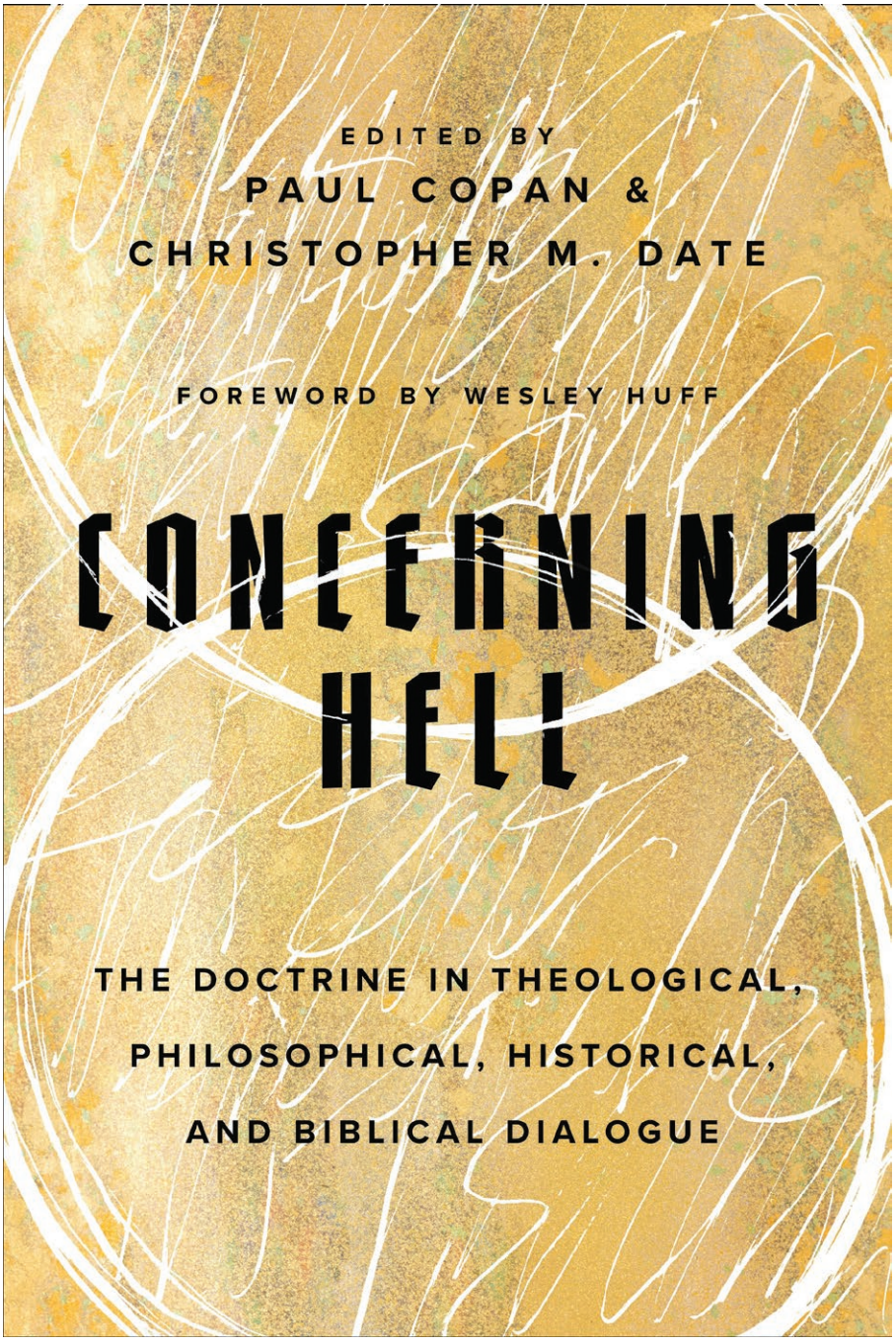

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1

INTRODUCTION

WHY ANOTHER BOOK ON HELL?

Paul Copan and Christopher M. Date

"What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun" (Eccles 1:9). So laments the frustrated author of Ecclesiastes, expressing a sentiment likely shared by evangelicals today whenever another book on hell is published. In the past forty years, Christian authors and publishers have released at least as many books on the fate of the finally impenitent, constituting a veritable glut of literature on the topic.[1] Many of these books present challenges to the historically dominant view of hell and promote controversial alternatives.[2] Still,

[1]Roughly forty years ago, Edward William Fudge published his groundbreaking defense of conditional immortality and annihilationism, *The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of Final Punishment* (Providential, 1982), which to this day remains the seminal book on the topic, now in its third edition (Cascade, 2011). Many books published since then have directly responded to Fudge's, e.g., Robert A. Morey, *Death and the Afterlife* (Bethany House, 1984); John H. Gerstner, *Repent or Perish* (Soli Deo Gloria, 1990); John Blanchard, *Whatever Happened to Hell?* (Evangelical Press, 1993); Robert A. Peterson, *Hell on Trial: The Case for Eternal Punishment* (Presbyterian & Reformed, 1995); Larry Dixon, *The Other Side of the Good News: Confronting the Contemporary Challenges to Jesus' Teaching on Hell* (Christian Focus, 2003); Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, eds., *Hell Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents Eternal Punishment* (Zondervan, 2004); Kenneth D. Boa and Robert M. Bowman Jr., *Sense and Nonsense About Heaven and Hell* (Zondervan, 2007).

[2]E.g., Fudge, *Fire That Consumes*; David J. Powys, *"Hell": A Hard Look at a Hard Question; The Fate of the Unrighteous in New Testament Thought* (Paternoster, 1997); Gregory MacDonald [Robin A. Parry], *The Evangelical Universalist*, 2nd ed. (Cascade, 2012); Bradley Jersak, *Her Gates Will Never Be Shut: Hope, Hell, and the New Jerusalem* (Wipf & Stock, 2009); Sharon L. Baker, *Razing Hell: Rethinking Everything You've Been Taught About God's Wrath and Judgment* (Westminster John Knox, 2010); Rob Bell, *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived* (HarperOne, 2011); J. Gregory Crofford, *The Dark Side of Destiny: Hell Re-Examined*

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most evangelicals continue to believe what the overwhelming majority of Christians have believed for at least a millennium and a half, namely that the resurrected lost will suffer miserably forever in hell.[3] One might therefore reasonably conclude that yet another book on hell—especially one like the present volume, in which the dominant view is again challenged—is just another example of "vanity and a chasing after wind" (Eccles 1:14).

Understandable though such a conclusion would be, it would nevertheless be premature, for an increasing number of evangelicals are in fact embracing nuanced variations of the dominant view of hell, if not outright alternatives to it. Tom Wright thinks the damned will indeed suffer in hell forever but grow increasingly inhuman until they no longer bear the image of God, something like the transformation of Sméagol into Gollum in *The Lord of the Rings*.[4] Shawn Bawulski likewise believes eternal torment awaits lost humanity, but he argues they will be reconciled to God, inasmuch as they will submit to God and cease to sin.[5] Preston Sprinkle recently abandoned the doctrine of eternal torment altogether, after publishing a very popular book in its defense just a few years earlier.[6] At roughly the same time, Terrance Tiessen likewise left the traditional view of hell behind, having not long ago defended it in a respected, academic theological dictionary.[7] It seems, then, that while most Christians remain unmoved by the

(Wipf & Stock, 2013); Kim Papaioannou, *The Geography of Hell in the Teaching of Jesus: Gehenna, Hades, the Abyss, the Outer Darkness Where There Is Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth* (Pickwick, 2013); J. Webb Mealy, *The End of the Unrepentant: A Study of the Biblical Themes of Fire and Being Consumed* (Wipf & Stock, 2013); Christopher M. Date et al., eds., *Rethinking Hell: Readings in Evangelical Conditionalism* (Cascade, 2014); Christopher M. Date and Ron Highfield, eds., *A Consuming Passion: Essays on Hell and Immortality in Honor of Edward Fudge* (Pickwick, 2015); James S. Spiegel, *Hell and Divine Goodness: A Philosophical-Theological Inquiry* (Cascade, 2019).

[3]This is not to say that the overwhelming majority of Christians have agreed on all the details of hell's everlasting misery, such as whether it will involve literal fire, whether those who suffer there will continue to sin and rebel against God, etc.

[4]N. T. Wright, *For All the Saints? Remembering the Christian Departed* (SPCK, 2003), 44-45.

[5]Shawn Bawulski, "Reconciliationism, a Better View of Hell: Reconciliationism and Eternal Punishment," *JETS* 56, no. 1 (2013): 123-38.

[6]Preston Sprinkle, "Bearing the Curse of Hell" (paper presented at Rethinking Hell Conference, Richardson, TX, March 9, 2018), https://youtu.be/mRI_poLkOms; see also Francis Chan and Preston Sprinkle, *Erasing Hell: What God Said About Eternity, and the Things We've Made Up* (David C. Cook, 2011).

[7]Terrance L. Tiessen, "My Long Journey to Annihilationism," in Date and Highfield, *Consuming Passion*, 17-31; cf. Tiessen, "Hell," in *Global Dictionary of Theology: A Resource for the Worldwide Church*, ed. William A. Dyrness and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen (IVP Academic, 2008), 372-76.

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past half-century's torrent of literature challenging traditional notions of hell, it has nevertheless prompted a few changes in course.

One of the latest and most noteworthy changes of mind is that of infamously former Christian and eminent New Testament scholar Bart Ehrman. In his recent book on the afterlife, Ehrman unsurprisingly argues that the Bible contradicts itself on various issues related to the afterlife. In light of the growing body of literature defending alternatives to eternal conscious punishment, what *is* surprising is that Ehrman seems to think the biblical authors all anticipate the unrighteous finally dying and ceasing to exist—that they will be annihilated. He claims that most Old Testament writers expect this to be the fate of sinners and saints alike; that Daniel envisions a bodily resurrection of many, the righteous unto endless life and the unrighteous unto annihilation; that Jesus warned the same fate awaits the wicked; that Paul did likewise; and that even the hellish imagery in the book of Revelation symbolizes the final annihilation of God's enemies.[8] Surely the significance cannot be overstated: This unbelieving scholar, so notorious for arguing that biblical authors frequently contradict one another (as human writers are wont to do, apart from divine superintendence), seems nevertheless convinced that they agree the finally impenitent will one day be no more.

Proving that Christians at the *popular* level also continue talking about hell and changing their minds, actor and evangelical Christian speaker, filmmaker, and activist Kirk Cameron recently announced he was beginning to lean toward conditional immortality and annihilationism. In December 2025, Cameron revealed his tentative change of mind on his popular YouTube channel.[9] This sparked widespread controversy in the global Christian community and prompted much criticism, to which Cameron responded in a follow-up video.[10] Combined, these videos had

[8]Bart D. Ehrman, *Heaven and Hell: A History of the Afterlife* (Simon & Schuster, 2020), 86-88, 123, 160, 165-66, 188-89, 225, 227-28. Ehrman acknowledges that, in Jesus' story of Lazarus and the rich man (Lk 16:19-31), the latter is *depicted* as suffering ongoing torment in the afterlife (202-3). However, he takes the story to be an imaginative parable that is not meant to be a literal description of reality (199).

[9]Kirk Cameron, "Are We Wrong About Hell? | The Kirk Cameron Show Ep 86," YouTube, 39:33, December 3, 2025, www.youtube.com/watch?v=_RflbA8Vt_Y&t.

[10]Kirk Cameron, "Did I Change My Mind? | The Kirk Cameron Show Ep 90," YouTube, 16:22, December 17, 2025, www.youtube.com/watch?v=7NrwM3Qy-5w.

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already been viewed over a half million times a month later, when Cameron recorded a highly anticipated and sponsored roundtable panel discussion featuring (among others) the editors of this volume.[11] The intramural hell debate shows no signs of petering out, with the learned and laity alike continuing to study and change their minds.

Several advances in biblical and historical scholarship may help explain such contemporary changes of mind and justify ongoing publication on the topic of hell. Research into intertestamental Jewish literature has revealed a seeming diversity of views among Jesus' contemporaries, some of them believing in the eventual annihilation of the damned, others their everlasting conscious punishment.[12] Naturally, this raises the question, Which intertestamental writings do those of the New Testament most resemble? In particular, scholars are still researching the peculiarities of Jewish apocalyptic literature and publishing updated findings.[13] This can and should inform exegesis of the book of Revelation, the very namesake of the apocalyptic genre. The writings of the early church fathers, too, continue to be examined, the fruit of which may vindicate those who claim the likes of Ignatius and Irenaeus as annihilationists.[14] Alternatively, perhaps this research will end up supporting those who contend that the church has accepted the doctrine of eternal torment from the beginning.[15] Ongoing developments in the aforementioned fields and others therefore call for their ongoing application to the hell debate in publications such as the present one.

Importantly, such developments have featured throughout the deluge of hell literature in recent decades, but their potential for bearing fruit has been somewhat stymied by the limited ways in which writers and publishers have contributed to the conversation. Most books on hell are monographs, written by a single author whose specialization is in only one or two

[11]Kirk Cameron, "Hellgate: The Christian Debate We're Afraid to Have | The Kirk Cameron Show Ep 102," YouTube, 2:34:55, January 28, 2026, www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ds3UbUsIaQs.
[12]Paul R. Williamson, *Death and the Afterlife: Biblical Perspectives on Ultimate Questions* (IVP Academic, 2017), 138-39.
[13]John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 2nd ed. (Eerdmans, 1998), x.
[14]E.g., Fudge, *Fire That Consumes*, 3rd ed., 256-57, 266-67.
[15]E.g., Morey, *Death and the Afterlife*, 163-67.

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of the several fields required to do the topic justice. A handful of publications are edited collections featuring contributors from several disciplines, which is an improvement on the typical monograph format.[16] However, most monographs and multiauthor, multidisciplinary volumes equally suffer from the same deficiency: They faithfully present only one side of the debate, leaving readers—many of whom already share the authors' perspective—unexposed to thoughtful responses worthy of consideration. Popular multiple views debate books have sought to fill this gap in the literature, but each side in *these* books is represented by a single contributor with limited specialization, just like the monographs.[17] Readers therefore have nowhere to turn for a single resource that features *both* multiple disciplines *and* multiple views.

Thus, the present volume is meant to be an important first of its kind: not just multidisciplinary and not just a dialogue but a *multidisciplinary dialogue*. It presents the findings, reasoning, and conclusions of six respected Christian scholars, representing six fields of specialization, on each of two sides of the intramural hell debate. And because "one who first states a case seems right, until the other comes and cross-examines" (Prov 18:17), each scholar also offers a rebuttal to his counterpart on the other side, so readers can better evaluate each case. Of course, this book will by no means settle the debate, but its editors are confident its unique format will aid the church as it strives to achieve "the unity of the faith" (Eph 4:13).

Heaven, Hell, and the New Creation

In reading this book, keep in mind that references to heaven and hell are heuristic devices or catchphrases that refer, respectively, to the final state of the redeemed and unredeemed. More precisely, the "heaven" to which many Christians refer is the intermediate state between death and resurrection, which they think is a state of being "away from the body and at home with

[16]E.g., Morgan and Peterson, *Hell Under Fire*; Date et al., *Rethinking Hell*; Date and Highfield, *Consuming Passion*.

[17]E.g., William Crockett, ed., *Four Views on Hell* (Zondervan, 1996); Edward William Fudge and Robert A. Peterson, *Two Views of Hell: A Biblical and Theological Dialogue* (IVP Academic, 2000); Preston Sprinkle, ed., *Four Views on Hell*, 2nd ed. (Zondervan, 2016).

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the Lord," of being "with Christ," of being "in paradise" with the Lord (2 Cor 5:8; Phil 1:23; Lk 23:43). The ultimate destination is better referred to as "the new heavens and the new earth" (Is 66:22; cf. 2 Pet 3:13). The new creation began with Christ's bodily resurrection on that first Easter—what Justin Martyr called the eighth day of creation—and each believer participates in this new creation (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15).[18] At Jesus' return, the new Jerusalem (i.e., deceased believing saints in the intermediate state—"heaven") will descend to a transformed earth as "a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev 21:2). They will, with saints who remain on earth, receive immortal resurrection bodies and "reign on earth" (Rev 5:10), and God "will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them" (Rev 21:3).

On the other hand, the final state of the unbelieving is ultimately "the lake of fire" (Rev 20:14). Death and Hades are cast into this fiery lake, along with Satan and his minions as well as the resurrected lost (Rev 19:20; 20:10-15). What is the nature of this lake of fire—this alternative destiny? That is the topic of the remainder of this book.

Two (of Three) Views

Though they are often confused with each other, the debate over the nature and duration of hell is distinct from the debate over what happens to people immediately after they die. Whether people remain conscious after death, and whatever the nature of their conscious experience while dead, all orthodox Christians believe the dead will universally be brought back to life in resurrection.[19] The hell debate concerns what will happen to the unsaved *after* resurrection, not what anyone experiences *prior* to it in what theologians, after all, call the intermediate (not final) state.

Theologians have promoted a diverse assortment of ways to think about hell, but they are all variations of three basic views competing for acceptance by Christians. Locating them at the corners of a triangle reveals that each view affirms something denied by the other two. The triangle graphic

[18]Justin, *Dial.* 41, 138.

[19]This is true of both a- and postmillennialists, on the one hand, who believe the saved and lost will rise together, and premillennialists, on the other hand, who believe the saved will be raised a thousand years before the rest of the dead.

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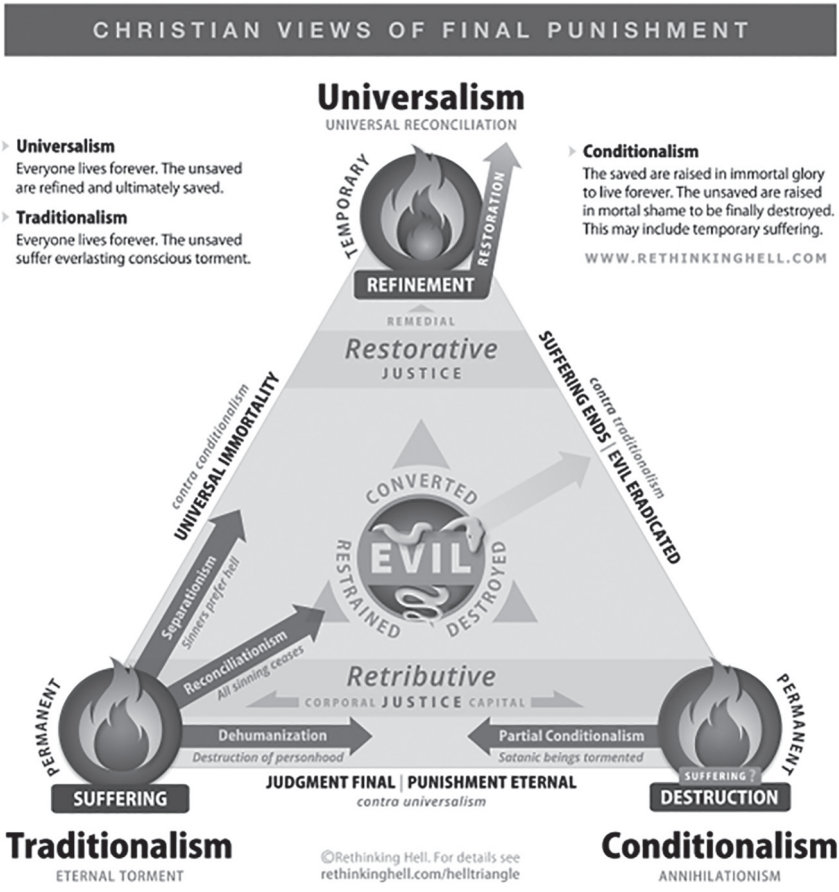
presented by the ministry Rethinking Hell helpfully illustrates this, and it further captures some of the diversity of thought within each view.



Source: Peter Grice, "'Hell Triangle'—Christian Views of Final Punishment," *Rethinking Hell*, April 7, 2016, www.rethinkinghell.com/hell-triangle. Used by permission.

Traditionalism. Because most Christians, past and present, have believed in the doctrine of *eternal torment* or *eternal conscious punishment*, it is often called *traditionalism*. According to this historically dominant view, when the dead are resurrected—saved and lost alike—their risen bodies will all be rendered immortal and they will live forever thereafter. Having been raised, the saved will go on to enjoy the blissful presence of God and the fellowship of his people for all eternity, but the lost will live and suffer

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in hell forever, isolated from God and his kingdom. Hell, then, is not a place where disembodied spirits or souls suffer forever; it is where resurrected immortals will live everlastingly in a miserable condition called death.

Some modern traditionalists, perhaps thinking their forebears should have exercised more care with their terminology, argue that the bodies of the risen lost will not be properly immortal, even though they will live physically forever.[20] The traditionalist coeditor of this volume, for example, thinks it is more technically accurate to say *believers* will rise with immortal resurrection bodies, but *unbelievers* will be raised with merely physical bodies that endure everlastingly.[21] Yet not all modern traditionalists are so reluctant to ascribe immortality to the resurrected bodies of the lost. In his debate with conditionalist Edward Fudge, traditionalist Robert Peterson writes, "I believe in the immortality of human beings (united in body and soul after the resurrection of the dead) because the Bible teaches that there will be 'eternal punishment' for the lost."[22] Traditionalist Don Carson points out that the Bible never explicitly states the bodies of the risen lost will be mortal, as conditionalists argue they will.[23] And traditionalist John Gerstner insists that "a holy and just God must make the sinner's body and soul immortal in order that he receive his deserved punishment."[24] Modern traditionalists thus differ somewhat on this detail of whether *immortal* rightly characterizes the risen lost.

Traditionalists differ on many of the details of hell, in fact. Contemporary believers in *separationism* argue that hell is self-imposed—locked, as it were, from the inside, its torments largely psychospiritual and self-induced.[25] Traditionalists who espouse belief in *reconciliationism* think everyone will be reconciled to God, but in the case of the lost, only in that they willingly

[20]In his 2013 debate with the conditionalist coeditor of this volume, traditionalist Phil Fernandes said, "There may have been some traditionalists that were a little sloppy in their terminology." Rethinking Hell, "Chris Date and Phil Fernandes Debate Hell," YouTube, 2:49:18, October 8, 2013, www.youtube.com/watch?v=PaPz33dVPvc.

[21]See also Blanchard, *Whatever Happened to Hell?*, 216; and Dixon, *Other Side of the Good News*, 94.

[22]Fudge and Peterson, *Two Views of Hell*, 88-89.

[23]D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism*, 15th anniv. ed. (Zondervan, 2011), 534-35.

[24]Gerstner, *Repent or Perish*, 72.

[25]E.g., C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (1940; repr., HarperOne, 2001), 129-30.

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submit to God and accept their unending punishment.[26] Advocates of *dehumanization* suggest the damned will grow less and less human, eventually ceasing to bear the image of God altogether but remaining consciously separated from God forever.[27] Such differences notwithstanding, these variations of eternal torment all include belief that the risen lost will be immortal, or at least endure everlastingly, living forever in hell.

This belief in the universal immortality (or "immortality") of resurrected humanity enjoys extremely historic pedigree. As long ago as the late second century AD, Tatian of Adiabene assured readers that, after death, humans "receive the immortal with enjoyment, or the painful with immortality," and Athenagoras of Athens applied Paul's language of resurrected immortality in 1 Corinthians 15:54 to the saved and unsaved alike.[28] Two and a half centuries later, Augustine of Hippo said the quality of immortality, presently exhibited only by the immaterial soul, will also be exhibited by the resurrected bodies of the damned.[29] Fast-forward to the medieval period, and Anselm of Canterbury insisted it was irrational to think guilty souls could ever die; and like Augustine before him, Thomas Aquinas thought the soul's immortality would be communicated to the risen bodies of both the good and the evil.[30] In another three hundred years, the Reformer John Calvin denied that the risen wicked would ever die.[31] Jonathan Edwards did likewise two centuries later.[32] In the mid-nineteenth century, Charles Spurgeon attempted to explain how Christ could bear humanity's punishment on the cross and die when humanity "was condemned to live forever in hell."[33] To this day, traditionalists from C. S. Lewis to Wayne Grudem all teach that the resurrected lost will live forever in hell.[34] This

[26]E.g., Bawulski, "Reconciliationism, a Better View of Hell."
[27]E.g., Wright, *For All the Saints?*, 44-45.
[28]Tatian, *Address to the Greeks* 14 (*ANF* 2:71); Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection of the Dead* 18 (*ANF* 2:159).
[29]Augustine, *Civ.* 21.3.2 (*NPNF* 1/2:453-4).
[30]Anselm, *Monologion* 71; Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I.97.3.
[31]John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 3.25.9.
[32]Jonathan Edwards, *The Salvation of All Men Strictly Examined* (Boston, 1824), 331-32.
[33]Charles Haddon Spurgeon, "Sermon XIII: The Death of Christ," in *Sermons of Rev. C. H. Spurgeon*, 4th series (New York, 1883), 217.
[34]C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (HarperCollins, 1972), 74; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Zondervan Academic, 2020), 803. See also John

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collective testimony, from these and many others of the brightest Christian thinkers throughout church history, should surely give doubters pause.

Biblically, traditionalism is thought by its defenders to be the clear teaching of several Old Testament and New Testament texts. Daniel predicts that the unrighteous will rise "to shame and everlasting contempt" (Dan 12:2), which is alleged by traditionalists to require that the risen wicked will remain alive forever. Isaiah describes an eschatological scene of judgment, saying of those who rebel against God, "their worm shall not die, [and] their fire shall not be quenched" (Is 66:24; cf. Mk 9:48), and some think this means these rebels will forever provide the worm and fire with food and fuel. Jesus warns of punishment that is as "eternal" as eschatological life (Mt 25:46), and if this punishment is assumed to consist of consciously experienced pain, then those sentenced to it must remain alive forever to experience it. Most graphic and explicit are scenes in the Apocalypse of John, which depicts the wicked suffering fiery torment for all eternity (Rev 14:9-11; 20:10-15). Traditionalists are convinced that these and other texts are interpreted most faithfully as supporting the doctrine of eternal torment or conscious punishment in hell.

Theologically, many traditionalists argue for their view from the infinitude of God and the doctrine of Christ's substitutionary atonement. God is of limitless, inestimable greatness, so any sin against him merits an infinite penalty.[35] Confirming this, God became man to suffer the infinite consequences of sin, for no ordinary human could exhaust those consequences in their own suffering.[36] Moreover, if the finally impenitent will be

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MacArthur Jr., *Revelation 12–22*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Moody, 2000), 274; Robert A. Peterson, "A Traditionalist Response to John Stott's Arguments for Annihilationism," *JETS* 37, no. 4 (1994): 566.

[35]Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I-II.87.4; John Blanchard, *Whatever Happened to Hell?* (Evangelical Press, 1993), 204-5, 224; Denny Burk, "Eternal Conscious Torment," in Sprinkle, *Four Views on Hell*, 19-20; Gerstner, *Repent or Perish*, 77; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1416; Morey, *Death and the Afterlife*, 242; Peterson, *Hell on Trial*, 133; David F. Wells, "Everlasting Punishment," *Christianity Today*, March 20, 1987, 42.

[36]Shawn Bawulski, "The Fire That Reconciles: Theological Reflections on the Doctrine of Eternal Punishment, with Special Consideration of Annihilationism and Traditionalism" (PhD thesis, University of St Andrews, 2012), 111-12; Fudge and Peterson, *Two Views of Hell*, 175; Gerstner, *Repent or Perish*, 85-86, 161-62; Morey, *Death and the Afterlife*, 103; Peterson, *Hell on Trial*, 133; Wells, "Everlasting Punishment," 42.

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destroyed such that they cease to exist altogether, Jesus could not have borne that fate in place of sinners without temporarily rendering the Trinity a binity or rending the hypostatic union of his human and divine natures.[37] If Jesus did *not* bear that fate, though, then that cannot be what awaits the damned who obstinately refuse to appropriate his atoning work as substitute. Only everlasting conscious punishment is therefore compatible with the work of Jesus as substitute—or so the argument goes.

Traditionalists also offer philosophical, historical, and pastoral reasons for accepting their view. If God is infinitely holy, then any sin against an infinitely holy God must merit an infinite penalty that can never be exhausted, even after a trillion years of suffering in hell. In light of traditionalism's aforementioned historical pedigree, if any alternative is true, then "the Spirit of truth," who Jesus promised would "guide you into all the truth" (Jn 16:13), has failed miserably to do so. And if sinners are told that anything less severe than eternal torment awaits those who reject Christ, then many of them will happily accept it rather than turn to him. The comprehensive case for traditionalism, of which the foregoing has been a mere sampling, must not be dismissed haphazardly.

Conditionalism. Short for the phrase *conditional immortality*, *conditionalism* maintains that only those who meet the condition of being saved will be raised immortal and live forever. It is in this way, primarily, that it differs from its alternatives, which affirm the universal immortality of resurrected humanity. On the darker side of the proverbial coin, the lost, having been raised still mortal, will die again in hell and remain dead forever. If they had nonphysical spirits or souls that remained conscious after the *first* death, these will be destroyed with their bodies in the *second* death. This final, everlasting death will therefore entail the total destruction of whole persons, for which reason conditionalism is sometimes called *annihilationism*.

Like traditionalists, conditionalists disagree with each other concerning the particulars of their shared view. Most call their view conditionalism or

[37]Bawulski, "Fire That Reconciles," 121-30; Fudge and Peterson, *Two Views of Hell*, 177. Which is entailed depends on whether Jesus ceased to exist in both human and divine natures, or only in the former.

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annihilationism, but some think the phrase *terminal punishment* best reflects what they believe.[38] Some see death as the fundamental punishment of hell and think any torment experienced by the damned will be caused by the means of their execution.[39] Others, however, locate final punishment in the torment itself and think a just proportion thereof will eventually culminate in death.[40] Whereas most conditionalists believe Satan and demons will be destroyed in hell with unredeemed humanity, representatives of what might be called *partial conditionalism* think demonic beings (but not human ones) will instead be tormented forever.[41] Whatever their differences, conditionalists of all stripes agree that unsaved human beings will be raised mortal and die in hell, in both body and soul, never to live or experience anything ever again.

Conditionalists acknowledge that their view has been in the extreme minority, at least since the time of Augustine, but they are convinced that the earliest church fathers shared their view. A half-century before Tatian and Athenagoras said the risen bodies of the damned will be immortal, Clement of Rome included immortality as one among many divine gifts promised only to God's people.[42] At roughly the same time, Ignatius of Antioch taught that Christ died to secure immortality for his church and urged people not to perish and forsake this gift.[43] Still predating Tatian and Athenagoras, the *Didache* instructs catechumens to pray after eating and thank God for "immortality, which Thou madest known to us through Jesus," and the *Epistle of Barnabas* warns that one who does not walk in the judgments of the Lord "shall be destroyed with his works."[44] Irenaeus of Lyons, a contemporary of Tatian and Athenagoras, said the unsaved reject God's gift of "continuance" and "length of days for ever and ever."[45] Conditionalists therefore think they are following in the footsteps

[38]E.g., John G. Stackhouse Jr., "Terminal Punishment," in Sprinkle, *Four Views on Hell*, 61-81.
[39]E.g., Fudge, *Fire That Consumes*, 3rd ed., 374.
[40]E.g., Stackhouse, "Terminal Punishment," 64.
[41]E.g., David R. Reagan, *Eternity: Heaven or Hell?* (Lamb and Lion Ministries, 2010), 115-16.
[42]*1 Clem.* 35.
[43]Ign. *Eph.* 17.
[44]*Didache* 10.2 (*ANF* 7:380); *Barn.* 21 (*ANF* 1:149).
[45]Irenaeus, *Haer.* 2.34.3 (*ANF* 1:411-2).

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of the Protestant Reformers, who were willing to slough off what they saw as centuries of accumulated, unbiblical tradition in favor of what they were convinced the earliest church fathers taught.

Also like the Reformers, conditionalists feel compelled to reject the historically dominant view in favor of what they think Scripture clearly teaches. After Adam and Eve sin, God revokes their access to the tree of life so they cannot "eat and live forever" (Gen 3:22); and because only the citizens of new Jerusalem are depicted as having access to this tree in the eschaton (Rev 22:2), conditionalists think only the saved will be immortal and live forever. John says the Son was given "that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (Jn 3:16), right after Jesus compares himself to the serpentine statue that literally saved the lives of Israelites who had been bitten by otherwise fatally venomous snakes (Jn 3:14; cf. Num 21:9). Paul writes, "The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 6:23), suggesting that immortality and everlasting life await only believers. Conditionalists think Jesus could not be clearer when he warns his disciples to "fear the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Mt 10:28). Indeed, some conditionalists insist that the Bible teaches their view as clearly as it does just about anything else.[46]

As for theology, conditionalists appeal to the same thing traditionalists do: the substitutionary, atoning work of Christ. No, Jesus did not cease to exist when he died on the cross, *but he did die*. Importantly, the Bible seems to identify his substitutionary work primarily with his death (e.g., Mt 20:28; Mk 10:45; Jn 10:11; Rom 5:8), not his pain. Consequently, conditionalists contend that death must be the fate awaiting the damned in hell, not immortality and enduring life. In the estimation of conditionalists, the punishment traditionally thought to await the damned in hell could not be more *unlike* the death Jesus bore in the place of sinners.

Besides these biblical and theological arguments, conditionalists appeal to philosophical, historical, and pastoral considerations. If the damned will

[46]E.g., Glenn A. Peoples, "Sure as Hell: Is Scripture Really Clear About Final Punishment?," *Rethinking Hell*, February 17, 2016, https://rethinkinghell.com/2016/02/17/sure-as-hell/.

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never experientially exhaust their infinite punishment in hell, then justice will never be fully satisfied, but if they pay their penalty with their lives on the day of judgment, then there will be no injustices left to remedy. Conditionalists think their view was believed by the earliest church fathers, while the rise and popularity of traditionalism thereafter is owing to the influence of unbiblical, Platonic philosophy. And it seems unlikely that anyone who would embrace Christ for fear of eternal torment would fail to do so if the alternative were everlasting death, but either way, many who *reject* Christ claim to do so *because* of what they see as the absurdity of the traditional hell. At face value, then, the comprehensive case for conditionalism deserves as much careful consideration as the one for traditionalism.

Universalism. Variously known as *universalism*, *universal salvation*, and *universal reconciliation*, this third Christian view of hell posits that all human beings will eventually repent, exercise saving faith in Christ, and thereby be rescued from hell or avoid it entirely. Universalists share with traditionalists a belief in universal human immortality, for the risen lost will live as long as it takes to be saved. However, universalists share with conditionalists a belief that all suffering will end and that all evil will be eradicated, albeit by means of conversion rather than annihilation. And contrary to both traditionalism and conditionalism, universalists deny that the punishment for sin meted out in (or by means of) hell will be everlasting.

Universalism is often unfairly associated with liberalism and equated with outright pluralism. Some universalists are indeed liberals or pluralists and appear to think all go to heaven when they die, regardless of what they did or believed in life. However, self-identifying *evangelical* universalists—a label many *other* evangelicals would consider to be oxymoronic—typically argue that those who fail to embrace Christ and be forgiven in the here and now will have the opportunity to do so on the day of judgment or thereafter in hell, and that everyone *will* eventually do so, at which point they will be saved and join the community of God's redeemed people.[47] This sort of universalism appears to be neither liberal nor pluralistic.

[47]E.g., Robin A. Parry, "A Universalist View," in Sprinkle, *Four Views on Hell*, 116-17.

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Nevertheless, and though the case for universalism is often given less careful consideration than it deserves, it will not feature in the present volume. The number of voices in a multidisciplinary dialogue between *two* views already requires a great number of contributions. Adding voices representing a *third* position would increase the size of this book, not just linearly but exponentially.[48] Therefore, we its editors have chosen to give defenders of traditionalism and its least controversial alternative (conditionalism) the opportunity to dialogue, confident that future publications will have room for universalism.

Six Disciplines

The Protestant doctrine of *sola Scriptura* affirms that the Bible is the sole infallible authority of Christian faith and practice, but it does not deny the importance of other disciplines when it comes to accurately interpreting Scripture. The Anglican trilateral illustrates the role played by Scripture, tradition, and reason in making sense of reality, to which Wesleyans add experience in their quadrilateral.[49] However one wishes to construe the relative authority and weight of biblical exegesis and other disciplines, virtually any theological dialogue is incomplete without input from several of them. Accordingly, the present volume features dialoguing voices from six disciplines: (1) biblical theology, (2) exegesis, (3) historical theology, (4) systematic theology, (5) philosophy, and (6) pastoral theology.

Biblical theology. Consistent with evangelicalism's commitment to the supreme authority of Scripture, each side in this conversation begins with the discipline of biblical theology, looking at the big picture painted collectively by the various biblical authors. Defining biblical theology as a distinct academic discipline can be difficult, but it is best understood in this volume as being concerned "with the overall message of the whole Bible" and with its recurring "concepts and themes," seeking "to understand the

[48]Six contributors from each of two sides makes for twenty-four contributions: twelve constructive essays, plus twelve responses. An additional six contributors would require a total of fifty-four contributions: eighteen constructive essays, plus thirty-six responses.

[49]Roger E. Olson, *God in Dispute: "Conversations" Among Great Christian Thinkers* (Baker Academic, 2009), 167.

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parts in relation to the whole."[50] Notwithstanding their differences in matters of bibliology, this volume's contributors agree that God's unifying purpose and truth undergird the words penned by Scripture's many and varied human authors. It is therefore appropriate to begin a multidisciplinary dialogue such as the present one with a bird's-eye look at the Bible's overall message on matters of life, death, immortality, and final judgment.

Paul Williamson makes the biblical-theological case for eternal conscious punishment in chapter two, arguing that Scripture warns of a final punishment worse than death (in the mundane sense of the word). From the opening chapters of Genesis, Williamson argues, divine punishment characterized as "death" has always entailed more than the privation of embodied life. Indeed, it is at times endured for years by the (physically) living. Importantly, it never terminates a person's very existence. Meanwhile, Jesus' warning in Matthew 25:46 amplifies Old Testament texts that anticipate an everlasting final judgment, and other New Testament texts make clear it will be everlastingly *experienced*, inflicting misery and agony so intense and protracted that the damned would be better off dead. Williamson then offers some theological rationale justifying such a judgment and reconciling it with the substitutionary atonement of Jesus.

Glenn Peoples argues for conditional immortality from biblical theology in chapter eight, observing four recurring scriptural themes that he thinks can be explained only by conditionalism. First, the punishment for sin is displayed most clearly on the cross, whereupon Jesus died as a substitute for sinners, as foreshadowed by the sacrificial deaths of animals in the Old Testament. Second, the first human sins secured the mortality and certain deaths of Adam, Eve, and all their progeny; but the hope of resurrection and immortality, suggested in the Old Testament, is fully promised in the New Testament, and only to the redeemed. Third, God is so holy that Israelites who profaned what he sanctified were punished with death, for perfect holiness obliterates sin as unmitigated light does to darkness. Fourth, the biblical vision of eternity is one in which

[50]Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *God's Kingdom Through God's Covenants: A Concise Biblical Theology* (Crossway, 2015), 22-23.

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everything that then exists has been reconciled to God, leaving no room for sin and unredeemed sinners.

Exegesis. With the lay of the more expansive biblical terrain having been sketched using biblical theology, the case for each view turns next from breadth to depth, narrowing the focus to a few key scriptural texts, exegeted in detail. The English word *exegesis* comes from the Greek *exēgeomai*, meaning "lead out of," and it captures the idea of reading an author's intended meaning *out* of a text, as opposed to reading originally unintended meaning *into* it (*eisegesis*).[51] In this volume, exegesis is treated as distinct from biblical theology in that the tools of exegesis—semantics, syntax, literary and historical context, intertextuality, genre analysis, and so on—are here *explicitly* brought to bear. Contributions from this discipline apply these tools to a small selection of biblical passages that feature prominently in the intramural hell debate, the results of which should cohere with the broader picture presented by their counterparts in biblical theology.

In chapter three, Jim Wicker offers an exegesis of four New Testament texts that he argues indicate the damned will suffer forever in hell. Jesus' warning in Matthew, that God can "destroy" body and soul in hell (Mt 10:28), does not mean he will annihilate the damned; the parallel in Luke records no mention of destruction; so Jesus' point must be only that God is more powerful than his enemies. Meanwhile, Jesus' warning of "eternal fire" and "eternal punishment" (Mt 25:41, 46) rules out any end to either the punishment of the damned or their conscious experience of hell. Likewise, smoke can ascend from fiery torment forever (Rev 14:9-11) only if the torment goes on forever—which is explicitly said to be the case for those thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 20:10-15). Thus, Wicker contends, exegesis of these texts reveals that those sent to hell will suffer consciously there everlastingly.

In chapter nine, however, Chris Date exegetes three of Wicker's four texts and argues they in fact teach conditional immortality. Leading up to Matthew 25:41-46, Date contends, the biographer conditions readers to believe the lost will finally die and be destroyed. "Eternal fire" coheres with

[51]Stanley E. Porter and Kent D. Clarke, "What Is Exegesis? An Analysis of Various Definitions," in *Handbook to Exegesis of the New Testament*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Brill, 1997), 5, 16.

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this pattern—in intertestamental literature, everlasting fire kills and destroys—and "eternal punishment" is the penalty of death forever. Later, in a prophetic vision, John the Revelator is shown scenes depicting eternal fiery torment (Rev 14:9-11; 20:10-15). However, these leverage Old Testament and intertestamental concepts and expressions that communicated death and destruction, thereby symbolizing the final annihilation of all God's enemies. Date thus concludes that the truth of conditional immortality is hidden in plain sight, as it were, taught by the very texts most frequently cited as support for eternal torment.

Historical theology. Of course, the biblical text was not written in a vacuum; its authors were situated in time and space, their thinking influenced by their larger cultures—so doing justice to a topic such as the present one requires consideration from the field of historical theology. Often, this discipline concentrates on "the interpretation of Scripture and the formulation of doctrine by the church of the past," but the development of Christian doctrines of hell through church history is beyond the scope of this volume.[52] Rather, its contributors in this domain explore (1) what the Jewish writings between the Old and New Testaments say about final, divine punishment; (2) what was taught about the topic by Christians writing immediately after the close of the New Testament canon; and (3) what these bodies of literature suggest was meant by New Testament authors writing in the years between.

Jeffrey Bingham argues in chapter four that these bodies of literature constitute a continuous stream of Jewish and Christian teaching, according to which the unrighteous will suffer eternally in hell. Bingham begins with a close look at Irenaeus of Lyons in the second century AD, contending he taught the everlasting existence of all human souls and that one's blissful or miserable experience in the intermediate state, between death and resurrection, anticipates a similar but amplified experience forever in the eternal state, after resurrection. Bingham then looks backward in time at intertestamental Jewish literature, finding ideas such as those of Irenaeus in *1 Enoch*, 4 Ezra, Judith, the Wisdom of Solomon, and the Dead Sea Scrolls. Returning

[52]Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Zondervan, 2011), 23.

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finally to the church age, Bingham argues that Christian writers in the sub-apostolic era warned of eternal torment in hell, including Clement of Rome, Justin Martyr, Polycarp, the *Epistle of Barnabas*, and *2 Clement*.

David Instone-Brewer and Chris Date interpret the relevant history differently, identifying in chapter ten what they see as a throughline of belief in conditional immortality connecting Jewish and early Christian writings. They contend that, throughout intertestamental literature, Jewish authors warn of torment in hell that culminates in annihilation, including in texts that seem at first glance like descriptions of eternal torment. But rabbis in the school of Shammai began teaching that some Jews would go to hell only initially and thereafter be rescued to heaven. Instone-Brewer and Date propose that Jesus and sectarian Jews, in combating this novelty, emphasized the *eternal* duration of the death penalty meted out in hell: No one will get out of hell. And while the apostolic fathers followed in their footsteps, some of their successors warned instead of eternal torment, possibly misunderstanding their forebears' language of eternity as if it applied to the torments of hell.

Systematic theology. If by this point the case presented by one side of the debate seems more compelling than the other, the reader should not consider the debate won before first testing whether that case's conclusions sufficiently fit within a biblically Christian systematic theology. The discipline of systematic theology is typically defined as "asking what the *whole* Bible teaches about any subject."[53] However, here contributors are concerned with which view of hell is more consistent with what the Bible says about *other* topics. As Wayne Grudem explains, this discipline "provides one sort of check against inaccurate analysis of individual topics, for it means that all other doctrines that are treated can be compared with each topic for consistency in methodology and absence of contradictions in the relationships between the doctrines."[54] If a view of hell fails in important ways to cohere with other clear and demonstrable truths revealed in Scripture, it probably ought to be rejected.

[53]John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (P&R, 2013), 9; italics original.

[54]Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 4.

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Shawn Bawulski argues for eternal conscious punishment in chapter five, contending that a variant thereof known as reconciliationism harmonizes well with other biblical teaching and that conditionalism does not. Bawulski unpacks reconciliationism as a version of traditionalism that affirms God will finally eradicate evil and reconcile all things—not by annihilating evildoers or saving them but by defeating and eternally punishing them such that they willingly accept their judgment and forever affirm God's holiness and justice. In so doing, reconciliationism escapes some of the common objections to traditionalism from conditionalists and universalists; it coheres with divine love, for example, because everlastingly God shows grace and mercy to the damned, sustaining their ongoing being and preventing them from further sinning. But Bawulski suggests that conditionalism fails the test of systematic theology. Insisting conditionalists must believe death entails nonexistence, Bawulski argues this would mean Jesus ceased to exist in some way while dead, a proposition that violates the doctrines of the Trinity and hypostatic union of Christ's human and divine natures.

John Peckham offers a systematic case for conditional immortality in chapter eleven, arguing that it meets the standard of systematic coherence much better than the traditional view of hell. The aseity of God and the contingency of creatures, according to Peckham, suggest that those finally separated from God—the divine source of all life and contingent being—will therefore be deprived of life and being forever. Peckham further explains why this does *not* require that death necessarily entails nonexistence, such that conditionalism is compatible with any Christian view of human constitution and an intermediate state. For the same reason, it is compatible with orthodox views of Christology and the atonement. Indeed, it appears *more* consistent with them than traditionalism: The sin-consequence borne by Jesus in sinners' places, as their substitute, was the painfully inflicted privation of embodied life, not unending torment in an immortal body that never dies. Finally, Peckham argues that conditional immortality is more consistent with the character of God as perfectly good, just, and loving, and with his sovereignty and holiness in his final victory over all evil.

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Philosophy. If a view of hell is to be considered legitimately Christian, it will not *only* be faithful to Scripture, believed among the communities in which it was written and cherished, and consistent with Christian theology more broadly; it will *also* be logically coherent—which calls the reader to examine the two sides of the present debate philosophically. This is important for (at least) two reasons. First, Paul Gould and James Dew explain that "logical consistency and internal coherence are necessary conditions" for a claim to be even *possibly* true. They are not *sufficient* conditions, and a logically coherent view may nevertheless be untrue, but an incoherent one is *guaranteed* to be untrue.[55] Such a view of hell is therefore unworthy of consideration, no matter how compelling the exegetical, theological, and historical case for it may seem. Second is hell's impact on apologetics. As observed by Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen, "Increasingly in the West today, Christians are in a minority amid an often hostile culture," and "the credibility of our faith" depends "on our being able to provide a logical account of it."[56] Perhaps the most *incredible* element of the Christian faith—as popularly understood, anyway—is the doctrine of eternal conscious punishment. Tim Keller calls it "one of Christianity's most offensive doctrines"; Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli soberly assess it to be "the most difficult to defend, the most burdensome to believe and the first to be abandoned" of all Christian doctrines.[57] If Christians are to commend their faith to a skeptical and unbelieving world, they must be able to present and defend a logically coherent view of hell.

In chapter six, R. Zachary Manis argues that a variant of eternal conscious punishment, in which the endless torment of the damned is how they experience the unmitigated, loving, and life-giving presence of God, is more philosophically defensible than its alternatives. Manis begins by contending that the weight of tradition is such that a Christian should default to believing the historically dominant view of hell, and to seeking a

[55]Paul M. Gould and James K. Dew Jr., *Philosophy: A Christian Introduction* (Baker Academic, 2019), 17-18.

[56]Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *Christian Philosophy: A Systematic and Narrative Introduction* (Baker Academic, 2013), 5.

[57]Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (Riverhead, 2008), 71; Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics: Hundreds of Answers to Crucial Questions* (InterVarsity Press, 1994), 282.

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philosophical defense thereof, rather than abandon it altogether. Manis then identifies *retribution* as the tenet of all forms of the traditional view of hell, and its annihilationist alternative, that render them all incoherent: It cannot be an act of love to inflict a purely retributive punishment; therefore the Christian God, who *is* love, cannot inflict it. After exploring two popular nonretributive traditionalist models and finding them wanting, Manis presents a "divine presence model" of eternal conscious punishment. God, on this view, lovingly desiring communion with his human creatures, will finally expose them all to the fullness of his loving and vitalizing presence, knowing—*but not intending*—that it will be subjectively experienced as torment by those hardened in their hate for him.

For his part, in chapter twelve, Matthew Flannagan assesses traditional and annihilationist responses to the objection that the Bible's teaching on hell is incompatible with belief in a loving and just God, concluding that only the annihilationist response is philosophically coherent. Fundamentally, Flannagan argues, the problem with the doctrine of eternal conscious punishment is that defending its consistency with the biblical portrait of God requires intolerably radical revisions to the ways people ordinarily understand love, justice, mercy, and goodness. Flannagan then evaluates a paradigmatic defense of the view by William Lane Craig and identifies several problems with it before turning to annihilationism. He first briefly defends its faithfulness to the biblical data, and then he turns to how annihilationism answers the challenges Craig's response fails to answer satisfactorily. A loving God may sentence his beloved human creatures to death if it is merited and if sacrificing their good is necessary to secure the ongoing welfare of the rest of humankind. And while it is an everlasting punishment, it is not everlasting *suffering*; its severity is not disproportionate to the crime.

Pastoral theology. The cases for eternal conscious punishment and conditional immortality having been made on the bases of Scripture, history, theology, and philosophy, this volume's final contributors turn (mostly) away from case making to fleshing out the implications of their respective views when it comes to daily Christian living: pastoral theology. This is not

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a theologically detached approach to pastoral theology determined by pragmatism, moralism, egotism, or cynicism; it is a theologically driven approach that recognizes the dependence of behavior on theological belief.[58] And Christians' behavior will be affected by what they believe about hell. On the one hand, for example, belief that the lost will suffer forever in hell may spur a Christian to appreciate and cherish their salvation from that destiny, to thank and worship God for securing it, and with a sense of urgency to share the good news of salvation in Jesus with an unbelieving world. On the other hand, however, such a Christian may wrestle with doubt and intimacy with God, struggling to reconcile belief in a good and loving God with the belief he will condemn untold billions of humans to unending misery. If by this point readers find the case for one view of hell or the other decisive, how might they expect that view to shape their behavior and thinking? How should they strive to live out that belief?

Chip Bennett answers such questions in chapter seven for those inclined to believe Scripture teaches eternal conscious punishment. Bennett begins by discussing the need for pastors to be firm and clear in their leadership and teaching, providing their congregation with guidance on this topic rather than letting them flounder. Next, Bennett explains that Christian belief must be dictated by Scripture and not by a person's fluctuating feelings and a culture's changing sensibilities. Christians must willingly embrace the mysterious tension between God's love and his holiness as biblically revealed. Aiding in the development of a balanced spiritual formation, the traditional view of hell provokes gratitude for being spared the fate of everlasting torment; and it motivates the pursuit of maturity in Christ, an urgent desire to seek and save the lost, and the practice of praying for those who need Jesus. Traditionalist Christians must be prepared to defend their doctrine of hell, and they must not shy away from preaching it, albeit with care, thoughtfulness, vulnerability, and empathy. But they ought also to live out the truth that hell is not a doctrine of such central importance that they must divide from those who believe differently.

[58]Daniel L. Akin and R. Scott Pace, *Pastoral Theology: Theological Foundations for Who a Pastor Is and What He Does* (B&H Academic, 2017), 3-12.

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Ralph Bowles addresses the issue of pastoral theology in chapter thirteen for those convinced of conditional immortality. Bowles assesses the impact of competing views of hell through the lenses of faith, hope, and love. Concerning faith, conditionalism makes good sense of Scripture and does not burden one's conscience or provoke embarrassment, whereas traditionalism has left its adherents reluctant to openly discuss hell and drawn toward universalism as a less objectionable picture of God. When it comes to hope, conditionalism—unlike the traditional view—honors resurrection unto immortality as the central hope of the Christian faith and as *the* answer to humankind's existential fear of death, and it offers hope that one day all creation will be renewed and altogether free from any sin and evil. As for love, the traditional view of hell risks provoking only fear of a God expected to eternally torment the lost, and judgmental vindictiveness toward unbelievers; conditional immortality, by contrast, spurs love for both the God who offers eternal life and those he loves enough not to force it on them. Finally, Bowles concludes with some concrete practical recommendations to conditionalist readers.

One Invitation

Nearly forty years ago, John Stott provoked the suspicion and ire of many fellow evangelicals when he invited readers "to survey the biblical material afresh" with a mind open to "the possibility that Scripture points in the direction of annihilation."[59] Stott was to evangelicals nearly what the pope is to Roman Catholics, but his invitation led some to doubt that he was even saved.[60] John Gerstner went so far as to say hell will be more tolerable for the average damned person than it will be for Stott and other ministers who do not believe and teach eternal conscious punishment.[61] Reactions like these are simply uncalled for. We editors of the present volume, one traditionalist and one conditionalist, eschew such divisiveness and instead

[59]David L. Edwards and John Stott, *Evangelical Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue* (InterVarsity Press, 1988), 315.

[60]Lee Strobel, *The Case for Heaven: A Journalist Investigates Evidence for Life After Death* (Zondervan, 2021), 159; Gerstner, *Repent or Perish*, 57.

[61]Gerstner, *Repent or Perish*, 216.

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embrace each other as brothers in Christ. We affirm with the Evangelical Alliance that "the holding of either one of these two views of [hell] over against the other [is] neither essential in respect of Christian doctrine, nor finally definitive of what it means to be an evangelical Christian."[62] The nature and duration of hell is not a dividing line between believer and apostate, and we encourage readers to accept Stott's invitation.

Importantly, however, this is an invitation to submit to God's revelation in Scripture—whatever it teaches and whether it sits well with you or not. It is *not* an invitation to follow your heart, and Stott was not simply following *his* heart. Famously, Stott did say, "I find the concept [of eternal conscious punishment] intolerable and do not understand how people can live with it without either cauterising their feelings or cracking under the strain." *Less* famously, he added, "But our emotions are a fluctuating, unreliable guide to truth and must not be exalted to the place of supreme authority in determining it. As a committed Evangelical, my question must be—and is—not what does my heart tell me, but what does God's word say? And in order to answer this question, we need to survey the biblical material afresh."[63]

We wholeheartedly agree, and we ask you to rethink certain fixed intuitions and set aside mere feelings about hell in favor of divine revelation, a healthy reverence for the Spirit-led giants on whose shoulders you stand, and philosophical testing of your tentative conclusions. After all, God desires "worshipers [who] will worship the Father in spirit *and truth*" (Jn 4:23), worship that requires a careful consideration of a multidisciplinary dialogue like this one.

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[62]David Hilborn, ed., *The Nature of Hell: A Report by the Evangelical Alliance Commission on Unity and Truth Among Evangelicals (ACUTE)* (Paternoster, 2000), 134.

[63]Edwards and Stott, *Evangelical Essentials*, 314-15. Defenders of eternal torment seem to be responsible for the fact that what Stott goes on to say is less well-known than his expression of his emotional struggle with the traditional view. After quoting said expression in their published works, traditionalists Christopher Morgan, John Piper, and Randy Alcorn all omit Stott's expression of commitment to the authority of Scripture, replacing it with an ellipsis. See Christopher W. Morgan, "Annihilationism: Will the Unsaved Be Punished Forever?," in Morgan and Peterson, *Hell Under Fire*, 196; John Piper, "The Echo and Insufficiency of Hell, Part 1," *Desiring God*, June 14, 1992, www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-echo-and-insufficiency-of-hell-part-1; and Randy Alcorn, *If God Is Good: Faith in the Midst of Suffering and Evil* (Multnomah Books, 2014), 313.

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