

# **Survey of Theology 10.**

**The Last Things: The  
Christian Hope**

# Outline

Introduction

Overview

- ◆ Tradition to the 18th Century
- ◆ Modern Consensus

Some Historical and Contemporary Views on  
Topics in Eschatology

- ◆ The Kingdom of God. Now and Not Yet
- ◆ The Millennium
- ◆ The Two Cities of Augustine
- ◆ Joachim's Ages of History
- ◆ Dante's Hell
- ◆ Dispensationalism
- ◆ Jurgen Moltmann's Theology of Hope
- ◆ Hell
- ◆ Purgatory
- ◆ Heaven

# Introduction

*Eschata*: Greek for ends or outcomes

**Eschatology** = the study of the last things

- a reflection on the Christian hope for the future, including reflection on the risk of not attaining that hope
- includes consideration of:
  - the end of history
  - the fate of the created universe
  - death
  - judgment
  - heaven and hell

# Introduction

Eschatology can be broadly divided in two parts:

- **General Eschatology.** Considers the fate and ultimate purpose of:
  - creation and the physical universe; the cosmos
  - humankind and human society, encompassing all generations; history
- **Individual Eschatology.** Considers the fate and ultimate purpose of each individual

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- ◆ Heaven

# Tradition to the 18<sup>th</sup> Century

## The Traditional Roman Catholic and Protestant Orthodox Teaching:

- at death, a person's **immortal soul** separates from their **body**
- a **Particular Judgment** occurs in which the soul understands its fate
  - the soul proceeds to **hell** or to a **state of waiting** (and perhaps the souls of some martyrs and saints get to go directly to **heaven**)
- at the end of history Christ comes again in power and glory (the **Second Coming** or **Parousia**)

# Tradition to the 18<sup>th</sup> Century

- there is then a **General Resurrection** of all bodies, which are reunited with their souls
- there is then a **Final Judgment**
  - eternal fate of all proclaimed (presumably confirming the **Particular Judgment**)
  - the saved proceed to **heaven**; the damned to **hell**
- fate of the universe was unclear
  - some Lutheran theologians suggested God would annihilate it

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Heaven

# Modern Consensus\*

## History

Human history has a beginning, an end, and a purpose. It is not cyclic.

## Death

Each human being's life on this earth has a beginning and an end. Death is certain; its time is unpredictable.

The fact of death and its unpredictability requires us to acknowledge our dependence and contingency at all times, in all projects and relationships. Failure to do so is to live inauthentically

\* mainstream theologians

# Modern Consensus

## The Kingdom of God

God is the source, the end and goal of all.

The reign of God has already begun; and will be fully expressed at end of history.

God's purposes for creation *will* be fulfilled

**What is ultimately real will be ultimately realized. . .**

- A. T. Robinson

**The eschatological affirmations of the Christian faith are primarily assertions about God, who is the Lord of the end as well as of the beginning of the world, and secondarily assertions about the future.**

- Thomas & Wondra, Intro. to Theology, p. 246

# Modern Consensus

## Parousia = The Second Coming of Christ

The doctrine of the *Parousia* is an affirmation that the Kingdom of God *will* be fully expressed at the end of history. God's purpose *will* be fulfilled, and this will consist in the reign of God as revealed to us in Jesus

# Modern Consensus

## The General Resurrection of the Body

- the *whole person* dies, the *whole person* participates in the fulfillment of God's purpose
- the Christian hope is *not* an escape from the "physical" aspects of existence
- the body cannot be separated from the *natural world*; suggesting that the *cosmos* will also be fulfilled
- the body is *the basis of interpersonal communications* and the resurrection is *general*, both suggesting a fulfilled continuation of community and social life

# Modern Consensus

## The General Judgment

A **General Judgment** before all generations suggests

- an essential interrelatedness and communal destiny of all human persons at all times and places
- human history will be assessed and judged in the light of our communal responsibility for the destinies of each other
- the ambiguities of good and evil in history will be overcome

# Modern Consensus

## Heaven

"Heaven" is the assertion that **"the destiny intended by the creator for every human person is to find ultimate happiness and the final resolution for the quest of life in intimate and essentially indescribably personal communion with God, and in God with all creation."** (Monika K. Hellwig)

# Modern Consensus

## Hell

"Hell" is the assertion that human freedom can be used for a painful self-damnation and self-destruction, which may involve a final concluding reality beyond death

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# The Kingdom of God. Now and Not Yet

New Testament: *something new and significant happened in history through the life and death of Jesus: the coming of the Kingdom of God*

- **Kingdom of God** a dominant theme in Jesus' teaching (70 times in the Synoptic Gospels)
  - "Kingdom" = kingship or rule
- Paul: coming of Christ *inaugurates* a new era or age, a "new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17), which has yet to be fulfilled

# The Kingdom of God. Now and Not Yet

There is a tension between the "**Now**" and "**Not Yet**"

- "**Now**:" Jesus has inaugurated the Kingdom (planted the mustard seed)
- "**Not Yet**:" Kingdom not yet fulfilled (mustard seed has not grown fully)

**Inaugurated Eschatology:** Kingdom inaugurated, not yet fulfilled. Opposed to:

- **Realized Eschatology:** Kingdom fully realized in the coming of Jesus
- **Futurist Eschatology:** Kingdom remains in the future and will disrupt history

# The Millennium

A widespread belief in the early centuries of the church; faded by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century

**"Millennium:"** at the Parousia (Second Coming of Christ), Jesus would reign for 1000 years before the final fulfillment (based on Rev 20:4-6)

# The Two Cities of Augustine

Augustine (354-430): *The City of God*

- The Church is the "City of God" in exile within the "City of the World"
- The "City of God" is *in the world*, yet *not of the world*
- The "City of God" must somehow maintain its ethos while surrounded by the unbelief of "City of the World"
- The "Millenium" refers simply to the period between Jesus' death and his Second Coming. It is the period of the "City of God" in exile

# Joachim's Ages of History

Joachim of Fiore (1132-1202)

- monk Benedictine monastery of Corazzo
- elected Abbott in 1177

History could be divided in three ages:

- 1. **Age of the Father** (Old Testament dispensation). Adam to Christ. Age of the law, of the married, and of God the Father.
- 2. **Age of the Son** (New Testament dispensation). Christ to 1260. Age of a mixture of law and gospel, of the clergy, and of God the Son.
- 3. **Age of the Spirit**: age of love and liberty, of the monks, and the Holy Spirit.  
Beginning of a new "Spiritual Church"

# Joachim's Ages of History

Each age: 42 generations of thirty years.  
Calculated **Age of Spirit** would start  
1260.

Condemned by Fourth Lateran Council  
1215

Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274): "conjectural"

# Dante's Hell

Dante Alighieri (1265-1321)

*Divine Comedy*: Poet guided through

*Inferno* ("Hell"), *Purgatorio*

("Purgatory"), and *Paradiso* ("Paradise")

Hell: 9 concentric spheres:

- **Upper Hell** (no fire)
  - level 1: Limbo (no torment; illuminated by the light of human reason)
  - level 2: the Lustful
  - level 3: the Gluttonous
  - level 4: the Avaricious (the miserly)
  - level 5: the Wrathful
- **River Styx**

# Dante's Hell

- **Lower Hell** (fire)
  - level 6: Heretics
  - level 7: the Violent
  - level 8: the Fraudulent
  - level 9: the Treacherous (traitors)

# Dispensationalism

Movement within 20<sup>th</sup> century conservative evangelical Christianity

Began with John Nelson Darby (1800-82); popularized by the *Scofield Reference Bible* of C. I. Scofield (1843-1921)

Posits a series of 9 "dispensations" in the history of salvation:

1. Innocence, Creation to the Fall
2. Conscious, Fall to Noah
3. Human Government. Flood to Abraham
4. Promise. Abraham to Moses
5. Law. Moses to death of Christ
6. the Church. Resurrection to the present
7. the Millennium. Still to come

# Dispensationalism

Two characteristic notions:

1. **The Rapture:** believers will be "caught up in the clouds" to meet Christ at the second coming (1 Thess. 4:15-17)
2. **The Tribulation.** 7-year period of divine judgment upon the world (Daniel 9:24-27)

No consensus whether the rapture is Pre-tribulational or Post-Tribulational

# Jurgen Moltmann's Theology of Hope

Ernst Bloch, **Philosophy of Hope**: all human culture is moved by a passionate hope for the future that transcends the present's alienation

Jurgen Moltmann, **Theology of Hope**: The Christian hope, should be the central motivating factor in the life and thought of the church and of each Christian. The whole creation longs for the renewal by the "God of Hope"

# Jurgen Moltmann's Theology of Hope

Response to hope involves:

- 1. mission of the church to all nations
- 2. the hunger for righteous in the world
- 3. love for the true life of the imperiled and impaired creation

**"The Christian mission... aims at reconciliation with God... but also at the realization of the eschatological *hope of justice*, and *humanizing* of man, the *socializing* of humanity, *peace* for all creation."**

# Hell

- interest in hell particularly strong in the Middle Ages (for example, Dante's hell of 9 concentric spheres)
- described a static, eternal place
- view continues to have influence in modern times

**"It would be dreadful to suffer this fierceness and wrath of Almighty God for one moment, but you must suffer it for all eternity. There will be no end to this exquisite horrible misery... You will know that you must wear out long ages, millions of millions of ages, in wrestling and conflicting with this almighty merciless vengeance"**

- Jonathan Edwards' sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," preached July 8, 1741

# Hell

Criticism of this idea of hell:

- Its existence seems a contradiction to belief in that in the end God will reign over all. Instead, it implies God will never fully triumph over evil
- An eternal vindictive punishment of sinners for a finite number of offenses (even if against an infinite God) seems "un-Christian," impossible to reconcile with a loving God

# Hell

## Universalism

Origen (185-254):

- The idea that God and Satan would rule over respective kingdoms for all eternity a flawed *dualism*
- The final redeemed version of creation cannot include a hell or kingdom of Satan. In the end, all of creation must be restored to God

# Hell

## Universalism

John A. T. Robinson (radical English theologian 1960's):

- “May we not imagine a love so strong that ultimately no one will be able to retrain himself from free and grateful surrender?”
- “In a universe of love there can be no heaven which tolerates a chamber of horrors.”

# Hell

**"So this issue comes down to whether we are to give more weight to human freedom to turn away from God's love, or to the power of God's love to win all people freely to God. Any victory of God that violates human freedom is not a victory of love but of coercion. But it is possible to conceive of a love so powerful that ultimately no one will be able to resist free and grateful surrender."**

- Thomas and Wondra

# Hell

## Particular Redemption, Conditional Immortality

A proposal popular among conservative, Evangelical Christians since 1980's:

- human beings have the *potential* for immortality. Salvation is the *actualization* of that potential.
- those who respond to the gospel have that potential actualized
- those who do not respond to the gospel do not, and cease to exist at death
- no separation into two kingdom's (one Christ's one the devils), and no hell is thus necessary
- *Criticism*: inadequate scriptural basis

# Purgatory

Part of traditional Roman Catholic theology  
an intermediate stage where those who die  
in a state of grace purge themselves of  
the guilt of their sins before entering  
heaven

scriptural basis: 2 Maccabees 12:39-45 (part  
of the Apocrypha, canonical in Roman  
Catholicism, noncanonical among  
Protestants)

# Purgatory

## History:

- idea developed in early Church
- Clement of Alexandria (150-215) and Origen (185-254) both taught those who had died without time for penance who be "purified by fire" in the next life
- practice of praying for the dead widespread in Eastern Church by the Fourth Century: liturgy drove the theology
- Augustine (354-430): purification for the sins necessary before entering joys of the next

# Purgatory

## History:

- Pope Gregory I (Gregory the Great) in 593 or 594 suggested from Matt. 12:32 that there are sins that are forgiven in an "age to come." Suggested a "purifying fire" (*purgatorius ignis*)
- Catherine of Genoa *Treatise on Purgatory* 1490: a fire that purifies rather than a fire that punishes
- Doctrine rejected by Protestant Reformers
  - insufficient scriptural foundation
  - inconsistent with doctrine of justification by faith. Christ's sacrifice sufficient
  - Reformers stopped practice of praying for the dead

# Purgatory

Today, Roman Catholics, Orthodox and Anglicans pray for the dead (thus implying belief in an intermediate stage where prayers can help)

- Article XXII in the Book of Common Prayer condemns "Romish doctrine of purgatory" but "may be interpreted not to rule out other doctrines of purgatory" (Thomas and Wondra)

If all die imperfect, and fulfillment involves perfection of all persons ("sanctification"), then the alternatives are:

- sudden transformation at death
- process of moral growth after death involving purgation from sin

# Heaven

## Heaven:

- the realization of the presence and power of God
- the final elimination of sin
- the consummation of salvation

# Heaven

## Communal Nature of Heaven

New Testament parables give strongly  
*communal* descriptions of heaven

- a banquet
- wedding feast
- a city (New Jerusalem)

Doctrine of God as Trinity also argues for  
the communal nature of heaven

**"Eternal life is thus not a projection of an individual human existence, but is rather to be seen as sharing, with the redeemed community as a whole, in the community of a loving God."**

- McGrath

# Heaven

## The Resurrected Body and The New Creation

Suggests "a fulfillment of creaturehood, individuality, ... physical embodiment, and temporality, and not to the denial or transcending of these aspects of human and cosmic history." (Thomas & Wondra)

Invites speculation on the renewal or re-creation of the cosmos:

- a new creation? (*creatio ex nihilo*)
- a transformation of the present creation? (*creatio ex vetere*)

# Heaven

## **The Resurrected Body and The New Creation**

**The old creation has the character which is appropriate to an evolutionary universe, endowed with the ability through the shuffling explorations of its happenstance to 'make itself'.**

**The new creation represents the transformation of that [the old] universe when it enters freely into a new and closer relationship with its Creator, so that it becomes a totally sacramental world, suffused with the divine presence.**

- John Polkinghorne

# Heaven

## The Beatific Vision and the Essential Happiness of Heaven

"Heaven" is the assertion that **"the destiny intended by the creator for every human person is to find ultimate happiness and the final resolution for the quest of life in intimate and essentially indescribably personal communion with God, and in God with all creation."** (Monika K. Hellwig)

What is the nature of the communion that provides such ultimate happiness? What is the essential happiness of heaven?

# Heaven

## **The Beatific Vision and the Essential Happiness of Heaven**

Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274) suggested essential happiness of heaven was the "beatific vision:"

- the full vision of God, previously known only incompletely
- "the love that moves the sun and the other stars" (Dante)

# Heaven

## **The Beatific Vision and the Essential Happiness of Heaven**

**"when we speculate about the nature of happiness of heaven we are projecting what we know about our own humanity and its needs and longings. . . there must be fulfillment and happiness beyond what we can see, particularly for those whose lives among us never escape from oppression, persecution, humiliation, or simple grinding poverty and pain."**

(Monika K. Hellwig)

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