



The history of

# HELL

**A brief survey and resource guide**

*From the publishers of*

**CHRISTIAN  
HISTORY**



# THREE VIEWS OF HELL

## TRADITIONAL

Some people (perhaps even a majority of the human race) will not be saved. ● Each person is judged once and for all at death and given either eternal life or eternal condemnation. ● Hell is a place of endless, conscious punishment for sin. This punishment is sometimes interpreted literally (physical torment) and sometimes metaphorically (a state of being, spiritual suffering, separation from God). ● Once a person is in hell, there is no exit. ● Some versions of this view argue that there are variations in punishment depending upon the severity of a person's sins. ● Some (Calvinist) versions emphasize God's sovereignty in punishing those whom he chooses to punish, while other versions emphasize the freedom of human choice. ● The Roman Catholic view distinguishes between hell and purgatory, a place of temporary purification for those who are destined for heaven.

## CONDITIONAL IMMORTALITY OR ANNIHILATIONISM

Some people will not be saved. ● The human soul is not naturally immortal. Eternal existence is a gift of God to the redeemed. ● The unrepentant will be punished, but this period of conscious punishment will be temporary. ● At the final resurrection, the unrepentant will be destroyed and cease to exist. The biblical "fire" of hell is a consuming, rather than tormenting, fire. ● Some conditionalists believe that after death a person will receive a second chance to accept or reject God.

## RESTORATIONISM OR UNIVERSALISM

All people will eventually be saved, and God will restore the creation to perfect harmony. ● Eternal punishment contradicts the love of God, since God wills the salvation of all and has the power to overcome sin and evil. God's love is stronger than human resistance. ● If there is a hell, it is not eternal. Punishment is temporary and remedial, leading the sinner towards repentance and union with God. ● Even the devil can ultimately repent and be saved. ● Some theologians throughout history have maintained a more cautious "hopeful universalist" stance: We cannot say dogmatically that all will be saved, but neither can we deny the possibility.

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# Letter from the editors

Welcome!

Christian History Institute, publisher of *Christian History* magazine, is pleased to provide this brief survey and resource guide on the history of Christian thought about hell. The doctrine of hell has sparked considerable debate, especially since the 19th century and most recently with Michigan pastor Rob Bell's book *Love Wins*. We hope you'll find that we've done our job as historians, so that this resource provides light in a debate where there's a lot of heat.

This guide is also our first answer to the many readers of the magazine who have told us you would like to see us do more in the history of theology. Please continue to let us know how we're doing—we exist to serve you. And if you find this publication helpful and would like to order multiple copies for church or classroom use, see the letter and order form bound into center of this booklet.

Many thanks to Jennifer Trafton, who served as project editor for this guide. We congratulate and rejoice with Jennifer on her forthcoming wedding this summer.

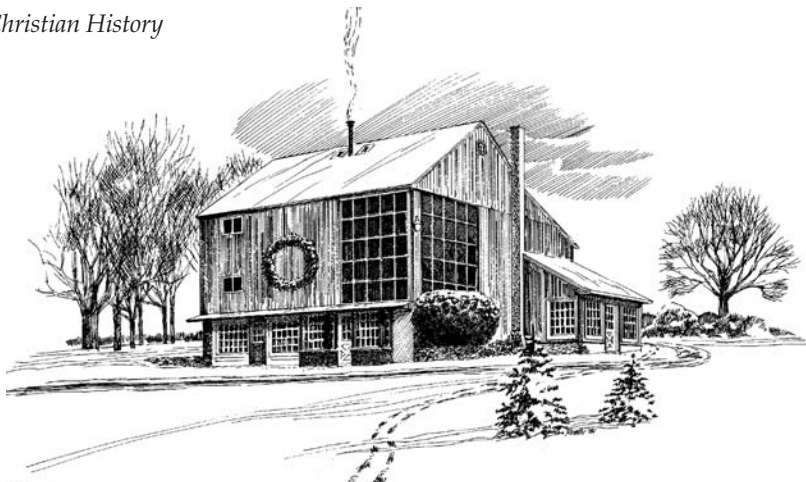
Meanwhile, our team is hard at work on issue #101 of *Christian History*, to be released this fall. The issue's theme is healthcare in the early and medieval church, and its top story is about how Christians pioneered an important social service institution: the hospital. Another topic we are strongly considering for an upcoming issue is the African Church Fathers (Tertullian, Cyprian, Athanasius, Origen, and others).

If you want to be sure to receive future CHI publications, you can check to see whether you have an account number on the back cover of this guide. If not, you can subscribe by logging on to [www.christianhistorymagazine.org](http://www.christianhistorymagazine.org) and clicking "subscribe" or by calling 1-800-468-0458.

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Yours in the renewing knowledge of our spiritual heritage,

The team at *Christian History*







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*What have Christians throughout history believed about hell? Here are some key people and their views.*

## Early Christian Texts

The Didache, or “Teaching of the Twelve Apostles,” is an anonymous text dating from the late first or early second century, making it one of the earliest non-canonical Christian texts. A central theme of the text is moral instruction, organized around the “two ways”: the “way of life” and the “way of death.” Each “way” consists of a list of actions that characterize those who follow it.

The same theme is found in the Epistle of Barnabas, another early non-canonical text. These early Christian writings affirm a close link between moral behavior and one’s eternal destiny but show little interest in the details of the eternal punishment about which they warn.

Other texts, such as the Apocalypse of Peter, go farther, providing lurid descriptions of the punishments that correspond to particular sins. Adulterers, for instance, would be punished in this way: “And there were also others, women, hanged by their hair above that mire which boiled up; and these were they that adorned themselves for adultery. And the men that were joined with them in the defilement of adultery were hanging by their feet, and had their heads hidden in the mire, and said: ‘We believed not that we should come unto this place.’” This theme would show up frequently in medieval visions of hell (including Dante’s) and also finds striking echoes in the Qur’an.

## Justin Martyr (c. 103–165)



Justin Martyr was a convert to Christianity from pagan philosophy, and his most distinctive theological contribution was the idea that the eternal Logos, the Word of God, was active in “seed” form in all people. This allowed Justin to argue that whatever is said well by pagans can properly be appropriated by Christians: “Whatever things were rightly said among all men, are the property of us Christians . . . For all the writers were able to see realities darkly through the sowing of the implanted word that was in them. For the seed and imitation imparted according to capacity is one thing, and quite another is the thing itself, of which there is the participation and imitation according to the grace which is from Him.”

While Justin was reticent about the implications of this idea for the eternal fate of pagans, his ideas about the Logos



inspired later Christian speculation about “virtuous pagans” who might somehow have access to the truth of Christ apart from the usual channels—making Justin the father of the inclusivist tradition within Christianity.

## Clement of Alexandria

(c. 150–c. 215)

Clement of Alexandria was arguably the first Christian writer to speak of the *apokatastasis*, the return of all created beings to God. He also suggested that the fire of judgment is a fire of purification rather than destruction. However, he did not develop his ideas systematically.

## Irenaeus

(late second century)



Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, is best known for his refutation of the Gnostics. The Gnostics used the proof-text “flesh and blood will not enter the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 15:50) to argue against a bodily resurrection. Irenaeus argued, in contrast, that Jesus took on human nature in order to redeem every aspect of humanity, including our physical bodies. Irenaeus described the fall as the deception of an innocent, childlike Adam and Eve by Satan. While Irenaeus believed in eternal punishment, he stressed Jesus’ redemption of humanity as a whole, with damnation as the fate only of those who chose to reject this redemption.

## Tertullian

(c. 160–c. 220 AD)



Tertullian, the fiery Christian apologist from North Africa, eloquently represented the most rigorous aspects of early Christian thought. He believed that serious post-baptismal sin could not be



forgiven and argued against infant baptism on that basis. In his writing against paganism, he noted that the eternal flame tended by the vestal virgins (aristocratic priestesses in traditional Roman religion) was an apt symbol of the fate that awaited them after death.

## Origen

(c. 185–254)



Origen was perhaps the most controversial early Christian writer on eschatology (and other doctrines as well). Deeply shaped by the traditions of Middle Platonist philosophy current in second-century Alexandria, and by the work of Clement, Origen understood the drama of salvation history as the divine initiative to restore created “minds” to the ecstatic intellectual union with God in which they were originally made. The entire physical world, in Origen’s theology, was a purgatorial discipline

created by God in order to give fallen minds the necessary stimulus to return from their state of apathy. Hell was simply an extreme form of that purgatorial discipline, and the Scriptural texts speaking of eternal punishment were benevolent deceptions by God meant to shock us into repentance. While Satan and the demons are at a disadvantage because they lack bodies, Origen expressed hope that they too would return to God in the *apokatastasis*, the final restoration of all creation. The *apokatastasis* was condemned as heretical at the Second Council of Constantinople in 553, three centuries after Origen’s death.

## Athanasius

(c. 296–373)

Athanasius, patriarch of Alexandria and staunch defender of the full divinity of Jesus, described salvation primarily in terms of restoration to union with the divine life. Since we are created from nothing, Athanasius believed, we tend to fall back into nothingness when separated from the divine life through sin. This is both the natural result of sin and a just punishment imposed by God. All aspects of human weakness and “corruption” are thus the result of our separation from the divine life. Like Irenaeus, Athanasius believed that Jesus had redeemed humanity as a whole by taking on the just punishment of our sins in his death (thus defeating death and ending its legal claim on us) and by restoring the link between human nature and the life of God. Athanasius’s understanding of “corruption” seems to imply that the wicked would eventually be annihilated, but he does not seem to have drawn this conclusion. He may instead have believed that



damnation was an endless slide toward nothingness that never quite got there—a view later suggested by C. S. Lewis.

## Gregory Nazianzen

(c. 325–389)

Gregory Nazianzen, one of the “Capadocian” theologians who helped formulate the doctrine of the Trinity, discussed Origen’s concept of the *apokatastasis* and refused to take a decisive stance for or against it, preferring to leave the question to God.

## Gregory of Nyssa

(c. 335–394)

Gregory of Nyssa, another Cappadocian, drew heavily on the work of Origen, including his doctrine of the *apokatastasis*. Gregory was fond of the image of the refining fire, which burns out the dross from the ore. While he sometimes spoke of eternal punishment, he seems to have understood this merely as a long-lasting purgatorial punishment that would eventually result in salvation. The corruption of human bodies, Gregory argues, is purged by physical death, while the corruption of the soul is purged by punishments after death.

Gregory was one of the greatest exponents of the “ransom theory,” whereby Jesus offers himself to Satan as a ransom for the souls of sinful humanity. When Satan clamps down on the “bait,” he is caught by the fishhook of Christ’s divinity and humanity is delivered. Gregory goes on to say, however, that this defeat



of Satan is not only for our good but for his, since Satan too will ultimately be restored to union with God.

## John Chrysostom

(c. 347–407)

John Chrysostom was accused of “Origenism” as part of a politically-motivated heresy investigation, but he does not seem to have held Origen’s views on the *apokatastasis*. He frequently warned of eternal punishment in his sermons. In his homilies against Judaizers, he contrasted what he saw as the “prosperity gospel” proclaimed by the Jews with the more austere (and thus more authentic) Christian teaching: “In our churches we hear countless discourses on eternal punishments, on rivers of fire, on the venomous worm, on bonds that cannot be burst, on outer darkness.”



## Jerome

(c. 347–420)

Jerome was influenced by Origen in his earlier writings and allegedly defended the view that all the baptized would eventually be saved, with only the demons and non-Christians being eternally damned. This view was rejected by Augustine, and Jerome himself turned harshly against Origen's ideas in his later years.

## Augustine of Hippo

(354–430)



Augustine, unquestionably the most influential theologian of the Western church, defended the doctrine of eternal punishment against the followers of Origen and others who held to a more "purgatorial" understanding of hell.

(Augustine also believed in some form of purgation, but he saw this as something fundamentally different from hell.) More significant, perhaps, was his doctrine of original sin and the resulting view that fallen human beings constitute a *massa damnata*, condemned as a whole for the sin of Adam and Eve which has been transmitted to them as a corruption of the will. God graciously chooses some human beings from this condemned "mass," who then share in the salvation procured by Christ when he ransomed humanity from the devil.

## Maximus the Confessor

(c. 580–662)

Maximus is best known for his defense of the doctrine that Jesus has a human will distinct from his divine will, and that the humanity of Jesus has saving importance for the redemption of human beings. Maximus's theology was deeply shaped by that of the Cappadocian Fathers including Gregory of Nyssa, and thus by Origen. Maximus used the language of *apokatastasis*, but he also warned that human beings can reject God's grace and experience "ill-being" rather than "well-being." He appears to have believed that all creation will be restored to the primal knowledge of God, but for those who have chosen to reject God this knowledge will be a source of sorrow rather than joy. However, the cosmic implications of his Christology are such that, in the end, all will return to God. The process of return will involve purification, and "ill-being" and sorrow will eventually arrive at "well-being" and joy.

# The Middle Ages

(roughly 500–1500 AD)



The medieval period saw a shift in emphasis from the early church's focus on the biblical "Last Things"—the Second Coming of Christ, general resurrection, and final judgment—to a new concentration on the afterlives of individuals. Until the 400s and even beyond, Jesus' return was still expected imminently; thus those who died in the intervening generations could be thought of as simply sleeping or awaiting the resurrection. There was not much written during this early period about the immediate fate of those who died before Jesus returned.

As the Second Coming came to seem more remote, however, Christians increasingly focused on the doctrine of the immediate judgment of each soul at death. The Book of Rev-

elation in particular began to guide Christian imagination on people's fate after death. This emphasis on the afterlife resulted in a lavishly visual and grotesque new genre of literature: the vision of the otherworldly journey, of which Dante's *Divine Comedy* represented the pinnacle. In these journeys, more words were usually lavished on the descriptions of hell than on purgatory or heaven—and the imagery included eternally burning fire, snakes, boiling kettles, fields of eternal ice, rivers of swirling sulfur, and demon-administered tortures.

Often these visionary journeys purported to show readers hell from the vantage point of a person who had died (briefly), visited the realms of the dead, and returned to tell the tale. The goal of such stories was almost always to exhort the reader or hearer to live morally on earth, avoiding the sins that condemn the damned forever.

## Anselm of Canterbury

(1033–1108)







In the development of Christian doctrine about hell, the early scholastic theologian Anselm of Canterbury is best known for arguing for the eternal timespan of punishment in hell by an analogy from feudal law. In feudalism, the severity of the punishment for an offense was determined not so much by the nature of the offense as by the relative worthiness of the one offended against. Stealing from a king resulted in a steeper punishment than stealing from a serf, for example. On this basis, Anselm concluded that a crime against God's infinite honor deserves an infinite punishment. However, since humans are finite, we can pay the penalty for our sins only by suffering for an infinite time.

This was Anselm the scholastic, clarifying a doctrine that Christians already believed by applying reason to it (his motto was "faith seeking understanding"). But at the end of his "Meditation to Arouse Fear," he showed his pastoral side (he was both an archbishop and a former abbot). There, after describing the torments of hell, he addressed the question, "Who could possibly deliver any person from this fate?" His answer: "It is he himself, he himself is Jesus. The same is my Judge between whose hands I tremble. Take heart, sinner, and do not despair. Hope in him whom you fear, flee to him from whom you have fled. . . . Jesus, Jesus, for your name's sake deal with me according to your name. . . . Have mercy, Jesus, while the time of mercy lasts, lest in the time of judgment you condemn."

# The Cathars

(11th–12th centuries)

The Cathars, a Christian sect that sprung up in France and other parts of

Europe, were dualists. They believed that earthly existence, including the human body, is evil, created not by the Christian God but by an evil god. The God whom they worshipped was a being of pure spirit who would never have stooped so low as to take on evil flesh. Thus they denied that Jesus could become incarnate and still be the son of God. They denied, too, the Christian understanding of the crucifixion and the cross as saving things. The Catholic Church saw the Cathars as dangerous heretics and persecuted them ruthlessly, even launching a crusade against them (the "Albigensian crusade").

Not surprisingly, the Cathars also rejected the traditional Christian doctrine of hell. For the Cathars, this world was the only hell (and it was hell enough, given the persecution they suffered). There was nothing to fear after death, except maybe a sort of reincarnation that some of their sect taught. Their objective was to escape from the cycle of reincarnation, to earn the right to go to heaven and avoid another term of imprisonment here in hell on earth.

# Thomas Aquinas

(1224–1274)

The great scholastic theologian Thomas Aquinas is known for several teachings related to hell. First, he argued that eternal conscious punishment was fitting for a person who rejected God in favor of temporal goods here on earth, because such a person actually showed that he *preferred* temporal goods over even eternal life with God. God is just, he reasoned, to punish that person in the same way as if he had *sinned* eternally—with



eternal punishment—such that, in the biblical phrase, he would “gain the world but lose his soul.”

Thomas also addressed the charge, which is also heard from some modern critics, that God has somehow been limited in his omnipotence if any must go to hell (thus thwarting his divine plan in creating humanity to share divine blessedness with him). He acknowledged that God’s goodness demands that all be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). But he also argued that the manifestation of God’s justice (or his hatred of sin) requires that at least some people should sin so that they may be justly punished. Thus God’s will to save all is modified by the demands of his justice and produces a compromise: He will save the elect, thus manifesting his mercy, and damn the reprobate, thus manifesting his justice.

Particularly jarring to modern sensibilities is Aquinas’s defense of the traditional doctrine that in order for the saints in heaven to “enjoy their beatitude more thoroughly and give more abun-

dant thanks,” they would be granted a ringside seat to the punishment of the damned. As with other traditional doctrines, this one was grounded in Scripture: Rev. 14:9-11 shows the wicked being tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the angels and of the Lamb (Rev. 14:9-11); in the story of Dives and Lazarus in Luke 16, Dives can see Lazarus across “the great gulf fixed,” and so it seems reasonable that Lazarus could also see Dives; and Isaiah 66:22-24 promises that the worshippers of the Lord will “go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against Him: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched.”

Aquinas also contributed the notion of a “limbo” where unbaptized infants would avoid the worst penalties of hell. Limbo was still a part of hell, because infants were still stained by original sin, but they were allowed to suffer only the absence of God and not the physical torment vividly pictured in so many medieval writings and artworks.

## Dante Alighieri (1265–1321)

No medieval treatment of hell springs to mind more readily today than Dante’s *Inferno*—the first of the three books of his *Divine Comedy*. According to the poem, one day in 1300 Dante found himself wandering in a gloomy forest. After encountering three ravenous beasts, he was met by the Latin poet Virgil, who promised to conduct him through hell and purgatory. On the evening of Good Friday, April 8, they entered the gate of hell (over which are the famous words: “Abandon hope, all ye who enter here”), and they began to travel through its successive circles. In





Dante's imaginative vision, hell is an inverted cone with its apex at the center of the earth. The upper circle is that of the Elysian Fields where the noble pagans dwell. At each deeper level the travelers see punishments for more and more heinous sins, until they reach a frozen lake in which Lucifer himself punishes the most awful sinners of all: the traitors.

In keeping with the didactic purpose of such medieval tales, Dante's otherworldly journey turns him, step by step, from his darkness and sin and back to the joyous, shining presence of God. At the end of the poem's third book, Dante glimpses the blessed saints enjoying God in heaven.

The *Inferno* is intentionally repellent in its depiction of the Christian hell. Even the sympathetic Christian reader Geoffrey Nuttall said, "If the *Inferno* were the whole poem, one could hardly avoid the conclusion that Dante had a diseased mind, obsessed with sadistic and other sexual perversions." But the denizens of Dante's hell on some level want to be

where they are. Their loves have become so disordered that they have arrived in hell of their own will.

Dante agreed with Aristotle's ancient opinion that the soul "forms" the body: people's facial expressions, gestures, and body language bear witness to what is in their hearts. So, habitual sin changes the way we look (as our parents always told us: "Don't make that face or it will stick that way"). Thus Dante had the sinners in his *Inferno* reenact forever in their bodies the very sins they had habitually practiced on earth. Those familiar with the *Chronicles of Narnia* by C. S. Lewis (a lover of Dante) will remember Eustace turning into a dragon in Narnia because he had had greedy, dragonish thoughts. This was exactly Dante's point.

Of course, as in Anselm's "Meditation to Arouse Fear" and the medieval literary tradition of journeys into hell, Dante showed his readers hell so they would turn to the God of loving kindness who does not desire that any should perish.

## Desiderius Erasmus (c. 1466–1536)

Erasmus was a pioneer of biblical, patristic, and classical scholarship at the turn of the 16th century. He referred to the core of the Christian faith as the *philosophia Christiana* (Christian philosophy) and believed that this Christian philosophy had much in common with the ethical teachings of the great pagan philosophers. In his colloquy "The Religious Banquet," the character Eusebius praises the deathbed sayings of ancient pagans as signs that they had lived virtuously and were prepared for death, in contrast



thens. He based his inclusivist position on the doctrine of predestination. Faith was the inevitable response of the elect to the proclamation of the gospel, but infants and those who had never heard the gospel could be saved without faith, simply because they were chosen by God. If they grew up, they would live virtuously, and if they heard the gospel, they would believe it, but salvation depended on nothing but God's sovereign choice.

## Martin Luther

(1483–1546)



to many Christians who relied on superstitious ceremonies.

"I sometimes find some things said or written by the ancients," says Eusebius, "nay, even by the heathens . . . so divinely, that I cannot persuade myself but that when they wrote them they were divinely inspired, and that the spirit of Christ diffuses itself further than we imagine: and that there are more saints than we have in our catalogue." Citing specifically the humility of Socrates's speech shortly before his death, recorded in Plato's dialogue *Crito*, Eusebius remarks: "I can scarce forbear when I read such things of such men, but cry out: 'Holy Socrates, pray for us!'"

## Huldrych Zwingli

(1484–1531)

Zwingli followed Erasmus in his hope for the salvation of virtuous hea-

Luther understood hell primarily in terms of alienation from God resulting from the futile human effort to be justified by our own works. In his early writings, such as the lectures on Romans, Luther suggested that purgatory is in fact indistinguishable from hell, and that a person who is truly in the grace of God



will accept this apparent damnation as the just punishment for their sins. At this point purgatory will have done its work and the repentant sinner will experience the presence of God. The effort to escape damnation (understood as horrific torment after death) or even purgatory (often understood in Luther's time as an equally horrific but temporary state of torment) is spiritually harmful and will in fact result in damnation. Only by throwing themselves on the mercy of God and abandoning efforts at self-justification may human beings escape the divine judgment. In the Romans lectures, Luther also seems to support the view of Erasmus that virtuous heathen might be saved.

Later, Luther rejected purgatory outright and insisted on the importance of actually hearing the Word proclaimed (in contrast to Erasmus, Zwingli, or Denck). However, he continued to stress damnation as alienation from God resulting from self-righteousness rather than as a state of hideous torment.

## Hans Denck

(c. 1500–1527)

Denck was seen in his short lifetime as one of the major representatives of Anabaptist thought, even though he renounced the idea that baptism must be a sign of prior faith shortly before his death and reconciled himself with mainstream Protestantism. Denck understood the "Word of God" as an internal word that speaks to the heart of every human being. This made it possible for those who had not heard the gospel to be saved. Denck was accused of universalism, and his teaching on salvation seems to point in

that direction, but it is not clear that he actually affirmed that everyone would be saved.

## John Calvin

(1509–1564)



Calvin sided with the later Luther over Zwingli on the absolute necessity of hearing the Word of God for salvation. For Calvin, the doctrine of predestination explained why it was just for only those who heard the gospel to be saved. (Calvin's affirmation of original sin as defined by Augustine, which Zwingli had questioned, gave him a basis for affirming the damnation even of those who appeared never to have had a chance for salvation.) However, like Luther, Calvin focused on the existential aspect of damnation as separation from God, rather than on the physical torments of hell described in much medieval preaching and visionary literature. Hence, Calvin could describe Jesus as suffering the

torments of hell in Gethsemane and on the cross when he was abandoned by God because of our sins.

## John Milton

(1608–1674)



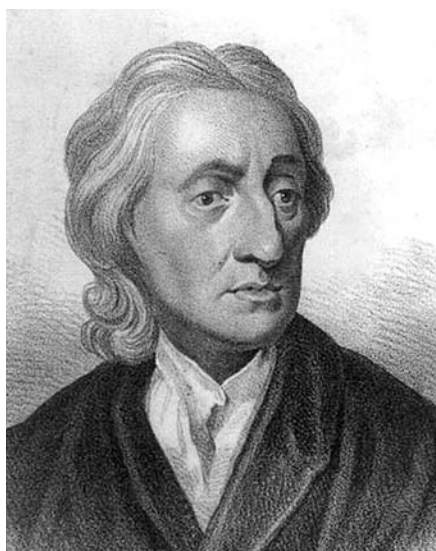
Milton's influence on later views of hell comes largely through his poetic masterpiece *Paradise Lost*, which pictures a humanized Satan in contrast to the medieval traditions which portrayed the Devil as grotesque and monstrous. Satan famously described his predicament as more psychological than physical: "Which way I fly is Hell; myself am Hell;/ And in the lowest deep a lower deep/ Still threat'ning to devour me opens wide,/ To which the Hell I suffer seems a Heav'n." Many writers of the Romantic era, with their penchant for anguished, outcast heroes, found this portrait a sympathetic one and considered Satan the real hero of the poem.

Milton's physical description of hell—large, dark, hot, painful, endless, and

centering around a lake of fire—is a traditional one but has particularly vivid staying power: "No light, but rather darkness visible/ Served only to discover sights of woe,/ Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace/ And rest can never dwell, hope never comes/ That comes to all; but torture without end."

## John Locke

(1632–1704)



Locke is well known as a writer who favored religious toleration and argued for Christianity as a reasonable religion suitable for belief by Enlightenment intellectuals. In at least some of his writings, he endorsed annihilationism—the view that whereas the saved enjoy eternal life with Christ, the damned are simply annihilated, either immediately or after a defined period of punishment, rather than suffering torments for eternity. (Regarding the "unquenchable fire" mentioned at several points in the Bible, he



commented that this did not mean “that the bodies which were burnt in it were never consumed, only that the worms that gnawed and the fire that burnt were constant and never ceased till they were destroyed.”)

Like John Milton, Locke is often claimed on Unitarian Universalist websites, but like Milton, this rests more on his unorthodox beliefs about the Trinity and his advocacy of a tolerant Christianity (within limits—he refused to tolerate either Catholics or atheists) than it does on any universalism in his writings.

## Isaac Watts

(1674–1748)



Hymnwriter Watts held to the traditional view of hell as an eternal place of torment for the sinner, and he portrayed it as such often in his poetry. Watts wrote many hymns that focused on God as sovereign and majestic, including in his righteous damnation of sinners, a damnation

that the saved observe from heaven with rejoicing (“Thy hand shall on rebellious kings/ A fiery tempest pour,/ While we beneath thy shelt’ring wings/ Thy just revenge adore.”) His *Divine and Moral Songs for Children* was one of the first known hymnals written specifically with children in mind (it is the source of one of his most famous hymns on God’s sovereignty, “I sing the almighty power of God”), and many of its hymns remind those children of their potential for damnation.

Like Edwards, Watts often used fear of hell as a motivating factor to encourage his listeners to repent. One of the most famous hymns from *Divine and Moral Songs* reads: “There is beyond the sky/ A heaven of joy and love;/ And holy children, when they die,/ Go to that world above./ There is a dreadful hell,/ And everlasting pains:/ There sinners must with devils dwell/ In darkness, fire, and chains./ Can such a wretch as I/ Escape this cursed end?/ And may I hope, whene’er I die,/ I shall to heaven ascend?/ Then will I read and pray,/ While I have life and breath,/ Lest I should be cut off to-day,/ And sent t’ eternal death.” Other hymns threaten hell as the reward for cursing, blaspheming God, insulting others, being influenced by “sinful children,” lying, becoming hardened in sin, and conforming to “wicked fashions” rather than standing up for the truth.

## William Law

(1686–1761)

Law is chiefly known for his *Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, a call to moral living and single-minded focus on God. It was influential on religious

and cultural leaders of his day from John Wesley to William Wilberforce to Samuel Johnson to Edward Gibbon (whose children Law served for ten years as a tutor. Gibbon disliked religion, but he respected Law.) While he was always focused on “heart religion,” his later writings, under the influence of the mystic Jacob Boehme, became themselves more mystical and speculative as he sought to explain Boehme’s ideas to a lay audience.

Law was a universalist who saw God’s punishment and God’s love as two sides of the same coin, both directed towards the ultimate end of eliminating sin and death from the world: “And if long and long ages of fiery pain, and tormenting darkness, fall to the share of many, or most, of God’s apostate creatures, they will last no longer, than till the great fire of God has melted all arrogance into humility, and all that is SELF has died in the long agonies and bloody sweat of a lost God, which is that all-saving cross of Christ, which will never give up its redeeming power, till sin and sinners have no more a name among the creatures of God.”

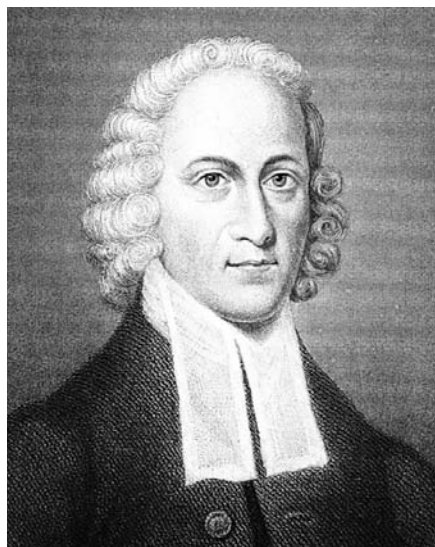
## Jonathan Edwards

(1703–1758)

Part of Edwards’ vision of hell is imprinted in the mind of every high school or college student who ever read his sermon “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” (“The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked...”). Certainly Edwards held to traditional doctrines regarding the exis-

tence of hell, its torments, and its infinite duration. He also believed that our eternal destiny is fixed in this life; change and growth might occur in heaven, but hell is a place of punishment, not purification or purgation.

His vivid visions, however, were preached in a larger context which impressed on his hearers the glories of heaven, the majesty of God and God’s justice, and the necessity of escaping hell’s torments: “And now you have an extraordinary opportunity, a day wherein Christ has thrown the door of mercy wide open, and stands in calling and crying with a loud voice to poor sinners; a day wherein many are flocking to him, and pressing into the kingdom of God. Many are daily coming from the east, west, north and south; many that were very lately in the same miserable condition that you are in, are now in a happy state, with their hearts filled with love to him who has loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood, and rejoicing in hope of the glory of God.





How awful is it to be left behind at such a day! To see so many others feasting, while you are pining and perishing! To see so many rejoicing and singing for joy of heart, while you have cause to mourn for sorrow of heart, and howl for vexation of spirit! How can you rest one moment in such a condition? Are not your souls as precious as the souls of the people at Suffield, where they are flocking from day to day to Christ?"

## John Wesley

1703–1791

## Charles Wesley

1707–1788



John Wesley's sermons made it clear that he believed in hell as a place of eternal punishment, with the chief focus being on the loss of fellowship with friends and with God, and on the endless physical fire suffered by the damned. (Regarding any other torments he wrote, "Let us keep to the written word. It is torment enough to dwell with everlasting burnings.") As a believer in unlimited atonement, Wesley thought that salvation from sin, death, and hell was available to all through the grace of God, though he did not think all had chosen it.

Charles Wesley did write a few hymns

about the torments of hell, but far more of his hymns focus on the offer of free grace and the powers God gives us to defeat evil ("Lo! to faith's enlightened sight,/ All the mountain flames with light;/ Hell is nigh, but God is nigher,/ Circling us with hosts of fire.")

## Unitarianism

Unitarianism, whose central tenets were a belief in the unity (not Trinity) of God and a denial of the divinity of Christ, flourished in the late 18th and early 19th centuries and influenced many Christians in other denominations. Most Unitarians denied the natural immortality of the soul and eternal punishment, instead emphasizing future physical resurrection and progress towards a restored paradise. Some suggested an intermediate state after death when the wicked would be purified of evil. The statement by Unitarian minister Henry Giles in 1839 expressed the sentiment of numerous others in the latter half of the century: "There is no room in the same universe for a good God and an eternal hell."

## Thomas Erskine

(1788–1870)

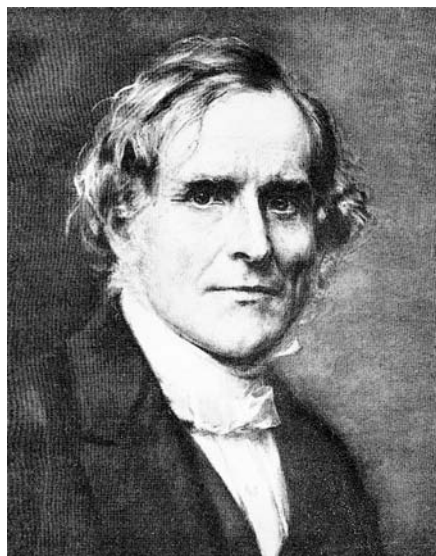
Erskine was a well-known and well-loved Scottish thinker who believed that the essence of sin is self-worship and that hell is a state of being—a condition of solipsistic misery. God's abhorrence of sin, and therefore his purpose to destroy it, is the only ground of a sinner's hope. The only punishment we face is the repentance and self-denial that raises us above our sin into the bliss of loving God: "Salvation does not consist in the removal of punishment, but in the will-



ing acceptance of it—in dying to self and living unto God.” If anyone is in hell it is because he put himself there by refusing to enter heaven: “So long, therefore, as a man chooses to keep his sin, so long as he refuses to allow the forgiving love of God to enter his heart . . . if he continues in this state through eternity, he must through eternity be a child of wrath, abiding in outer darkness.” However, Erskine elsewhere asserted that since the creature has no existence independent of its Creator, “It is impossible that I should be separated from him without ceasing to exist.”

## Frederick Denison Maurice

(1805–1872)



Considered one of the most important theologians of 19th-century England, Maurice was discharged from his teaching post at King's College, London, in 1853 after his *Theological Essays* created

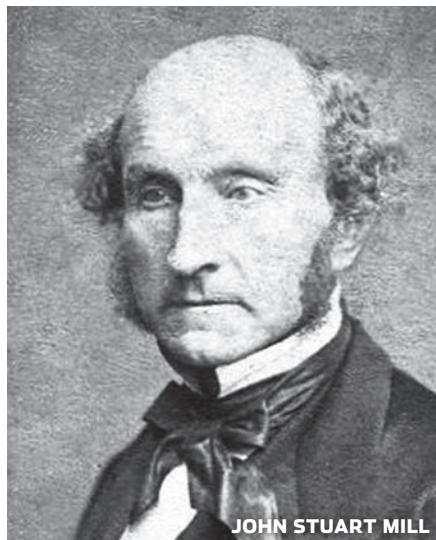
a scandal. In the concluding essay, “On Eternal Life and Eternal Death,” he argued that the word “eternal” in the New Testament means being outside of time. Eternal life and eternal punishment refer to a state of being, or more precisely, to a quality of relationship to God, rather than to an everlasting duration. The condition of being alienated from God is its own punishment. Eternal death is thus a present reality for all those caught in a state of sin, from which Christ delivers them into an ongoing experience of new divine life. It is the sinful self at the center of existence which is the worst torture for the convicted soul, worse than any external legal penalty.

Maurice could not believe that God would condemn to everlasting death those who did not know of the earthly Jesus, or that human resistance could ever be stronger than the universal love of God. He stopped just short of denying the possibility of a never-ending hell but hinted that the infinite love of God must be greater and deeper than human corruption (he embraced a kind of “hopeful universalism”): “I am obliged to believe in an abyss of love which is deeper than the abyss of death: I dare not lose faith in that love. I sink into death, eternal death, if I do. I must feel that this love is encompassing the universe. More about it I cannot know. But God knows. I leave myself and all to Him.”

## John Stuart Mill

(1806–1873)

The English philosopher found it morally contradictory to believe in a God who is loving and yet “who could make a Hell: and who could create countless generations of human beings



JOHN STUART MILL

with the certain foreknowledge that he was creating them for this fate. Is there any moral enormity which might not be justified by imitation of such a Deity?" He retorted, "I will call no being good, who is not what I mean when I apply that epithet to my fellow creatures; and if such a being can sentence me to Hell for not so calling him, to Hell will I go."

## Thomas Rawson Birks (1810–1883)

Thomas Rawson Birks, a leading English Evangelical and a moderate Calvinist, argued that those in hell, while cut off from the direct presence of God, would still have the opportunity to passively observe and enjoy God's goodness. He also rejected the Calvinist doctrine of limited atonement and widened the scope of salvation to include those outside the church.

## J. W. Colenso (1814–1883)

The missionary movement opened the eyes of Europe to the diversity of cultures and religions in the world and, for some, made hellfire preaching not only morally objectionable but unrealistic and ineffective. In his commentary *St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, J. W. Colenso, the Bishop of Natal in South Africa, put forth Pauline support for the idea of post-mortem salvation: "I entertain the 'hidden hope' that there are remedial processes, when this life is ended, of which at present we know nothing, but which the Lord, the Righteous Judge, will administer, as He in His Wisdom shall see to be good."

Colenso's ideas reflect the influence Darwinism was having upon Christian theology at the time. He believed not only that there will be gradations of punishment after death, but also that these punishments would be remedial in function and would effect a growth or progress toward spiritual enlightenment. His reaction against eternal punishment was based in part on his repugnance for the hypocrisy of Christians who, asserting that heathens would burn forever in hell, lived complacent and happy lives without lifting a finger to remove the burden of eternal doom from those they condemned to it.

## F. W. Robertson (1816–1853)

Like F. D. Maurice, F. W. Robertson, the minister of Trinity Chapel in Brighton, saw eternal life or death in terms of quality of existence, not temporal dura-

tion. His confirmation class catechism included the following question and answer:

"Q. Why is a correct faith necessary to salvation?"

"A. Because what we believe becomes our character, forms part of us, and character is salvation or damnation; what we *are*, that is our *heaven* or our *hell*. Every sin bears its own punishment."

## Edward White

(1819–1898)

An English Congregational minister, White was a leading proponent of "conditional immortality," an attempt to find a middle road between eternal punishment and universalism, both of which assumed the natural immortality of the human soul. Conditionalists argued that the soul is mortal and that immortality is a gift from Christ to the redeemed. Therefore, the wicked will eventually be annihilated.

One of the most important publications expounding this view was White's book *Life in Christ*. White avoided the term "annihilationism" and, unlike some conditionalists, suggested that there was an intermediate state of the soul between bodily death and the "second death" at the Last Judgment, when the souls of the wicked would cease to exist. Drawing on Darwinian theory, he described the gift of immortality as a kind of moral natural selection: "The New Testament does not teach the survival of the *strongest*, but the survival of the *fittest*"—i.e., those who have faith in God's redeeming love.

At a time when the spiritual fate of those in other cultures was much debated, White rejected the doctrine of

eternal punishment as the impetus for missions. "There is nothing less than an INFINITE MORAL DIFFERENCE between the character of a Being who WILL torture a . . . man or woman . . . through boundless eternity, and that of one who will NOT."

Conditionalism, he believed, avoided the moral problem of a loving God who punishes people eternally, while still providing an urgent motivation for evangelism.

## James Baldwin Brown

(1820–1884)

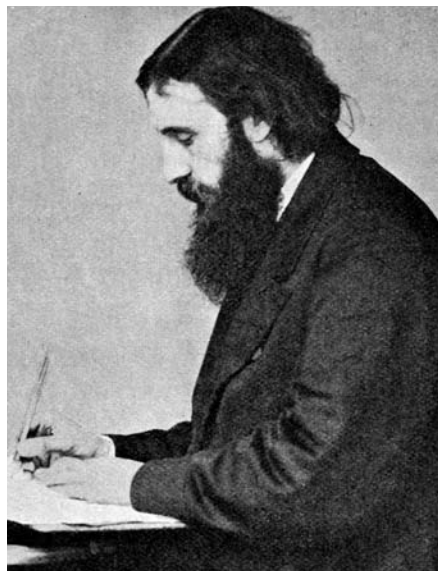
Brown was very influenced by the evolutionary ideas popular at the time and considered the Fall not a fracture or interruption of creation but a step in the creation's development towards a higher state of being. He believed that punishment for sin arises from the state of sinfulness itself—defined primarily as self-idolatry and self-absorption. The pit of hell is "the grave of a living soul" stifling in its own sin and tormented by the knowledge of itself. True repentance arises, not out of sorrow over having violated a law and fear of being punished, but out of love for the divine Father.

## George MacDonald

(1824–1905)

Pastor, novelist, fantasy writer, and disciple of F. D. Maurice, George MacDonald is best known today for his profound influence on C. S. Lewis and other 20th-century Christian writers.





The beginning point of MacDonald's theology was the universal love of God who "is always doing his best for every man," working all things together for the salvation of each of his children. Citing Hebrews 12:29, MacDonald argued that the "consuming fire" of God is in fact the inexorable purity of his love, which burns away all impurities in the beloved, destroying that which is unlovable: "God loves them so that he will burn them clean." All punishment exists for the sake of repentance.

Hell, for MacDonald, is a mental state of being which begins on earth for many people and may continue after death in a much more acute form. The person in hell is just as much an object of God's love as the holiest saint, but this person, in resisting God, experiences that love as wrath. Hell is not a place of never-ending torment but a temporary condition of purgatorial suffering. "I believe that justice and

mercy are simply one and the same thing . . . I believe that no hell will be lacking which would help the just mercy of God to redeem his children."

For MacDonald, the darkest pit of hell existed for one purpose: to bring the prodigal to the knees of his Father in self-loathing and new-found love. "God in the dark can make a man thirst for the light, who never in the light sought but the dark." Eventually, MacDonald implied, even the devil will relent and turn back to his Master, and hell itself will be destroyed. Finally, the Father's love will be victorious.

## *Essays and Reviews* vs. the Oxford Declaration

The highly controversial volume *Essays and Reviews* (1860) thrust the issues of the inspiration of Scripture and eternal punishment into public debate. Liberal thinker Henry Bristow Wilson argued that, at a time when Western Christians were discovering more and more about the non-Christian world, it was necessary to reconsider traditional dogmas about eternal punishment. He suggested as an alternative the possibility of further spiritual development after death, a kind of "second chance" eschatology.

In response to the *Essays and Reviews* controversy, 11,000 Church of England clergymen signed the Oxford Declaration in 1864 affirming their belief "that the 'punishment' of the 'cursed,' equally with the 'life' of the 'righteous,' is 'everlasting.'"

# F. W. Farrar

(1831–1903)

# vs. E. B. Pusey

(1800–1882)



In the late 1870s and 1880s, a well-known debate over the traditional doctrine of eternal punishment took place between F. W. Farrar, canon of Westminster, and E. B. Pusey, leader of the Oxford Movement in the Church of England. Farrar preached a series of sermons that he later published in the book *Eternal Hope*. In it he affirmed what he believed to be the core of the biblical view of hell: “That there is terrible retribution upon impenitent sin both here and hereafter; that without holiness no man can see the Lord; that sin cannot be forgiven till it is forsaken and repented of; that the doom which falls on sin is both merciful and just.”

He rejected, however, the ideas that hell is a place of eternal, physical torment and that the majority of human beings will end up there. He wanted to leave open the possibility of repentance after death. Many people interpreted the book as teaching universalism, despite the fact that Farrar claimed he was rejecting both universalism and conditionalism.

In rebuttal, Pusey published a schol-

arly defense of the church’s traditional teaching, *What Is of Faith as to Everlasting Punishment?* Pusey argued that the orthodox doctrine of hell does not require us to believe that punishment will be physical, nor does it predict how many will be lost or saved. We may never know how many people are in a state of grace or repent on their deathbeds. Of those who have never heard the gospel, he claimed, “each soul will be judged as it responded or did not respond to the degree of light which He bestowed on it.” Against Farrar, he affirmed that hell is eternal and that the fate of each person is determined at death.

## Seventh-day Adventists

(Formally established in 1863)

The Seventh-day Adventist Church grew out of the Millerite movement in America during the 19th century (William Miller had predicted the Second Coming of Christ during 1843 and 1844). Their name reflects their observance of Saturday (the seventh day) as the Sabbath and their emphasis on the imminent premillennial return of Christ.

One of the distinguishing beliefs of Adventists is conditional immortality or annihilationism: Humans are an indivisible unity and do not have an immortal soul that exists after death. God alone is immortal and grants eternal life to the redeemed at the resurrection when Christ returns. Those who die enter into an unconscious state until then, and the unredeemed will be resurrected at the end of the Millennium, when the fire of God will destroy them. ☐

# Modern Debates

## RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

Since the 19th century, and particularly in recent decades, discussions of hell have mushroomed. Which perspectives will prove most influential is yet to be seen. To help you explore the biblical and theological issues at stake in the current debates over eternal punishment, we've gathered a selection of books on hell and eschatology (the doctrine of the last things, including the return of Christ, the Last Judgment, resurrection, and the eternal destiny of human beings) written from a wide variety of viewpoints.

*Christian History* does not necessarily endorse the perspectives in these books.

**Hilarion Algeyev, *Christ the Conqueror of Hell* (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2009).**



This book by a Russian Orthodox archbishop looks at the early church fathers' understanding of Christ's "Harrowing of Hell" (1 Peter 3:18-21) and argues that this event opened the way for the sal-

vation of all human beings.

**Philip C. Almond, *Heaven and Hell in Enlightenment England* (Cambridge University, 1994).** Examines changing ideas of heaven and hell in English thought from 1650-1750.

**Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Immortality or Resurrection? (Biblical Perspective, 1998).*** A Seventh-Day Adventist theologian challenges the traditional idea that humans have immortal souls. Foreword by Clark Pinnock.

**Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Dare We Hope That All Men Be Saved? With a Short Discourse on Hell* (Ignatius Press, 1988).** Balthasar was one of the most influential Catholic theologians of the 20th century, though his views on salvation and hell are controversial. His notable contribution to the debate was his theology of Holy Saturday. After his death of the cross, Christ, in solidarity with sinful humanity, descended into hell and experienced utter rejection by God—the full eternal punishment for the sin of all people. Balthasar is careful to leave open the possibility that someone can resist the offer of salvation and be eternally lost, but he believes that Christians are commanded to hope that all will eventually repent and find forgiveness.



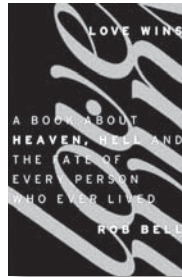
**William Barclay, *A Spiritual Autobiography* (Eerdmans, 1975).** Barclay's New Testament commentaries for laypeople have had many evangelical readers. He says in his *Spiritual Autobiography*, "I am a convinced universalist. I believe that in the end all men will be gathered into the love of God," and explains his thought process in coming to this position.

**Karl Barth, *God Here and Now* (Routledge, 2003) and *Dogmatics in Outline* (Harper, 1959).** In Barth's theology, Christ is the elect one, and all are elect and reconciled in him; he is also the condemned one, bearing the punishment for the sin of all people. Christ suffered hell in order to triumph over it. Yet Barth was



not a universalist. To pronounce dogmatically on either side of this issue, he believed, would be to place limits on the freedom of God: "The proclamation of the Church must make allowance for this freedom of grace. . . . a grace which automatically would ultimately have to embrace each and every one would certainly not be free grace. It surely would not be God's grace. But would it be God's free grace if we could absolutely deny that it could do that? Has Christ been sacrificed only for our sins? Has he not, according to 1 John 2:2, been sacrificed for the whole world? (*God Here and Now*)

**Rob Bell, *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived* (HarperOne, 2011).** Bell's highly controversial book raising questions about the traditional understanding of heaven and hell echoes many themes debated in previous centuries of the church. His book has already prompted a number of responses, including *Erasing Hell* by Francis Chan and Preston Sprinkle (David C. Cook, 2011) and *God Wins* by Mark Galli, a former editor of *Christian History* magazine (Tyndale, 2011).



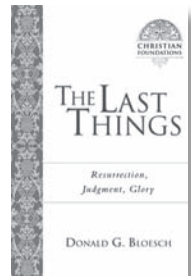
**Alan E. Bernstein, *The Formation of Hell: Death and Retribution in the Ancient and Early Christian Worlds* (Cornell, 1993).** With sections on ancient Greece and Rome, ancient Judaism, the New Testament, and early Christianity, this "history of hell" traces the development of ideas about death, justice, and eternal punishment.



**Harry Blamires, *Knowing the Truth about Heaven and Hell: Our Choices and Where They Lead Us*, edited by Peter Kreeft and J. I. Packer (Servant Books, 1988).** British theologian and novelist Blamires was a student and later friend of C. S. Lewis.

**John Blanchard, *Whatever Happened to Hell?* (Evangelical, 1993).** Defense of the traditional view of hell against universalism and annihilationism. Foreword by J. I. Packer.

**Donald G. Bloesch, *The Last Things* (InterVarsity, 2004).** A theological exploration of biblical themes of the kingdom of God, the second coming of Christ, angels, the Last Judgment, the millennium, resurrection, purgatory, hell, and heaven. Bloesch interprets hell as a "sanatorium for sick, incurable souls" but rejects universalism. He claims a "reverent agnosticism" regarding the eternal fate of the wicked.



**Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, eds., *The Last Things: Biblical & Theological Perspectives on Eschatology* (Eerdmans, 2002).** Various ecumenical views on the significance of Christian eschatology for the contemporary church.

**Emil Brunner, *Eternal Hope* (Greenwood Press, 1954, 1972).** Brunner was a Swiss Protestant pastor and one of the leading neo-orthodox theologians of the 20th century. He accepts the seeming paradox in Scripture between the final judgment of the wicked and the hope of universal redemption, concluding that what the Word confronts us with is a personal challenge: "We must listen to the voice which speaks of world

judgment as to the voice of God Himself, in order that we may fear Him; we must listen to the voice which speaks of universal redemption as to the voice of God Himself, in order that we may love Him."

**Harry Buis, *The Doctrine of Eternal Punishment* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1957).** A Reformed defense of the traditional view of eternal punishment, including a historical survey from the biblical through post-Reformation periods.

**Jonathan M. Butler, *Softly and Tenderly Jesus Is Calling: Heaven and Hell in American Revivalism, 1870-1920* (Carlson, 1991).** A study of how the imagery of hell and heaven was used by revivalist preachers during America's great awakenings.

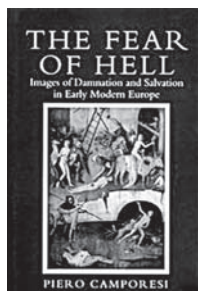
**Nigel M. de S. Cameron, ed., *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell* (Baker, 1992).** Written by evangelical authors from a variety of perspectives, the essays touch on universalism, conditional immortality, the atonement, the problem of evil, hell, and historical debates.

#### UNIVERSALISM AND THE DOCTRINE OF HELL

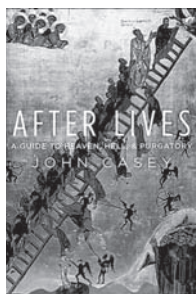


Nigel M. de S. Cameron

**Piero Camporesi, *The Fear of Hell: Images of Damnation and Salvation in Early Modern Europe* (Penn State Univ. Press, 1991).** Scholarly study of the vivid imagery of hell in the writings of 16th- and 17th-century Italian preachers and theologians. The second part of the book deals with images of the Eucharist.



**D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Zondervan, 1996).** One chapter addresses the popularity of annihilationism and other alternative views of hell.



**John Casey, *After Lives: A Guide to Heaven, Hell & Purgatory* (Oxford University Press, 2009).** A Cambridge scholar's guide to views of the afterlife in different centuries, cultures, and religions.

**J. Cooper, *Body, Soul and the Life Everlasting* (Eerdmans, 1989).** A critically acclaimed study of human nature and destiny that defends "holistic dualism."

**William Crockett, ed., *Four Views on Hell* (Zondervan, 1992).** Four theologians debate four different views of hell: literal (a physical place with eternal fire), metaphorical (eternal punishment, but not literal fire), purgatorial (purification after death), and conditional (annihilationism).

**William Crockett & James Sigountos, eds., *Through No Fault of Their Own?* (Baker, 1991).** Essays by evangelical scholars taking various approaches to the question of the eternal fate of those who have never heard the gospel.

**Larry Dixon, *The Other Side of the Good News: Confronting the Contemporary Challenges to Jesus' Teaching on Hell* (Victor Books, 1992).** A defense of the traditional doctrine of hell against the major alternatives of universalism, annihilationism, and postmortem conversion. Foreword by J. I. Packer.

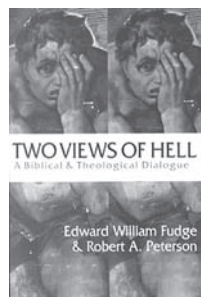
**Ajith Fernando, *Crucial Questions about Hell* (Crossway, 1994).** Examines biblical texts to answer a variety of questions about hell from a conservative evangelical perspective. Foreword by J. I. Packer.

**LeRoy E. Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers*, 2 vols. (Review & Herald, 1965).** A survey of conditionalist views throughout history by a Seventh-Day Adventist minister. Clark Pinnock called it “a classic defense of conditionalism.”

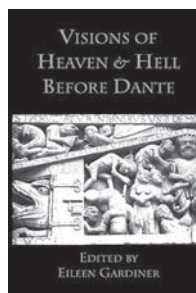
**Edward Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes: The Biblical Case for Conditional Immortality* (Providential, 1982).** Widely praised and influential book arguing that the traditional view of hell as eternal conscious torment is unbiblical, and defending the conditionalist view.



**Edward William Fudge and Robert A. Peterson, *Two Views of Hell: A Biblical & Theological Debate* (InterVarsity, 2000).** A dialogue on hell between two evangelical theologians, with Fudge defending the conditionalist view and Peterson defending the traditional view.



**Daniel P. Fuller, *The Unity of the Bible: Unfolding God's Plan For Humanity* (Zondervan, 1992).** Fuller is a professor emeritus of hermeneutics and son of Charles E. Fuller, co-founder of Fuller Theological Seminary. Includes a chapter on “The Justness of an Eternal Hell.”



**Eileen Gardiner, *Visions of Heaven and Hell Before Dante* (Italica Press, 1989).** A scholarly study of heaven and hell in early medieval literature.

**John H. Gerstner, *Jonathan Edwards on Heaven and Hell* (Baker, 1980).** Briefly summarizes the theology of heaven and hell of the theologian who preached the famous sermon “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.”

**John H. Gerstner, *Repent or Perish: With a Special Reference to the Conservative Attack on Hell* (Soli Deo Gloria, 1990).** Gerstner wrote *Repent or Perish* at the request of John H. White, President of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), to defend the traditional doctrine of hell against the rising popularity of annihilationism (or conditionalism) as articulated by Fudge and others.



**Paul Helm, ed., *Jonathan Edwards: Philosophical Theologian* (Ashgate, 2003).** Essays by various scholars on the theology and philosophy of Edwards, including two chapters on hell.

**Paul Helm, *The Last Things* (Banner of Truth, 1989).** A Reformed perspective on four “last things”: death, judgment, heaven, and hell.

**John Hick, *Death and Eternal Life* (Collins, 1976) and *Evil and the God of Love* (MacMillan, 1966).** Once an

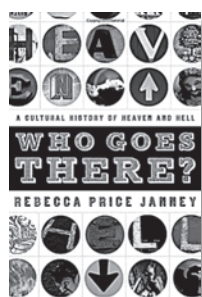


evangelical, Hick is one of the most outspoken and controversial proponents of religious pluralism and universalism in the last century. He rejects hell as incompatible with a God of love and argues that after “a series of lives” all people will eventually be saved.

**Martha Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell: An Apocalyptic Form in Jewish and Christian Literature* (Augsburg Fortress Press, 1985).** A scholarly study of the literary tradition of “tours of hell” found in ancient and early medieval Jewish and Christian apocalyptic writings.

**Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Eerdmans, 1979).** Amillennialist eschatology by a Reformed theologian, who believes that the Bible teaches the eternal punishment of the lost.

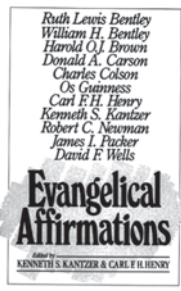
**Philip E. Hughes, *The True Image: The Origin and Destiny of Man in Christ* (Eerdmans, 1989).** Annihilationist perspective.



**Rebecca Price Janney, *Who Goes There? A Cultural History of Heaven and Hell* (Moody, 2009).** Janney traces American beliefs about the afterlife from the Great Awakening through the 20th century.

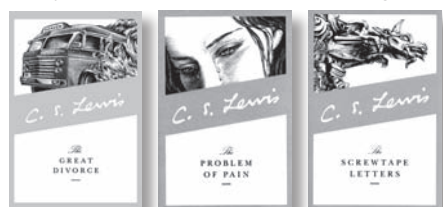
**Kenneth S. Kantzer and Carl F.H. Henry, eds. *Evangelical Affirmations* (Zondervan, 1990).** This book is a compilation of papers presented at the 1989 Consultation on Evangelical Affirmation, a gathering of nearly 700 evangelical scholars, theologians, and leaders co-sponsored by the NAE and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. It includes

an essay by evangelical theologian J. I. Packer, “Evangelicals and the Way of Salvation,” rejecting universalism and respectfully disagreeing with John Stott and other evangelicals who have advocated annihilationist views.



**Jonathan L. Kvanvig, *The Problem of Hell* (Oxford, 1993).** Kvanvig’s philosophical approach outlines the major categories of thought related to hell, explaining the elements of the traditional “strong view” of hell as well as how alternative views differ.

**C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (1945), *The Problem of Pain* (1940), and *The Screwtape Letters* (1942).** Unlike the universalist tendencies of his “master” George MacDonald, Lewis affirmed the reality of an eternal hell despite its distastefulness to modern sensibilities: “Some will not be redeemed. There is no doctrine which I would more willingly remove from Christianity than this.” He created new and enduring images of hell and evil in fictional works such as *The Great Divorce* and *The Screwtape Letters*. Rather than picturing a place of fiery torture, Lewis spoke of hell in terms of a state of becoming less and less a divine-image-bearing human being—a danger that is inherent in all of us. Moreover, hell is actually a reflection of God’s mercy in setting limits on the evil that creatures can do to themselves and to each other. Lewis placed the responsibility for hell squarely on the shoulders of humans who freely choose self-will in rebellion against



God: "There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, in the end, 'Thy will be done.' All that are in Hell, choose it."

**Gregory MacDonald, *The Evangelical Universalist* (Cascade Books, 2006).** This controversial book argues that one can remain true to Scripture and historic Christianity while believing that all people will eventually be saved.

**Bernard McGinn, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism* (Continuum, 2000).** This three-volume academic historical survey covers themes in apocalyptic literature from Judaism and early Christianity through the modern period.

**Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (Harper & Row, 1967) and *The Coming of God* (Augsburg, 1996).** This German Reformed theologian's influential works on eschatology take "hope" as the beginning point of theology, specifically the hope we have in the resurrection of Christ and the vision of a new creation where "God will be all in all." Moltmann sees Christ's descent into hell and victory over it as the ground for hope in the ultimate restoration of all things.

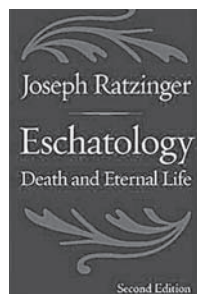
**Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, eds., *Hell Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents Eternal Punishment* (Zondervan, 2004).** Contributors are evangelicals who



support the traditional doctrine of hell as everlasting conscious punishment. The book is a response to rising challenges to this view within the church, particularly annihilationism and universalism.

**Joseph Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life* (Catholic University of America Press, 1988, 2007).**

An internationally respected text by the current pope, Benedict XVI, dealing with Christ's second coming, humans' death and immortality, the intermediate state, resurrection, the Last Judgment, purgatory, heaven, and hell. About the latter he says: "The idea of eternal damnation, which had taken ever clearer shape in the Judaism of the century or two before Christ, has a firm place in the teaching of Jesus, as well as in the apostolic writings. Dogma takes its stand on solid ground when it speaks of the existence of hell and of the eternity of its punishments."



**Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Shape of Death: Life, Death, and Immortality in the Early Fathers* (Greenwood Press, 1961).** A leading church historian looks at themes of the nature of death, resurrection, and the immortality of the soul in Tatian, Clement of Alexandria, Cyprian, Origen, and Irenaeus.

**Robert A. Peterson, *Hell on Trial: the Case for Eternal Punishment* (Presbyterian & Reformed, 1995).** A



conservative defense of the traditional doctrine of hell against annihilationism and universalism, including a survey of biblical texts and historical views.

**Clark H. Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus in a World of Religions* (Zondervan, 1992).** A controversial evangelical theologian best

known for his support for “open theism,” Pinnock argues for an inclusivist attitude towards the unevangelized, arguing that salvation is through Christ alone but that some people who have never heard the gospel may be saved because of their response to the light they have. Pinnock also wrote a number of articles defending annihilationism/conditional immortality, including a chapter in *Four Views on Hell*.

**John R. Rice, *Hell! What the Bible says about it* (Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1945).** “An exposition of the doctrine of eternal punishment in a burning hell for all the unsaved people of all ages” by a Baptist evangelist and founding editor of the fundamentalist newspaper *The Sword of the Lord*.

**Geoffrey Rowell, *Hell and the Victorians* (Clarendon Press, 1974).** A study of 19th-century theological controversies about eternal punishment and the afterlife.



ESCHATOLOGY  
Hans Schwarz

**Hans Schwarz, *Eschatology* (Eerdmans, 2001).** A comprehensive survey of Christian beliefs about the return of Christ, the Last Judgment, hell, heaven, and Christian hope.

**John Stott and David L. Edwards, *Evangelical Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue* (InterVarsity, 1988).** This book caused a stir when Stott, one of the most highly respected and influential evangelical leaders in the world, tentatively voiced his support for annihilationism as a biblical alternative to eternal conscious torment and wrote, “I cherish the hope that the majority of the human race will be saved.”

**Owen Strachan and Doug Sweeney, *Jonathan Edwards on Heaven and Hell* (Moody, 2010).** Part of the series *The Essential Edwards Collection*, this volume seeks to reacquaint modern Christians with the eschatologically driven preaching and teaching of Edwards.

**Jerry Walls, *Hell: The Logic of Damnation* (Notre Dame, 1992).** Approaching the topic from the perspective of philosophical theology, Walls argues that some traditional versions of the doctrine of hell are intellectually defensible and morally compatible with divine goodness, especially on the grounds of humans’ freedom to choose evil.



**Jerry Walls, ed., *Oxford Handbook of Eschatology* (Oxford, 2008).** An essential reference book for anyone in-

terested in this topic. The 700-page volume includes chapters on hell, purgatory, universalism, and annihilationism.

**N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (HarperOne, 2008).** Wright debunks popular thinking about the afterlife in order to reassert the heart of Christian hope: God’s renewal of the whole creation, launched by the resurrection of Christ. Though primarily a book about heaven, resurrection, and the new creation, Wright addresses the question of hell. Given the scant New Testament references, he warns against dogmatism on the topic but views the progress of sin as a dehumanizing process, until ultimately one who persists in rejecting grace ceases to reflect the image of God, and ceases to be human, passing “beyond hope and beyond pity.”





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