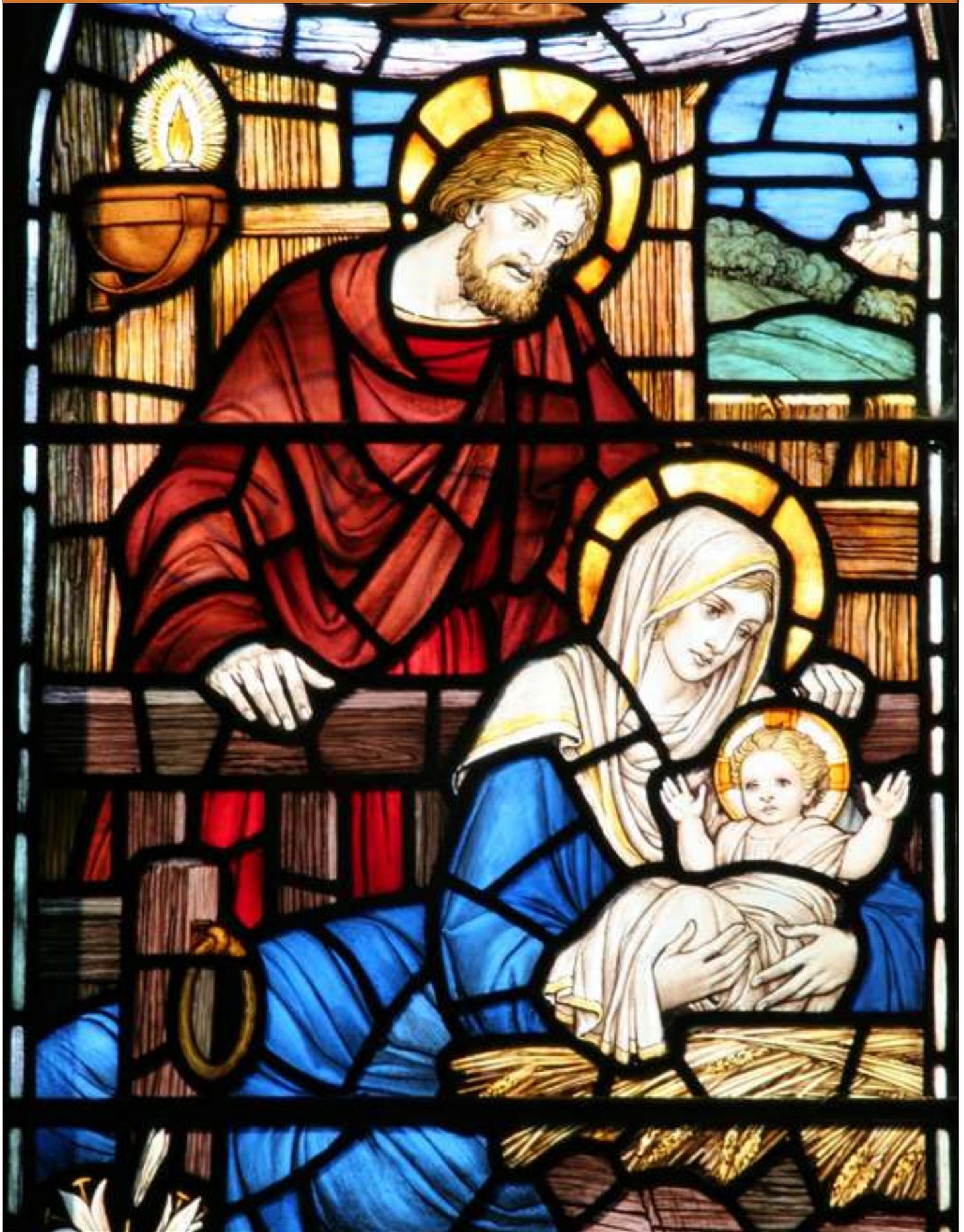


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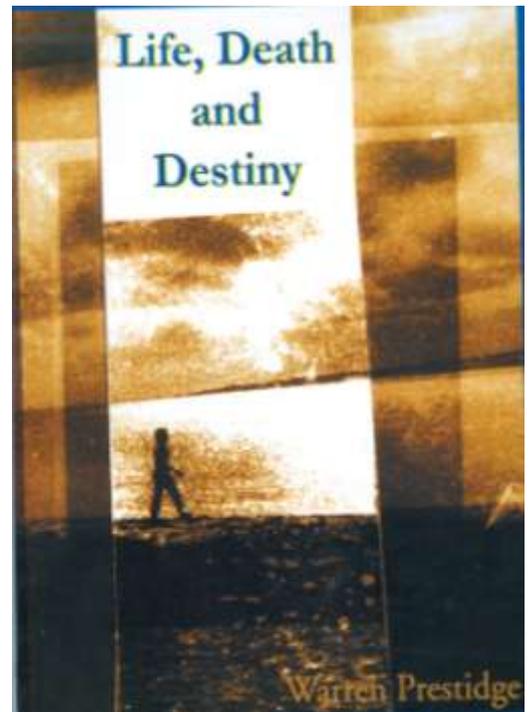
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Christmas Myths

Editorial—Jefferson Vann

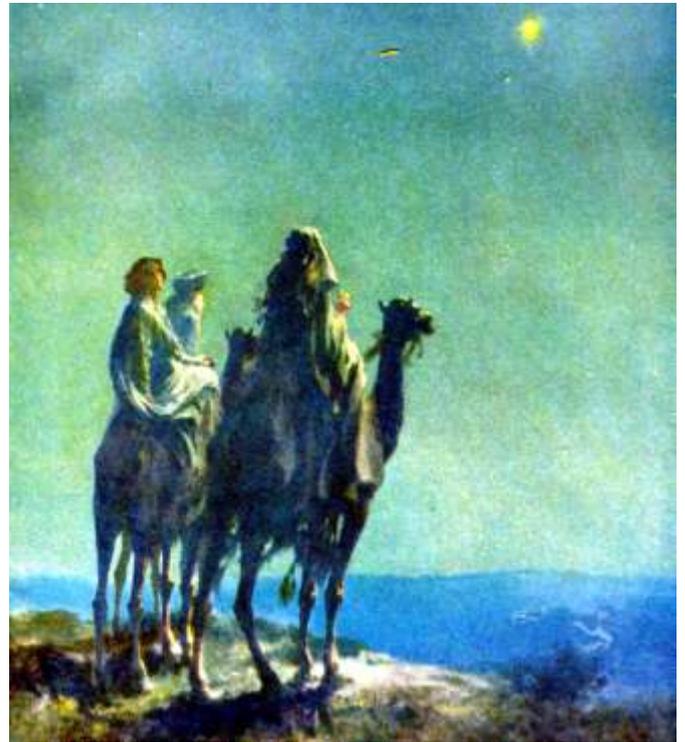
The world has adopted Christmas as a time of celebration. If Christians are not careful, we might find ourselves swallowing some Christmas myths -- affirming some non-Christian ideas about Christmas.

Some of these myths are just the result of being careless about the **facts of Christ's birth** – like the myth that the wise men followed the star to the stable at Bethlehem. Actually, by the time the wise men arrived, Mary and Joseph had moved into a house.¹ Other myths are just traditions that people have added to Christmas – like the notion of a jolly man in a red suit and his reindeer.

Then there are the hidden myths about the meaning of Christmas. The Christian should be careful not to casually affirm these statements, because they actually teach the opposite of what Christ taught about his first coming.

Myth #1 Because of Christmas, we are all forgiven.

The world does not mind acknowledging the birth of Christ once a year. In fact, the world wants



desperately to believe that now that Jesus has come, his Father no longer holds them accountable for their sins. It wants to believe that God has abolished his law. But Jesus said he came not to abolish the law, but to fulfil it.² He said he came as light, but anyone who rejects that light (his words) will be condemned on the last day.³

Myth #2 Because of Christmas, we can have peace and unity.

Our secular Christmas cards also proclaim that Christmas means peace on earth, but the Bible says that Christmas brings peace to those with

whom God is pleased.⁴ Jesus taught that his coming did not bring peace, but division.⁵ Real faith in Christ separates us from non-believers.

Myth #3 Because of Christmas, we can ignore death.

People act as if Christ's birth is all that really matters. The world wants to celebrate life, and not think about death. During this time of year, Christ is a child in a manger, not the man dying on a cross, and not the man who came forth from the tomb. But Christ said that he came down from heaven (at Christmas) so that those who believe he died for them will be saved, and that he will raise them on the last day!⁶ **He didn't ignore death.** He defeated it.

Have a happy holiday, and remember that the first Christmas gift was the best ever. ■

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¹Matthew 2:11.

²Matthew 5:17.

³John 12:46-48; 18:37.

⁴Luke 2:14.

⁵Matthew 10:34-36; Luke 12:51-53.

⁶John 6:38-40.

The Unkillable Soul

Jefferson Vann

Matthew 10:28 is a watershed text. It serves as a rope, and on either side of the rope is a group of well-meaning Christians tugging over the issue of human nature and destiny. On the one side are those who teach



innate immortality. These draw support from Matthew 10:28a, where Jesus compares the body, which can be killed by other men, to the soul, which cannot. This side of **the debate believes that “in death, the body only dies; but the soul lives on uninterrupted, and is immortal.”**¹

On the other side of the rope are conditionalists. We tend to emphasize Matthew 10:28b, where Jesus speaks of God being able to destroy both soul and body in Gehenna hell. We reason that anything that can be destroyed is not by nature immortal. We do not

believe that “Matt. 10:28 presupposes a sharp division between body and soul in which the ‘soul’ is the more important, immortal part.”² We see that presupposition as reading into the text of Matthew 10:28a a dualistic view of the nature of humanity which is not reflected in the rest of Scripture, and essentially denies the reality of death.

In a recent article on this text, David Burge summarized a conditionalist approach:

1. The Bible affirms that death is a real event which affects the whole person.
2. In hell, the lost will suffer complete destruction; no part of them will survive.
3. Jesus is teaching that the first death is only temporary. The resurrection will reverse it.
4. Jesus is teaching about the nature of God here, not the nature of man. Believers should fear God, not human persecutors.⁴

Psuché in Matthew

If our brothers with the innate immortality view are right, Jesus is affirming something about the nature of humanity in Matthew

10:28a. He is teaching that there is a part of every human being that God has made indestructible. This is the soul. One way of assessing the validity of that interpretation is to cross-reference each occurrence of the word soul (psuché in Greek) as it **appears in Matthew’s Gospel.** This should help us grasp how Matthew understood the term – whether or not he understood it as an immortal part of every human being.

2:20

The first occurrence of psuché in Matthew comes from the mouth of the Angel of the Lord. He tells Joseph that it is safe to return to Israel from Egypt because those who sought **Jesus’ life are dead.** The word the angel uses for life is psuché. It is clear that the angel is speaking about **Herod’s desire to kill Jesus, to prevent him from challenging the authority of the Herodian dynasty.** There is absolutely no way to read into this statement any affirmation of human immortality. Perhaps this is the reason that the translators of many versions render the term psuché as life in this passage. Matthew is using the word psuché as the Old Testament⁴ usually does: as a reference to the life of the whole person.

6:25

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus uses the term *psuché* to talk about human appetites. He tells his disciples not to worry about their **psuché: “what you will eat or what you will drink.” This is a significant text in the debate for two reasons: 1) these are the words of Jesus, so they reflect how Jesus used the term *psuché*; 2) Jesus also used the word **body (sōma) in the same verse.****

Crucial to the innate immortality position is the assumption that body and soul are contrasting terms. Yet, in this passage body and soul are not contrasted. Both body and soul are terms which imply the earthly, fleshly appetites. The body is concerned with what it will wear, and the soul is concerned with its next meal. Clearly Jesus is not teaching that what one eats and drinks is more important than what one wears. He is not contrasting the soul with the body. Both soul and body are used here to refer to earthly, fleshly appetites of the whole person. Nor is Jesus downplaying the importance of these human needs. He is merely teaching that the kingdom of God is more important. That is what believers should concern themselves over.⁵

10:39

Another significant use of *psuché* by Matthew occurs just eleven verses after 10:28. This is within the most immediate context. The situation and audience is the same: Jesus is preparing the twelve disciples for the mission to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.⁶ The threat is the same: believers are risking their lives if they proclaim the gospel. They will find that even the members of their own households will turn against them.⁷ To be a true believer is to face the sword⁸ **and take up one’s cross.**⁹

Yet, Jesus is not telling his disciples that it is only their bodies that are threatened. He is actually encouraging them to surrender their **souls to be killed. He tells them “If you cling to your life, you will lose it; but if you give up your life for me, you will find it” (NLT). Once again, the word life in that passage refers to the present life of the whole person, not an immaterial essence that survives death. But that term, life, is a translation of the same Greek word, *psuché*. If Jesus had meant to affirm that the soul is an immortal part of the human being that cannot die, why did he use the very same word to refer to the human life, which, by definition is mortal and in threat of**

dying? What is more, he is using the same term in the same message to the same audience.

So, conditionalists cannot accept the interpretation of Matthew 10:28a that insists that soul and body are separate anthropological entities, one of which is indestructible and the other is destructible. That interpretation contradicts what Jesus says in the four most important contexts of Matthew 10:28a. It requires that Matthew 10:28b be reread: anything that is indestructible cannot be destroyed, even by God. Therefore the innate immortality view insists that Jesus is talking about the perpetual torture of human souls, not their destruction. It requires that the same term be **translated “life,” in 2:20 and 10:39,** because the idea of an immortal soul cannot fit those texts. It also downplays the strong connection that the soul has with the body, as seen in 6:25.

11:29

Expanding the contextual boundaries a bit further, we find Jesus promising rest for the souls of those who take his yoke upon themselves. Jesus could not have been referring to merely the immaterial essences of the disciples,

because in the previous verse he had said the same thing without using the **word *psuché*: “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”**¹⁰ Here Jesus uses the term *psuché* the same way as he did in the previous passages in Matthew: as a synonym for the whole person. It **parallels the pronoun “you.”**

12:18

In the next chapter, Matthew quotes Isaiah 42:1-3, which definitely does refer to an immortal soul. Unfortunately for the innate immortality view, that immortal soul **is God’s soul. The text cannot prove anything about human souls.** But in this text as well, the best way to **understand God’s use of the word soul is as a parallel to the “I” in the same verse.**

16:25-26

In chapter 16, Jesus repeats the same admonition that he gave his disciples in 10:39. Jesus is about to go to the cross, , take up their crosses, and follow him. If they try to save their lives (by rejecting him) they will lose their lives. If they lose their lives (by being killed along with him) they will find them.

Here a rather peculiar thing happens. The word *psuché* appears in

this passage four times: twice in v.25, and twice in v.26. Many of the modern translations render it as *life* in v. 25, and *soul* in v. 26. Apparently, the only reason for doing so is that v. 26, taken out of its context, could be used to contrast the soul with the body. In its context, however, v. 26 is saying the same thing that Jesus has said before: personal safety is not worth rejecting him.

In chapter 20, Jesus uses the term *psuché* referring to himself. He said **that he came “to give his life as a ransom for many.”** Again, the best translation for the term *psuché* is the English word *life*. It is clear that Jesus is referring to his impending death at Calvary. By his physical death on the cross, Jesus drank from the cup that led to atonement for the sins of the world. By dying that death, Jesus gave his “soul.” If the soul of every human being is immortal, then Jesus’ soul could not die. But if Jesus’ soul could not die, how could he give it as the world’s ransom?

22:37

In chapter 22, Jesus quotes from the Old Testament again. He had been asked which is the greatest commandment. He replied that it involved **loving the Lord with all one’s**

heart, soul, and mind. Despite the fact that this text is a favorite of preachers due to its built-in three **points, it is best to see “heart, soul and mind” as an example of** hendiatriys. Jesus is emphasizing complete devotion to God. He is not teaching anthropology. Any of the three terms in this verse could have been used alone to convey the idea of complete devotion. Together they maximize the same emphasis.

26:38

The final example of *psuché* in **Matthew’s Gospel is a quote from** Jesus to his disciples at Gethsemane. He is in agony as he prays in the garden, knowing that his death is immanent. He explains to the **disciples that his soul is “very sorrowful, even to death”** and asks them to remain there with him and “watch.” It is clear from Matthew’s description of the event that Jesus’ body was also sorrowing. In fact, Matthew had said the same thing of **the whole Jesus in v.37: “he began to be sorrowful and troubled.”** So, once again, Matthew is using the term *psuché* as a parallel to a pronoun.

The Lucan Parallel

Luke 12:4 offers a synoptic view of the same statement as Matthew

10:28. Luke has Jesus saying “do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do.” Luke does not even mention the *psuché*, thus avoids the perception of dualism, perhaps because he was writing to a Gentile audience who would have been more prone to dualistic thought. His emphasis was the same as that of Matthew. He was encouraging commitment to God rather than fear of man. The death that the persecutors threaten is a real death, but it is merely a temporary one. The cost of rejecting Christ is permanent destruction in Gehenna at the final judgment.

What Matthew 10:28a Does Not Imply

Having surveyed every use of *psuché* in Matthew, and looked at the only synoptic parallel passage, we are now prepared to infer from our text what it does not imply. It does not imply an obvious contrast between two parts of the human person. In every text investigated, the *psuché* is used of the whole person, not one of many parts. In many of the texts, the **soul’s loss is inextricably linked to the death of the body.** In the most immediate context – Matthew 10:28b – both body and soul are

destroyed together at the final punishment of the wicked. Thus, 10:28a could not be implying the innate immortality of the soul. Also, the only significant thing this text implies about the intermediate state is that it is just that – intermediate. It does not imply consciousness. It is a state of death, albeit a temporary death.

What Matthew 10:28a Does Imply

Conditionalists are not prepared to concede that body and soul are two distinct parts of a human, nor that the soul is by nature immortal. But that does not mean that conditionalists refuse to take Matthew 10:28a seriously. We believe that freed from the shackles of platonic dualism this text is better able to convey the original intentions of both Christ and Matthew. They encourage believers to be more **concerned about doing God’s will** than cautious about how others might respond to their devotion. They also remind us that although death is real, it is not permanent. Between Matthew 28a and 28b there is space and time for the dead to be **raised by God’s power at Christ’s return.** For believers, this is cause for celebration. ■

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¹ George Christian Knapp, *Lecture on Christian Theology* (New York: G. & C. & H. Carvill, 1833), 588.

² Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1991), 153.

³ David Burge, "On Matthew 10:28" in *From Death To Life*, Issue 29, Jan/Mar 2006, p.3.

⁴ I am referring, of course, to the Septuagint – the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament.

⁵ Matthew 6:33.

⁶ Matthew 10:6.

⁷ Matthew 10:35-36.

⁸ Matthew 10:34.

⁹ Matthew 10:38.

¹⁰ Matthew 11:28.



Jefferson Vann and his wife Penny have been missionaries with Advent Christian General Conference since

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Dr. Oscar Cullman

Famous European Theologian

By Rev. Christian Bultinck



Dr. Oscar Cullman was a famous 20th Century New Testament scholar who held a conditionalist view of the nature of man.

Born in 1902 in Strasbourg, Dr. Cullmann was a Lutheran scholar in New Testament and Early Christianity at the University of Strasbourg (1930-1938) and Basel (1938-1972) and at the same time in Paris. He was invited as an observer by Cardinal Beas to the Second Vatican Council (1963-1965). Cullmann has published on New Testament Exegesis, Systematic Theology and Ecumenism. He debated with famous theologians like Albert Schweitzer, Rudolf Bultmann and Karl Barth. In *Christ et le Temps* (1947) he defended the position that the New Testament only refers to 'linear time' - - yesterday, today and tomorrow; and that any Philosophy that tries to mix other Metaphysical concepts of time cannot be found in the New Testament. This position led him to write an article on "*Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?*"¹This

article defended the conditionalist position from an academic point of view. As a much respected scholar in Europe, Cullmann taught that the minority can be right on this issue. He **asserted that “This remarkable agreement (among his opponents) seems to me to show how widespread is the mistake of attributing to primitive Christianity the Greek belief in the immortality of the soul.”** Cullmann’s article presented death as the wages of sin, and the last enemy. It presented Christ as the First-Born from the dead, and it presented the dead as those who sleep. This article led to deep controversy in some protestant Reformed denominations (for example in the Netherlands). The article was an unexpected support from the academic world for those Christian denominations that hold the doctrine of conditional immortality. These include Seventh-Day Adventists, Advent Christians, and The Churches of Christ, Life and Advent. Oscar Cullmann became doctor *Honoris causa* at the Universities of Lausanne, Manchester, Edinburgh, Lund and Debrecen. In 1972 he was elected member of the *Académie des Sciences morales et politiques*. He died in 1999. ■

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¹ Unsterblichkeit der Seele und Auferstehung der Toten. Das Zeugnis Neuen Testaments (Theologische Zeitschrift 12, 1956, S.126-156) for a translation in English see : <http://www.religion-online.org/showchapter.asp.title=1115&C=1213>

Rev. Christian Bultinck is a full time prison chaplain and pastor in the United Protestant Church in Belgium. His church is a member church of the World Methodist Council and the World Council of Reformed



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Resurrection Revealed

Part 15—Beryl Ching

The Resurrection in the Epistles—Part 2

General Resurrection (cont.)

A very precious passage which has been a comfort and encouragement to mourning Christians over the centuries, as it was meant to be, is 1 Thess. 4:13-18. In these verses Paul teaches the young Christians in Thessalonica that those who have died since they believed are not lost, and that there will be no difference between them and those who are still alive when Christ returns. The fact that Paul speaks of the last trump is proof that he is not speaking **of a saint's death, but of that day at the end of time when all will be raised. "He says that those who have died will not be left behind; those living will not precede the dead."** In his comment on this passage Ladd adds, **"The goal of the Christian existence is not 'to die and go to heaven', as it is often expressed, but rather, it is the resurrection of the body at the Second Advent of Christ."**⁶⁹

In the next chapter we see a reference to death as sleep, as we

saw earlier. 1 Thess. 5:11, **"(He) died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him."** In other words, if we are alive when He returns, He will change us and take us with Him; if we are dead in the grave, He will resurrect us with new resurrection bodies - and take us to be with Him. In v. 23 it is not only our spirit and soul which are to be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but our bodies. Only resurrection could **produce a "blameless" body.**

Paul had to combat some wrong teaching on the resurrection. One of these teachings was that the resurrection had already taken place (2 Timothy 2:18). **"They were evidently explaining the resurrection in a spiritual sense, equating it with regeneration, or the new birth."**⁷⁰ This was a very disturbing teaching, **unsettling some people's faith, and Paul spoke very strongly against those who dared to do so.**

The resurrection of the dead was a foundational faith (Heb. 6:2).

As we have seen, the apostles included teaching on the resurrection in their basic announcement of the gospel. In the eleventh chapter of the same epistle, the author points out that the reason men and women of faith endured much persecution and even death, was their faith in the resurrection (Heb.11:35).



In 1 Pet.1:11 we are told that the Spirit of Christ not only forecast the sufferings of Christ but the glories that should follow. F. B. Meyer includes amongst these glories the Resurrection, as well as the Ascension, as also the Second Advent and the Millennial Reign.⁷¹ A. M. Stibbs, on the other hand, connecting **the word “grace” in v. 10 with “glories” in v. 12, sees the sufferings of Christ as of necessity having to occur before the following glories which would come to not only Christ**

but to those who experience His saving grace.⁷²

John has something to say about our future state in 1 John 3:2, where he states that when Christ appears, we shall be like Him. How shall we be like Him? As He had a new body when He arose from the tomb, so we can expect to have new **bodies, like His. “The resurrection of our bodies is a kind of coming out of the womb of the earth, and being born into another life”, says J.F.B. Commentary**

Jude, in verse 14, informs us of something not revealed in Genesis, that Enoch was a prophet, and had prophesied that the Lord would come with ten thousands of his saints.

This infers resurrection. “Enoch, before Job, had implied that ‘the saints shall live again’ (Jude 14...)⁷⁴

Resurrection of Christ

The epistles constantly refer to the resurrection of Christ, stressing that it is an essential part of the Gospel message. They also often connect our resurrection to His.

We turn to the first page of the epistles, and find the resurrection of the Lord mentioned, in Rom.1:4. He was declared to be the Son of God by



His resurrection from the dead.

In Romans 4, the need is **declared for us to believe on “him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead”, (v. 24), and the next verse tells us that that resurrection was for our justification - “was raised again for our justification” (v. 25).**

In Romans 6:9 Paul says that Christ has been raised from the dead, and will not die again. His resurrection has proved that death has no authority over Him now. **“Though Christ’s death was in the most absolute sense a voluntary act...that voluntary surrender gave death such rightful ‘dominion over Him’ as dissolved its dominion over us. But this once past, ‘death hath,’ even in that sense, ‘dominion over Him no more.’ ”73**

Paul gives an allegory in Rom.7 which relies on the resurrection of Christ for its meaning. We are dead to the law he says, but alive to Jesus Christ. The law is our old husband, but being dead to the law, we are freed from that old marriage to make **a new marriage with “him who is raised from the dead” (v. 4).**

In Rom.8 we are told that we need to have the Spirit of him which raised Jesus up from the dead dwelling in us, and then we can be assured that the same Spirit will also raise up our

mortal bodies (v. 11). The same chapter assures us that we need have no fears of condemnation by others, because Christ, who is risen from the dead, is seated at the right hand of God and intercedes for us (v.34).

In Rom 10:9 also, the necessity of believing on the resurrection of Christ for salvation is emphasised. Two things are said to be necessary if we are to be saved - confession of the Lord Jesus with the mouth , and believing in the heart that He has been raised from the dead.

A slightly different aspect of **Christ’s death and resurrection is expounded in Ro.14:9.** His death makes Him to be Lord of those who

are dead, and His resurrection makes Him Lord of the living.

Paul gives us a report of several resurrection appearances of Christ, in his first epistle to the Corinthian church. (1 Cor.15:5-8). He says Christ was seen by Cephas (Simon Peter), and by the twelve disciples. (Acts 1:3 says that He showed **Himself to them “by many infallible proofs” for forty days.**) He then gives two occasions not mentioned in the gospels. He tells of 500



believers who saw Christ at one time, and adds that most of them were still alive, and so obviously could testify to this fact. However, the I.V.F. Commentary says about Matt. 28:16-18, **“This appearance [to the Eleven and others on a Galilean mountain] is thought to be the same as that referred to by Paul in I Corinthians xv.**

6 where he says, ‘he was seen of about five hundred brethren at once.’ If this is so, this is an occasion already mentioned in the gospels.

He then refers to a personal appearance to James. This would refer to the Lord’s brother, who by the time of the writing of this epistle was the leader of the church in Jerusalem. His last reference is to the appearance to all the apostles, which we may assume was the second appearance in the upper room when Thomas was present. Or it could refer to the appearance to all at the time of His ascension. (Luke 24:50; Ac. 1:4).

Paul then adds a further appearance, **“and last of all he was seen of me also...”** By this he was probably referring to the Lord’s coming to him on the Damascus Road. It is noted that Paul saw a great light, which blinded him. He also heard a voice, which made him say, **“Who art thou, Lord?”** The Lord told him, **“I am Jesus...”** but there is no mention of Paul seeing a vision at this time (Acts 9:1-6). Even in Acts 22:5-11 and Acts 26:12-18 he refers only to the light and the voice in narrating this story. However, he may mean that Christ was shrouded

by that light, so that he could not see the actual figure, but knew he was there, of course, because He spoke to Paul. We note that Ananias, when he came to pray for Paul to receive his sight again, said, “the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto in the way as thou camest” (Acts 9:17), and also said, “God had chosen thee, that thou shouldst ... see that Just One, and shouldst hear the voice of his

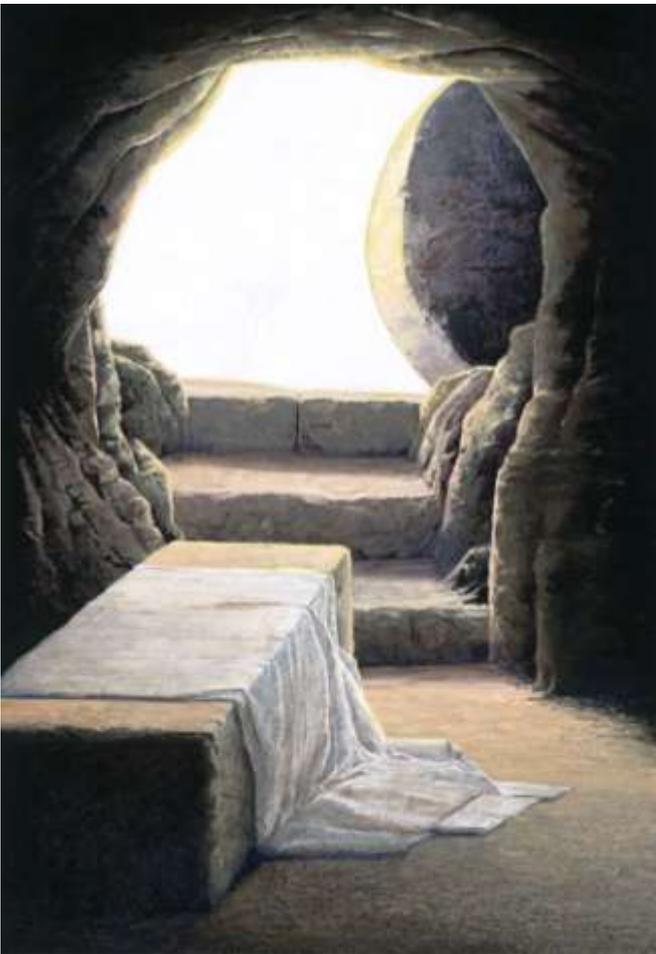


mouth. For thou shalt be his witness ... of what thou hast seen and heard” (Acts 22:14). The use of the words “appeared”, “see” and “seen” seem to indicate that Paul did see more than we are told about earlier in chapter 9, either during the encounter on the road to Damascus, or in the vision which he saw of Ananias coming to him, or perhaps even during the three days when he was blind and fasting. Presumably he was both fasting and praying

during this time. Then again, Paul did see Christ in a vision in the temple at Jerusalem, not a very long time after his conversion (Ac.22:17-21). This vision is not mentioned in the narrative of Paul’s conversion, where we are told only that he had to flee from Damascus, and went to Jerusalem. Schofield, however, in his listing of the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus, equates this appearance to Paul with that of the vision on the Damascus Road [p.281]. Paul strongly affirms, with these proofs, the resurrection of Christ, because the whole foundation of the Christian faith rests upon it. As Arthur T. Pierson says:

“When a religion approaches a man and boldly says: ‘God bears me witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles’ it meets him with a challenge; it bids him dispute its claims if he dare, by first disproving its signs if he can. But when a man has already become a disciple, for example, of Mohammed, he is disposed to receive his miracles as genuine without any witness but his word; and so the religious system instead of being based on these miracles as its proof, rather becomes the basis which supplies them with proof. But Christianity *starts* by

bidding us apply these severe tests. If we can even disprove one miracle, the resurrection of Christ, St. Paul



confesses that the whole structure falls; **“our preaching is vain; your faith is vain.”**⁷⁵

In the midst of trouble in Asia, Paul had the comfort that no matter what happened to him, he could trust in **“God which raiseth the dead”** (2 Cor. 1:9), a comfort and encouragement to us today also.

In 2 Cor. 4:14 Paul says, “...he

which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall **present us with you.”** The fact that God raised up Jesus from the dead gives Paul confidence in the resurrection of all believers, including **his own.”** He writes to the believers to instil in them the same assurance.

2 Corinthians 5:15 stresses that **aspect of Christ’s resurrection which** means that Christians should not live for themselves, **“but unto him which died for them, and rose again.”**

The importance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is given prominence in Gal. 1:1, where it is **mentioned as part of Paul’s greeting** to the church, God the Father being credited with that resurrection.

Again in the extended greeting to the Thessalonian church, in I **Thess.1:10, it is part of Paul’s** testimonial of the church that they have turned from idols to wait for **“his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus...”**

Though the words **“resurrection”** or **“raised from the dead”** do not appear in 2 Timothy 1:10, the declaration that Jesus Christ has abolished death (**“rendered**

death ineffectual” - The New Berkeley Version) and “brought life and immortality to light” necessitates resurrection, without which they could not be accomplished.

Paul reminds the young pastor, Timothy, that an essential part of his gospel was that God had raised Jesus Christ from the dead (2 Tim. 2:8). It was in writing to Timothy, also, that Paul censured Hymenaeus and Philetus, whose chief sin was that they preached the resurrection was past already, so causing the loss of faith of some of the believers.

In all their thinking about the Lord Jesus, the early teachers had in mind that He had risen and it was God who had raised Him from the dead. It is even included in the benediction of Heb.13:20, “the God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus...”

Peter does not lag behind Paul in advocating the resurrection of Christ. In commending the faith of those to whom he is writing, he says, “(you) believe in God, that raised him up from the dead...” (1 Pet.1:21). ■

References:

⁶⁹. G.E.Ladd. *Bible Characters and Doctrines*. Scripture Union. Vol. 16,

Study 29.

⁷⁰. Ralph Earle. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*.

⁷¹. F.B.Meyer. *Tried by Fire*

⁷². A.M.Stibbs. *1 Peter, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, .

⁷³. *The J. F. B. Bible Commentary*.

⁷⁴. *The J. F. B. Bible Commentary, on Job 14:12*.

⁷⁵. Arthur T. Pierson. *Many Infallible Proofs*, p.98.



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Hell Under Fire

Part 2—Warren Prestidge

CIANZ Annual Conference Address

(cont from Part 1 in Iss 46)

Why is Universalism so commonly held today even among mainstream Christians? Or, if they **don't actually advocate** Universalism, why do so many Christians today, including so many Christian pastors and teachers, pretty much avoid the whole subject of final judgment all **together, even though it's** standard, both in the Bible and in all Christian traditions?

And the main reason, surely – or at least one of the two or three main reasons – is that *even Christians today are utterly embarrassed by, and in fact ashamed of, the Traditionalist view of hell!* And James Packer himself agrees with this. He says: **“the deepest motivation in [Universalists'] minds has always** been revolt against mainstream belief in endless punishment in hell

for some people” (p171). In the first essay in the book, J. Albert Mohler Jr. traces something of the growing moral disquiet about this doctrine during the 19th Century.⁵ He writes: **“Of all the articles of accepted** Christian orthodoxy that troubled the consciences of Victorian churchmen, none caused more anxiety than the everlasting punishment of the **wicked.”**

Well I would say: I should think so! So it should! It should cause us anxiety, or again there is something seriously wrong with us. And this anxiety should drive us back to the Scriptures to discover whether in fact the Traditional view is substantiated – and there we will find it is not substantiated at all. The great modern Evangelical Christian leader John Stott, who of course came to believe in Conditional Immortality, **said: “I find the concept [of eternal** conscious torment] intolerable and do not understand how people can live with it without cauterizing their

feelings or cracking under the strain.”⁶ Even some of the Traditionalists in this book *Hell Under Fire* are clearly disquieted about eternal torment. For example, in the essay “Jesus on Hell”, Robert W. Yarborough writes, “With Stott I affirm that the doctrine of eternal conscious punishment strains our sense of justice”, and concedes he “cannot make sense” of it (p90).

Yet it seems to me that, in the biblical view, God’s justice ought to make sense to us. In fact, the Bible insists that **God’s justice** is something we can all rejoice in! This is what the Psalmist says: “Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who dwell in it! Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills sing for joy together before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity” (Ps 98:7-9)! Really? How can you rejoice at a hell of eternal suffering which doesn’t make sense or cauterizes your feelings?

This is what makes sense to me. God is the Lord of life. I have no existence without God. If I reject God, if I sin against God, I cannot expect to live and I am not fit to live.

That makes sense. Interesting that **it’s more or less what was affirmed**, in 1995, in a report by the Doctrine Commission of the Church of England entitled *The Mystery of Salvation*, quoted in fact in *Hell Under Fire*. The report said: “**Hell is not eternal torment, but it is the final and irrevocable choosing of that which is opposed to God so completely and so absolutely that the only end is total non-being.**”⁷ It makes sense, and it’s self-evidently just, that if you reject **God’s will for your life, you must die –**



for you have no power or right to live without it.

Yet Traditionalists say that even those who reject God will live forever. One of the essayists in *Hell Under Fire*, Sinclair B. Ferguson, quotes with approval the remark by Thomas Brooks of the 17th Century: “**The damned shall live as long in Hell as God himself shall live in Heaven.**”⁸ That’s merely putting bluntly what

the Traditionalist view does in fact imply. Well, not only is it an appalling thought, it makes no sense and it is entirely unbiblical. The Bible says eternal life is available only through the Saviour Jesus Christ by faith, that **sinner shall “die”, shall “perish”, and that in the end God will be “all in all” (I Cor 15:28).** I believe that, because that is the biblical Gospel, **and I’m happy to say it makes sense as well.**

And in fact this is what the Bible **affirms: both that God’s justice does make sense and that what it prescribes for sinners is death.** In Ezekiel 18, for example, the prophet Ezekiel goes to great lengths to spell out how God’s justice works to people who are finding it obscure. **He doesn’t say, Like it or lump it! He says to his contemporaries: “You say, ‘What the Lord does isn’t right.’ Well, listen to me and I’ll explain it” (Ezek 18:25), and launches into the most painstaking exposition of God’s judgment in the whole Old Testament.** And this is what he says – or rather, what God says through him: **“‘As I live,’ says the Lord God, ‘...all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sins shall die’” (Ezek 18:4).** Sorry,

Traditionalists! God doesn’t say: “shall suffer forever”! He says: “shall die.”

The Apostle Paul says the same thing. In the most theologically systematic and precise of all his letters, Romans, in the middle of the most painstaking exposition of God’s judgment in the whole New Testament, Paul says, **“[Sinners] know God’s decree that those who deserve such things deserve to – die” (Rom 1:32).** They **“know” it, both in the sense that they are aware of it and in the sense that their consciences acknowledge its justice.** And what is it that sinners **deserve, by God’s decree? Eternal suffering? No. They “deserve to die”.** Just as Paul repeats later, in Romans 6:23: **“The wages of sin is – death”.** Just as God told the first man and woman in Eden: **If you sin, you will die. And just in case you don’t get what death is, God said – just in case,**



like many Traditionalists, you think **the word “death” may not mean what it seems to mean – I’ll tell you: Genesis 3:19: “You are dust and to dust you shall return”. You will cease to exist. Conditional Immortality.**

This also is what makes sense to me: that ultimately God will put an *end* to evil and to unrepentant evildoers. **Isn’t that what the Bible means,** among other things, when it affirms **that ultimately God will be “all in all” (I Cor 15:28), or that ultimately God will “unite all things in Christ” (Eph 1:10), or that “Babylon” “shall be found no more” (Rev 18:21)?** And yet this is not what *Hell Under Fire* says. *Hell Under Fire* says that evildoers will both continue forever, that in fact God will deliberately keep them that way and, furthermore, that they will continue to be unrepentantly evil forever!

I refer, for example, to one of the two essays by the co-editor Christopher W. Morgan.⁹ Morgan knows that God could put an end to the unsaved, if He wanted to. Even Christians who believe in the immortality of the human soul usually concede these days that such immortality cannot be **absolute, as is God’s, but can only continue by God’s will. And actually**

most Bible scholars and competent Christian thinkers today agree that, biblically, we have no immortal soul **at all. So Morgan writes: “...the wicked will be punished consciously forever in hell, not because they exist as immortal souls but because God will sustain them” (p205). So God could put them out of their misery if He wished, but He won’t!**

So Traditionalists have this huge problem: they have to somehow explain how it is just, even thinkable, let alone merciful, for God – our God, Jesus and His Father – to deliberately cause people, millions of them, to keep on suffering forever and ever. The usual explanation is, that because God is infinite, and infinitely worthy, sin against God demands an infinite penalty. And sure enough, Morgan argues this (pp210-1). Here **he goes: “If people lied to us or disobeyed us, would they deserve death? Of course not. If they do these things against God, do they deserve capital punishment? The Bible’s consistent answer is yes....”**

Well, okay. But did you notice something strange? Morgan has just **argued for “death”, for “capital punishment” – not for eternal suffering.** It seems that the

Traditional view of hell is so **unthinkable that, even while he's arguing for it, Morgan can't think it!** **But wait: there's more! Morgan** realises that, in order to justify eternal torment, he must go further than the infinite God argument. For **he goes on to add: "It also seems likely that those in hell remain in their sinful state...continuing in sin and therefore stockpiling more and more guilt and its consequent punishment."** (p212). **What an appalling notion!** Yet Morgan is not alone in this. He is able to cite A. H. Strong and D. A. Carson to the same effect. Clearly, this is considered to be an important plank of Traditionalist teaching. And, in fact, **I can't see any alternative to it, if indeed the wicked continue forever deprived of the saving grace of God – for how else do we escape from the habit of sin at all, except by God's grace?** And sure enough, in the last essay in the book, Sinclair B. **Ferguson says the same thing: "In Scripture," says Ferguson, "...the sinfulness of the wicked is viewed as continuing...There is no repentance. Hatred of God has no time limitation on it"** (p235)! **God "all in all"? Doesn't sound like it!**

"All things reconciled to God" (Col 1:20)? Not according to the Traditionalists. **"Every tongue in heaven, in earth and under the earth confessing that Jesus Christ is Lord" (Phil 2:9-11)? Not at all. "New heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwell" (II Pet 3:13)? Don't count on it, says *Hell Under Fire!*** Rather, evil without end, by evildoers whom God Himself actively sustains. And to what purpose? *This sounds like no final judgment at all, to me.* In fact it sounds like a most appalling nightmare. Frankly, it sounds like blasphemy. And yet Traditionalists are the ones who regularly accuse Conditionalists of **heresy! No. Conditionalism doesn't threaten any fundamental Christian doctrine whatever: it enhances them all.** But this Traditionalist teaching of evil without end – **well, that's another matter.**

As a matter of fact, I doubt that Traditionalists really mean what they say! In *Hell Under Fire*, R. Albert Mohler Jr. makes the following quotation *with approval*: **"Hell expresses the intent of a holy God to destroy sin completely and forever..."**.¹⁰ **Amen. But that's not Traditionalism! That's Conditional**

Immortality. But I don't want to "up the anti" any further! I just thank God that the Bible teaches, not eternal torment, but Conditional Immortality.

But does it? Isn't it Traditionalism that is biblical? This is the central question, after all, as I've already said. For if Traditionalism is biblical, we need to go with it and try to make sense of it, however hard that may be. Well, on the basis of the arguments put forward in this book, I would say: No, Traditionalism is not biblical at all. This book cannot marshal a serious case based on the consistent witness of Scripture, not even on credible interpretation of a significant basket of texts.

Maybe contributors to *Hell Under Fire* sense that their own arguments are



weak, for they do actually employ several strategies to skew the debate unfairly and unreasonably in their

favour. *For one thing*, they often argue that Conditionalists are not really listening to the Bible: that we are allowing ourselves to be led astray by emotional or sentimental considerations. Actually they claim **even more**. As I've just observed, they repeatedly seek to link the doctrine of Conditional Immortality either with age-old sectarianism or with modernist liberal tendencies to deny the full authority of Scripture, to pick and choose which parts of the Bible will be taken seriously and to undermine key features of orthodox Christian faith.¹¹ A pair of Traditionalists have even stated that **"The doctrine of eternal punishment is the watershed between evangelical and non-evangelical thought!"**¹²

Well, that's just ridiculous. Can Traditionalists really claim that such proponents of Conditional Immortality as Michael Green, John Wenham, Philip E. Hughes and John Stott are less committed to the authority of Scripture, or less competent Bible teachers, than they? They do have the grace to admit, at **least, that Edward Fudge's book *The Fire That Consumes*** is thoroughly biblical. As for myself, all I can say is, that I am at least as committed to the Bible as these Traditionalists, and just as concerned as they are about

modernist trends to undermine the biblical Gospels, or about emergent church tendencies to shelve orthodox teaching regarding the atonement. In my own book, I deliberately avoid any appeal to emotionalism and seek to found everything I say squarely on what the Bible consistently teaches ■

(Part 3 of Hell Under Fire will be published in FDTL Issue 48)

References:

⁵ ***“Modern Theology: the Disappearance of Hell”***.

⁶ Cited by Robert W. Yarborough on p88

⁷ Cited in *Hell Under Fire*, p33.

⁸ ***“Pastoral Theology: The Preacher and Hell”***, p227.

⁹ ***“Annihilationism: Will the Unsaved be Punished Forever?”***

¹⁰ P17; quoting Thomas Oden, who is attempting to summarize the patristic consensus, in his *Systematic Theology*; Vol 3 (1992).

¹¹ E.g. R. Albert Mohler Jr, in *Hell Under Fire*, pp34ff.

¹² John Ankerburg and John Weldon, cited by R. Albert Mohler Jr. In *Hell Under Fire*, p32.

Warren and his wife Jackie have been in church ministry since 1981.



Before entering theological college Warren taught English at tertiary and secondary levels. He spent 14 years at a

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From the Web – T Burge

Conditional Immortality continues to be a topic that many write about on their websites. Here is a quote from one questioning the validity of conditional immortality:

“For soul-sleepers, the story of Lazarus and the Rich Man in Luke 16:19-31 is difficult to explain away. It indicates a consciousness after death. So, what is the soul-sleep theory? It purports that between death and the resurrection, the soul sleeps and is not conscious.”

The Afterlife.co.nz website is a valuable resource to point people to who raise such questions. There are many articles on website that address the issues the blogger raises. The website has a search box so you can find what you are **looking for. “Lazarus” for example** will provide a page full of articles.

And a quote supporting conditional immortality from a different author:

“Lu 23:42 And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.

Being with the thief in Paradise is **not “remembering” him. Jesus was** correcting the thief by letting him know that He was remembering him that very day.

The false teaching of souls in heaven started a very long time ago. When the entire Bible is studied for truth, there is no doubt whatsoever that there is a punctuation flaw in our Bibles in Luke 23:42. How ridiculous to think that Jesus walked this earth before His ascension in just His bodily form. And if He was not only in bodily form when He was resurrected, then, like Lazarus before Him, His soul must have made a trip to heaven, back to earth and then **back to heaven again.”²**

Once a month on the www.afterlife.co.nz website I list the latest blog posts I can find on the topic of conditional immortality

■ References :

¹<http://igspong.blogspot.com/2010/09/two-souls-not-asleep.html>

²<http://atheolous.blogspot.com/2010/10/correction-for-mr-camping-on-1st-thess.html>

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Statement of Faith

1. We believe in God and His one and only Son, Jesus the Christ. Heb. 11:6; John 14:1; 3:16; 20:31; Mat. 16:16.
2. We believe in the Holy Spirit. 2Pet. 1:21; 1Cor. 6:19; Jude 20; Eph. 3:5.
3. We believe that Jesus died for us and gave himself a ransom for all. Rom. 5:8; 1Cor. 15:3; 1Tim. 2:6.
4. We believe that God raised Jesus from the dead; that by resurrection He became Lord of both the dead and the living, and the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep; and that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. Rom. 10:9; 14:9; 1Cor. 15:20; John 3:16.
5. We believe that baptism is commanded by Christ, was practiced by His Apostles, and is taught in the New Testament. Mat. 28:18,19; Acts 8:12,38.
6. We believe that all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the people of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2Tim. 3:16,17.
7. We believe that human beings are by nature mortal. Gen. 2:7; 3:19; 1Tim. 6:16; 2Tim. 1:10; Rom. 2:6-7.
8. We believe that human beings in death are unconscious. Psalms 6:5; 115:17; Ecc. 9:5,10. This is likened to "sleep". Job 14:12; Psalms 13:3; Jer. 51:39; Dan. 12:2; John 11:11-14; 1Cor. 15:51.
9. We believe that immortality is obtained only through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. 1Cor. 15:21-23; 2Tim. 4:7-8; 1John 5:9-12.
10. We believe that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked, to be followed by the Judgment. Acts 24:15; John 5:25,28,29; Rev. 20:12,13.
11. We believe that evil and evil-doers shall be finally destroyed. Psalms 145:20; Mat. 10:28; Rom. 6:21; Phil. 3:19; Heb. 2:14; 1John 3:8; Rev. 22:3.
12. We believe in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Acts 1:11; John 14:3; 1Thes. 4:16.