

RECONCILIATIONISM, A BETTER VIEW OF HELL: RECONCILIATIONISM AND ETERNAL PUNISHMENT

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What should a successful doctrine of hell look like, and what should it do? These are difficult questions. By way of beginning to offer an answer, I suggest that for any view of hell the following set of desiderata should be met. The first is compatibility with the scriptural passages that teach on hell, eternal punishment, and judgment in the life to come. The second desideratum is compatibility with passages that speak of the cosmic and universal reconciliation and consummation of all things in the eschaton. The third is that an eternal cosmological dualism between good and evil must not be entailed. The fourth is this: affirming that the punishment for sin must be infinite.¹ The fifth desideratum of any view of hell is that it must be able to give a satisfactory account of God's love. The sixth and final desideratum to be met is compatibility and harmony with other eschatological themes and with one's broader theology. Sadly, space limitations will restrict this essay to consideration of only the first three, leaving those that remain for the (near) future.

From the exegetical and theological considerations that give rise to these desiderata, one view arises naturally and is, I argue, successful at meeting these criteria where other views fail on one or more points. First I will briefly sketch reconciliationism and then I will examine it in relation to the first three desiderata.

I. INTRODUCING RECONCILIATIONISM

Reconciliationism is a somewhat inferential position, seeking to synthesize broad, seemingly disparate theological strands flowing from eschatological pictures given to us in Scripture—for example, how the finally impenitent will be thrown into the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth, while at the same time God will be all in all and every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord (Matt 8:12; 1 Cor 15:28; Phil 2:9–11). The way forward must be forged by responsible inference, putting together doctrines taught more clearly in Scripture, because in this age our view of the eternal state is somewhat fuzzy; we are given glimpses of that future reality but it still has elements of mystery. When it comes to many issues of eschatology, we only “see in a mirror dimly” (1 Cor 13:12), but we do see a bit, and we can, with reverence and caution, put together some of the pieces given to us to get a better picture.

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¹ For argumentation supporting this desideratum, see Shawn Bawulski, “Annihilationism, Traditionalism, and the Problem of Hell,” *PhC* 12 (2010) 61–79, esp. 73–78.

Put succinctly, reconciliationism is the view that all sinning ceases in the eternal state, and in some sense the reprobate participate in the cosmic reconciliation of all things to God: they are reconciled, not salvifically but in and through punishment. They do not experience the divine presence of blessing, but instead experience punishment, loss, shame, humiliation, pain, suffering, subjection, and lucidity of their wrongdoing and of God's holiness and justice. They are defeated rebels, no longer able to continue in rebellion. They acquiescently accept their judgment and in so doing glorify God, under and through punishment praising him for his justice, an ability brought by the lucidity of God's right and their wrong. This view embraces a universal and cosmic reconciliation of all things to God: the finally impenitent are part of a restored divine order not by receiving salvation but by their subjection and punishment.

The view insists that there are senses of "reconciliation" that extend further than that which is realized through salvation. Later I will address Col 1:20 and other passages that speak of the unlimited eschatological reconciliation of all things to God, where I will argue that even the reprobate must not be excluded from this and offer an explanation as to how such is possible. It also insists that once the nature of the reprobate's participation in the cosmic reconciliation is properly understood, it is possible—with proper nuances and qualifications in place—to envisage the reprobate as both reconciled and eternally subject to just divine punishment.²

Reconciliationism provides modifications to the traditional view of hell that alleviate some of the anxieties that serve as points of departure into other views. If successful, it could serve as a view more winsome to the annihilationist and the universalist, even if this middle ground still lies within a somewhat traditionalist territory. In exercising the problematic additions that have crept into some traditionalisms, and especially in taking seriously some of the "universalist" passages (as discussed below), it seems that reconciliationism might turn out to be the most biblically faithful view of eternal punishment on offer.

While fundamentally a modified traditionalism, to distinguish the view I will adopt the term "reconciliationism." Also, the groundwork has recently been laid by Henri Blocher, one of few contemporary defenders of this view (although he does not explicitly use the label), and I develop and extend his ideas, making adjustments as necessary.³

² See *ibid.* 77–78. A future work will treat this issue in greater detail than is possible in this essay.

³ See Henri Blocher's chapter in Nigel M. de S. Cameron, ed., *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1992) 283–312. For another example of a contemporary advocate of the view, see Andy Saville, "Hell without Sin—a Renewed View of a Disputed Doctrine," *Churchman* 119 (2005) 243–61; *idem*, "Reconciliationism—a Forgotten Evangelical Doctrine of Hell," *EvQ* 79 (2007) 35–51. I also draw from several theologians in the nineteenth and early twentieth century who held views with varying similarities to reconciliationism: T. R. Birks, James Orr, J. R. Illingworth, Samuel Garratt, and Langton Clarke. Stephen Williams has written a helpful article providing a survey of their views on hell which I will not reproduce here, but he rightly concludes that these thinkers, despite familial similarities, probably cannot be synthesized into one unified view. See Stephen N. Williams, "The Question of Hell and Salvation: Is There a Fourth View?," *TynBul* 57 (2006) 263–83.

II. DESIDERATUM 1: PASSAGES ON ETERNAL PUNISHMENT

The first desideratum is exegetical: consistency with the scriptural teaching on hell, eternal punishment, and judgment in the life to come. Any view of hell must be able to provide consistent and exegetically plausible interpretations of passages such as Matt 7:21–23; 25:31–46; 2 Thess 1:5–10; Rev 14:9–11, and Rev 20:9–15 (amongst many others). Space limitations prevent a detailed treatment of all the relevant passages here; interested readers can refer to the relevant literature.⁴ However, building from what I regard to be responsible exegesis (in conjunction with appropriate consideration of the tradition), I can here suggest a core teaching from these texts; some essentials that any doctrine of hell should not abandon. As for the brevity of the treatment of this first desideratum in this essay, I ask for the reader's forbearance as I continue with my argument (especially of those who might be resistant to the traditional view).

As difficult a doctrine as it may be, it seems to me that eternal punishment cannot be purged from the Scriptures without doing some degree of violence to the text.⁵ Warnings of the reality of hell come frequently from the lips of Jesus himself. Once this basic doctrine is in place, however, the particulars are not so straightforward: what is essential to any view of eternal punishment, a “core” teaching? Unfortunately, a brief and incomplete sketch must suffice. First and foremost, hell involves distributive retributive punishment—each individual receives the punishment due to her in proportion to her deeds; God actively requites to the reprobate the deserved punishment for their sin (Matt 16:27). God is “dealing out retribution” to the finally impenitent, and they will “pay the penalty of eternal destruction” (2 Thess 1:5–10). Second, hell is the destruction of the sinner—not, I contend, the extinction of annihilation, but *destruction*; their existence is one of loss and ruin in comparison to the blessedness of the saints (Gal 6:8). The reprobate are forever broken shells of what they might have been. Third, hell is banishment, separation from God's presence and exclusion from his kingdom (Matt 7:21–23). In judgment God banishes the wicked from the heavenly city, and they are excluded from experiencing his presence of blessing. Fourth, there is an eternal and more-or-less binary distinction between the righteous and the wicked that is actually realized. In other words, hell is populated. This contrast starts in this current age (a theme running through the whole canon; see Psalm 1; Matt 25:31–46; and Luke 12:8–9

⁴ See the list in Evangelical Alliance-Commission on Unity and Truth among Evangelicals (ACUTE), *The Nature of Hell: A Report* (London: ACUTE, 2000) 36–52. For a more detailed treatment of the relevant texts, see Robert A. Peterson, *Hell on Trial: The Case for Eternal Punishment* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1995) 21–96. For a nearly exhaustive list of all the relevant texts and discussion from an annihilationist perspective, see Edward Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of Final Punishment* (Houston, TX: Providential, 1982).

⁵ I recognize that I have here assumed a form of traditionalism, a position that is sometimes contested. Since I lack space to give a full defense, I refer interested readers to two excellent contemporary defenses: Peterson, *Hell on Trial* and Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, eds., *Hell under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents Eternal Punishment* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004). I also note that I stand in the company of such weighty theologians as Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin, Luther, and Edwards.

for just a few examples) and is finally and fully realized in the eschaton (Matt 25:31–46; Rev 20:10–15; 21:1–8).

Reconciliationism satisfies this desideratum—consistency with the scriptural teaching on eternal punishment—and maintains that hell is retributive punishment, destruction, and banishment. The view can harmoniously accommodate all the passages on hell, eternal punishment, future judgment, and the like. It affirms that eternal punishment involves the conscious experience of penal suffering, an existence that is subjectively negative (Matt 8:12; Mark 9:43). Further on this point—the devil and his demons are tormented (Matt 8:29; Rev 20:10) and humans who share the fate of hell with the devil experience the same conscious torment (Luke 16:23, 28; Rev 14:10–11; 20:15). It affirms final punishment as *eternal* in the sense of *everlasting* in duration, not merely in effect. The reprobate have continued existence where they experience everlasting punishment, just as the redeemed experience everlasting life (Matt 25:41, 46; Mark 9:48). Reconciliationism posits a punishment inflicted by God’s judgment, where God is in some sense active (2 Thess 1:6–9). Other versions of traditionalism, often those cashing heavily on human free will, sometimes withdraw to a hell of mere separation where God is basically passive; final punishment, while not excluding the outworkings of sin, is unduly truncated if limited to such. Also, hell is permanent: unlike in many types of annihilationism or in purgatorial views, in reconciliationism, the final state *really is* the final state (the entirety of Revelation 20–22 strongly suggests the fixed permanency of the state of affairs in both the lake of fire and the new heavens and new earth). Reconciliationism takes seriously the biblical teaching on hell, recognizing that the relevant passages are not empty threats or mere kerygmatic or existential statements about what is ultimately an unreality.⁶ Finally, it affirms the universal resurrection and final judgment (Dan 12:2, John 5:28–29).

III. DESIDERATUM 2: THE ESCHATOLOGICAL RECONCILIATION OF THE COSMOS

The second desideratum is also exegetical and will receive a more detailed treatment in this essay: any view of hell must be compatible with passages that speak of the cosmic and universal eschatological reconciliation and consummation of all things (these passages might be shorthanded as *the universalist hope*). These texts, often considered mainstays of universalism, seem to teach an unqualified reconciliation and restored cosmic order, one that any view of hell must not preclude. Reconciliationism satisfies this desideratum: in the view, all things in the cosmos—whether in heaven, on the earth, or under the earth—will be subject to the direct rule of Christ and the uncontested sovereign reign of God. A perfect

⁶ My presentation of the view makes no commitment to the number or scope of the saved compared to the reprobate, nor does it entail one particular view on the requirements for salvation. While not my own view, I see no reason why reconciliationism could not be made to work with some inclusivisms or pluralisms, provided they are sufficiently “Christian.” This, however, is a discussion for some other occasion.

cosmic order will be restored, and *all things* will be reconciled to God through Christ. All this, however, in no way precludes eternal punishment (as the universalist would insist), but only rules out a hell of a certain sort. Reconciliationism fits very well with the eschatological reality portrayed in these passages.

I will consider three of these passages in detail (1 Cor 15:28; Col 1:20; Phil 2:9–11), first giving a summary of the implications for this desideratum, followed by exegetical support.⁷

1. *1 Cor 15:28: God will be all in all.* God being “all in all” means that God’s rule will be unmediated, direct, and unchallenged. It is a statement describing the restored order, the reconciliation of all things. No longer will there be the rift between God and everything in the cosmos that sin brought about, but when death—as representative of the effects of sin—is destroyed, the whole cosmos will be right and right with him again. This does not necessarily preclude eternal punishment, because the verse speaking of defeat, destruction, and subjection in the immediate context seems to allow hell to be part of the grander whole.

Structurally, verses 24–28 constitute a chiasm, with verse 26 at the center. Verse 28 is paired with verses 24a and b, where God being all in all is conceptually linked with the coming of “the end,” where the son hands over the kingdom to the father.⁸ In v. 26, “the death” is personified as a last enemy whose defeat represents the most important victory: the undoing of the effects of sin, the cosmic overturning of the curse of Adam. Verse 26 is a pivot in the chiasm, where before it all opposition in the cosmos is defeated and destroyed and after it all things are put into subjection and subordination, restoring the harmonious created order.⁹ In so em-

⁷ Two related passages are worth mentioning. First is the passing mention of “restoring all things” (ἀποκαταστάσεως πάντων) in Acts 3:21 taken up by Origen, who was followed by more than a few, to build a theology of *Apokatastasis*. Proper exegesis, however, shows that this phrase refers to a realization of *prior prophetic promises*, perhaps with a hint towards universal cosmic restoration to the original created order but certainly not entailing universal salvation. See I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary* (TNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 94; Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles, a Commentary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971) 208; Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 29; and Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1998) 288–89. Second is Eph 1:10, where, at the fullness of time, τὰ πάντα will be “summed up” or “united” in Christ. Consensus on ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι is that it means “to sum up” or “to bring something to a main point,” rather than “to bring under one head.” P. T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 111. See also Markus Barth’s discussion in *Ephesians* (AB; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974) 89–92. For God to “sum up” all things is for God to unify all things in Christ. The “in him” in this verse is not instrumental; rather Christ is the sphere: “Christ is the one *in whom* God chooses to sum up the cosmos, the one in whom he restores harmony to the universe” (emphasis original; O’Brien, *Ephesians* 111–12). “Things in heaven and things on earth” is more than just a reference to the totality of the cosmos; that these represent two spheres of reality undergirds a theme running through the epistle, and Christ “sums up” and unifies both (ibid. 112). The unification in this verse seemingly also includes the reprobate. Fitting well with this verse, eternal punishment in reconciliationism has Christ as a focal point and can speak of a unification by means of the pacification and defeat of the reprobate.

⁸ John Paul Heil, *The Rhetorical Role of Scripture in 1 Corinthians* (SBLMS; Atlanta: SBL, 2005) 212–13.

⁹ Ibid. 215.

phasizing the destruction of death Paul is continuing his argument for the resurrection: that Christ's resurrection will ultimately lead to God being "all in all."¹⁰

In this passage, saying that God will be "all in all" or "all things in all" is not to assert a metaphysical position or to affirm any sort of pantheism but rather is to speak of God's relationship to creation, his unmitigated sovereign rule over the entire cosmos, without challenge and without opposition.¹¹ As Garland says, "It applies to the pacification and redemption of the created order and is similar to saying that God is over all. It affirms God's undivided and total power over the enemies."¹² In this eternal state "God's will will be supreme in every quarter and in every way."¹³ Fitzmyer says that "all in all" means that "[a]ll will be ordered by God to himself directly, with no further need of mediation, not even of the 'kingdom' or the 'reign' of Christ (vv. 24, 25)."¹⁴ Regarding τὰ πάντα in verse 28, Thiselton says, "Paul sees God as the source and goal of a world in need of reconciliation and salvation through (δὲ αὐτοῦ, Rom 11:36) God in Christ."¹⁵

The scope of this final sovereignty is cosmically unlimited. "All" in verses 20–28 is "a symbol of comprehensiveness and completeness."¹⁶ More specifically, in verse 28 "[a]ll things' [τὰ πάντα] would include the created order, the world, the heavenly powers, and human beings."¹⁷ The "all" in ἐν πᾶσιν (v. 28) is the whole of the human realm, all that is experienced by humans.¹⁸ Fee states it well:

In Paul's view the consummation of redemption includes the whole sphere of creation as well (cf. Rom. 8:19–22; Col. 1:15–20). Nothing lies outside God's redemptive purposes in Christ, in whom all things finally will be "united" (Eph. 1:9–10). Therefore, at the death of death the final rupture in the universe will be healed and God alone will rule over all beings, banishing those who have reject-

¹⁰ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 759. See also David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003) 714.

¹¹ See Craig S. Keener, *1–2 Corinthians* (New Cambridge Bible Commentary; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 127–28; Fee, *First Corinthians* 760; Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975) 275; and Garland, *1 Corinthians* 714. Also, David Fredrickson has an interesting article in which he argues that God being all in all is not to be seen in terms of sovereignty but rather in terms of personal relations, including things like love and need fulfillment, where there is a personal identity through participation. See David Fredrickson, "God, Christ, and All Things in 1 Corinthians 15:28," *WW* 18 (1998) 260. Even if Fredrickson is right in this, the implications for a doctrine of eternal punishment would be much the same: sin shall be no more.

¹² Garland, *1 Corinthians* 714.

¹³ Fee, *First Corinthians* 760.

¹⁴ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Yale Bible; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008) 575.

¹⁵ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) 1239.

¹⁶ Scott M. Lewis, *So That God May Be All in All: The Apocalyptic Message of 1 Corinthians 15:12–34* (Tesi Gregoriana; Serie Teologia 42; Roma: Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1998) 149.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 69.

¹⁸ Thiselton, *First Corinthians* 1239. See also Marinus C. de Boer, *The Defeat of Death: Apocalyptic Eschatology in 1 Corinthians 15 and Romans 5* (JSNTSup 22; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988) 126.

ed his offer of life and lovingly governing all those who by grace have entered into God's "rest."¹⁹

God being "all in all" is very much universalistic but does not necessarily entail universal salvation. It is about the restored order, the reconciliation of all things, of which the reprobate will be participants, but by some means other than salvation.

Reconciliationism fits well with this passage. In this restored order where God truly is "all in all," reconciliationism sees the reprobate participating in this reality *by way of their punishment and defeat*. It will not do, as in some traditionalist views, to see hell as involving *continued existence* but yet somehow *outside the scope* of this reality. If God's rule genuinely will be unmediated, direct, and unchallenged, the reprobate cannot continue in rebellion and sin.²⁰

2. *Col 1:20: To reconcile to himself all things*. Christ is the means of reconciliation but is also, as the one preeminent in all things, the subject of reconciliation (v. 20) as all things will be reconciled to him. The scope of this reconciliation is unlimited and presumably extends even to the reprobate: "all things" includes everything in the cosmos, sentient or otherwise.²¹ The cosmos and everything in it has been afflicted with a rupture, and the necessary reconciliation is found in Christ. The Christ-event has universal significance and the dimensions are cosmic—by the cross, the cosmos are restored to an Edenic harmony, brought into a "renewed oneness and wholeness."²² For the redeemed, this reconciliation and peace is available now, in the present (v. 22), but such present reality is not a given—it is only true of the Colossians if they continue in their belief (v. 23). Reconciliation is

¹⁹ Fee, *First Corinthians* 760.

²⁰ Interestingly, some annihilationists have argued against the traditional view on the basis of this verse. Atkinson writes, "While sinners live and continue to sin, how can God be all in all?" Basil F. C. Atkinson, *Life and Immortality: An Examination of the Nature and Meaning of Life and Death as They Are Revealed in the Scriptures* (Taunton: Phoenix Press, 1969) 112. See also Le Roy Edwin Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers; the Conflict of the Ages over the Nature and Destiny of Man* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1965) 1.23–25, 269, 301–2, 413–14, 518–19; and David Lawrence Edwards and John R. W. Stott, *Evangelical Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1989) 319. Harold Guillebaud makes a similar argument that draws from Eph 1:9–10 and Phil 2:9–10 in addition to 1 Cor 15:24–28. In his view, the submission "under the earth" in Phil 2:10 is part of the reprobate's defeat and penal suffering before annihilation, but the "summing up" of all things and God being "all in all" precludes the possibility of their everlasting existence *in any state whatsoever*, because their mere existence would constitute an evil. Harold E. Guillebaud, *The Righteous Judge: A Study of the Biblical Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment* (Taunton: Phoenix Press, 1964) 5–6. For an argument similar to Guillebaud's, see Henry Smith Warleigh, *Twelve Discussions Proving the Extinction of Evil Persons and Things* (London: E. Stock, 1873) 219–20. In my judgment the annihilationist has a valid point but an invalid conclusion. God being all in all, where his reign is unqualified in a perfected cosmos, excludes the possibility of continued sin and evil, but this does not require the non-existence of the reprobate.

²¹ See the argument for this in Robert A. Peterson, "'To Reconcile to Himself All Things': Colossians 1:20," *Presbyterian* 36 (2010) 37–46. See also Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008) 134–37.

²² James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 104.

achieved through Christ alone but reconciliation and salvation are not coterminous and there is nothing in this passage that precludes other means of reconciliation.²³

Crucial for the current purposes with this verse is an understanding of the word “reconcile.” Strictly, the words translated “reconcile” mean to change something from one state to a quite different state.²⁴ In Paul’s usage, the word “reconcile” (ἀποκαταλλάσσω in Col 1:20, 22; Eph 2:16; elsewhere in Paul καταλλάσσω) describes an act or a relationship between God and mankind or creation.²⁵ God is always the agent of reconciliation and here Christ is said to be the agent.²⁶ “All things” will be reconciled to God, but from that it does not follow that everything and everyone will be reconciled in the same way, as Henri Blocher has noted.²⁷ For believers, reconciliation is brought about by salvation. For the part of the cosmos that is non-sentient, reconciliation is dependent on the completed redemption of humans (Rom 8:19–23). For the “principalities and powers,” the reconciliation spoken of in Col 1:20 is best understood as finding realization through their conquest detailed later in the letter (Col 2:13–15); reconciliation for them “means more of what is understood as pacification, the imposing of peace, something brought about by conquest.”²⁸

Reconciliationism accords with this passage without difficulty. In Col 1:20, *all things* will be reconciled to Christ, and while the focus of this passage is the reconciliation believers currently have in salvation, it does not preclude the possibility of

²³ Usually in the NT “reconcile” points to what happens between God and sinners through salvation. Extending normative to comprehensive, a few exegetes wish to always limit reconciliation to just those human beings who rightly respond to the gospel invitation. I. Howard Marshall is counted among this group, making a distinction between reconciliation becoming an actual reality for some (as in v. 23) and the seemingly universal reconciliation in verse 20, which he sees to simply be “God’s provision of reconciliation for the world.” I. Howard Marshall in Robert A. Guelich, ed., *Unity and Diversity in New Testament Theology: Essays in Honor of George E. Ladd* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 16–127. As Moo has pointed out (*Colossians & Philemon* 134–35), this will not do, because the context and the repeated use of “all things” for the entire universe indicates that the scope cannot be restricted in this way. Marshall seems to be limited to the concept of reconciliation through salvation by acceptance of the gospel (which, granted, is the focus of much of the NT’s treatment of reconciliation, but it need not be taken as exhaustively definitive), while the verse demands that reconciliation be universal. The need, then, is to explain different possible means and types of reconciliation that can account for inanimate creation, rulers and powers, and, by implication, the reprobate.

²⁴ Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, and Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Baker’s Greek New Testament Library 4; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000) #2984.

²⁵ Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke, *Colossians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1994) 213–14. According to M. Barth, the addition of the prefix ἀπο is probably just stylistic. Similarly, see F. F. Bruce, “Colossian Problems, Pt 4: Christ as Conqueror and Reconciler,” *BSac* 141 (1984) 292. See also the discussion in Moo, *Colossians & Philemon* 134–35.

²⁶ This passage assumes that the cosmic order has suffered a rupture. Reconciliation is necessary, and it comes through the Christ event. See Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon: A Commentary on the Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971) 59.

²⁷ Blocher says, “Reconciliation” does not imply *salvation*, here, as independent exegetes have recognized; it means the restoration of order, of all within God’s order, ‘pacification,’ as all are brought back into the divinely-ruled harmony” (Cameron, ed., *Universalism* 303).

²⁸ Bruce, “Colossian Problems, Pt 4” 293. See also Peter T. O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* (WBC; Waco, TX: Word, 1982) 56. O’Brien argues that the pacification in this passage is essentially a type or means of reconciliation.

other means of reconciliation.²⁹ Like the principalities and powers, the reprobate participate in the final reconciliation by way of conquest and pacification. Further, this verse also states that Christ is the agent of all reconciliation; certainly in salvation but also in judgment, for Christ is the agent of God's judgment (Matt 25:31–33; John 5:22, 27; Rev 19:11, 15). Reconciliation is the bringing of all things under the divine rule and order, whether by salvation or by defeat. The reprobate, though not explicitly mentioned here, seem to share in the same fate of defeat as opposing powers, the devil and his angels (Matt 25:41).³⁰ The universe and everything in it are reconciled in that they will be subjected to Christ, bringing about a state of pacification and peace; but this is realized by quite diverse routes.³¹ As F. F. Bruce puts well, "The peace effected by the death of Christ may be freely accepted, or it may be imposed."³²

3. *Phil 2:9–11: Every knee will bow and every tongue confess.* Jesus' dominion as Lord is such that when his lordship is perceived—in the present, by some, but in the end, by everyone—the universal response will be acts of homage, openly and publically declaring and acknowledging that which can no longer be denied. All sentient beings in the cosmos will bow the knee and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.³³

This passage draws from Isa 45:20ff., where God declares that one day everyone will worship him.³⁴ In Philippians this passage is applied to Christ. The name bestowed to Christ is "Lord" (really, the tetragrammaton!), revealing his true na-

²⁹ On this Moo writes, "The implications of this reconciliation for unbelievers is not entirely clear from Scripture. [Ruling out universalism and annihilationism] ... Perhaps, however, we might tentatively think that reconciliation will mean that unbelievers will themselves, though suffering the torments of Hell, nevertheless cease to sin and express remorse for their sin." He then cites Blocher and Stephen Williams. Moo, *Colossians & Philemon* 136, n. 218.

³⁰ For an excellent discussion of Col 1:20 as it relates to this issue, see Peter Thomas O'Brien, "Col. 1:20 and the Reconciliation of All Things," *Reformed Theological Review* 33/2 (1974) 51–53. See also *idem*, *Colossians, Philemon* 54–57. O'Brien reaches similar conclusions: the reprobate are included within the cosmic reconciliation through defeat.

³¹ See Peterson, "To Reconcile" 43. On Paul's presenting reconciliation to include "all things, whether on earth or in heaven," Peterson says, "In so doing the apostle teaches that Christ accomplished a cosmic reconciliation, though that concept needs to be defined." Later he writes, "the Son of God died and rose again on the third day to accomplish the reconciliation of human beings, angels, and the creation itself, *mutatis mutandis*" (italics original) *ibid.* 44. From this framework, reconciliationism can be seen as explaining the *mutatis mutandis* when it comes to the reprobate.

³² F. F. Bruce, "Colossian Problems, Pt 2: The 'Christ Hymn' of Colossians 1:15–20," *BSac* 141/562 (1984) 109.

³³ This, agrees Calvin, includes the demons. Calvin in commenting on Phil 2:10–11 says the devils "are not, and never will be, subject of their own accord and by cheerful submission; but Paul is not speaking here of voluntary obedience." John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians* (Calvin's Commentaries 11; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965) 252.

³⁴ The universality and limitlessness is expressed in terms that even encompass all of creation. See Richard Bauckham's essay in Ralph P. Martin and Brian J. Dodd, eds., *Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998) 131, 33. Bauckham also mentions Rev 5:13 as depicting the worship of Christ to include the whole of creation.

ture.³⁵ Verses 10–11 are a *ἵνα*-clause, stating that both the purpose and result of God “highly exalting” and “bestowing the name on” Jesus is universal bowing and confessing. This passage has a strong sense of confidence: verses 10–11 are not conditional or expressing a mere intent but a future certainty.³⁶ Ralph P. Martin rightly describes the bowing of the knee in this passage as “a mark of extreme abasement and submission (as in Eph. iii.14) and denotes that the universal homage marks the subjection of those who so kneel to the lordship of Christ.”³⁷ *Every* knee shall bow, and *every* tongue confess, the scope of which is unlimited: “in heaven and on earth and under the earth.”³⁸ Lexically, “confess” can mean either “admit and acknowledge publically” or “proclaim with thanksgiving and confession of faith,” but the former is preferred as it best fits the context of verses 9–11 and Isa 45:20ff.³⁹

The timing of this universal homage is not clear—is it current, on account of the ascension, or future, perhaps at the parousia?—but probably follows Paul’s (and the NT’s) eschatological already/not yet tension.⁴⁰ Ruemann captures the idea: “Believers are part of a broader company giving homage to Jesus ‘in the heavens, on earth, and in the underworld.’ Not ‘genuflecting every time the name ‘Jesus’ is mentioned,’ but submission when the title *Lord* for Jesus is perceived. Perceived in his true identity? That happens for some in the present; it will obtain for all in God’s future time.”⁴¹

Reconciliationism loudly resounds with this passage. In Phil 2:9–11, upon perceiving Jesus’ true identity, every knee will bow to him and every tongue will confess his lordship. All sentient beings in the cosmos will bow the knee and con-

³⁵ Peter Thomas O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) 237–38. See also Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians* (WBC; Waco, TX: Word, 1987) 91 and Bauckham in Martin and Dodd, eds., *Where Christology Began* 131.

³⁶ Commentators seem to be in agreement that the *ἵνα*-clause should be understood as both purpose and result; for example, see O’Brien, *Philippians* 239, John Henry Paul Reumann, *Philippians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Yale Bible; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008) 373, Ralph P. Martin, *Carmen Christi: Philippians 2:5–11 in Recent Interpretation and in the Setting of Early Christian Worship* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) 249. An exception to this is Hawthorne, who, in an appeal to human free will, considers it to be merely stating purpose or intent—see Hawthorne, *Philippians* 94. For a convincing argument directly against Hawthorne, see Moisés Silva, *Philippians* (2d ed.; BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005) 111–12.

³⁷ Martin, *Carmen Christi* 265.

³⁸ The stating of the three tiered structure serves to explain the “every” as modifying knee and tongue and should be taken to include the reprobate, however one might understand “in heaven and on earth and under the earth.” It seems preferable to consider the phrase to mean all rational beings, be they human, angelic or demonic, dead or alive, but even if one interprets the phrase to be stating a less defined cosmic scope, the reprobate would be included. For further discussions see O’Brien, *Philippians* 244–45, Hawthorne, *Philippians* 93, Martin, *Carmen Christi* 257–65.

³⁹ Most recent scholars follow this conclusion, for example see O’Brien, *Philippians* 247–48, Martin, *Carmen Christi* 263, or Bockmuehl, who even says of the word that “it can occasionally be used of acknowledging something against one’s will.” Markus N. A. Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (BNTC; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998) 147.

⁴⁰ Martin, *Carmen Christi* 268.

⁴¹ Reumann, *Philippians* 374.

fess that Jesus Christ is Lord.⁴² The redeemed do so in loving adoration, the reprobate in subjection, shame, and defeat—not with contrived and insincere external lip service but as an expression of their internal recognition of the undeniable worth, goodness, and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is an open acknowledgement of their guilt and shame upon perceiving Jesus' true identity. *Every* knee shall bow, and *every* tongue confess, the scope of which is unlimited: "in heaven and on earth and under the earth," which includes both the redeemed and the reprobate in acknowledging Jesus' rule. The reprobate bow and confess as one defeated and conquered.⁴³ As O'Brien points out, this is in significant accord with Isa 45:20ff. (which is drawn from in Phil 2:9–11), where the future reality of universal worship is an irrevocable truth (v. 23) and at the same time "all who have raged against him will come to him and be put to shame" (v. 24).⁴⁴

IV. DESIDERATUM 3: COSMOLOGICAL DUALISM AVOIDED

Any view of hell, I suggest, cannot entail in any form an eternal cosmological dualism between good and evil. I contend that the eschatological picture is one in which sin, evil, rebellion, wickedness, etc., are all defeated and eradicated. In the end the state of the cosmos is one where "all things will be subjected to him [God]," "God [will] be all in all," and "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord."⁴⁵ The biblical picture of the final eschatological state seems to preclude any sin or evil, and the restored divine harmony and order—the return to the shalom of Eden, and indeed, even the surpassing of it—leaves no room for sin, even in hell.

Here is where reconciliationism succeeds while many other views founder. The view's biggest distinctive, probably its *sine qua non*, is that in the eternal state all sinning ceases: God's victory will be such so that sin shall be no more. Many other aspects of the view stem or derive from this fundamental insight. The ceasing of all sin means both the ceasing of sinful actions (including mental acts) and the ceasing of all sinful attitudes and dispositions. When evil is ultimately and finally vanquished, sinful acts and sinful hearts will nowhere be found.

In this regard reconciliationism diverges from a common stream in traditionalism which envisages sin continuing in hell.⁴⁶ While a well represented view, some significant figures in the tradition do not advocate continuing sin, and reconcilia-

⁴² See Bauckham's essay in Martin and Dodd, eds., *Where Christology Began* 134–37. Bauckham argues that the acts of homage and worship in this passage are indicative of recognition of Christ's unique divine identity. Since the scope of those who will worship is unrestricted (all creation), reconciliationism gives an account of the reprobate that accords with this eschatological reality.

⁴³ For hints towards this idea, see O'Brien, *Philippians* 250. See also Bockmuehl, *Philippians* 146–47.

⁴⁴ O'Brien, *Philippians* 243.

⁴⁵ 1 Cor 15:28; Phil 2:10–11.

⁴⁶ See the helpful survey of the trends in the tradition in J. H. Leckie, *The World to Come and Final Destiny* (2d ed.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1922) 188–207. The continuing sin view seems to be common. For more on the continuing sin view, see also Bawulski, "Annihilationism, Traditionalism, and the Problem of Hell" 70–73.

tionism is in good company in insisting that sin shall be no more. It is interesting that all of the major church creeds are silent on the issue of everlasting sin while affirming the return of Christ, the final judgment, and eternal punishment. Augustine, while not entirely clear on the matter, does say that the reprobate will have “no power to sin.”⁴⁷ Calvin also hints at this, writing, “but then the majesty of God, and also the justice which they have violated by their sins, are eternal. Justly, therefore, the memory of their iniquity does not perish.”⁴⁸ In speaking solely of the memory of the reprobate’s iniquity he could plausibly be understood as implying that just their memory of such remains, not further iniquity as well.

For being common in traditionalism, the continuing sin view has at best scant and speculative biblical support. No passages teach ongoing sin in hell, and Blocher rightly decries the lack of even an attempt to give the view exegetical legs on which to stand.⁴⁹ Perhaps the only obvious potential verse in support of the view, Mark 3:29 (“he is guilty of an eternal sin”) is more naturally understood as describing guilt that remains than perpetual sinning, especially considering the context of the verse and its synoptic parallels.⁵⁰

One of the few scholars to attempt to offer exegetical support for continuing sin is D. A. Carson (*N.B.*, who did so after the publication of Blocher’s essay). In his influential book *The Gagging of God*, Carson argues for continuing sin (calling the view “probable” but “hard to prove”) from Rev 16:21 and 22:10–11, saying of the latter:

Of course, the primary emphasis here is on the time from “now” *until* judgment: there is a kind of realized judgment, within time, that sometimes takes place. Nevertheless the parallelism is telling. If the holy and those who do right continue to be holy and to do right, *in anticipation of the perfect holiness and rightness to be lived and practiced throughout all eternity*, should we not also conclude that the vile continue their vileness *in anticipation of the vileness they will live and practice throughout all eternity*?⁵¹

Contra Carson, the parallelism is interesting because of the allusion to Dan 12:9–10 in Rev 22:10–11, not because it has any significant bearing on the continuation of sin in the final state. In Dan 12:9 the words of prophecy are “closed up and sealed until the time of the end”; in Rev 20:10 John is instructed *not* to “seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near.” On the implications of appreciating the allusion to Daniel in this verse, Beale (in a work co-edited with Carson) says the prediction in Dan 12:9–10 is that some in the latter days will fail to recognize the “dawning fulfillment of prophecy” and continue in wickedness,

⁴⁷ Augustine, *Enchiridion* Ch. xxix, sect. 111.

⁴⁸ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* III, 25, 5.

⁴⁹ See Blocher in Cameron, ed., *Universalism* 301.

⁵⁰ See Morna Dorothy Hooker, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Mark* (London: Continuum, 1991) 117. See also Blocher in Cameron, ed., *Universalism* 301–2.

⁵¹ D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 533 (emphasis original). For Carson’s objection that the lost in hell sin by failing to keep the first and second commandments, see Bawulski, “Annihilationism, Traditionalism, and the Problem of Hell” 70–71, esp. n. 26.

while the righteous will understand and obey.⁵² “The change from prediction in Daniel to imperatives in Rev. 22:11 expresses an awareness that Daniel’s prophecy is commencing fulfillment in John’s own time and that genuine believers should discern this revelation and respond positively.”⁵³ Carson seems to have it backwards: the wicked currently continue in wickedness not in anticipation of their wickedness to be done in eternity but because, unlike the righteous, *they fail to anticipate* the beginning of the fulfillment of prophecy and the imminently coming judgment (Rev 22:13). The answer to the question of continuing sin in hell is not found in this verse.

On Rev 16:21, Carson says, “Moreover, does not Revelation 16:21 provide a portrait of those who are being punished and who curse God?”⁵⁴ In Rev 16:21, large hailstones from heaven fell on people, “and they cursed God for the plague of the hail.” This theme is repeated thrice in this chapter, the other instances being verses 9 and 11, which also speak of rebels cursing God, but unlike verse 21, they mention a refusal to repent from the wicked as they experience judgment from the plagues. The major problem with Carson’s use of this verse is that, whether on an amillennialist or a premillennialist interpretation, there is good reason to think that Rev 16:21 is not particularly concerned with a chronology of events and thus does not shed light on the eternal state of the wicked. While the verse does come sequentially after the seventh bowl (which, in the amillennialist scheme, is a recapitulation of the final judgment), the placement of the hailstorm plague after the seventh bowl in verses 17–20 is easily explained by stylistic factors rather than chronological ones. Seeing the eschaton as a new exodus (on account of the linking of the final judgments with the exodus plagues), Beale argues that the hailstorm is linked with the cosmic events of the Sinai theophany that was invoked in verse 18, possibly because Ezek 38:19–22 forms a motif of an earthquake followed by a hailstorm marking the final stroke of defeat of the end-time enemy.⁵⁵ In explaining why they appear at the very end of Revelation 16, Beale says, “the plague of hail together with the Sinai phenomena are placed last in Rev. 16:17–21 because the theophany is a more climatic event in Exodus and is placed there after the plagues.”⁵⁶ Their placement at the end of the chapter is plausibly explained by these stylistic considerations and means one should not draw conclusions regarding continuing sin from these verses: there is no reason to require Rev 16:21 to be depicting the state of affairs after the final judgment. Things are even more problematic for Carson’s appeal on a premillennialist reading. On this view, described in Rev 16:14–16 and 19:17–21 is a battle led by the beast where the Lord destroys the rebellious army; the final battle of Rev 20:7–10 is led by Satan and “includes the rest of the world.”

⁵² G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007) 1157.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Carson, *Gagging of God* 533.

⁵⁵ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 845. See Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002) 600.

⁵⁶ Beale, *Revelation* 845.

As Osborne says, “the details are sufficiently different to warrant the view of a second battle rather than a recapitulation of the first.”⁵⁷ So the judgments in Revelation 16 are not final eternal punishment because it is *earth-dwellers* who are described here (Rev 16:18 seems to indicate such), not those who are resurrected for judgment (Rev 20:11–15). As to the lack of a mention of unrepentance in verse 21, this is likely because the seventh bowl is the final event *before* the eschaton (in which resurrection and final judgment will take place).⁵⁸

Richard Bauckham has a brief discussion that has bearing on this issue.⁵⁹ Bauckham says, in Revelation 16, “The point is the response of those who finally harden themselves against all witness to the truth of God. The result of this hardening is their final assault against God’s kingdom, in which they are destroyed so that God’s kingdom may come.”⁶⁰ But I note that nothing is said of their response *once they experience final judgment*. Earlier, in speaking about the response of unrepentant sinners to the plagues of Revelation 16, Bauckham does say, “In the subsequent account of the fall of Babylon, the parousia and the battle of Armageddon (chaps. 18–19) there is never any suggestion that those who suffer final judgment finally acknowledge God’s rule in enforced worship.”⁶¹ Though an argument from silence, even if successful it need not warrant the conclusion of eternally continuing sin. That the finally impenitent maintain this attitude of cursing God through their last act of rebellion and while being brought into subjection does not entail this to be the case once they are finally defeated, that is, the eternal state that follows the final universal judgment. Further, the acknowledgement of God’s rule and limited worship by those who fall under final judgment is so inferior to and so categorically different from that of the saints, it ought not to surprise us that Revelation is not bothered to mention it. The point of Revelation 16 is that despite judgments and despite God’s repeated gracious offers, the reprobate stubbornly persist in open opposition and refuse to repent. But there seems to be no compelling reason to think this continues on once the opportunity to repent has passed altogether and when nothing is left but the eternal judgment and the ultimate defeat of sin and evil.

Even setting aside the lack of biblical support, the continuing sin view still has major problems. Views of eternal punishment that incorporate continued sin must grapple with its everlasting existence: continuing sin is an eternal blemish and any view of hell that incorporates it appears to entail an eternal dualism. Sin involves rebellion from the divine kingship, which seems precluded by passages such as 1 Cor 15:28 and Phil 2:10–11. Further, in Scripture the focus of judgment is squarely on this earthly life. For example, it is said to be in retribution “for the things done while in the body” (2 Cor 5:10), according to what the dead had done (in the im-

⁵⁷ Osborne, *Revelation* 713.

⁵⁸ See *ibid.* 601.

⁵⁹ Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993) 307–9.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 309.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 307.

agery of Revelation) “as written in the books” (Rev 20:12, 13).⁶² This, coupled with the divine victory over sin and evil, argues strongly against continued sin in hell. One final consideration worth mentioning—the problem of evil seems all the more exacerbated if sin and evil *per se* are never eradicated and an eternal cosmological dualism is realized. Reconciliationism helps alleviate the problem of evil by unqualifiedly affirming that sin and evil will someday be no more.

Blocher captures well the shortcomings of the continuing sin view:

The theory of sin forever flourishing ignores the message of Christ's perfect victory over sin and all evil. *Every* knee shall bow and *every* tongue confess ... (Phil. 2:10f), those of the lost included. It cannot mean mere outward, hypocritical and forced agreement; what sense could there be in any outward show in the light of that Day, when all the secrets shall be exposed (Rom. 2:16), before the God who is Spirit? Sinners are forced, then, to confess the truth, but they are forced by truth itself, by its overwhelming evidence and spiritual authority; they can no longer refuse to see, they cannot *think* otherwise Nothing could be farther removed from divine defeat and sin going on after divine judgment.⁶³

V. CONCLUSION AND PASTORAL IMPLICATIONS

Having limited this essay to only the first three desiderata, I conclude that reconciliationism best satisfies them. Here I have endeavored to demonstrate the exegetical strength of the view. Yet a fuller, more theological treatment of reconciliationism and discussion of the remaining desiderata is still due, and certainly readers will have many more questions about the view. Where does it appear in the tradition? How can the reprobate be reconciled and banished at the same time? What is the mode of existence in the second death? How can there be remorse and shame without repentance and destruction without annihilation? Do the reprobate love God, and if not, how is that not a sin? What of the love of God? Unfortunately, all this will have to await some future occasion.

The reconciliationist seeks to give an explanation as to why hell is as she portrays it rather than something else. Presumably there are a variety of ways that God could execute punishment that would be compatible with his justice, why the reconciliationist picture? The answer lies in the realization that there is much more to the eschaton than punishment; we might even say that punishment is at best ancillary to other objectives in the grand *teleos* of God. God has many other purposes in the eschaton (and even now in creation) and these other considerations exert influ-

⁶² I recognize that scholarly opinion is divided on the scope of those being judged in 2 Cor 5:10. (1) If the general judgment is in view, then it obviously applies to the reprobate—they are judged for the deeds done in “the body.” Given that this judgment is a specific event, it is reasonable to think it based on deeds done in *this earthly* body, not just *a* body (as of course the universal resurrection is bodily and eternal punishment involves bodily existence). It would also be strange for this judgment to be for all *bodily* existence but exclude the intermediate state, or for future sins (those committed in hell). Best to understand “things done while in the body” to mean “during one’s bodily life on this earth.” (2) If this judgment is exclusively for believers, then the idea that the reprobate are judged on the basis of their earthly deeds is only supported indirectly, as it would seem odd for believers to be judged on earthly lives but the judgment of the reprobate to have a different, broader scope.

⁶³ Cameron, ed., *Universalism* 303.

ence on hell. To name a few: God will completely defeat evil; there will be a cosmic renewal and reconciliation; he will restore his unmediated rule in the universe; he will more fully display his nature to the cosmos everlastingly and everything will glorify him everlastingly; every knee shall bow and every will tongue confess that Jesus is Lord; even after the fall humanity retains the dignity of being created in the image of God and this extends even to the reprobate; and his desire to avoid any human existence amounting to a total loss. These factors and others are operative in shaping the nature of eternal punishment but they do so without mitigating the degree of punishment that God's goodness, righteousness and justice require. Reconciliationism best accounts for these factors while at the same time being faithful to the scriptural teaching on hell. The view, if successful, ties together several biblical streams of thought without depreciating one over the other, as competing views of eternal punishment seem liable to do. It may well be the most biblically and theologically satisfying view on offer.

We do well to remember that hell in the eschatological picture, while important, is merely a footnote in comparison to the redemption of the saints and the restored cosmos. Reconciliationism reflects this: hell is real, but existence in hell is a shadow of true intended existence—which is thriving in eternal life in fellowship between creature and Creator!

If a theology's worth is measured by its pastoral and preaching implications, reconciliationism fares well. It removes the troubling depictions of hell as a place where sin is eternally unbridled and wicked people and demons torment each other and themselves and replaces it with a place where God is supreme, a place where even the defeated have a positive role to play, if you will. It gives comfort for those who are suffering today, that evil will ultimately be completely eradicated and defeated. Finally, it pictures a final relationship between God and the totality of creation where the rift of sin is no longer. Even in eternal punishment, reconciliationism can say "in the end, God."