

Champions of Conditional Immortality

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The line is long and impressive of those championing conditional immortality. In contrast, the opposers of conditional immortality included Pope Leo X who on December 19th, 1513 issued a Bull (*Apostoloici regimis*) declaring:

"We do condemn and reprobate all who assert that the intelligent soul is mortal."

"Dammamus et reprobamus omnes assertentes animam intellectivam mortalem ess."

This bull was directed against the growing "heresy" of those who denied the natural immortality of the soul, and avowed the conditional immortality of man. But the list of detractors of this papal decree is long and eloquent and includes man from all faiths and nationalities.[100]

Pietro Pomponatius of Mantua, a noted Italian professor and leader among the Averrorists, who denied the immortality of the soul, issued a book in opposition to the papal bull titled, *Treatise on the Immortality of the Soul*, 1516. This book was widely read, especially in Italian universities.[200]

Dr. Martin Luther posted his Theses on October 31, 1517 in Wittenberg. In his 1520 published Defence of 41 of his propositions, Luther cited the pope's immortality declaration, as among "those monstrous opinions to be found in the Roman dunghill of decretals." [250] The 27th proposition read:

"However, I permit the Pope establish articles of faith for himself and for his own faithful - such are: a) That the bread and wine are transubstantiated in the sacrament; b) that the essence of God neither generates nor is generated; c) that the soul is the substantial form of the human body; d) that he (the pope) is emperor of the world and king of heaven, and earthly god; e) **that the soul is immortal**; and all these endless monstrosities in the Roman dunghill of decretals - in order that such as his faith is, such may be his gospel, such also his faithful, and such his church, and that the lips may have suitable lettuce and the lid may be worthy of the dish." [300]

Archbishop Francis Blackburne states:

"Luther espoused the doctrine of the sleep of the soul, upon a Scripture foundation, and then he made use of it as a confutation of purgatory, and saint worship, and continued in that belief to the last moment of his life." [400]

Champions of the 16th Century

William Tyndale (1484-1536), British Bible translator, came to the defense of the revived teaching of conditional immortality. This, as well as other teachings brought him in direct conflict with the papal champion, Thomas More, who strongly objected against Tyndale and Luther who, in the words of More, said, "all souls lie and sleep till doomsday". In 1530 Tyndale responded vigorously saying,

"And ye, in putting them (the departed souls) in heaven, hell, and purgatory, destroy the arguments wherewith Christ and Paul prove the resurrection ... And again, if the souls be in heaven, tell me why they be not in as good case as the angels be? And then what cause is there of the resurrection?" [500]

Tyndale pressed his contention even further showing that the papal teaching on the subject is in conflict with St. Paul:

"'Nay, Paul, thou art unlearned; go to Master More, and learn a new way. We be not most miserable, though we rise not again; for our souls go to heaven as soon as we be dead, and are there in as great joy as Christ that is risen again.' And I marvel that Paul had not comforted the Thessalonians with that doctrine, if he had wist it, that the souls of their dead should rise again. If the souls be in heaven, in as great glory as the angels, after your doctrine, shew me what cause should be of the resurrection?" [600]

John Frith, associate of Tyndale stated his views similarly to those of Tyndale. He wrote:

"Notwithstanding, let me grant it him that some are already in hell and some in heaven, which thing he shall never be able to prove by the Scriptures, yea, and which plainly destroy the resurrection, and taketh away the arguments wherewith Christ and Paul do prove that we shall rise;

... and as touching this point where they rest, I dare be bold to say that they are in the hand of God." [700]

George Wishart (1500-1546), Greek scholar, friend of Latimer, tutor of John Knox. Wishart was charged with attacking aurricular confession, transubstantiation, extreme unction, holy water, invocation of saints (who couldn't hear their supplications anyway), and purgatory.

Charge "XVI" stated: "Thou false heretic has preached openly saying, that the soul of man sleep to the latter day of judgment and shall not obtain life immortal until that day." [800]

During this time the 'General Baptists' militated against the 'soul - sleep' teaching through **John Calvin** and **Johann L. von Mosheim**, chancellor of the University of Göttingen, [900] who wrote: "that the soul, between death and the resurrection at the last day, has neither pleasure nor pain, but is in a state of insensibility."

Dr. Joseph Priestley, after observing that many of the early reformers held to 'soul-sleep', stated: "Had it not been for the authority of Calvin, who wrote expressly against soul sleep, the doctrine of an intermediate conscious state would, in all probability, have been as effectually exploded as the doctrine of purgatory itself." [1000]

The 17th Century

Richard or Robert Overton (1609-1679), scholar, soldier and pamphletier, published in 1643, *Man's Mortality*, in which the title page reads:

"A Treatise wherein 'T is proved, both theologically and Philosophically. That as *whole man sinned, so whole man died*; contrary to the common distinction of *Soul and Body*: And that the *present* going of the Soul into *heaven* or *hell*, is a meer Fiction. And that at the *Resurrection* is the beginning of our *immortality*; and then actual *Condemnation* and *Salvation*, and not before." [1100]

Samuel Richardson (1633-1658), pastor of the First Particular Baptist Church of London [1200] wrote on the subject.

John Milton (1608-1674), was a well known or even the greatest of the sacred poets. Milton taught the totally unconscious sleep of man in death until the coming of Christ and resurrection, and wrote:

"Inasmuch as the whole man uniformly said to consist of body, and soul (whatever may be the distinct provinces of these divisions), I will show, that in death, first, the whole man, and secondly, each component part, suffers privation of life. ... The grave is the common guardian of all till the day of judgment." [1300]

George Wither (1588-1667), contended for conditional immortality in which the soul is asleep in death.[1400]

John Jackson (1686-1763), was the Rector of Rossington school and wrote several titles in which he confutes and condemns the doctrine of eternal torment.[1500]

John Canne (1590-1667) was a pastor of the Broadmead Baptist Church in Bristol and printer of R. Overton's work and held essentially the same view as Overton.[1600]

Archbishop John Tillotson (1630-1694) of Canterbury states

"I do not find that the doctrine of the immortality of the soul is anywhere expressly delivered in Scripture, but taken for granted." [1700]

Dr. Isaac Barrow (1630-1677), professor of Greek at Cambridge University maintained that eternal life is conditional and believed in the final destruction of the wicked.[1800]

The 18th Century

Dr. William Coward (1657-1725) was a practicing physician in London. He states

"Second thoughts concerning the human soul, demonstrating the notion of human soul, as believed to be a Spiritual and Immortal Substance, united to a Human Body, to be plain Heathenish Invention, and not Consonant to the principles of Philosophy, Reason or Religion." [1900]

Henry Layton (1670-1706) was a member of the Anglican Faith and the author of 12 books on conditionalism in which he contends that

"... during life, we live and move in Christ; and when we die we rest and sleep in Him, in expectation of being raised at His second coming. [2000] **Joseph Nicol Scott M.D.** (1703-1769) was also a minister who assisted his father, Thomas Scott and maintained that

"... life is for the righteous *only*, with destruction for the wicked." [3000] **Dr. Joseph Priestley** (1733-1804) was a member of the Unitarian Church, a scientist and philosopher. He wrote: "The 'state of the soul in death' is one of utter insensibility, as much dead as the body itself while it continues in the state of death." [3100]

Bishop Edmund Law (1703-1787) was the master of St. Peter's College, archdeacon of Staffordshire and bishop of Carlisle. He challenged the doctrine of a conscious intermediate state; held death to be a sleep, a negation of all life, thought, or action - a state of rest, silence and oblivion. [3200]

Peter Pecard (ca. 1718-1797) was master of Magdalen College in Cambridge, England, and dean of Peterborough. He believed that

"immortality not to be innate, but was a gift through Christ." [3300] **Archdeacon Francis Blackburne** (1705-1787) was archdeacon of Cleveland and rector of Richmond wrote a most complete history of the topic in the 18th century.[3400]

Bishop William Warburton (1698-1779) was bishop of Gloucester and a theological controversialist who "... styled militant believers in everlasting torment as the 'unmerciful doctors.'" [3500]

Samuel Burn (1714-1796) was known as a dissenter and was from Rivington, Lancashire. He "... stresses 'total destruction, or annihilation or ceasing to exist' for the incorrigibly wicked." [3600]

Dr. William Whiston (1667-1752) was a Baptist theologian and professor of mathematics at Cambridge University and "... denied the doctrine of eternal torment and held that the wicked would be totally destroyed." [3700]

Dr. John Tottie (flourished 1772) was the canon of Christ Church in Oxford and archdeacon of Worcester. He "... opposed the doctrine of the natural immortality of the soul." [3800]

Prof. Henry Dodwell (1641-1711) was a classical scholar and professor at Oxford and became known as 'the learned Dodwell'. He set out to "... prove from the Scriptures and the First Fathers, that the soul is in principle naturally mortal, but immortalized actually by the pleasure of God." [3900]

The 19th century

Bishop Timothy Kendrick states in a sermon from 1805:

"The soul of man dies with the body, and is restored to life at the resurrection and second advent." [4000]

Dr. Amos Phelps, (1805-1874), a Methodist-Congregationalist clergyman and professor of Yale University, wrote:

"This doctrine [of natural immortality] can be traced through the muddy channels of a corrupted Christianity, a perverted Judaism, and pagan philosophy, and a superstitious idolatry, to the great instigator of mischief in the garden of Eden. The Protestants borrow it from the Catholics, the Catholics from the Pharisees, the Pharisees from the pagans, and the pagans from the old serpent who first preached the doctrine amid the lowly bowels of Paradise to an audience all too willing to hear and heed the new and fascinating theology: 'Ye shall not surely die.'" [4050]

Dr. William Thomson (1819-1890) was the archbishop of York. He wrote: "Life to the godles must be the beginning of destruction since nothing but God and that which pleases Him can permanently exist." [4100]

Dr. Edward White (1819-1887) was a Congregationalist pastor at St. Paul's Chapel and chairman of the Congregational Union. For over forty years he was a leading advocate of conditional immortality [4150]. In 1883 he made it known:

"I steadfastly maintain, after 40 years of study of the matter, that it is the notion of the infliction of a torment in body and soul that shall be absolutely endless, which alone gives a foot of standing ground to Ingersol in America, or Bradlaugh in England. I believe more firmly than ever that it is a doctrine as contrary to every line of the Bible as it is contrary to every moral instinct of humanity." [4200]

In the following year he adds: "The Old Testament is consistent throughout with the belief of eternal life of the servants of God, and of the eternal destruction of the wicked. And it is consistent, when taken in its simple sense with no other belief ..." "The Gospels and Epistles with equal pertinacity adhere *almost uniformly* to language respecting the doom of the unsaved which taken in its simple sense, teaches, as does the Old Testament, that they shall *die, perish, be destroyed, not see life*, but suffer *destruction, everlasting destruction*, 'destruction,' says Christ, 'of body and soul in Gehenna.' [4300]

Dr. John Thomas (1805-1871) was the editor of the *Apostolic Advocate* and the founder of the Christadelphians. He believed in the "... final extinction of the wicked and in immortality as a gift through Christ." [4400]

H.H. Dobney (1809-1883) was a Baptist pastor in Maidstone, England. He expressed the same believe.[4500]

Archbishop Richard Whately (1787-1863) was archbishop of Dublin, Ireland and a professor at Oxford and principal. He taught the final destruction of the wicked and believed "The wicked are never spoken of as being kept alive, but as forfeiting life." [4600]

Dean Henry Alford (1810-1871) worked at Canterbury and was a Biblical Scholar. He believed "Eternal fixity and duration belong only to those who are in accordance with God." [4700]

James Panton Ham (around 1849) was a congregationalist minister in Bristol. He believed similarly.[4800]

Charles F. Hudson (1821-1867) was a Congregationalist minister and Greek scholar who believed the same.[4900]

Dr. Robert W. Dale (1829-1895) was a Congregationalist pastor of Carr's Lane Church in Birmingham. He was editor of *The Congregationalist* magazine; chairman of the 'Congregational Union of England and Wales'; and president of the 'First International Council of Congregational Churches in 1891'. He announced his acceptance of conditionalism in a paper before the Congregational Union of 1874.

"Eternal life, as I believe, is the inheritance of those who are in Christ. Those who are not in Him will die the *Second Death* from which there will be no resurrection ...

I am not conscious that they [the positions of Conditionalism] have at all impaired the authority in my teaching of any of the great central doctrines of the Christian faith. The doctrine of the Trinity remains untouched; and the doctrine of the incarnation, and the doctrine of the atonement in its evangelical sense, and the doctrine of justification by faith, and the doctrine of judgment by works, and the doctrine of regeneration have received, I believe, from these conclusions a new and intenser illustration." [5000]

Frederick W. Farrar (1831-1903) was the canon of Westminster Abbey and the dean of Canterbury. He denounced the "... dogma of endless, conscious suffering and could not find a single text in all Scripture that, when fairly interpreted, teaches the common views about endless torment." [6000]

Herman Olshausen (1796-1839) was professor of theology at Königsberg, Ostpreussen in Germany. He wrote:

"The doctrine of the immortality of the soul and the name are alike unknown in the entire Bible." [6100]

Henry Constable (died 1894) was canon and prebendary of Cork, Ireland. He also believed:

"The immortality of the soul, and the name, are alike unknown in the entire Bible." [6200]

William E. Gladstone (1809-1898) was a British Prime Minister and Theologian. In a searching criticism of Bishop Butler's *Analogy* and its defense of innate immortality, Gladstone contended: "[It is only] from the time of Origen that we are to regard the idea of natural, as opposed to that of Christian, immortality as beginning to gain a firm foothold in the Christian Church." [6300]

"The doctrine of natural, as distinguished from Christian, immortality had not been subjected to the severer tests of wide publicity and resolute controversy, but had crept into the Church, by a back door as it were; by a silent though effective process; and was in course of obtaining a title by tacit prescription." [6400]

"Another consideration of the highest importance is that the natural immortality of the soul is *a doctrine wholly unknown to the Holy Scriptures*, and standing on no higher plane than that of an ingeniously sustained, but gravely and formidably contested, philosophical opinion." [6500]

"The character of the Almighty is rendered liable to charges which cannot be repelled so long as the idea remains that there may by His ordinance be such a thing as never-ending punishment, but that it will have been sufficiently vindicated at the bar of human judgment, so soon as it has been established and allowed that punishment, whatever else it may be, cannot be never-ending." [6600]

Joseph Parker (1830-1902) was a Congregationalist pastor of the 'City Temple' of London. He stated, "Glorious to me is this idea of asking man whether he will accept life and be like God, or whether he will choose death and darkness for ever. God does not say to man, 'I will make you immortal and indestructible whether you will or not; live for ever you shall.' No; he makes him capable of living; he constitutes him with a view to immortality; he urges, beseeches, implores him to work out this grand purpose, assuring him, with infinite pathos, that he has no pleasure in the death of the sinner, but would rather that he should LIVE. A doctrine this which in my view simplifies and glorifies human history as related in the Bible. Life and death are not set before any *beast*; but life and death are distinctly set before man - he can live, he was meant to live, he is besought to live; the whole scheme of Providence and redemption is arranged to help him to live - why, then, will ye die?" [6700]

Discussing the ultimate banishment of sin from the universe, Parker adds:

"By destroying evil I do not mean locking it up by itself in a moral prison, which shall be enlarged through the ages and generations until it shall become the abode of countless millions of rebels, but its utter, final, everlasting extinction, so that at last the universe shall be 'without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing' - the pure home of a pure creation." [6800]

Commenting on the "Destruction of Sodom," Parker denies that "in giving life God has put it absolutely out of his own power to reclaim or withdraw it." He comments on the implications:

"Having once given you life you are as immortal as he himself is, and you can defy him to interfere with his own work! The doctrine seems to me to involve a palpable absurdity, and hardly to escape the charge of blasphemy. Throughout the whole Bible, God has reserved to himself the right to take back whatever he has given, because all his gifts have been offered upon conditions about which there can be no mistake." [6900]

"In this case [of Sodom] we have an instance of utter and everlasting destruction. We see here what is meant by "everlasting punishment," for we are told in the New Testament that "Sodom suffered the vengeance of eternal fire," that is of fire, which made an utter end of its existence and perfectly accomplished the purpose of God. The "fire" was "eternal," yet Sodom is not literally burning still; the smoke of its torment, being the smoke of an eternal fire, ascended up for ever and ever, yet no smoke now rises from the plain, - "eternal fire" does not involve the element of what we call "time": it means thorough, absolute, complete, final: that which is done or given once for all." [7000]

Bishop John J. S. Perowne (1823-1904) was a scholar of Hebrew and an Anglican Bishop of Worcester, England. He wrote:

"The immortality of the soul is neither argued nor affirmed in the Old Testament." [7100]

"The immortality of the soul is a phantom which eludes your eager grasp." [7200]

Sir George G. Stokes M.P., (1819-1903) was professor of mathematics at Cambridge and president of the Royal Society. He wrote:

"It was natural that, after the forfeiture of immortality through transgression, man should seek to satisfy his craving for immortality by imagining that he had something immortal in his nature. It is, then, to revelation that we must look, if we are to find out something about man's condition in the intermediate state." [7300]

"Man's whole being was forfeited by the Fall, and the future life is not his birthright, but depends on a supernatural dispensation of grace. To look to man's bodily frame for indications of immortality, to look even to his lofty mental powers - lofty, indeed, but sadly misused - is to seek the living among the dead. **Man must look not into himself, but out of himself for assurance of immortality.**" [7400]

Dr. W.A. Brown (1865-1943) was of the Union Seminary in New York. he believed:

"From Israel came the doctrine of resurrection, and of the advent; from Greece, the doctrine of natural immortality." [7500]

Dr. J. Agar Beet (1840-1924) was a Wesleyan professor. He stated:

"The following pages are ... a protest against a doctrine which, during long centuries, has been almost universally accepted as divine truth taught in the Bible, but which seems to me altogether alien to it in both phrase and thought, and derived only from Greek Philosophy. Until recent times, this alien doctrine has been comparatively harmless. But, as I have here shown, it is now producing more serious results ..."

"It will of course be said, of this as of some other doctrines, that, if not explicitly taught in the Bible, it is implied and assumed there ... They who claim for their teaching the authority of God must prove that it comes from Him. Such proof in this case, I have never seen." [7600]

Dr. R. F. Weymouth (1822-1902) was the headmaster of Mill Hill School and translator of *New Testament in Modern Speech*. He said:

"My mind fails to conceive a grosser misrepresentation of language than when five or six of the strongest words which the Greek tongue possesses, signifying to *destroy* or *destruction*, are explained to mean 'maintaining an everlasting but wretched existence.' To translate black as white is nothing to this." [7700]

In his book in a note on 1 Corinthians 15:18 he says: "By 'perish' the Apostle here apparently means 'pass out of existence.'" [7800]

On Hebrews 9:28 we read: "The use in the N.T. of such words as 'death', 'destruction', 'fire', 'perish', to describe Future Retribution, point to the likelihood of fearful anguish, followed by extinction of being, as the doom which awaits those who by persistent rejection of the Saviour prove themselves utterly, and therefore irremediably bad." [Ibid., 7800]

On Revelation 14:11: "There is nothing in this verse that necessarily implies an eternity of suffering. In a similar way the word 'punishment' or 'correction' in Matthew 25:46 gives itself no indication of time."

On Revelation 20:10: "The *Lake of fire* implying awful pain and complete, irremediable ruin and destruction." [Ibid., 7800]

Dr. Lyman Abbott (1835-1922) was a Congregationalist pastor and editor of *Christian Union* and *The Outlook*. He wrote:

"Outside of the walls of Jerusalem, in the valley of Gehenna, was kept perpetually burning a fire, on which the offal of the city was thrown to be destroyed. This is the hell fire of the New Testament. Christ warns his auditors that persistence in sin will make them offal to be cast out from the holy city, to be destroyed. The worm that dieth not was the worm devouring the carcasses, and is equally clearly a symbol not of torture but of destruction." [7900]

"The notion that the final punishment of sin is continuance in sin and suffering is also based in part on, what seems to me, a false philosophy of man. This philosophy is that man is by nature immortal. The conviction has grown on me, that according to the teaching of both of science and Scripture, man is by nature an animal, and like all other animals mortal; that immortality belongs only to the spiritual life; and that spiritual life is possible only in communion and contact with God; that, in short, immortality was not conferred upon the race in creation whether it would or not, but is conferred in redemption, upon all those of the race who choose life and immortality through Jesus Christ our Lord." [Ibid., 7900]

Dr. Edward Beecher (1803-1895) was a Congregationalist theologian and president of Illinois College. He stated:

"If [the Bible] does not recognize, nay, it expressly denies the natural and inherent immortality of the soul. It assures us that God only hath immortality. (1 Timothy 6:16). By this we understand that He has immortality in the highest sense - that is, inherent immortality. All existence besides Himself He created, and He upholds. Men are not, as Plato taught, self-existent, eternal beings, immortal in their very nature. ... There is no inherent immortality of the soul as such. What God created He sustains in being, and can annihilate at will." [8000]

Dr. Emmanuel Pétavel-Olliff (1836-1910) was a Swiss theologian and lecturer at the University of Geneva. He wrote as a comment on Genesis 3:22 and Numbers 23:10:

"There is nothing in all the Bible which implies a native immortality." "From the Biblical point of view the soul can be put to death, it is mortal." [8100]

Dr. Franz Delitzsch (1813-1890) was a Hebraist and professor at Rostock, Erlangen and Leipzig, Germany. As a comment to Genesis 3:22 and Numbers 23:10, he wrote: "There is nothing in the Bible which implies a native immortality." "From the Biblical point of view the soul can be put to death." [8150]

Bishop Charles J. Ellicott (1820-1905) of Bristol was also the chairman of the English Revision Committee. He stated:

"It seems inconceivable that when God is all in all, there should be some dark spot, where amid endless self-inflicted suffering, or in the enhancement of ever-enduring hate, rebel hands should be forever raised against the Eternal Father and God of Everlasting Love." [8200]

Dr. George Dana Boardman (1828-1903) wrote on the issue of immortality this way: "Not a single passage of Holy Writ, from Genesis to Revelation, teaches, so far as I am aware, the doctrine of Man's natural immortality. On the other hand, Holy Writ emphatically declares that God only hath immortality (1 Tim. 6:16): that is to say: God alone is naturally, inherently, in His own essence and nature, immortal." [8300]

"If, then, Man is immortal, it is because immortality has been bestowed on him. He is immortal, not because he was created so, but because he has become so, deriving his deathlessness from Him Who alone has immortality. And of this fact the 'Tree of Life' in the

midst of the Garden seems to have been the appointed symbol and pledge. That this is the meaning of the 'Tree of Life' is evident from the closing words of the Archive of the Fall:

"Jehovah God said: 'Behold, the Man hath become as one of Us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he stretch forth his hand, and take also of the 'Tree of Life', and eat, and live forever:' therefore Jehovah God drove the Man forth from Eden, and stationed on the East of the Garden the Cherubim, and the Flaming Sword which turned away every way, to guard the way to the 'Tree of Life.'" Genesis 3:22-24

If Man is inherently immortal, what need was there of any 'Tree of Life' at all? This much, then, seems to be clear: Immortality was somehow parabolically conditioned on the eating of this mysterious Tree, and the Immortality was for the entire Man - spirit and soul and body." [8400]

J.H. Pettingell (1815-1887) as a Congregationalist he was the district secretary of the Congregationalist Board of Foreign Missions. He wrote:

"It is worthy of remark, that the doctrine of eternal torment is found neither in the Apostle's Creed, nor the Nicene Creed, nor in two of the principal Confessions of Faith of the 16th century, viz., the otherwise rigid Creed of the French Reformed Church and the Thirty-nine Articles of the Anglican Church. And we believe that if this dogma has been handed down throughout the Protestant Churches, it is simply as an inheritance from the errors of the middle ages and from the speculative theories of Platonism. If we examine the writings of the earlier Fathers, Barnabas, Clement of Rome, Hermas, Ignatius, Polycarb, Justin Martyr, Theophilus of Antioch, Irenaeus, and Clement of Alexandria, we find them all faithful to the apostolic doctrine of the final destruction of the wicked. The dogma of everlasting torment did not creep into the Church until she yielded to the influence of Platonic philosophy." [8500]

Conferences on Conditionalism

In the 19th century, in addition to a great revival of individual exponents of conditionalism, conferences were held, such as the large 'London Conference on Conditional Immortality' on May 15, 1876, with its published report. Convened under the chairmanship of Lieutenant-General Goodwyn, the attendance included such prominent adherents as Henry Constable, Edward White, Minton, Heard, Howard, Leask, Tinling, and Barrett with messages from Dr. Pétavel of Switzerland, Dr. Weymouth of Mill Hill School, etc.

The gist of the conference report was: "The Bible nowhere teaches an inherent immortality; but teaches that it is the object of redemption to impart it. ... The communication of it requires a regeneration of man, by the Holy Spirit, and a resurrection of the dead." Page 28

It declared that the enjoyment of immortality is *conditional*; and that those who will not return to God will die and perish everlastingly. "Out of Christ there is no life eternal."

Dr. White declared there: "These are the ideas which have brought us together this morning. They are now firmly held by an immense multitude of thoughtful people of all lands, for although we are but a little company here assembled, we represent an immense army in Europe and America. These views are spreading every day amongst the churches; and number among their adherents some of the foremost men of science, theologians, missionaries, philologists, philosophers, preachers, and statesmen." [8600]

The 20th Century

Canon William H.M. Hay Aitken (1841-1927) was an Anglican mission organizer who stated:

"The doctrine of Eternal Torment has lost its hold on the common sense and moral sensibilities of mankind. People do not and will not believe that an infinitely good and merciful God can consign His own offspring (Acts 17:28-29) to measureless aeons of torture in retribution for the sins and weaknesses of a few swiftly passing years here on earth." [8700]

Along the same line of thought, it is inconceivable that - as we know that even one sin not forsaken can keep a sinner out of heaven - or, a young child whose parents did not instill a knowledge of God's saving graces and mercies, may not see heaven - that these should suffer for eternity - but many would pass off the scene in no time at all.

But we read in the epistle to the Hebrews the single-hearted purpose that should characterize the Christian's race for eternal life: "Let us **lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us**, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith." Hebrews 12:1, 2. Envy, malice, evil thinking, evilspeaking, covetousness--these are weights that the Christian must lay aside if he would run successfully the race for immortality. Every habit or practice that leads into sin and brings dishonor upon Christ must be put away, whatever the sacrifice. The blessing of heaven cannot attend any man in violating the eternal principles of right. **One sin cherished is sufficient to work degradation of character and to mislead others.** Like the athlete in a race lays aside everything which encumbers victory, so a Christian shall do likewise.

Eric Lewis (1864-1948) of Cambridge University was a missionary to the Sudan and India who made the following points:

1. That man is mortal. That immortality is not his by nature, but a gift of God to him in Christ, conditioned on faith and obedience, the earnest of which immortality, is the indwelling Spirit of God. And his immortality is put on at the resurrection.

2. That at death, man's soul, his physical organism, dies, and that man returns to dust.
3. That at death, his spirit, which is not a personal entity apart from his body, returns to God who gave it, while the man himself passes into unconscious sleep until the resurrection.
4. That at resurrection, God calls the dead man back to life, breathing into Him again His Spirit ... The resurrection body, given to the righteous at the coming of Christ, will be a spiritual body, a glorified body, like His own after His resurrection. There will be a resurrection unto judgment, as well as unto life. Those whose names are not found written in the book of life, will be cast into the lake of fire, there to perish ultimately, burned up like the chaff. How long their suffering will last, is known to God alone; His judgment will be according to the deeds of each. This is 'the second death,' from which there will be no resurrection. [8800]

Dr. William Temple (1881-1944) was the Archbishop of Canterbury and Primate of Great Britain. He wrote:

"[The] doctrine of the future life [will] involve our first disentangling the authentic teaching of the classical Scriptures from accretions which very quickly began to obscure this." [8900]

"Man is not immortal by nature or right; but he is capable of immortality and there is offered to him resurrection from the dead and life eternal if he will receive it from God and on God's terms." Ibid., p. 472.

"Are there not, however, many passages which speak of the endless torment of the lost? No; as far as my knowledge goes, there is none at all." Ibid., p. 464.

"After all, annihilation is an everlasting punishment though it is not unending torment." Ibid."

"One thing we can say with confidence: everlasting torment is to be ruled out. If men had not imported the Greek and unbiblical notion of the natural indestruction of the individual soul, and then read the New Testament with that already in their minds, they would have drawn from it a belief, not in everlasting torment, but in annihilation. It is the fire that is called aeonian, not the life cast into it." [9000]

"How can there be the Paradise for any while there is Hell, conceived as unending torment, for some? Each supposedly damned soul was born into the world as a mother's child, and Paradise cannot be Paradise for her if her child is in such a Hell." Ibid., p. 454.

Dr. Gerardus van der Leeuw (1890-1950) was a professor at the University of Groningen, Netherlands. He comments after quoting Ecclesiastes 3:19-21:

"[Innate] immortality is a conception which fits into the philosophy of pantheism. With death belongs not immortality, but Resurrection." [9100]

"The church has - no matter how much Hellenized it may be in doctrine and practice - always maintained the resurrection of the body ... The body dies, death is not being denied at all. Even the Spirit, the soul that I am, will not exist. The soul will also die. But the whole life of man will be renewed by God. God will raise me up "in the latter days." Ibid., p. 32.

"Many preachers of recent times are rather hesitant to preach about immortality. But in former days, when preaching about eternal life, it was without effort that they dwelt upon imaginations of a *corruptible body* and an *immortal soul*. The older devotional books and church hymnals are full of it. Even now people in the house of bereavement and on the graveyards are being comforted from the same source - yet these representations are not in any respect Christian, but purely Grecian and *contrary to the essence of Christian faith*. Ibid., p. 20.

Dr. Aubrey R. Vine (1900-??) was the editor of 'The Congregational Quarterly' and professor at Yorkshire United Independent College who stated:

"The natural immortality of the spirit is a Greek rather than a Christian concept." [9200]

"Against the idea of the natural immortality of the spirit we must set the fact that God is the only self-existent and that nothing exists or continues to exist except by His grace and will, within this schema or within any other. God only is exoschematic. When we use the word 'immortal', therefore, of anything but God, we must always realize that none but God is immortal by his own nature and without qualification." Ibid., p. 315.

"'Immortal' should not be applied to a human spirit if we clearly recognize that it is only immortal at God's grace and pleasure. Only God is immortal by His own nature and without qualification." Ibid., p. 311 footnote.

Dr. Martin J. Heineken (1902-1998) was professor of systematic theology at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. Speaking of man as a unit, he stated:

"In the Biblical account of creation we are told that God formed man of the dust and of the earth, and that he then breathed into his nostrils and man became a living soul. This is usually interpreted to mean that God made a soul, which is the real person, and that he then gave this soul a temporary home in a body, made of the dust of the earth. But this is a false dualism. ... Man must be considered a unity." [9300]

"We are dealing with a unified being, a person, and not with something that is called a soul and which dwells in a house called the body, as though the body were just a tool for the soul to employ, but not really a part of the person." Ibid., p. 38.

Coming then to the issue of immortality of the soul Professor Heineken then says:

"It is held by some people that there is within every man an unchanging and indestructible core, immortal in its own right. It is unaffected by time; it had no beginning, neither can it have an end. It has always been and always will be. It came into this world of changing things from the realm of eternity and will return to it." [9400]

"The Christian view is by no means to be identified with the above belief in the immortality of the soul. The Christian belief is in the immortality of the God-relationship, and in the resurrection. **The Christian dualism is not that of a soul and body, eternal mind and passing things, but the dualism of Creator and creature.** Man is a person, a unified being, a center of responsibility, standing over against his Creator and Judge. He has no life or immortality within himself. He came into being through God's creative power. He spends as many years on this earth as in God's providence are allotted to him. He faces death as the wages of sin." Ibid., p. 133,134.

"Men have speculated like this:

At death the soul is separated from the body. It appears then before God in a preliminary judgment which is mentioned nowhere in scripture and enters into a preliminary state either of blessedness or condemnation. Then, when the last trumpet sounds, the body is resurrected and rejoined with the soul, and complete once more, the reunited body and soul appear for the final, public judgment scene, from there to enter into final bliss or final condemnation. It is no wonder that, with this view, men must have little use for a resurrection, and have finally dropped the notion altogether and have been satisfied with the redemption of only the soul." Ibid., p. 135.

"to die then means to pass to the resurrection and the judgment at the end of time. Even if someone should say that all men sleep until the final trumpet sounds, what is the passage of time for those who are asleep? The transition from the moment of death to the resurrection would still be instantaneous for them. It would be no different from going to bed at night and being waked in the morning." Ibid., p. 136.

David R. Davies (1889-??) was the rector at St. Mary Magdalen in Britain. He stated:

"The soul of man is not necessarily automatically immortal. It is capable of being destroyed. The Bible offers no ground whatsoever for believing that the soul is immune from death and destruction. The soul *can* be destroyed. The immortality of the soul is not a Biblical doctrine, but Greek philosophy. The Biblical doctrine about the soul is the resurrection from the dead. Man is a created being. God created him out of nothing. Man was created for immortality, but by his own rebellion against God he made himself mortal." [9500]

"The Hebrew view of man was entirely different. In the Bible man is regarded as a unity of 'life' or spirit, which manifests itself as both soul and body. Since man has made himself mortal, his soul, in consequence, also partakes of mortality. Man is not a compound of two different entities, matter and spirit, but a unity of spirit functioning as matter and soul. It is this unity that is mortal." Ibid., p. 84,85.

Dr. Basil F.C. Atkinson (1895-??) was the under-librarian of Cambridge University Library and commented on Genesis 2:7 saying:

"It has sometimes been thought that the impartation of the life principle, as it is brought before us in this verse, entailed immortality of the spirit or soul. It has been said that to be made in the image of God involves immortality. The Bible never says so. If it involves immortality, why does it not also involve omniscience or omnipresence, or any other quality or attribute of the Infinite? Why should one alone be singled out? The breath of life was not breathed into man's heart, but into his nostrils. It involved physical life. Throughout the Bible man, apart from Christ, is conceived of as made of dust and ashes, a physical creature, to whom is lent by God a principle of life. The Greek thinkers tended to think of man as an immortal soul imprisoned in a body. This emphasis is the opposite to that of the Bible, but has found a wide place in Christian thought." [9600]

Dr. Emil Brunner (1889-1966) was professor of systematic and practical theology at the University of Zurich, Switzerland, and a guest professor at Princeton, and at the International Christian University at Tokyo, Japan.

After discussing the widespread, historic concept of the 'survival of the soul after death' as 'the separation of soul from body', he states: "For the history of Western thought, the Platonic teaching of the immortality of the soul became of special significance. It penetrated so deeply into the thought of Western man because, although with certain modifications, it was assimilated by Christian theology and church teaching, was even declared by the Lateran Council of 1512 [1513] to be a dogma, to contradict which was heresy." [9700]

Then he added:

"Only recently, as a result of a deepened understanding of the New Testament, have strong doubts arisen as to its compatibility with the Christian conception of the relation between God and man." Ibid.

According to Platonism:

"The body is mortal, the soul immortal. The mortal husk conceals this eternal essence which in death is freed from its outer shell." [9800]

After observing that 'this dualistic conception of man does not correspond to the Christian outlook', he then remarked:

"Since this mode of robbing evil of its sting runs necessarily parallel with the rendering innocuous of death through the teaching about immortality, this solution of the problem of death stands in irreconcilable opposition to Christian thought." Ibid.

Commenting further on the 'doctrine of the immortality of the soul' (p.

105), which medieval Christianity 'took over' from Greek philosophy', he observes that it was 'utterly foreign to its [Christianity's] own essential teaching.' And he adds:

"The opinion that we men are immortal because our soul is of an indestructible, because divine, essence is, once for all, irreconcilable with the Biblical view of God and man." Ibid., pp. 105, 106.

"The philosophical belief in immortality is like an echo, both reproducing and falsifying the primal Word of this divine Creator. It is false because it does not take into account the real loss of this original destiny through sin." Ibid., p. 107.

Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971) was a professor at Union Theological Seminary. After contrasting the 'classical' view of man, of Graeco-Roman antiquity, and the 'Biblical' view, Niebuhr states that the two 'were actually merged in the thought of medieval Catholicism.' The classical view that the 'mind' or 'spirit' is 'immortal' was inseparably tied to the dualistic concept of man (p. 7). But among the Hebrews, he observes, "the concept of an immortal mind in a mortal body remains unknown to the end." [9850]

"Origen's Platonism completely destroys the Biblical sense of the unity of man." Ibid., p.153, footnote.

"Gregory's [of Nyssa] thoroughly Platonic conception of the relation of the soul to the body is vividly expressed in his metaphor of the gold and the alloy." Ibid., p.172.

"The idea of the resurrection of the body is a Biblical symbol in which modern minds take the greatest offense and which has long since been displaced in most modern versions of the Christian faith by the idea of the immortality of the soul. The latter idea is regarded as a more plausible expression of the hope of everlasting life." Ibid., vol. 2, p. 294.

"The resurrection is not a human possibility in the sense that the immortality of the soul is thought to be so. All the plausible and implausible proofs for the immortality of the soul are efforts on the part of the human mind to master and to control the consummation of life. They all try to prove in one way or another that an eternal element in the nature of man is worthy and capable of survival beyond death." Ibid., p. 295.

"The Christian hope of the consummation of life and history is less absurd than alternate doctrines which seek to comprehend and to effect the completion of life by some power or capacity inherent in man and his history." Ibid., p. 298.

DR. T.A. Kantonen (1900-??), a Lutheran professor at the Hamma Divinity School, and an American Member of the Lutheran World Federation Commission on Theology states: "The influence of Hellenic philosophy, represented by the Alexandrian fathers in particular, tended to spiritualize eschatology into a continuing inner purification and immortality of the soul." [9900]

"Primitive animism with its notion of a detachable ghost-soul which continues after death to lead a shadowy existence and to enter interaction with the living still underlies much of popular religious thinking on the subject. More important and influential from the theological point of view is the Greek idea of the immortality of the soul which found its classical formulation in Plato's dialogues four centuries before Christ. Since Platonism furnished the sublimest thought forms for the formative period of Christian theology, it is not surprising that many of the Fathers identified the Christian doctrine of eternal life with Platonic immortality and that finally the Fifth Lateran Council (1512-17) adopted it as a dogma of the church." Ibid., p. 27.

"It has been characteristic of Western thought ever since Plato to distinguish sharply between the soul and the body. The body is supposed to be composed of matter, and the soul of spirit. The body is a prison from which the soul is liberated at death to carry on its own proper nonphysical existence. Because of its immaterial spiritual nature the soul has been considered indestructible. Hence the question of life after death has been the question of demonstrating the immortality, the death-defying capacity, of the soul. The body is of little consequence.

This way of thinking is entirely foreign to the Bible. True to Scripture and definitely rejecting the Greek view, the Christian creed says, not "I believe in the immortality of the soul," but "I believe in the resurrection of the body." Ibid., p. 28.

"The soul is not a separate part of man, constituting a substance of its own." Ibid., p. 29.

"The Christian faith knows nothing about an immortality of the person. That would mean a denial of death, not recognizing it as judgment of God. It knows only an awakening from real death through the power of God. There is existence after death only by way of awakening, resurrection." [9920] There is no immortality of the soul but a resurrection of the whole person, body and soul, from death. The only immortality which the Bible recognizes is the immortality of a personal relationship with God in Christ."— Ibid., p. 33.

"The Bible does not distinguish between man and the beasts on the ground that man has an immortal soul while the beasts do not. Men, beasts, even plants, are alike in death. We do not need to concern ourselves about spiritualism or hypotheses of any kind concerning future existence. The whole matter of death and life after death is simplified when our only concern is faith in God who can destroy and who can resurrect. Life makes no sense and holds no hope except in terms of Christ's victory over death and the assurance that we share in that victory.

There is considerable support in Scripture for the view that the soul as well as the body is destructible. This evidence has been obscured because the Greek conception of the inherent immortality of the soul has supplanted the teaching of Scripture." Ibid., p. 34.

"There are two indisputable realities in the scriptural doctrine, the fact of death and the fact of resurrection from the dead at Christ's second coming. But between the death of an individual and the return of Christ is an interval, which from the human point of view, in the case of most men, is a long period of time." Ibid., p. 36.

"Against such speculation [Roman Catholic purgatory, Limbo, etc.] Protestant orthodoxy has, on the whole, denied all conceptions of a neutral state of waiting and held that souls pass immediately into a state of misery or of blessedness." Ibid., p. 37.

"If death means entrance into heaven, then resurrection and judgment lose their significance." Ibid., p. 38.

"The soul has no existence apart from the body. The whole man, body and soul dies, and the whole man, body and soul, is resurrected on the last day. At death man proceeds directly to the final resurrection and judgment. There is no period of waiting, for waiting implies time, and beyond death time no longer has any significance. From our own temporal point of view we may speak of the dead as being asleep and then say with Luther that for one in deep slumber the passage of centuries is as an instant. We may even say that departed believers are at home with the Lord in the sense that their striving and waiting are over and they have reached their final goal." Ibid., pp. 96, 97.[\[9930\]](#)

"An alternative solution is that the fate of the wicked is neither eventual redemption nor endless torment but simply annihilation. Eternal death would conform to the New Testament connotation of death in general, *apoleia*, destruction. Proponents of this view claim that the idea of eternal punishment rests on the Platonic conception of the inherent indestructibility of the soul and that the reasoning used to disprove it applies here also. On this ground the nature of God also appears to be vindicated." Ibid., p. 107.

"Dr. Kantonen has since modified his view, according with Walter K nneth (Theologie der Auferstehung) that the dead are not non-existent. (See p. 39.) "When Christ, then, in the end destroys "every rule and every authority and power," he will wipe out every vestige of opposition to God, both human and superhuman. This view, unlike universal restoration, preserves the twofold judgment taught in Scripture. And to be completely cut off from God, the source of life, would seem logically to imply nonexistence. Such a lapse into nothingness of all of life's hopes and values makes perdition a terrible reality even without the added feature of prolonged torture." Ibid., p. 108.

"The hope of the individual Christian at death does not lie in man's power to defy death but in God's power to raise man from the dead. Death is real, and man has no inherent capacity to leap over the grave into another existence." Ibid., p. 111.

"The ultimate significance of Christ's triumph over death will become manifest in the resurrection of the dead. Ibid., p. 112.

DR. D. R. G. Owen, professor of religious knowledge at Trinity College was also a lecturer and a teacher on philosophy and religion at Wycliffe College in Toronto, Canada. He said: "The points at issue revolve around the concepts of "body" and "soul." The "religious" anthropology [in contradistinction to the Biblical] adopts an extreme dualism, asserting that the body and the soul are two different and distinct substances. It claims that the soul is divine in origin and immortal by nature and that the corruptible body is the source of all sin and wickedness. It recommends the cultivation of the soul in detachment from the body, and advocates the suppression of all physical appetites and natural impulses. It regards the body as the tomb or prison of the soul from which it longs to get free. Finally, it tends to suppose that the soul, even in its earth-bound existence, is entirely independent of the body and so enjoys a freedom of choice and action untrammelled by the laws that reign in the physical realm." [\[9940\]](#)

"If we turn to the Bible, however, as we shall later, we find that a quite different view of man is assumed throughout. Here there is no dualism and scarcely any idea of the immortality of a detached and independent soul." Ibid., p. 29.

"Plato remains to the end an antiphysical dualist. It is he, and his followers, who most of all are responsible for imposing the "religious" anthropology on Western thought." Ibid., p. 41.

This latter belief especially - the idea that the soul can exist apart from the body - obviously implies some form of body - soul dualism. . . . This body-soul dualism was a necessary implicate of the Greek doctrine of the immortality of the soul. Ibid., p. 59.

"Now there are a few isolated Scriptural passages that may suggest the idea of the immortality of the soul in the Greek sense, but the normal Biblical point of view is quite different: in the New Testament it is the resurrection of the body that is stressed, and this doctrine is almost a direct contradiction of the "Orphic" eschatology. Why, then, did the Fathers lean toward this largely un-Biblical notion?" Ibid.

"The fact is that the Fathers' adoption of the "religious" idea of the immortality of the detachable soul forced them into the doctrine of body- soul dualism." Ibid., p. 61.

"The idea of the intermediate state eventually developed into the doctrine of purgatory." Ibid.

"The Fathers were no doubt impressed by the force of the arguments advanced by Greek philosophy to prove the immortality of the soul. And, finally, of course, the idea of an intermediate state gave the human being another chance to be purged of his sins before

the last judgment. It was the development of this notion that led to the doctrine of purgatory, with all the superstitions and objectionable practices that eventually made up the purgatorial system and, in the end, furnished part of the immediate cause of the Reformation." Ibid., p. 62.

"Their [Church Fathers] resulting anthropology was a mixture of Biblical and Greek ideas. They added to the New Testament doctrine of the resurrection of the body the idea of an intermediate state in which the soul exists apart from the body, awaiting its recovery at the end." Ibid., p. 77.

"The "religious" anthropology, as far as Western thought is concerned, is Greek and not Biblical in origin. It is also typical of Eastern religions in general, such as Hinduism and Buddhism. It seems to be characteristically "religious," and for this and other reasons has tended to creep into and corrupt the Christian view of man. This happened, as we saw, in the patristic and medieval periods, and modern Catholicism and Protestantism have tended to perpetuate this early mistake." Ibid., p. 163.

"The Biblical view of man is entirely different from the 'religious.'" Ibid., p. 164.

"The idea of the immortality of the soul in the Greek sense may be suggested in some passages in the wisdom literature and is definitely found in places in the Apocrypha. This line of thought was later developed in the Hellenistic Judaism of the Alexandrine School, in the inter-Testamental period, of which the religious philosopher Philo is the outstanding example." Ibid., p. 178.

Such are some of the host of advocates of conditional immortality, or life only in Christ, and/or of the ultimate destruction of unrepentant sinners.

Comments: After reviewing these many insights and noticing the commonalities it may be difficult to avoid some conclusions. These conclusions may state that the influence of paganism, that is Satan himself, is noticeable present in the history of the doctrine under discussion. People love the life of sin and therefore search for reasons to excuse themselves before God, or so they may reason. But the God of heaven has made himself known in the pages of the Hebrew Scriptures. Those are the deciding words each must follow. This may explain some angles as far as it goes. But there may be more. That the immortality ideas took firm root despite the publicly made comments we just read above, may also indicate that the Protestant Christian churches have been infiltrated by a few very cleverly trained teachers who answer to the founder's articles of their school, the Jesuit Loyola, particular in the days when these changes in doctrine came about.

Suggested Action: Teach your members how to study the Bible for themselves. Do not send your young people to established schools of higher learning but train them at home or newly established schools which teach the truth.

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- [9850] Reinhold Niebuhr, '*The Nature and Destiny of Man*', Scribners, 1955, (Gifford Lectures at Edinburgh, 1939), Vol. 1, p. 5, 13. [9900] T. A. Kantonen, *The Christian Hope*, 1954, p. 20.
- [9920] From Paul Althaus, *Die letzten Dinge*, (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1933), p. 126.
- [9930] Dr. Kantonen has since modified his view, according with Walter Künneth (Theologie der Auferstehung) that the dead are not non-existent. (See p. 39.)
- [9940] D. R. G. Owen, *Body and Soul*, p. 26. (Copyright, 1956, by U. L. Jenkins, The Westminster Press. Used by permission.)

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