally on the cross, but his suffering came to an end with his death.[78] Second, positively, Jesus did suffer an annihilationist hell because he suffered a period of torment followed by death, which is understood as extinction. Thus Fudge entitles the section in which he discusses the death of Christ 'Jesus' Death Involved Total Destruction', in which he argues that Christ's human nature, both body and soul, was extinguished on the cross.[79] Similarly Froom begins a section headed 'Christ Truly "Died" According to Prediction, Fulfilment, Attestation' with this statement:

---

[75] ACUTE, *Nature*, p. 104.

[76] Morey, *Death*, pp. 101-2.

[77] The ACUTE report makes a rare error, with respect to both the recent debate and the tradition, when it claims that, 'Traditionalists have tended to... [state] that the death of Christ was a one-off conscious punishment which cannot be used as an analogy for eternal conscious punishment after final judgment' (ACUTE, *Nature*, p. 104).

[78] See, for example, Fudge, *Fire*, pp. 232-3; Wenham, *Case*, p. 185; Atkinson, *Life*, p. 103.

[79] Fudge, *Fire*, pp. 381-2 [italics original]. See also Atkinson, *Life*, pp. 62-3; p. 103. Peterson notes the astonishing reluctance of Fudge to rule out the possibility that the whole person of Christ, deity and humanity, was extinguished, but proceeds on the assumption that Fudge does not hold this (Peterson, *Two Views*, pp. 176-7).

> It is essential to establish the fact that Christ *died* on Calvary – truly *died*. And no inner or real self, or being, *as a separate, continuing entity*, lived on during the period between His giving up of the "ghost," or "expiring," and His resurrection on the "third day."[80]

I think that annihilationists are correct that the doctrine of penal substitution entails the extinction of Christ's human nature. However, I will argue that this understanding of Christ's death results in unorthodox doctrines of the incarnation and the resurrection, and these constitute strong grounds for rejecting the annihilationist doctrine of hell.

The implication for the incarnation is that if Christ's human nature was extinguished at death then the incarnation ceased at that point. This, it can be argued, contradicts Chalcedonian Christology. John Cooper summarises the teaching of the Council of Chalcedon on the inseparability of the two natures after the incarnation, and then points out the implication of holding that Christ's human nature was extinguished on the cross.

> *Now if the extinction – re-creation account of Jesus' resurrection is true, then the teaching of Chalcedon is false.* The two natures of Christ are separable and were in fact separated between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. The human being Jesus completely ceased to exist... So the divine-human person Jesus Christ did not exist for the interim.[81]

The traditional understanding of the death of Christ is that his human body and soul were separated, and that this does not constitute a cessation of the incarnation. Peterson draws the conclusion that he believes annihilationists should make:

> I conclude: instead of Fudge's appeal to systematic theology strengthening his case for Conditionalism, it weakens it considerably. Indeed, to hold that Jesus' humanity was annihilated on the cross brings one into conflict with Chalcedonian Christology. Such a prospect ought to cause conditionalists to re-examine their views, for the Bible teaches

---

[80] Froom, *Conditionalist* (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1965), vol. 1, p. 377 [italics original].

[81] John Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting. Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), pp. 144-5. See also R. A. Peterson, 'The Hermeneutics of Annihilationism: The Theological Method of Edward Fudge', *Presbyterion* 21.1 (1995), p. 27; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1941), p. 339.

> that Christ did suffer the pains of hell, but not as they are conceived by Annihilationists.[82]

The implications for the resurrection are several. First, if Christ's human nature was extinguished at death then re-creation is required rather than resurrection. Resurrection is impossible after an annihilationist hell since there is nothing left to resurrect. Gerstner states this objection succinctly: 'God can't raise what is not there to raise.'[83] Cooper, in the quotation above, refers to 'the extinction – re-creation account of Jesus' resurrection'. Morey concludes, 'If [Annihilationists] are consistent, they will have to end up denying the bodily resurrection of Christ as do the Jehovah's Witnesses.'[84] Therefore if Christ was extinguished he cannot have been resurrected. Conversely, since the New Testament witnesses to the resurrection of Christ's body he cannot have been extinguished.

Second, there is a further difficulty with respect to the soul: even if something extinguished *can* be said to be resurrected, there is no doctrine in the New Testament of the resurrection of the *soul* of Christ. Gerstner makes this point in a comment on John 2:19:

> If the soul had perished with the death of the body, as [P. E.] Hughes assumes, it would have perished permanently because the soul, according to the Annihilationists, has no independent existence apart from the body... Our text refers to the resurrection of Christ's body, not His soul,

---

82 Peterson, *Hermeneutics*, p. 27. Fudge offers a response to Peterson's arguments from the atonement, and states that, 'Perhaps the most extreme of Peterson's red herrings is his argument based on the Council of Chalcedon's statement known as the Definition of the Union of the Divine and Human Natures in the Person of Christ (issued in the year 451)' (Fudge, *Two Views*, p. 205, in section pp. 204-7). Fudge's main argument seems to be that Peterson is wrong to rest an argument on anything but Scripture, and in doing so has been overly influenced by fallible human logic, yet he does not directly refute the points that Peterson has made.

83 Gerstner, *Repent*, p. 92.

84 Morey, *Death*, p. 102. Morey also argues that if Jesus suffered extinction then his body would have ceased to exist at the moment of his death, and not simply cease to be animated: 'If the Annihilationists were right, then Christ should have disintegrated on the cross and would have ceased to exist in body and soul' (*Death*, p. 102). He also notes that this is another conclusion drawn by the Jehovah's Witnesses (*Death*, p. 102). Therefore there could have been no deposition or entombment of Christ's body.

> which according to Hughes, must be gone forever since no re-creation of the soul is mentioned in the text.[85]

However, mortalists have argued that the soul as well as the body of the dead would be resurrected. Therefore while annihilationists need to account for the re-creation of Christ's soul, there is at least one, albeit minority, position which evangelicals could appeal to.

Third, and related to the issue of the incarnation, for the Annihilationist the first Easter morning marked a new incarnation, since Christ would now be taking to himself newly-created flesh. Peterson also makes this point, although confusingly he talks about 'resurrected flesh' rather than 're-created flesh' following extinction:

> Furthermore if Jesus were annihilated on Calvary, and his natures separated because his humanity ceased to exist, then his resurrection constituted another incarnation. This incarnation would differ from the first in that this time the Word would take to himself resurrected flesh. Notwithstanding, it would be a second incarnation.[86]

Robert Anderson also made this point in the nineteenth century: 'So we say if *the Man* Christ Jesus did not rise from the dead a wholly *new* being was called to life at the resurrection.'[87]

In conclusion, on the premise of the link between the atonement and hell that is held in this debate, there are significant difficulties for the annihilationist position which I believe are great enough to conclude that Annihilationism is an unacceptable position for an Evangelical.

Of course many annihilationists argue that the cross wasn't a traditionalist hell. John Wenham notes that,

> Many stress that on the cross Jesus suffered the pains we deserve. But, though he suffered physical torture, the utter dereliction of separation from the Father, and death, he did not suffer endless pain.[88]

---

[85] Gerstner, *Repent*, p. 44. Gerstner is inaccurate to state that all annihilationists reject the possibility of the independent existence of the soul. See under '1. The Immortality of the Soul' above.

[86] Peterson, *Hermeneutics*, p. 27.

[87] Robert Anderson, *Human Destiny: After Death – What?* (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1913), p. 95, footnote [italics original].

[88] Wenham, *Case*, p. 185; see also Atkinson, *Life*, p. 103.

However, the classic traditionalist response is that Christ did not need to suffer endless pain to make substitution, since he was able to bear the infinite punishment of hell in a finite period of time because of his divine nature.[89] The most common version of the argument uses what I call a 'divine multiplier' whereby the sufferings of Christ in his human nature are held to be of infinite value because of the union with the divine nature. To this, annihilationists have tended to respond that the argument is unduly speculative.[90] However, it has no objectionable doctrinal consequences, and a defence of Traditionalism at this point is not essential to a refutation of Annihilationism.

CONCLUSION

I have examined each of the main doctrinal arguments in the literature, and I have concluded that none are as decisive as many annihilationists believe.

The argument from the immortality of the soul is not decisive, even if it has been influential.

Under the argument from justice I argued that the annihilationist hell is actually a finite punishment, and might be defended from a collapse into a form of purgatory if it can be argued it is a finite punishment with permanent consequences. The chief remaining doctrinal task for annihilationists would be to demonstrate that the 'classic' argument for an infinite hell as a just punishment for sin against an infinite God is not successful. I also concluded that the claim that God is unloving turns on the argument about the justice of hell.

The argument about dualism is, I believe, the most significant of all the annihilationist arguments when formulated in terms of a dualism of continuing sin. I think that annihilationists have served to expose a damaging weakness in the traditional view at this point. However, I argued that Annihilationism has its own temporary dualism. I suggested that a modified Traditionalism, in which the damned continue to suffer but cease to sin, would offer a more satisfactory response to this problem.

Finally I argued that the link with the atonement is well grounded and raises major objections to Annihilationism which are sufficient for its rejection by evangelicals.

---

[89] See, for example, Grudem, *Systematic*, pp. 577-8.

[90] See, for example, Fudge, *Fire*, pp. 232-3.