

Hell as the Love of God

Mako A. Nagasawa



Defining Heaven: Self-Centered Rewards?



Defining Heaven: Self-Centered Rewards?



Defining Hell: Self-Centered Fears?



Defining Hell: Self-Centered Fears?

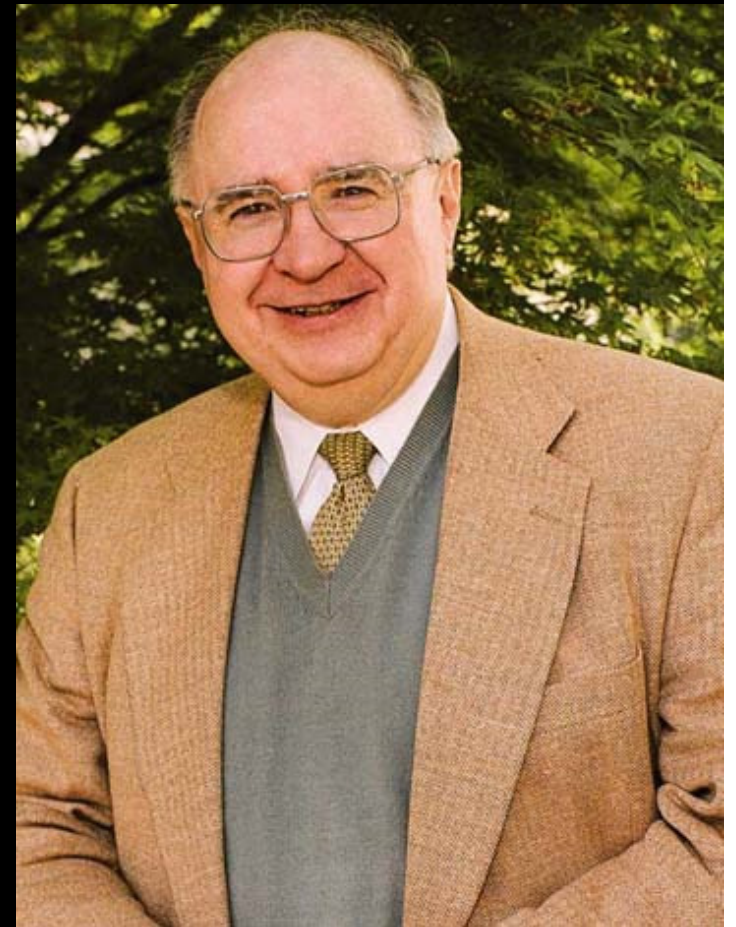


The Problem

- Is Jesus just a gatekeeper to getting what you want and avoiding what you don't?
- What if your desires are messed up?
- What if God is actually trying to fix your desires?
- Then you can't start with yourself and your current desires

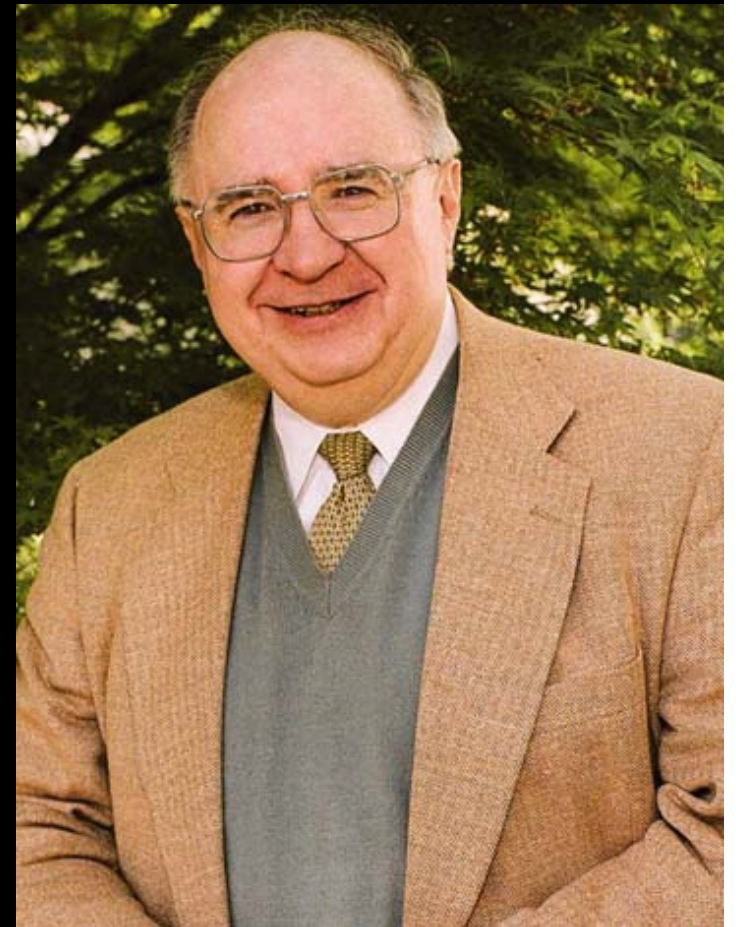
The Character of God Comes First

- ‘Of course, the question of punishment, i.e. of hell and damnation will arise in many people’s minds, and quite rightly. But damnation does not mean that God ceases to love the one damned. If that were true, then the sinner would be more powerful than God, since the sinner would have the power to make God, who is love, *agape*, something less than God.



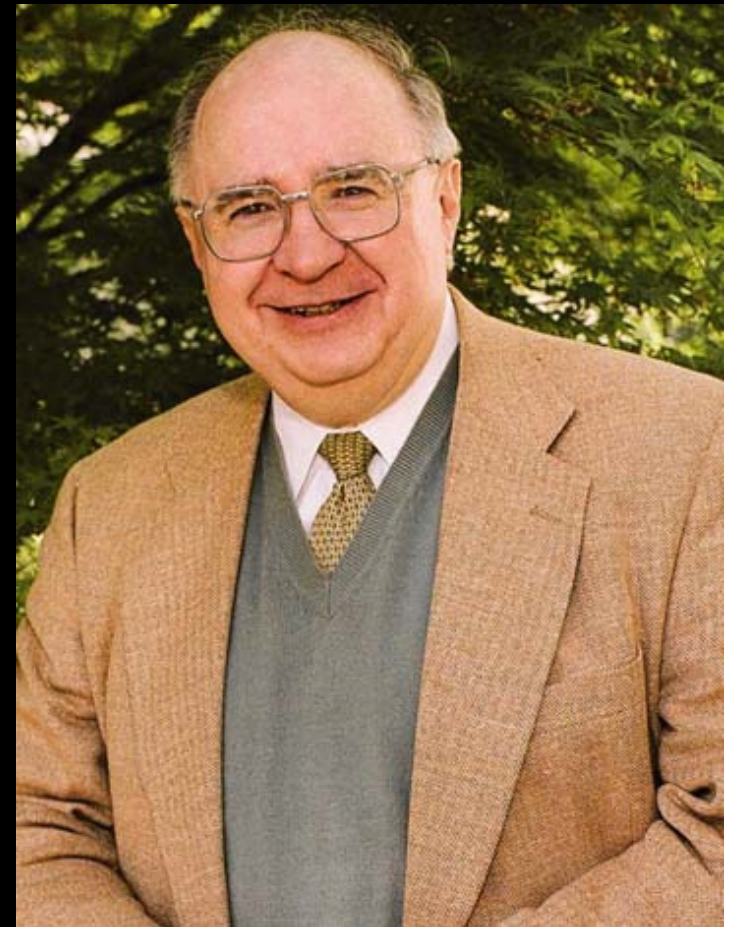
The Character of God Comes First

- 'No, God's love is constant, unchanging and perfect. Damnation means that the sinner refuses finally and absolutely to accept being loved and to love in response. The damned may not love God, but God continues to love the damned. After all, the love of God is what holds us in existence...



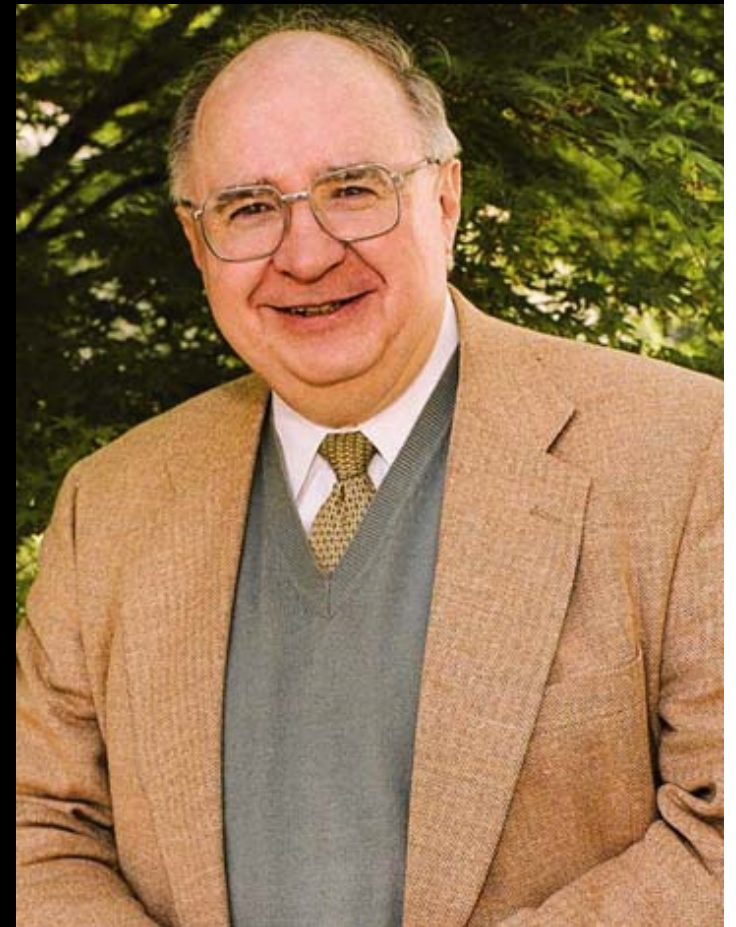
The Character of God Comes First

- 'If God does not love you, you're not damned. You simply aren't. What supports our existence and holds us in being is God's love. We exist by the fact that God gives God's self to us at every moment. Therefore, of course, God loves the damned. God loves everything that exists just because it exists. Indeed, that is what makes it exist: God loves it into being...



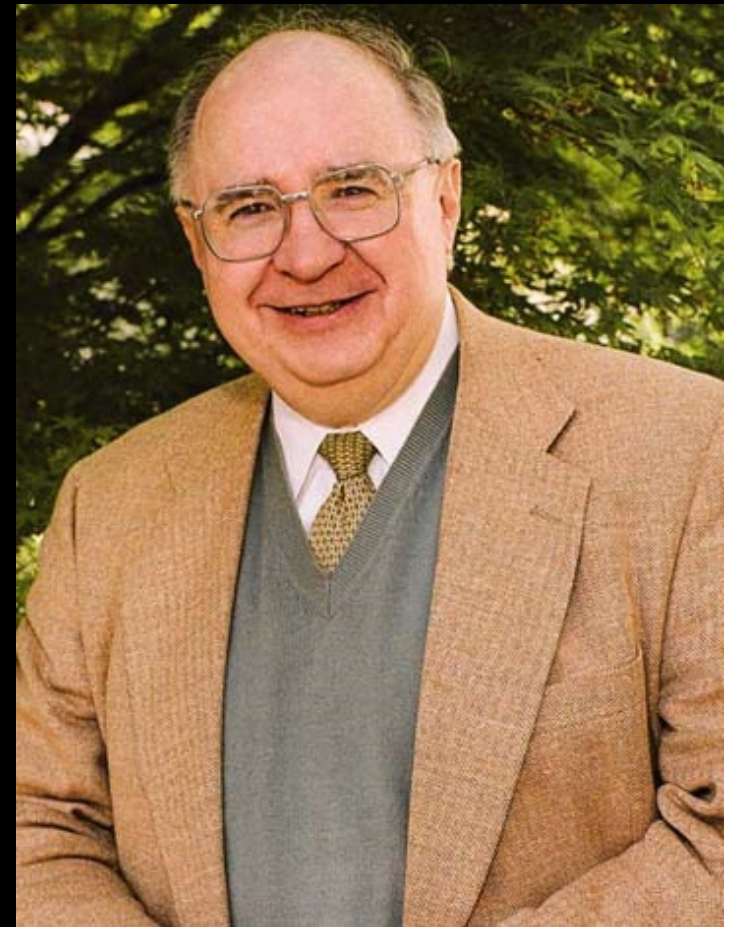
The Character of God Comes First

- 'Let me give you an image which comes from Gregory of Nyssa at the end of the fourth century. The difference between heaven and hell is described in this story he tells: Picture yourself walking out on a bright sunny day with healthy eyes. You will experience the sunlight as something wonderful and pleasant and beneficent.



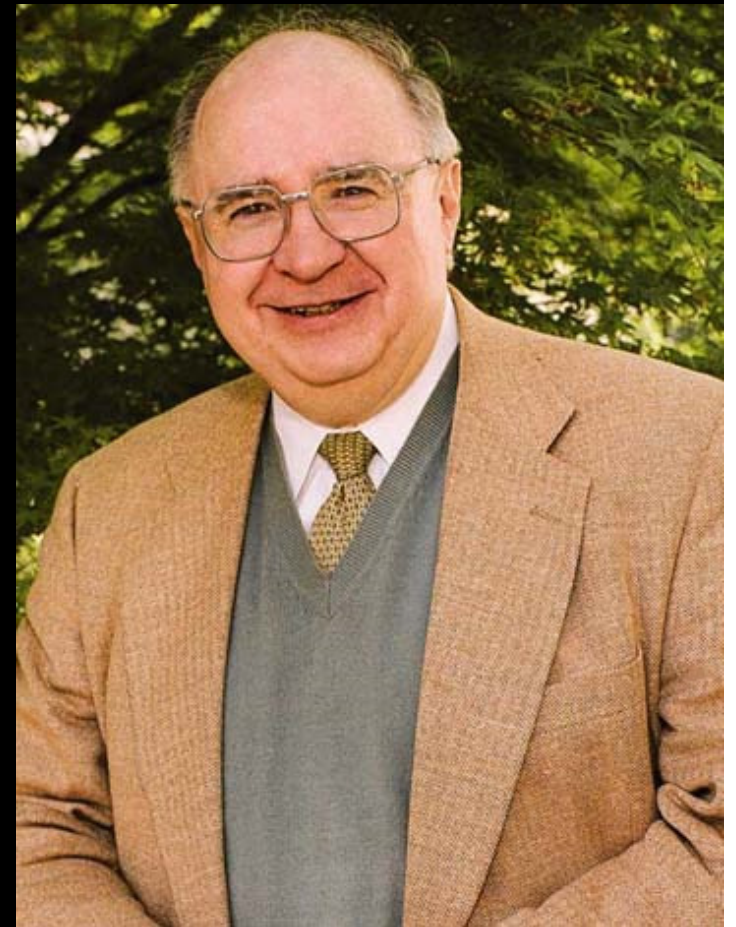
The Character of God Comes First

- ‘Now, picture yourself walking out on exactly the same bright sunny day, but with a diseased eye. You will now experience the sunlight as something terrible and painful and awful, something to shy away from. Well, the sun didn’t change. You did...



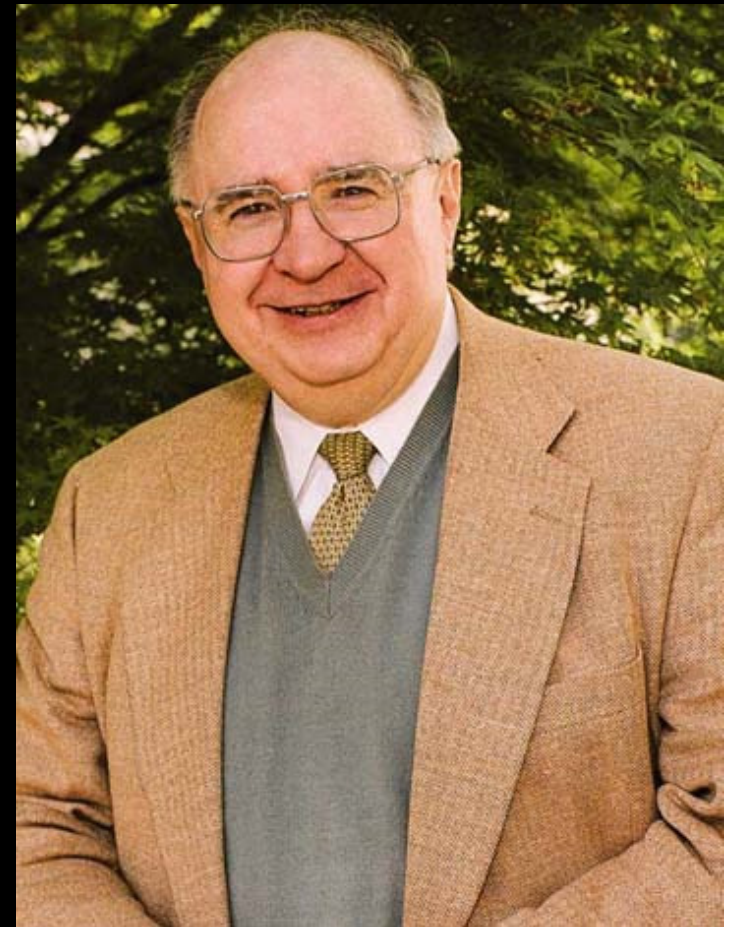
The Character of God Comes First

- ‘That is the point about heaven and hell. Heaven and hell are exactly the same thing: the love of God. If you have always wanted the love of God, congratulations, you got heaven. If you don’t want the love of God, too bad, you are stuck for all eternity. God remains God. God makes the sun shine on the just and the unjust, the rain fall on the good and the wicked.



The Character of God Comes First

- ‘If you don’t want rain or sun, too bad, you are still going to get them. The question is not that God changes in response to us. It is that we are judged by our response to the absoluteness of God’s self gift.’
 - Michael Himes, S.J., *Doing the Truth in Love*, p.14 – 15



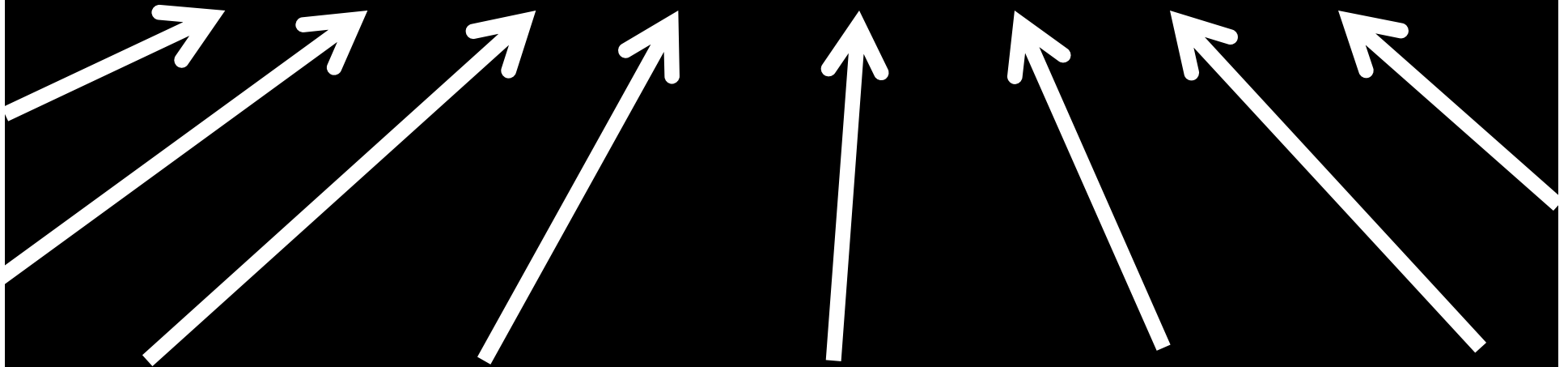
Really? What's the Evidence?

- Theology
- Church History
- Scripture

Really? What's the Evidence?

- Theology
- Church History
- Scripture

“God as Lightswitches”?



Love

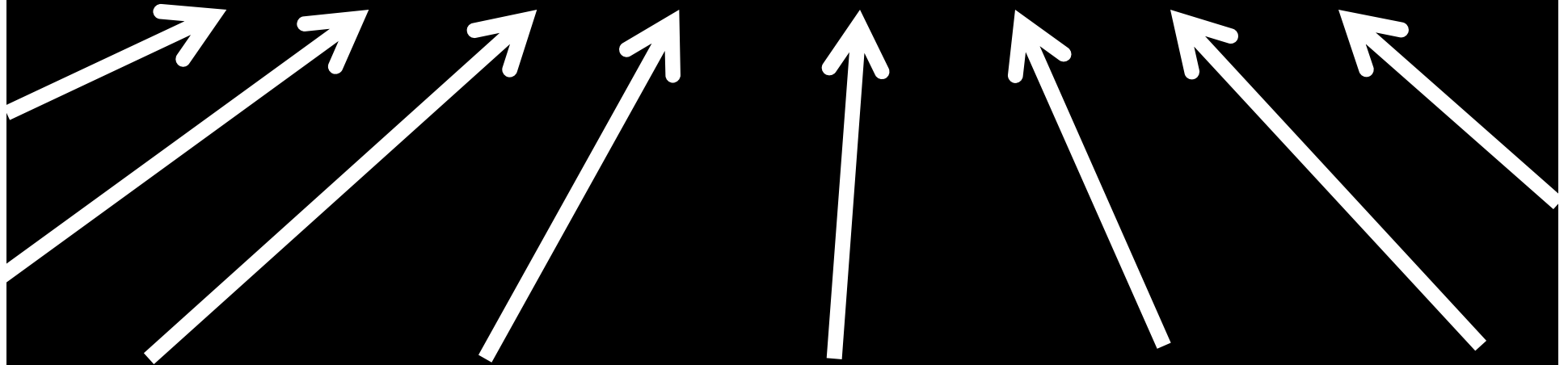
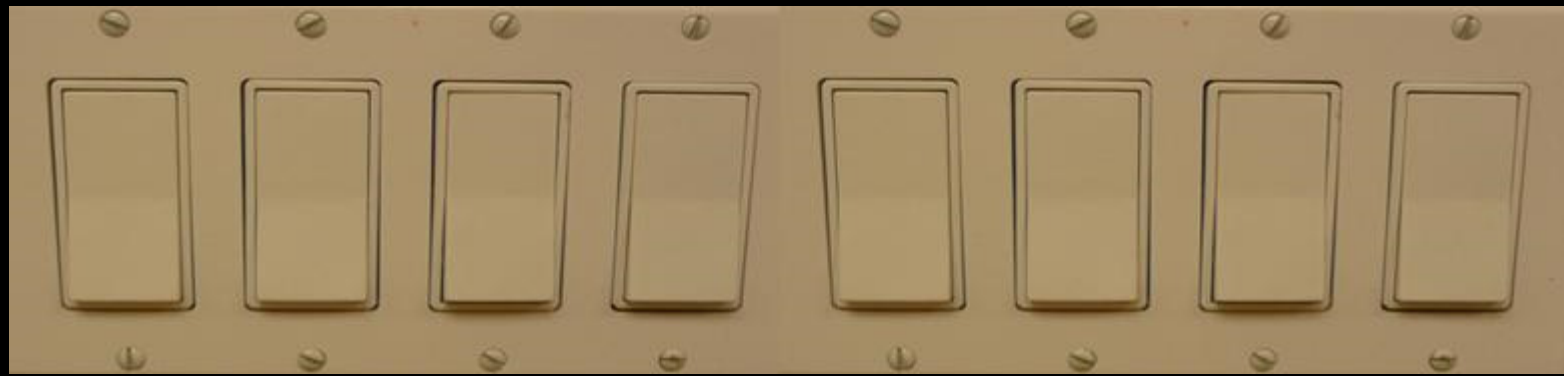
Wrath

Holiness

Mercy

Etc.

Systematic Theology: How to Integrate these Characteristics?



Love

Wrath

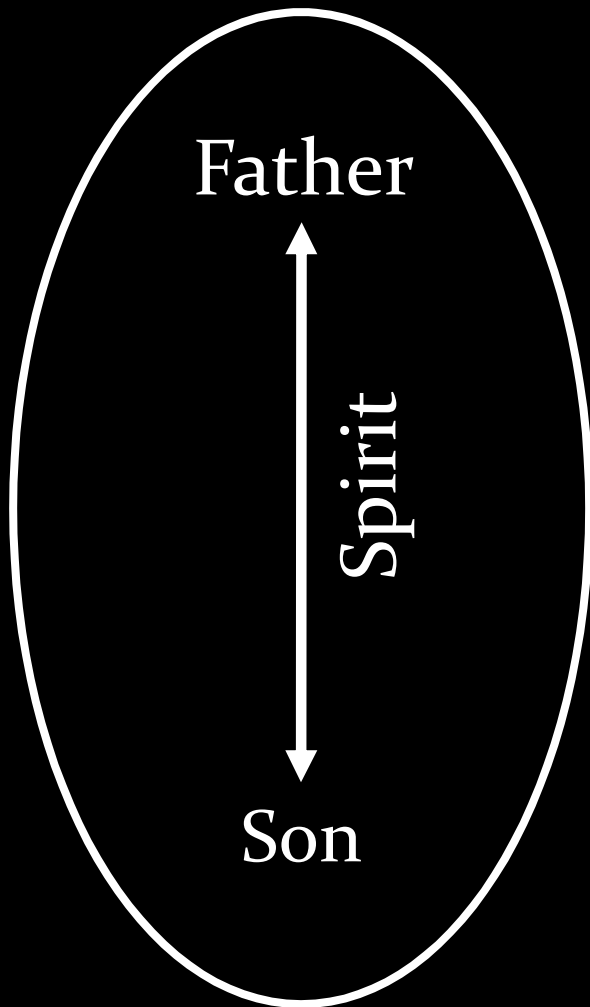
Holiness

Mercy

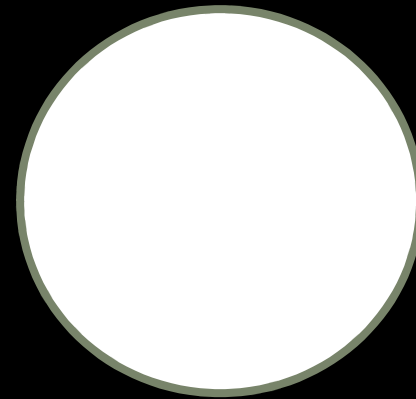
Etc.

What is God's Nature?

God as Trinity



God as Singularity



God's Primary Characteristics? Before Creation

God as Trinity

- Loving
- Personal
- Relational
- Family
- Friendship
- Unified
- Community
- Other-centered

God as Singularity

- ??

God's Primary Characteristics? Before Creation

God as Trinity

- Is Love (summary)

God as Singularity

- ??

God's Secondary Characteristics? After Creation

God as Trinity

- Is Love
- Holy
- Wrathful
- Merciful
- Just
- Sovereign
- Powerful
- Wise
- Etc.

God as Singularity

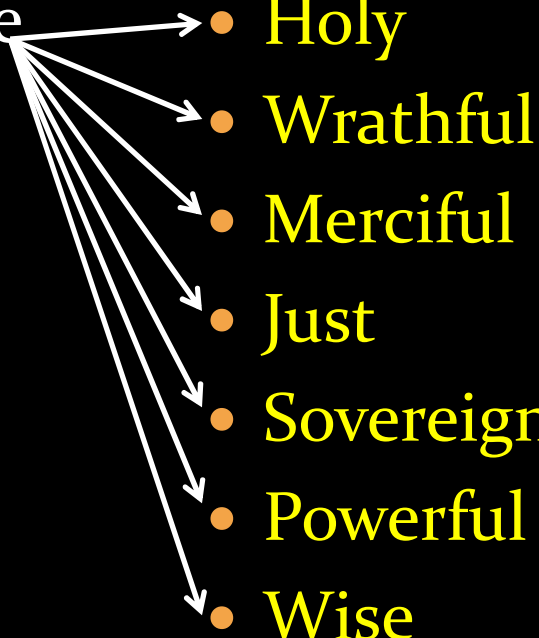
- ??

Secondary characteristics are how God relates to creation

- Holiness requires commonness, etc.

God's Secondary Characteristics? After Creation

God as Trinity

- Is Love
 - Holy
 - Wrathful
 - Merciful
 - Just
 - Sovereign
 - Powerful
 - Wise
- 

- Must be integrated
 - E.g. How does God's justice an *activity* of His love?

God as Singularity

- ??

- Can be arbitrary
- Can do and be anything
- No need to integrate

Systematic Theology

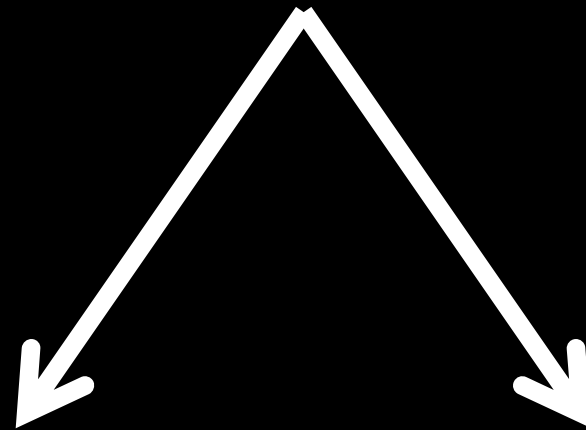
- Which model of God is Trinitarian?

God is loving



God in Jesus
offers new humanity
to ALL, opposes all
human evil down to
its source in us

God is arbitrary



God
saves
some
(mercy)

God
damns
others
(justice)

Systematic Theology

- Does God change fundamentally just because He created us and we sinned?
- “God is love” becomes “God is love and wrath”?? How?

God is loving



God in Jesus
offers new humanity
to ALL, opposes all
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God is arbitrary



God
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Systematic Theology

- Did anyone else notice that that is a problem?
- Yes, let's see what they said!

Really? What's the Evidence?

- Theology

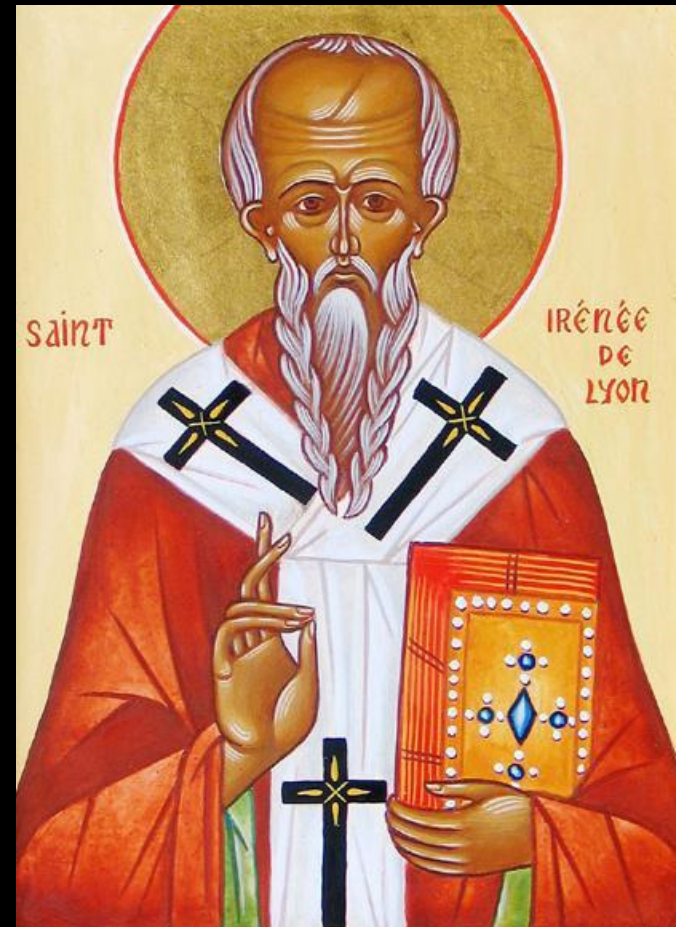


- Church History

- Scripture

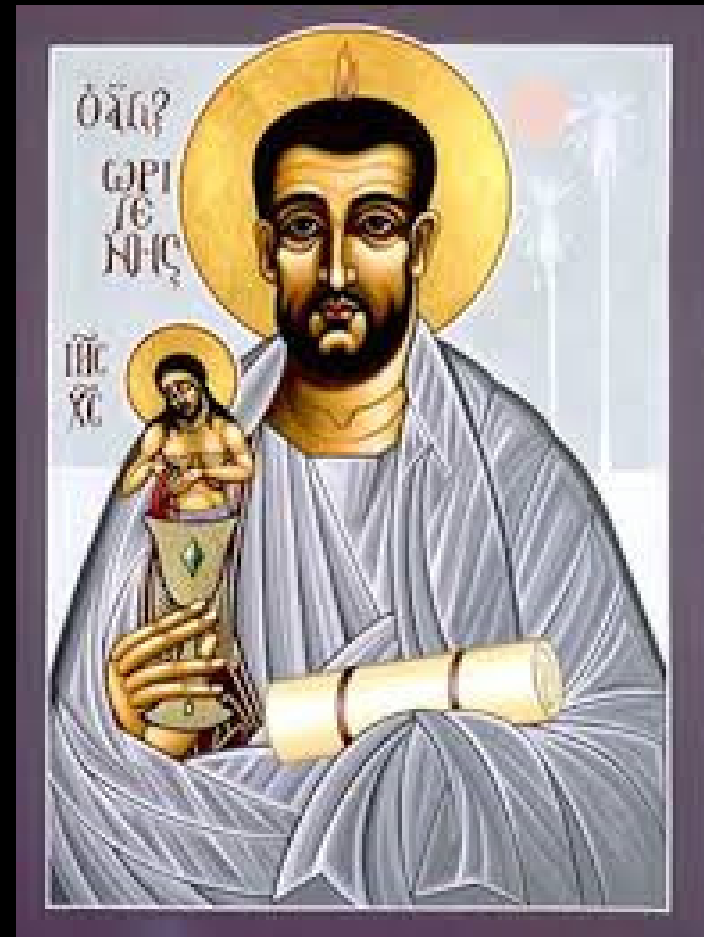
Hell: *Why* It's Like That

- 'For one and the same God [who blesses those who believe] inflicts blindness upon those who do not believe, but who set Him at naught; just as the sun, which is a creature of His, [blinds] those who, by reason of any weakness of the eyes cannot behold his light; but to those who believe in Him and follow Him, He grants a fuller and greater illumination of mind.'
- Irenaeus of Lyons, 2nd century
(*Against Heresies* 4.29.1; cf. 4.39.1 – 4)



Hell: *Why* It's Like That

- ‘...the sun, by one and the same power of its heat, melts wax indeed, but dries up and hardens mud not that its power operates one way upon mud, and in another way upon wax; but that the qualities of mud and wax are different, although according to nature they are one thing, both being from the earth.’
 - Origen of Alexandria, 3rd century (*De Principiis*, book 3, chapter 1 ‘On the Freedom of the Will’, paragraph 11)



Hell: *Why* It's Like That

- 'God is good, dispassionate, and immutable...Thus to say that God turns away from the wicked is like saying that the sun hides itself from the blind.'
 - Anthony the Great, 3rd to 4th centuries, Egyptian monk and founder of monasticism (*Philokalia*, Vol.1: On the Character of Men, 150), friend of Athanasius of Alexandria



Hell: *Why* It's Like That

- 'O God, you are the consuming fire that can burn away their love for these things and re-create the men in immortal life.'
- 'I have been divided...until I flow together unto You, purged and molten in the fire of Your love.'
 - Augustine, bishop of Hippo, 4th and 5th centuries (*Confessions* book 5.3, 11.29)



Hell: *Why* It's Like That

- 'Every inordinate affection is its own punishment.'
- Augustine, bishop of Hippo, 4th and 5th centuries (*Confessions* book 1)



Hell: *Why* It's Like That

An Imaginary Dialogue

- *Jesus*: Hello there!
- *Person* (rather taken aback): You...so it's true...
- *Jesus*: Yes, it is me.
- *Person* (sighing): Well, I hope you're going to treat me well for all the good I did? Lots of ice cream?
- *Jesus*: I think you have the wrong idea about what's going on here. I don't have ice cream.
- *Person*: What do you mean? I don't understand. I did a lot of good on earth.

Hell: *Why* It's Like That

- *Jesus*: You did do some respectable things, because you were made in my image and you retained a sense of goodness that comes from me.
- *Person*: What?! That goodness came from *me*! So I should be able to get all the ice cream I want now, right?
- *Jesus*: I'm afraid you have the wrong idea. I am only offering myself.
- *Person*: You? I don't want you. I thought there was some reward involved.
- *Jesus*: There is only me. Everything else is connected to me, so if you don't receive me, everything else here will be a terrible hardship to you.

Hell: *Why* It's Like That

- *Person*: What? How could you treat me like this?
- *Jesus*: You feel I have wronged you?
- *Person*: Of course! Look at all the good I've done!
- *Jesus*: Indeed, but there are many thing you did that are not good, and much good you failed to do. That points to the need you have to receive from me a new human nature, the human nature I lived and died and rose again to create in my own physical body. Will you receive me now?

Hell: *Why* It's Like That

- *Person*: No! I'm *offended*! How can you say I need to be healed? Transformed? I'm not that bad.
- *Jesus*: You are indeed. You have trained yourself to become addicted to ice cream, and much more: flattery, money, quite a bit of alcohol and porn, and independence. And your corrupted human nature is resisting me.
- *Person*: I'm resisting you, because you never gave me what I wanted in life. Even now you're not giving me what I want, and what I deserve!

Hell: *Why* It's Like That

- *Jesus*: I think you're mistaking me for someone else. I'm giving you what you *need*. You need to be with me, to be joined to me, and to be like me. You need to be loved by me and healed and transformed by me.
- *Person*: I refuse to believe that! That is insulting!
- *Jesus*: It is the truth. I only tell the truth.
- *Person*: Look at how you're treating those people over there. Why don't you treat me better?
- *Jesus*: I treat all people the same. I give myself to them, and ask that you give me your very self. They have chosen to say 'yes' to me.

Hell: *Why* It's Like That

- *Person*: Even my wife? You took her from me! Twice. At her so-called 'conversion.' And then she died. You took her. Now I demand that you give her back to me. I want to see her.
- *Jesus*: She is not yours.
- *Person*: She loved me, until you started taking her from me!
- *Jesus*: I did not cause her death. I healed her from our mutual enemy: the corruption of sin, which leads to death of all kinds.
- *Person*: You corrupted her. You stole her from me! Give her back to me the way she was.

Hell: *Why* It's Like That

- *Jesus*: You would do her evil just trying to possess her, by reducing her to her former state of weakness when she accepted your ego. But that is not possible, for she is now who I made her to be. She does love you, but only because she shares my love for you. She would say the same things to you that I am saying to you now. Would you like to hear her now?
- *Person*: No! I don't need her! And I don't need you! Leave me alone!
- *Jesus*: I will not leave you alone. I *cannot* leave you alone. It is not my nature. I love you.
- *Person*: You love me? You're stalking me!

Hell: *Why* It's Like That

- *Jesus*: For all eternity, I will call out to you to surrender yourself to me, to let me burn away the thing in you that should not be there, and replace it with my very self. That is my love.
- *Person*: Nothing you do could make me love you. You're repulsive, and the closer you get, the more I hate you. Stop! You're tormenting me!
- *Jesus*: *You* have made it so.

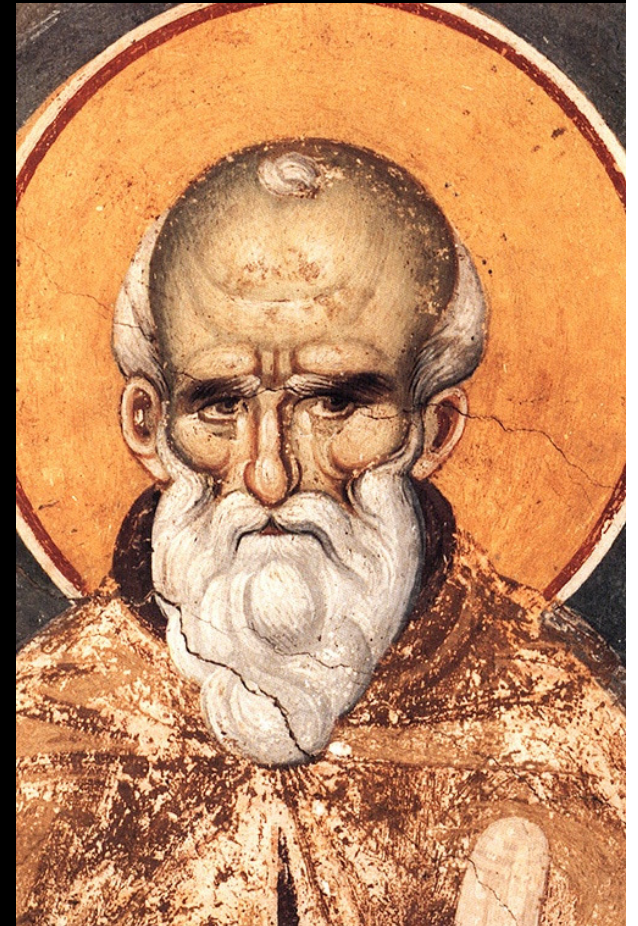
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- 'Every inordinate affection is its own punishment.'
- Augustine, bishop of Hippo, 4th and 5th centuries (*Confessions* book 1.19)



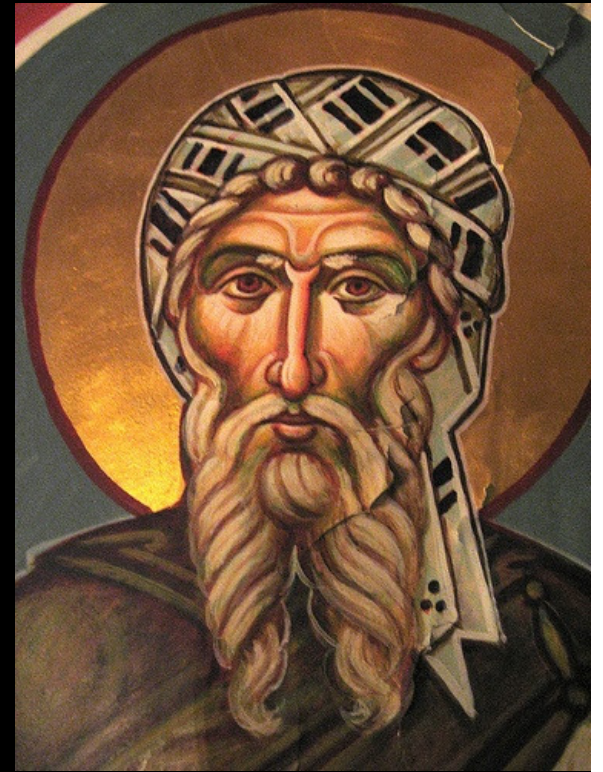
Hell: *Why* It's Like That

- ‘God is the sun of justice, as it is written, who shines rays of goodness on simply everyone. The soul develops according to its free will into either wax because of its love for God or into mud because of its love for matter. Thus just as by nature the mud is dried out by the sun and the wax is automatically softened, so also every soul which loves matter and the world and has fixed its mind far from God is hardened as mud according to its free will and by itself advances to its perdition, as did Pharaoh. However, every soul which loves God is softened as wax, and receiving divine impressions and characters it becomes the dwelling place of God in the Spirit.’
 - Maximus Confessor, 7th century, monk at Constantinople (*Chapters on Knowledge*, par.12)



Hell: *Why* It's Like That

- 'In eternity God supplies good things to all because He is the source of good things gushing forth goodness to all... After death, there is no means for repentance, not because God does not accept repentance – He cannot deny Himself nor lose His compassion – but the soul does not change anymore... people after death are unchangeable, so that on the one hand the righteous desire God and always have Him to rejoice in, while sinners desire sin though they do not have the material means to sin... they are punished without any consolation. For what is hell but the deprivation of that which is exceedingly desired by someone? Therefore, according to the analogy of desire, whoever desires God rejoices and whoever desires sin is punished.'
- John of Damascus, 7th and 8th centuries, Syrian priest (*Against the Manicheans* 94.1569, 1573)



Hell: *Why* It's Like That

- ‘The sorrow which takes hold of the heart which has sinned against love, is more piercing than any other pain. It is not right to say that the sinners in hell are deprived of the love of God...But love acts in two different ways, as suffering in the reprovéd, and as joy in the blessed.’
 - Isaac the Syrian, 8th century (Cited in Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, p.234; and Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, p.181 – 82)



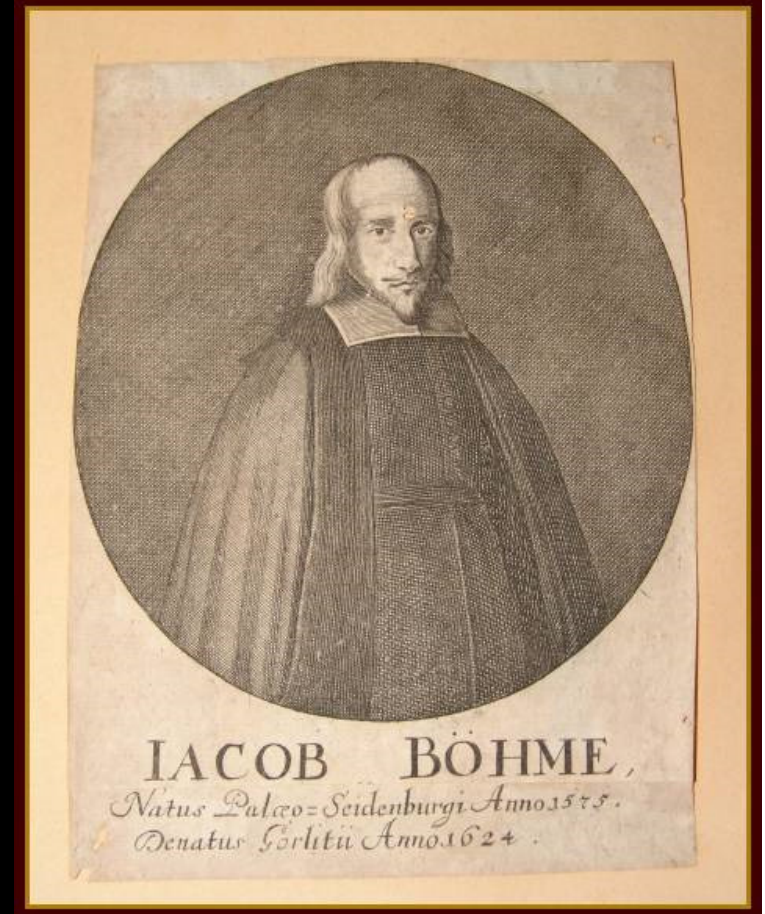
Hell: *Why* It's Like That

- ‘The Eastern Orthodox church teaches that heaven and hell are being in God's presence which is being with God and seeing God, and that there is no such place as where God is not, nor is hell taught in the East as separation from God. One expression of the Eastern teaching is that...God's presence...is punishment and paradise depending on the person's spiritual state in that presence.’ (wikipedia, “Christian Views on Hell”)



Hell: *Why* It's Like That

- 'Hell is in heaven and heaven is in hell. But the angels see only the light, and devils only the darkness.'
- Jakob Boehme (1575 – 1624)



Hell: *Why* It's Like That

- Who believes this?
 - The united church for a thousand years+
 - The entire Eastern Orthodox church
 - C.S. Lewis (Anglican), *The Great Divorce*
 - J.R.R. Tolkien (Catholic), *LOTR*, e.g. Gollum
 - Karl Barth (Reformed), *Church Dogmatics*
 - T.F. Torrance (Reformed), *Atonement*
 - Donald Bloesch (Reformed), *The Last Things*
 - Roberta Bondi (Methodist), *Out of the Green Tiled Bathroom*
 - Michael Himes, S.J. (Catholic), *Doing the Truth in Love*
 - Karl Rahner (Catholic), *Theo Investigations Vol.VI, Ency. of Theo.*
 - Hans Urs Von Balthazar (Catholic), *Dare We Hope*
 - Pope John Paul II (Catholic), *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*
 - Richard John Neuhaus (Catholic)
 - Avery Cardinal Dulles, S.J. (Catholic)

Really? What's the Evidence?

- Theology



- Church History




- **Scripture**

The Motif of Fire: Pentateuch

- **Fire** is symbolic of God's *refining* presence: Pentateuch
 - Guarding the way to the tree of life is a **flaming** sword (Gen.3:24), symbolizing the word of God (Rev.1:16, etc.) which can cut/circumcise uncleanness away
 - God as **fire** in the burning thorn bush (Ex.3:2; Acts 7:30)
 - God as **fire** on Mount Sinai inviting Israel higher up and further in (Ex.19:13; Dt.5:5)
 - See also Hebrews 12:18 – 29, where the writer says that we come not to the fiery Mt. Sinai, but to a new Mt. Zion after having been cleansed and perfected through Jesus, 'for our God is a consuming **fire**.'

A central image of a tree with its branches and trunk completely engulfed in bright orange and yellow flames. The tree is set against a dark, textured background of brown and black, suggesting a night sky or a dark landscape. The base of the tree is a dark, jagged silhouette of a rock or bush.

**the bush burned
with fire and it was not
consumed**



*And Mount Sinai was all in smoke
Because the Lord descended upon it in fire . . .
and the Lord called Moses up to the top of the mount.
And Moses went up.*

**Our God is a consuming fire
(Deuteronomy 4:4; Hebrews 12:29)**

Exodus 19:18, 20

A composite image featuring the Tabernacle in a desert landscape. The Tabernacle is a large, white, tent-like structure with a dark interior, surrounded by a white fence. In the foreground, there is a large fire burning in a metal container. The background shows a desert with mountains and a bright, glowing light source, possibly the sun or a divine light, illuminating the scene. The sky is dark with a nebula-like pattern.

*...and the glory of the LORD
filled the tabernacle...*

Our God is a consuming fire
(Deuteronomy 4:4; Hebrews 12:29)



Mosaic of Jesus transfigured on Mount Tabor,
from the 5th century, St. Peter's Basilica, Vatican



Pentecost by Jean Restout (1692 – 1768)
described in Acts 2:1 – 13

The Motif of Fire: Matthew

- **Fire** is symbolic of God's *refining* presence: Jesus in Matthew's Gospel
 - 'The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the **fire**. As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove his sandals; he will baptize you with the **Holy Spirit and fire**. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will thoroughly clear his threshing floor; and he will gather his wheat into the barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable **fire**. (Matthew 3:10 – 12)
 - How you experience divine **fire** depends on you

The Motif of Fire: Matthew

- **Fire** is symbolic of God's *refining* presence: Jesus in Matthew's Gospel
 - How you experience divine **fire** depends on you (positively):
 - Disciples: 'You are the light of the world... a city on a hill... nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.' (Mt.5:14 – 16; 'lamps' in 25:1 – 13)
 - Jesus: As he purifies his humanity by the Spirit (Mt.3:13 – 4:11) he announces that those in Galilee are seeing a 'great light' (4:16). This becomes actual 'light' when the Spirit transfigures him (17:1 – 13; implicitly 28:1 – 3)

The Motif of Fire: Matthew

- **Fire** is symbolic of God's *refining* presence: Jesus in Matthew's Gospel
 - How you experience divine **fire** depends on you (negatively):
 - 5:22 'Whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.' (Mt.5:22)
 - 13:42 Throw them into the **furnace of fire**; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Mt.13:42)
 - 22:13 Throw him into the **outer darkness**; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Mt.22:13)
 - 25:30 Throw out the worthless slave into the **outer darkness**; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Mt.25:30)

The Motif of Fire: Matthew

- ‘You came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, and the mountain burned with **fire** to the very heart of the heavens: **darkness**, cloud and thick gloom...’ I was standing between the LORD and you at that time, to declare to you the word of the LORD; *for you were afraid because of the fire and did not go up the mountain* (Dt.4:11; 5:5)
- **Fire** and **darkness** are literary motifs related to Israel’s failure at Mount Sinai. They said, ‘No’ to God’s invitation to come higher up and further in, and *remained on the outside of God* instead

The Motif of Fire: Sacrifices

- God in Israel's Temple: like a dialysis machine
 - It was like Jewish circumcision, cutting something unclean away from the person, cleansing the person
 - The laying on of hands on the animal symbolized placing the corrupted part of us and giving it to God to consume
 - God then gave Israel back innocent, uncorrupted animal blood
 - **Refining, purifying**



The Motif of Fire: Isaiah

- **Fire** is symbolic of God's *refining* presence: Isaiah
 - 'When the Lord has **washed away** the filth of the daughters of Zion and **purged** the bloodshed of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgment and the **spirit of burning**, then the LORD will create over the whole area of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day, even smoke, and the brightness of a **flaming fire** by night; for over all the glory will be a canopy.' (Isa.4:4 – 5)
 - Isaiah's unclean lips are cleansed with a **fiery, burning coal** (Isa.6:6)
 - Fire *becomes destroying* for those who want to hold onto their impurity (Isa.29:6; 30:27 – 30; 66:1 – 24 which is also connected to the theme of renewal of God's presence on Mt. Zion, a retelling of Sinai)

The Motif of Fire: Ezekiel

- **Fire** is symbolic of God's *refining* presence: Ezekiel
 - God's throne is described as 'a great cloud of fire...like glowing metal in the midst of the fire' (Ezk.1:4, 13, 27; 8:2)
 - 'Because all of you have become dross, therefore, behold, I am going to gather you into the midst of Jerusalem. As they gather silver and bronze and iron and lead and tin into the **furnace** to blow **fire** on it in order to melt it, so I will gather you in My anger and in My wrath and I will lay you there and melt you. I will gather you and blow on you with the **fire** of My wrath, and you will be melted in the midst of it. As silver is melted in the **furnace**, so you will be melted in the midst of it; and you will know that I, the LORD, have poured out My wrath on you.' (Ezk.22:19 – 22) This leads to a purified Israel (Ezk.36:16 – 36)

The Motif of Fire: Malachi

- **Fire** is symbolic of God's *refining* presence: Malachi
 - 'For He is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness.'
(Mal.3:2 - 3)

The Motif of Fire: Psalms

- **Fire** is symbolic of God's *refining* presence: Psalms
 - 'For You have tried us, O God; You have **refined** us as silver is **refined** ...We went through **fire** and through water, yet You brought us out into a place of abundance.' (Ps.66:10, 12)
 - Psalm 18:6 – 14 also seems to use Mt. Sinai as a reference point

The Motif of Fire: Luke

- **Fire** is symbolic of God's *refining* presence: Jesus in Luke
 - Acts
 - John the Baptist speaks of the **fire** of the Holy Spirit (refinement) or wood-burning (destruction) (Lk.3:9 – 18)
 - At Pentecost, the Spirit comes with 'tongues of **fire**' (Acts 2:1 – 3), which symbolically makes each believer a mini Mt. Sinai, since Pentecost commemorates the giving of the Sinai Law
 - How you experience divine **fire** depends on you

The Motif of Fire: Paul

- **Fire** is symbolic of God's *refining* presence: Paul
 - 'Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with **fire**, and the **fire** itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is **burned** up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through **fire**.' (1 Cor.3:12 – 15)

The Motif of Fire: Revelation

- **Fire** is symbolic of God's *refining* presence: Revelation
 - 'His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of **fire**. His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a **furnace**' (Rev.1:14 – 15; 2:18)
 - 'I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by **fire** so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see.' (Rev.3:18)
 - Fire is destroying for those who cling to impurity: 'tormented with **fire and brimstone** in the presence of the holy angels and *in the presence of the Lamb*' (Rev.14:10)

The Motif of Fire: Revelation

- **Fire** is symbolic of God's *refining* presence: Revelation
 - Fire is destroying for those who cling to impurity:
 - 'And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. Then death and Hades were thrown into the **lake of fire**. This is the second death, the **lake of fire**. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the **lake of fire**.'
- (Rev.20:12 – 15)

The Motif of Fire: Revelation

- Another example of *literary* interpretation:
 - 'Lake of fire' (Rev.20:14 – 15)
 - Lake: A victory over enemies, prefigured by the Red Sea and the Sea of Galilee
 - God drowned the Egyptians who pursued Israel in the Red Sea
 - Jesus drowned pigs possessed by demons in the Sea of Galilee
 - The Sea of Galilee was considered unstable, dangerous
 - Jewish preference for 'land' for humanity as opposed to the 'sea' from Genesis 1
 - Fire: God's refining power, feels like destroying power
 - A physical region where people experience the refining love of God as torment, because they have become addicted to something else; they experience no stability

The Motif of Fire

- **Fire** is a *literary theme* in each book
- You cannot draw conclusions about **fire** from only the passages where **fire** is destroying
- That is a methodological mistake

The Motif of Fire

- Other mistaken examples of breaking up a literary theme, using Acts as an example
 - Tongues and the Spirit: Do we examine only times when the Spirit bestows tongues on believers?
 - Imprisonment: Do we only examine times where God breaks the apostles out of jail?
 - The apostles' speeches and evangelism: Do we give evangelistic speeches only appealing to creation? (to Gentiles) Or only appealing to fulfillment of Messianic passages? (to Jews)
- Bad literary methodology!

Hell: *Why* It's Like That

- God's refining power, feels like destroying power



Hell: *Why* It's Like That

- What is Jesus refining/burning out?
 - The corruption in human nature, first in himself, then us
 - Gen.6:5 – 6; 8:21; Dt.30:6; Jer.4:4; 17:1 – 10; 31:31 – 34; Ezk.11:19; 36:26 – 36; Mt.15:18 – 20; Rom.2:28 – 29; 6:1 – 11; 8:1 – 4
 - Through Jesus' new humanity and his Spirit
 - Rom.6:1 – 11; 8:1 – 4
 - With our willing partnership
 - Rom.4:1 – 5:11

Hell: *Why* It's Like That

The dove descending breaks the air
With flame of incandescent terror
Of which the tongues declare
The one discharge from sin and error.
The only hope, or else despair
Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre-
To be redeemed from fire by fire.
Who then devised the torment? Love.
Love is the unfamiliar Name
Behind the hands that wove
The intolerable shirt of flame
Which human power cannot remove.
We only live, only suspire
Consumed by either fire or fire.



T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*

Hell: *Why* It's Like That

- Before you ask the question, 'What is hell like?' you must ask the question, 'What does sin do to us?'
- Sin makes your experience of God's love a burning torment
 - ¹⁷ Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. ¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. ¹⁹ Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. ²⁰ 'But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing **you will heap burning coals on his head.**' ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Romans 12:17 – 21)

Hell: *Why* It's Like That

- Before you ask the question, 'What is hell like?' you must ask the question, 'What does sin do to us?'
- Sin is your attempt at self-negation (John 18 – 19)
 - Jesus: 'I am'
 - Simon Peter: 'I am not'
 - Pontius Pilate: 'What is truth?'
 - Jewish leaders: 'We have no king but Caesar'

Hell: *Why* It's Like That

- What about Jesus apparently pushing people away when they want him?
 - ‘And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness’’ (Mt.7:23).
 - Later the other virgins also came, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open up for us.’ But he answered, ‘Truly I say to you, I do not know you.’ (Mt.25:11 – 12)

Hell: *Why* It's Like That

- In both cases, they want a reward from Jesus, but not Jesus himself. They do not want his heart transformation for themselves
 - The false prophets are inwardly ravenous wolves (Mt.7:15 – 23)
 - They reject the heart-changing teaching of Jesus (Mt.5:1 – 7:14)
 - The other five virgins lied about having oil; they had no oil and had not wanted to carry it (Mt.25:2).
 - Oil represents the Holy Spirit and the internalized word of Jesus.
 - They want to drain oil from others, and cut short the feast, which represents their petulant refusal to repent
 - So in that sense, yes, Jesus denies them what they want
 - But he keeps calling them to real repentance

Really? What's the Evidence?

- Theology



- Church History



- Scripture



Two Views of Hell

Legal: Prison Sentence

- God's wrath – like a judge
- God hates you, punishes you by throwing you into a prison or torture chamber
- You desire to be with God, but He says no
- Hell is against your desires
- Hell is infinite wrath and retributive justice

Medical: Addiction Treatment

- God's wrath – like a surgeon
- God hates the 'cancer' in you, denies your addiction, demands you let him perform the surgery
- You desire to be without God, but He says no
- Hell is your desires
- Hell is infinite love and restorative justice

Two Views of Hell

Legal: Prison Sentence

- Scriptures Emphasized:
What it's like
- 'Original sin' =
inherited guilt
- Fire is punishing
- Darkness is being
abandoned by God

Medical: Addiction Treatment

- Scriptures Emphasized:
Why it's like that
- 'Ancestral sin' =
inherited corruption
- Fire is refining
- Darkness is their self-imposed
blindness, un-creation

Two Views of Hell

Legal: Prison Sentence

- Scriptures Emphasized:
What it's like
- Sin is lawbreaking
- God's wrath is against us for lawbreaking, for the consequences of sin

Medical: Addiction Treatment

- Scriptures Emphasized:
Why it's like that
- Sin is addiction and self-destruction, then lawbreaking
- God's wrath is against the corruption in us, the source of our sin (Rom.1:18; 7:14 – 8:4)

Implications

- God's Character
 - God is 100% good, trying to undo 100% of the evil of humanity
 - Consistently and thoroughly Trinitarian
- Church Unity
 - The teaching of the earliest, united church, for a thousand years+
 - Everyone else must explain their departure from this
- Personally Relevant
 - What/Who do you desire?
 - Urgency: Address your addiction *now*; later is harder

Hell: Is There an Urgency?

- *Apathetic Dawdler:* I actually like what you're saying here, because I feel like there's not a rush for me to come to Jesus!
- *Me:* What do you mean?
- *Apathetic Dawdler:* I mean that you're not threatening me with hell. Other Christians would try to make me feel scared that I could die on my car ride home, and then I'd be in hell because I didn't accept Jesus right here, right now. You make it sound like I have a lot of time.

Hell: Is There an Urgency?

- *Me:* Well, I think there is still a real urgency to looking into Jesus now.
- *Apathetic Dawdler:* Why?
- *Me:* Because you are developing an addiction. What makes you think you will become the type of person who will want to give your life to Jesus later, if all you want now is more time to yourself?
- *Apathetic Dawdler:* What? Why? Won't it be easy?

Hell: Is There an Urgency?

- *Me*: No. If all you really want is independence, and not healing, then you are training your mind and human nature to reject Jesus. When you meet him, you will probably look at all eternity stretched out in front of you and say, 'Jesus, what's the rush? You've got lots of time in this eternity. How about 10,000 more years of freedom for me, and then I'll accept you?'
- *Apathetic Dawdler*: Say, that's right! I'm going to use that with him. See, there is no rush. [smiles]

Hell: Is There an Urgency?

- *Me*: There is a rush, actually. Not a rush because your life might be cut short by a car crash, but a rush because the longer you develop an addiction, the harder it is to break it.
- *Apathetic Dawdler*: That's a good question. If I'm an addict, I would probably say, 'I don't want what you have. Give me what *I* want.'
- *Me*: Absolutely. So what's your addiction?
- *Apathetic Dawdler*: Wait, so you think I'm going to hell?

Hell: Is There an Urgency?

- *Me*: I think you are *becoming* someone who would experience the love of Jesus as hell, because you're so apathetic, and Jesus wants you to be as loving as he is.
- *Apathetic Dawdler*: [silence]
- *Me*: Don't you look back on your life and see how apathy, lack of love, has hurt other people in your life? Hurt you? The question is whether you want to be in touch with the God of love. Maybe you'd like to read a short and surprisingly fun book by C.S. Lewis about why people in hell want to stay there (it's called *The Great Divorce*), and talk about it with me?

Salvation, Predestination, Hell

MAJ. WESTERN

EARLY CHURCH, EASTERN

What framework?

Legal (judicial)

Medical (being, ontology)

What is human sin?

Wrong actions

Wrong condition

Jesus dealt with sin...

At his death only

From conception to death

God's wrath went from...to...?

Father to Son, or
God to God

Jesus' divine nature to
Jesus' fallen human nature

Jesus is the

Victim

Victor

God saves us from

Himself

The corruption in us

Salvation is

Forgiveness

New identity, healing

Gets us into the

After-life

Mission-life

Predestination is

Only for some

For all (to share in resurrection)

Human free will

Is questionable

Is essential, decides how we
experience God & shape ourselves

Hell is

A prison

An addiction treatment center

God's nature is

Love and Wrath

Love only