CHAPTER 22

Theodicy and Contrasting Eschatological Visions: The Investigative Judgment and the Problem of Evil

Anthony MacPherson

The problem of evil is the most serious obstacle to belief in God. Why does God, who is all-powerful and all-loving, allow evil when He has both the power and motive to prevent it? In response to this, theologians offer theodicies or justifications of divine action showing why God is not unjust in allowing evil. Often these theodicies are concerned with the origin of evil in the past or the problem of ongoing suffering in the present. The purpose of this chapter is not to pursue these elements of theodicy per se, but to explore some of the theodicy questions that are specific to the *future* and the area of eschatology.

Theodicy Questions for Eschatology

Eschatology is very important to theodicy.[1] Eschatology is often seen as the ultimate and final means of answering the problem of evil:[2] evil

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[1] According to Christiaan Mostert, "Theodicy and Eschatology," in *Theodicy and Eschatology*, ed. David Neville and Bruce Barber (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2005), 116, "Christian theodicy cannot be attempted without eschatology."

[2] "The world's evil and suffering cannot make theological sense in any other framework; neither can it be incontrovertibly demonstrated other than eschatologically" (ibid., 116). Michael L. Peterson, "Eschatology and Theodicy," in *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, ed. Jerry L. Walls (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 518–519, writes, "Eschatology allows theodicists

and suffering may have emerged in the past and continue in the present, but we hold out hope that, eschatologically, God will make everything right in the future.[3] Eschatology is therefore often called upon to solve theodicy-related questions that are of great relevance to believers and nonbelievers. These pressing questions include: 1) What is the final eternal fate of unrepentant sinners? Is it an eternal hell? 2) What happens to those who die having never heard the gospel? This is also known as the question of "the fate of the unevangelized." 3) What happens to believers whose lives are manifestly imperfect or sinful at death? How can they enter heaven after death or see God? 4) If someone is eternally lost, then hasn't God ultimately failed? 5) What happens to the mentally ill and to children who die in infancy? 6) How can we be sure that evil and suffering will not arise again? Will God succeed? 7) What do all of these answers say about God? Is God just, merciful, and fair?

Theologians feel keenly the force of these questions and put forward a wide range of eschatological doctrines in response. While some of them are bold and speculative, all claim to represent something in harmony with Scripture. This study seeks to lay out different eschatological responses to these questions and contrast them with Seventh-day Adventist eschatology. This survey is introductory and representative, but not exhaustive.

Lack of Eschatological Consensus and Binary Options

A survey of the field of eschatology reveals a wide variety of answers and a lack of consensus. One reason is the complexity of the task. Eschatology must be consistent with all previous doctrinal decisions. Additionally, when forming eschatological answers, theologians must choose between multiple binary options. It is helpful to see what these binary options are.

One binary option asks whether the offer of salvation is exclusive or inclusive. In other words, is salvation only possible through an explicit offer of the gospel (exclusivism), or is it possible for God to offer salvation even when an explicit presentation of the gospel has not been made (inclusivism). Often this is seen as people living up to the light of revelation they have received, usually found in creation and conscience.

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to make projections about the ultimate disposition of evils in the life to come and thus offers distinct advantages in reconciling those evils with God's nature and purposes. This is eschatologies clear connection to theodicy."

[3] Eschatology is "not a dispensable part. It affects proleptically every part of the story; no part can be considered apart from it" (Mostert, 106).

Another binary option follows, concerning the issue of premortem versus postmortem opportunities for salvation. Is the opportunity for salvation available only in this life, or also in the afterlife? This is a question about when salvation is available. A third binary option involves the question of purgatory. Does the afterlife include a purification process for sinful human beings, or not?[4] A fourth binary option concerns the question of cosmic dualism. Will suffering and evil exist forever, or will they be completely eliminated? Will God's victory be manifest in the elimination of rebellion, or in a continual triumphing over it? A fifth binary option is the question of universalism. Will everyone eventually be saved, or will some refuse the offer of salvation? The final binary option that all eschatologies must consider is that of anthropology. In a sense, this is the foundational and first of all binary choices, but here it is placed last as the climactic question. The anthropological issue is whether human beings are naturally immortal with undying eternal souls, or whether they are naturally mortal and only receive immortality on the condition that God grants them eternal life through resurrection? The former position is known as dualism, where a person is a composite of a mortal body and an immortal soul. The latter position is known as wholism, which teaches that a person is an indivisible unity of the physical and spiritual. This means there is no element of a person that is capable of surviving after death apart from all the other elements. A person is mortal and can only live again if God reconstitutes the whole person.

Obviously these six binary options can be used in many different combinations. Theologians have attempted to recombine these options in the hope of providing the best answers to questions of theodicy. With an awareness of these options, let us briefly outline some of the main ways theologians have attempted to construct eschatologies to answer some of the deepest questions of theodicy concerning death and the afterlife. These eschatologies will not be critiqued in this section.

Eternal Heaven and Eternal Hell

The traditional and historically predominant answer Christianity has given is that heaven awaits believers while an eternal burning hell is the destiny of unbelievers. Opportunity for salvation is restricted to those who, in this life alone, have been exposed to the explicit claims of the gospel. This view claims to be faithful to Scripture and the claims of justice.[5]

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[4] If purgatory is possible, then a follow-up question is whether this purification is limited to sanctification (change of character) or if it includes the possibility of salvation (change of destiny). This reiterates the first binary option.

[5] This has historically been the majority view within Christianity.

Reconciliationism

Strong criticisms have been made of the doctrine of an eternal torment in hell for sinners. Many traditionalists feel keenly the problem of hell, and one creative attempt to soften this issue is found in a teaching called reconciliationism, which denies that hell consists of eternal sinners railing in hate against God. Instead it claims that the occupants of hell see the justness of their punishment, are cognitively reconciled to their fate, and do not eternally sin or engage in evil.[6] This is a sinless hell that has the advantages of rejecting the presence of eternal evil in the universe and affirming a final universalism of sorts without claiming that all are saved.

Catholic Purgatory

The Catholic eschatological position seeks to combine the traditional view of hell with a number of softening features. One is the Catholic Church's adoption of a broad version of inclusivism.[7] The other distinctive feature is purgatory. While Catholicism teaches that the opportunity for salvation is only in this life,[8] believers who are still unholy and imperfect may experience a postmortem, yet non-salvic, purification process.[9]

Catholic doctrine asserts that sin has a double consequence.[10] Sin, especially grave sin, separates us from God and requires eternal punishment; the second consequence of sin is that it entails an unhealthy attachment to creatures and deforms us.[11] The first effect of sin is an eternal debt that we cannot satisfy. Absolution for this sin is found only in Christ's death. The second consequence of sin and its corruption necessitates a debt of temporal punishment, which can be worked off either in this life or in the afterlife state of purgatory.[12]

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[6] Henri Blocher, "Everlasting Punishment and the Problem of Evil," in *Universalism and the Doctrine of God*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1992) and Andy Saville, "Hell without Sin: A Renewed View of a Disputed Doctrine," *Churchman* 119, no. 3 (2005): 243–261. This view can actually be traced back to the nineteenth century; see Andy Saville, "Reconciliationism: A Forgotten Evangelical Doctrine of Hell," *Evangelical Quarterly* 79, no. 1 (2007): 35–51.

[7] Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2012), 847–848.

[8] "Death puts an end to human life as the time open to either accepting or rejecting the divine grace manifested in Christ." Catholic Church, 1021.

[9] Catholic Church, *Catechism,* "The Final Purification, or Purgatory," sec. III. Eastern Orthodox Christianity allows for a purgatorial process but does not dogmatically define it.

[10] Ibid., 1472.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Catholic Church, *Catechism*, 1472–1479. This is where the treasury of the merits of the saints

Protestant Purgatory

In more recent times, Protestants have argued for a different form of purgatory that is more aligned with Protestant theology.[13] The Catholic purgatory is a satisfaction model that Protestants cannot accept. However, a sanctification model of purgatory is acceptable to Protestant theology.[14] The main difference between the two is that in Catholic theology salvation grants full pardon from sin's eternal penalty but not its temporal penalty (this distinction opens the way for its sacramental system). In contrast, the Protestant sanctification model of purgatory affirms that justification brings full pardon from all of sin's debt and penalty. It is only the remaining "power" or disposition to sin that needs to be eliminated in a sanctifying afterlife.[15] Purgatory is seen as a merciful way for God to save and prepare imperfect believers for eternity.

Annihilationism

The last premortem salvation view is that of annihilationism. In this view people are not inherently immortal. The wicked cease to exist after God's judgment, while the righteous are resurrected to enjoy eternal life. This means there is no eternal torment in hell. Sin and evil are permanently eliminated.[16]

Last-Chance (Ad-Mortem) or Second-Chance (Postmortem) Theologies

Eschatologies that focus on offers of salvation at death or after death are here referred to as last-chance and second-chance eschatologies. Last-chance theologies hold that salvation is only available in this life. However,

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is operative. The Catholic Church possesses this treasury, distributing it to people through its sacramental system and indulgences. See Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Popular Beliefs: Are They Biblical?* (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspective, 2008), 163–192, for a discussion and critique of purgatory from an Adventist perspective.

[13] Prominent is Jerry L. Walls, *Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory: A Protestant View of the Cosmic Drama* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2015). See also C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* (London: Harcourt Brace, 1964), 106–111.

[14] See Justin D. Barnard, "Purgatory and the Dilemma of Sanctification," *Faith and Philosophy* 24 (2007): 311–330.

[15] Neal Judisch, "Sanctification, Satisfaction, and the Purpose of Purgatory," *Faith and Philosophy* 26, no. 2 (2009): 167–185, denies there is any real material difference between the two models.

[16] As noted in Christopher M. Date, Gregory G. Stump, and Joshua W. Anderson, eds., *Rethinking Hell: Readings in Evangelical Conditionalism* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), proponents of annihilationism include Ignatius of Antioch, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Arnobius, John Stott, John Wenham, Michael Green, Clark Pinnock, Edward Fudge, E. Earle Ellis.

some theologians suggest that those who have not received an opportunity to hear the gospel during their lifetime will get a final chance either before[17] or at the moment of death.[18] How this happens is not clear; God may send an angel or grant a dream.[19]

Second-chance theologies subscribe to some form of postmortem opportunity for salvation.[20] How this happens is also unclear; often a new creative form of purgatory is proposed.[21] In the afterlife further opportunities for salvation are given and purification of character is possible. Not all will accept the offers of salvation in this life or the afterlife, but the opportunity is there—especially for those who did not receive an opportunity during their lifetime.

Universalism

The last view is a postmortem eschatology asserting that not only will there be ongoing opportunities for salvation in the afterlife, but that eventually everyone will be saved.[22] It claims that no one is able to eternally hold out against the relentless efforts of divine love. Even Satan will finally be reconciled back to God. Cosmic history goes through a grand cycle that turns back to the beginning when all were at one with God.

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[17] This is the idea of universalism evangelism. Proponents include Thomas Aquinas, Dante, Jacobus Arminius, Norman Geisler, Earl Radmacher, J. Oliver Buswell, and Robertson McQuilken. See La Verne P. Blowers, "Are They Really Lost? What Is the Status of the Unevangelized?" 6, http://www.bethelcollege.edu/assets/content/mcarchives/pdfs/v7n1p127.pdf (accessed March 21, 2018).

[18] This is also known as "universal opportunity." Proponents include John Cardinal Henry Newman (1801–1890), Ladislaus Boros, and Roger Troisfontaines. See ibid., 7.

[19] There is also a "middle knowledge" version of last-chance theologies. In this view God judges people on the basis of what they would have done *if* they had been exposed to the gospel. Proponents include Donald Lake, George Goodman, Luis de Molina, and William Lane Craig. See ibid., 8.

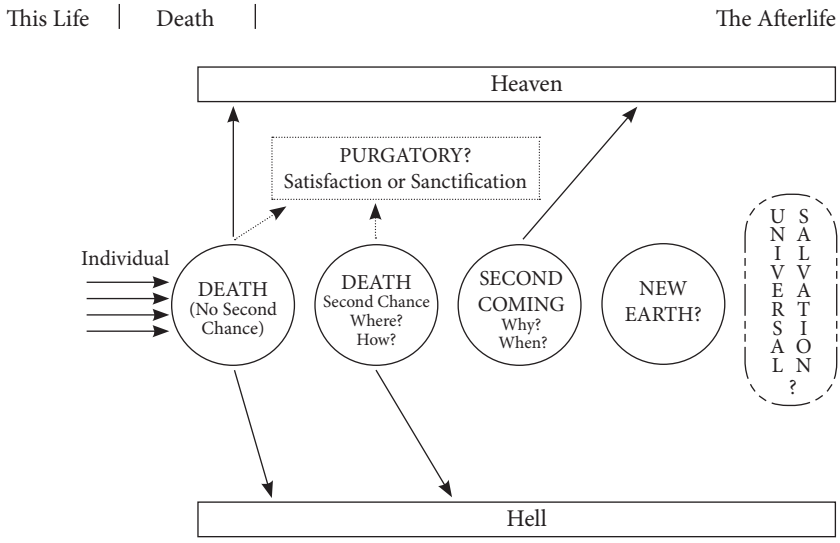
[20] See Clark H. Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 168–175. Gabriel Fackre, "Divine Perseverance," in *What About Those Who Have Never Heard?* ed. John Sanders (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 71–95. Proponents include Melito, Clement of Alexandria, Athanasius, Gregory of Nazianzus, Franz Delitzsch, C. E. B. Cranfield, Wayne Grudem, Joseph Leckie, Gabriel Fackre, George Lindbeck, Donald Bloesch, Richard Swinburne, Carl Braaten, Clark Pinnock, Stephen Davis, G. R. Beasley-Murray, and Jerry Walls. See Blowers, 9.

[21] Walls, *Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory*? 205, states, "I would suggest that postmortem repentance is a theological proposal that deserves serious consideration. Indeed, I would propose that the doctrine of purgatory be amended to include this claim."

[22] See Thomas Talbott, *The Inescapable Love of God* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014). Other universalists include Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher, G. C. Berkouwer, J. A. T. Robinson, Paul Knitter, and John Hick. See also Richard Bauckham, "Universalism: A Historical Survey," *Themelios* 4, no. 2 (1978): 47–54.

This is a profoundly optimistic, albeit controversial, view. Obviously, it has great appeal when dealing with issues of theodicy.

Figure 1: Dualism and Judgment: Range of Speculated Afterlife Options in Dualistic Eschatology



Reflections on Dualistic Eschatology

Before looking at the Seventh-day Adventist alternative, here are several observations about the positions we have just considered. First, all of these positions, except that of annihilationism, are based on anthropological dualism and its idea of an immortal soul. Anthropology is the defining issue. A wholistic anthropology appears to give rise to a simpler eschatology. It is characterized by less speculation. Conversely, dualistic anthropology seems to give rise to considerable speculation and very diverse, even contradictory, opinions.

Secondly, in dualistic views, death—not the second coming—is the key transition point. In Scripture the opposite appears to be the case. From the divine perspective, death is a metaphorical sleep that will be obliterated by Christ at His return. From a human perspective, Scripture depicts death as our enemy. It is the end of our life and our hopes; only God can break its power. But in both human and divine perspectives, Scripture presents death as an end, not as a transition. Only the life-giving, resurrecting action of Christ at the second coming transitions us to a new stage of life. Death may end suffering, but it does not transition to another stage. Hope is only in the advent of Christ. Only wholistic

anthropology preserves this dynamic. In contrast, dualism reduces the significance of the second coming by making it virtually redundant to one's destiny. In dualistic views destiny is either decided at death or in some postmortem event or process. The second coming is reduced to rewards and connecting bodies back to souls, and not a great deal more.

From this we note a third observation: that all of these dualistic eschatologies have an individualistic focus on the journey of the soul/spirit. We shall return to this when we see that the Adventist perspective only sees the individual within the collective-communal, which itself is within the larger cosmic activity of Christ.[23]

The Seventh-day Adventist Position: More Than Annihilationism

What, then, is the Seventh-day Adventist eschatological response to theodicy questions? An initial answer may be that Adventists are annihilationists.[24] This is true, but so are some other Christians. Annihilationism is an essential part of a bigger answer, but on its own, it does not say everything that a biblical doctrine of judgment and eschatology needs to say in the face of challenging theodicy questions.

Seventh-day Adventist theology places annihilationism and its accompanying wholistic doctrine of anthropology within a much wider twofold theological framework: The first framework is the history of God as a narrative of Him working out His eternal purposes in the face of a cosmic war waged by Satan against those purposes. This is also known as the great controversy.[25] Due to this understanding, eschatology must address cosmic ideological challenges that threaten not only the fate of sinners, but God's eternal purposes. There is need for a salvation worldview to be placed into a bigger cosmic controversy worldview.[26] The second framework is that the disclosure of God's plan to redeem creation is

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[23] We could add a fourth observation that the millennium plays a minor or nonexistent role in many dualistic descriptions of the afterlife. The afterlife is an otherworldly spiritual matter and the millennium is symbolical of the Christian era (amillennialism). Dispensationalism is different. While the millennium is mainly about an earthly rule of Christ, it does feature major judgments affecting the eternal destiny and afterlife of people. The Adventist position has an important role for the millennium in eschatological judgment that is neither spiritualized away nor literalized to an earthly reign.

[24] Niels-Erik A. Andreasen, "Death: Origin, Nature, and Final Eradication," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 314–346 and Aecio E. Cairus, "The Doctrine of Man," in Dederen, 205–232.

[25] Frank B. Holbrook, "The Great Controversy," in Dederen, 980–1009.

[26] See the discussion in Norman R. Gulley, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2003), 387–453.

revealed in the Old Testament sanctuary and its services.[27] Seventh-day Adventists understand that the biblical teachings on the sanctuary reveal one unified, integrated picture of God's work in atonement and judgment. Instead of theology seeking to patch together separate models and metaphors of salvation and judgment, the sanctuary is seen as a divinely revealed, unifying framework for all biblically based metaphors or models of atonement.[28] God's process of salvation is based in the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ, and then continues in His heavenly work as interceding High Priest, final Judge, and returning King.[29] This is one unbroken unified work by Christ.

For Seventh-day Adventists, if a salvation model, theory of judgment, or eschatological speculation does not take into account the cosmic controversy and does not fit within the sanctuary service, then it is not an adequate representation of God's revealed plan. A fully biblical eschatology is necessarily a sanctuary eschatology. Eschatologies concerned with only creaturely salvation—neglecting divine cosmic governance, or reducing the saving work of God to one element of the wider process—are incomplete.

Outlining Sanctuary Judgment Eschatology

This study will not outline the entire salvation and judgment process as revealed through Scripture and the sanctuary doctrine. In Scripture, judgment is a process that leads to the simultaneous salvation/deliverance of God's people and the judgment/destruction of God's enemies.[30]

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[27] For treatments of the sanctuary doctrine, see Roy Adams, *The Sanctuary: Understanding the Heart of Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1993); Fernando Canale, "Philosophical Foundations and the Biblical Sanctuary," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 36 (1998): 183–206; Richard M. Davidson, "Cosmic Metanarrative for the Coming Millennium," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 11 (2000): 102–19; Frank B. Holbrook, *The Atoning Priesthood of Jesus Christ* (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society, 1996); Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, "The Sanctuary," in Dederen, 375–417; and A. V. Wallenkampf and W. R. Lesher, eds., *The Sanctuary and the Atonement: Biblical, Historical, and Theological Studies* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1981).

[28] Richard M. Davidson, "Sanctuary Typology," in *Symposium on Revelation: Book 1*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series 6 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992). The sanctuary is an incredibly rich and multivalent theological revelation. Truth is encoded in the building, the rhythm of daily and yearly ministry, the calendar of feasts, the ministry of the priests, and the historical sanctuaries and their experiences (the heavenly sanctuary, Edenic temple, Mt. Sinai, wilderness tabernacle, Solomonic temple, the second temple, body temple of Jesus and the believer, the ecclesiological temple of the church, and the final new Jerusalem temple).

[29] See Holbrook, *Atoning Priesthood*.

[30] James M. Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

Salvation and judgment are intimately linked.[31] The focus here is not on the incarnation, cross, and resurrection, although everything is built on these atoning realities. This study will focus on the final eschatological elements of the work of Christ.[32] But before doing so, we need to understand that God's final judgment follows the pattern of divine judgment found throughout Scripture. Before God judges a collective group or particular period, He engages in an investigative judgment, which is then followed by the execution or implementation of the decisions of judgment. The biblical pattern is investigation/evaluation followed by execution. This pattern—seen in the very first judgments in Scripture of Adam and Eve, Cain, the flood, Babel, and Sodom—continues through the Pentateuch, into the Prophets, and on to the climactic judgment of Judah and the fall of Jerusalem.[33] After the completion of each process of judgment comes the end of a historical period or a group of people. In a greater way, the final investigative and executive judgment brings all of fallen human history to an end.

While many passages of Scripture and classical prophecy mention the day of the Lord and the final judgment, it is the apocalyptic prophecies that show an interest in the sequencing, timing, and order of the final judgment.[34] This is the picture that emerges when the apocalyptic descriptions of the final judgment are put together: Daniel 7 reveals a heavenly judgment that happens after four world kingdoms and during the continuing history of the little horn kingdom.[35] This judgment happens while history continues and before the arrival of Christ's kingdom. It is a

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[31] Jiří Moskala, "The Gospel According to God's Judgment: Judgment as Salvation," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 22, no. 1 (2011): 28–49.

[32] For a more comprehensive picture of judgment in both its pre-cross and post-cross dimensions, see Jiří Moskala, "Toward a Biblical Theology of God's Judgment: A Celebration of the Cross in Seven Phases of Divine Universal Judgment (An Overview of a Theocentric-Christocentric Approach)," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 15, no. 1 (2004): 138–165. Our discussion focuses on the last four judgments that Moskala identifies.

[33] See Gerhard F. Hasel, "Divine Judgment," in Dederen, 819–826; Richard M. Davidson, "The Divine Covenant Lawsuit Motif in Canonical Perspective," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 21 (2010): 45–84; William H. Shea, *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series 1 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1982), 1–28; and Eric C. Livingston, "Investigative Judgment: A Scriptural Concept," *Ministry*, April 1992.

[34] Called the "periodization of history." See John J. Collins, *Daniel: With an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 11. The author of this chapter rejects the application of *ex eventu* prophecy to biblical prophets.

[35] In Daniel 7 the four kingdoms are Babylon (lion), Medo-Persia (bear), Greece (leopard), Imperial Rome (beast), and Christian Rome (little horn), which endures to the fifth and final kingdom of Christ. See Shea, 111–153.

pre-advent judgment.[36] When this judgment ends, earthly kingdoms end and are replaced by the final heavenly kingdom.

After the second advent of Christ, another heavenly judgment takes places that parallels that of Daniel 7. This new judgment is the millennial or post-advent judgment (Rev 20).[37] It shares striking similarities to that of Daniel 7. Both feature the setting up of thrones (plural), the examining of books, and the involvement of creatures with God in judgment (angels in Dan 7:10 and the saints in Rev 20:4–6). This post-millennial executive judgment[38] also ends in a way that is strikingly similar to the second coming. This could justifiably be called the "third coming of Christ." Both the second and third advents of Christ take place on earth and involve resurrections, a dominant divine throne, the giving of eternal life or eternal death, and a fire that destroys evil.[39]

God's final judgment process is orderly and logical. He judges His people before judging unbelievers (1 Pet 4:12). We see this sequence in the final judgment: God judges His people in the pre-advent judgment (Dan 7). He does this by distinguishing the true from the false among His professed people. Christ then returns to resurrect and reward the righteous.[40] The wicked (angelic and human) are then judged by Christ and the saints (1 Cor 6:2–3) in a heavenly post-advent judgment during the millennium. God gives His people and the universe a long period of time to survey all of history and gain a full understanding of the story of sin and His saving response. When this judgment is finished, the wicked are resurrected to experience an earthly execution as a consequence according to their works. In this final moment of judgment, after the second resurrection, the wicked (angelic and human) see all that God has done for them. It is this revelation of the evidence of God's comprehensive mercy and their culpability that cause the wicked to freely confess the righteousness of God (Phil 2:10–11). Figure 2 brings out the symmetry, structure, logic, and order of the final judgment in the Adventist perspective.[41] The two heavenly works of pre- and post-advent judgment

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[36] Hasel, 833.

[37] Ibid., 846. For an exegetical study of Revelation 20, see Ekkehardt Mueller, "Microstructural Analysis of Revelation 20," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 37, no. 2 (1999): 227–255.

[38] Hasel, 847.

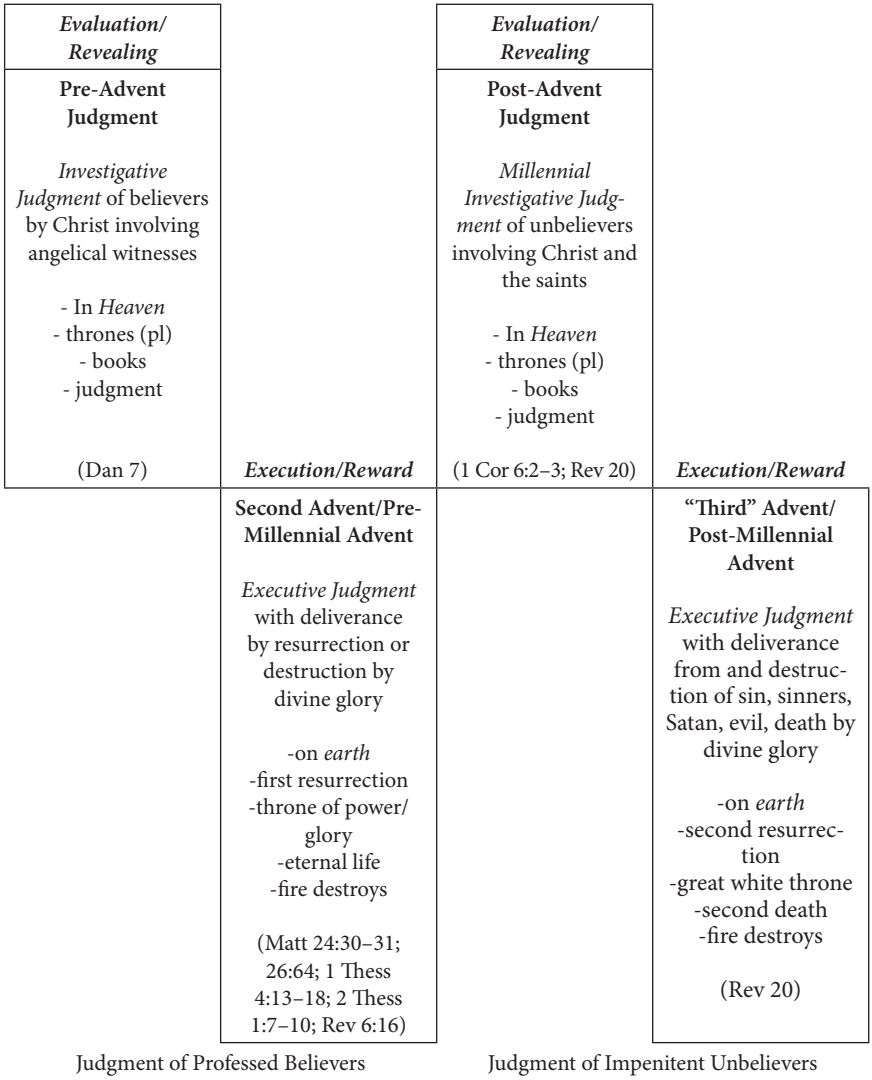
[39] See Matthew 24:30–31; 26:64; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; 2 Thessalonians 1:7–10; Revelation 6:16; 20.

[40] The wicked alive at this time are destroyed by Christ's glory at the second coming. This is not their final reward. It is a death due to the effect of Christ's glory. It is only at the end of the millennium that all the wicked are fully judged and experience the second death.

[41] In Adventist theology the final judgment outlined in figure 1 is seen as the fulfillment of the antitypical Day of Atonement. See Rodríguez, 394–401.

parallel each other. The second millennial work builds on, furthers, and completes the first pre-advent judgment. The same can be seen with the two earthly executive judgments of Christ. They parallel but also progress God's work in dealing with sin. The heavenly works also prepare and make possible the ensuing earthly work. God's executive actions issue from heavenly judgment and are completed in earthly elimination of evil. Heavenly vindication moves to earthly cleansing.

Figure 2: The Final judgment as Two-Stage Investigative Judgment



Individualistic Versus Collective Visions

When the Adventist vision of eschatological judgment is laid out, it is easier to see how it contrasts with other eschatological alternatives. The two diagrams (fig. 1 and 2) reveal two very different pictures. The first is highly individualistic and focuses on the fate of the individual disembodied soul or spirit. There is also a noticeable preference and tendency to significant speculation. In contrast, the Adventist eschatological vision is of a vast unified, cosmic, collective, open, and integrated judgment process by God that leads to a definitive, complete, and final resolution of sin. This vision subsumes the individual within the corporate.[42]

In the Adventist position, eschatological judgment deals with all of angelic and human history as a totality, through one connected sequential process. It is comprehensive and collective. In the investigative judgments people and events are seen in the light of other people and events and their total impact in history. Sin is a cosmic controversy—a problem that God's judgment deals with as a whole. It is not an issue of isolated acts of individual souls at separate points in time. People live in a web of relationships, and the final judgment considers all of humanity, and even the angelic and heavenly world. Its scope is the entirety of cosmic history. God's dealings with sin tell a dual story of creaturely culpability and divine mercy. Only in the light of the end of this history can the whole be understood.

In dualistic eschatology judgment at death is atomistic and individualistic. Dualism splits judgment itself into a particular judgment of the lone individual soul, which happens immediately after death, followed by a general judgment of all people at the end of history. Particular judgment does not take place in the revealed light of a completed and unified history. Individuals are judged without their full legacy playing out. Additionally, this splitting of particular and general judgment forces us to ask: what is the point of the final judgment? After all, no new decisions are made, and no new outcomes eventuate in the general judgment. Souls are connected to bodies and the already-decided heavenly or hellish fates are intensified as bodily experiences.

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[42] Judgment that decides the fates of people is usually pictured not as individualistic but corporate (of which individuals are a part). "The Lord will judge his people" (Heb 10:30). Jesus' parables depict corporate judgments (Matt 25).

Multiplying Places and States Versus a Unified Creation

The individualism of dualism and its fragmented account of human nature appear to be manifested in the multiple and conflicting speculative eschatological outcomes proposed for the postmortem soul. After death, individual souls exist in an intermediate state in numerous possible places. Some are in heaven, some in hell, and some in purgatory. Some have second chances, and some do not. Some progress in purification while others do not. This is a picture of the cosmological and judicial fragmentation that arises from dualism, which is not found in wholistic approaches.

If we take each dualistic eschatological position on its own terms, we still see dualism's diverse fragmenting effects. For example, no eschatology, except universalism, can escape the problem of cosmic dualism. In cosmic dualism evil never ends; it is permanent. Hell preserves an eternal domain where sin never stops. God's universe is eternally fragmented. Even reconciliationism's "sinless hell" features separation from God, along with endless suffering and pain. Creation's wounds are never healed. In contrast, wholism allows for the full, final, and permanent elimination of evil through the annihilation of sin. God's judgment process involves the participation of all creatures—human and angel, fallen and unfallen—and results in a genuine universal reconciliation and confession of God's justice.

In purgatorial eschatologies, either satisfaction or sanctification takes place in the afterlife. Dualism's fragmenting effects are revealed in multiple states and places in the afterlife. Consider the issue of existent states. Embodied imperfect people die and become disembodied imperfect spirits, who spiritually progress to disembodied perfected spirits, who will eventually become reembodied perfected persons when the resurrection takes place. Here are no less than three to four different states. These multiple states multiply the number of postmortem places. Redeemed immortal souls or spirits move from an earthly realm to a purgatorial realm and then eventually to a heavenly life—three different places. But if we add hell and a new earth, distinct from heaven, we have five places.[43] In contrast, wholistic anthropology affirms that a person only exists in one state of bodily existence or not at all. Death is not a state; it is the loss of existence. Re-existence to bodily existence only takes place through resurrection. For all of this there is only one interconnected place: the created cosmos. The cosmos has a heaven and an earth but they exist as

[43] In some dualistic theologies there are even more: limbo, paradise as somewhere other than heaven, and Hades as somewhere other than hell.

spaces within the one place. Hell is not a place and neither is purgatory. In summing up this section, we can see that dualism multiplies places and states in the afterlife and leaves the cosmos a permanently fragmented place. Adventism's wholistic view of judgment ends with a perfectly unified creation. A wholistic anthropology underlies a wholistic eschatology.

Splitting Salvation

Another split dualistic eschatology introduced into theology is fragmenting the process and way of salvation. Dualism splits off the where, when, and how of salvation from this world, its history, and from its necessarily embodied existence. Salvation is reimagined as a postmortem possibility in a disembodied otherworldly afterlife, abstracted from earthly history and the body. Salvation and sanctification are conceived of as pre- and postmortem possibilities, but the two worlds are vastly different and virtually opposites. This is highly speculative and stands in tension with the whole tenor of Scripture and its descriptions of sanctification and the gospel.

Scripture reveals that the plan of salvation unfolds through the work of Christ and His Spirit in history. Today is the day of opportunity. Christ acts in creation and conscience, in type, shadow, and fulfillment, and in proclamation as the saving light that guides every individual who comes into this world (John 1:9). Scripture reveals nothing of a salvation that operates outside of this world and this life. What would a salvation offer (or sanctification process) even look like in the disembodied realms of dualism?[44] And who would resist an offer without the passions and lusts of the flesh, without the lure of the world, without the temptations of the devil, and without the cares of life? These postmortem speculations are not even remotely like the salvation offer revealed in Scripture.[45]

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[44] One also has to ask how salvation and sanctification could take place without a body.

[45] Even if, for argument's sake, we allow for a dualistic interpretation of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31) and an intermediate state, it does not help postmortem salvation or universalism. The parable is clear that the rich man's fate is fixed. There is, for the rich man, an unpassable chasm, which means he can never cross over to salvation in the afterlife. It is also clear that the rich man's brothers must make their salvation decision before death (premortem) based on the revealed truth they possess during their probationary life, and not on some miraculous revelation. Interestingly, second-chance or postmortem salvation involves a miraculous-style revelation analogous to that which the rich man requests for his brothers. After all, consider dying and finding oneself in a disembodied state in another realm and hearing the gospel. Would that not be miraculous? Further, consider experiencing dreams and visions, or seeing angels, and it seems even more so. Would that not be miraculous—comparable to resurrection from the dead? The parable is not to teach us the geography of the afterlife, but to tell us that this life is the time of opportunity for salvation. Death will fix fate. For a non-dualistic interpretation of Luke 16:19–31, see Kim Papaioannou, *The Geography of Hell in the Teaching of*

Investigative Judgments Versus Non-Investigative Judgments

It is clear that dualistic-based judgments are not investigative. The argument is usually that God knows who will be saved and so there is no need for an investigation.[46] Judgment is primarily either declarative and punitive (hell, reconciliationism, satisfaction-based purgatory) or, if it involves a second stage or a second chance at salvation or sanctification, it is also purifying (postmortem, sanctification-based purgatory, universalism). The focus is the fate of the individual soul and its salvation status. Individual souls who do not progress to salvation remain condemned to eternal punishment. This way the universe is eternally split between the souls who are saved and the ones who are not. God's main concern in the judgment of these cases is not investigation but salvation or punishment.

In Adventism judgment is first investigative. This means that while judgment is declarative, it is primarily an exercise in revelation, disclosure, instruction, and learning for the universe.[47] In it Christ reveals the hidden things of man and of God. Because God involves others, judgment is irreducibly corporate and communal. It is not that creatures are in the place of God as judges; Christ alone decides everyone's fate. However, God involves His created beings in the judgment process so they may understand His character and wisdom in a deeper way. Judgment leads to reflection and discovery. The clarity brought about by a revelatory investigative judgment is not only the basis of final declaration and vindication; it is also a public, cosmic-sized reaffirmation and celebration of Christ's work on the cross that is experienced by faith.

Only when the deeper revelation found in the investigative judgment is finished does the execution of reward or punishment take place. Punishment is not endlessly retributive, but rather eliminative. Judgment ends evil. There is no need for an ongoing hell as a deterrent to sin. The full revelation of Christ's saving work disclosed in judgment achieves that. The universe is not permanently split in cosmic dualism because the focus is not the salvation of individual souls. Instead the focus is on the restoration of all of creation (individual salvation being a part of this) to God and the freedom from sin. Elimination of sinners only takes place after the investigative process. Investigative judgment is a theodicy-resolving judgment. Theodicy questions will be answered by the investigative judgments.

Jesus: Gehenna, Hades, the Abyss, the Outer Darkness Where There Is Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013), 111–135.

[46] See Livingston, 11.

[47] Note there are questions relating to the eternal fate of infants who die at birth and the mentally ill that this article does not attempt to answer, except to say the judgment will make known how and why God will act in a particular way toward these people (ibid.).

We should note what this means for reconciliation. Apart from universalism, dualistic eschatologies do not end with a universe reconciled to God.[48] Contrast this with Adventist teaching. At the end of the millennium the wicked are judged by all of their works recorded in the books (Rev 20:12–13). This divine review highlights to the wicked all that God has done for them. In view of this tangible evidence, they freely confess that God is just and Christ is Lord (Phil 2:9–11). This is a genuine form of unforced reconciliation and it is universal. All, even Satan, are of one opinion that God is just and they are without excuse. However, unlike reconciliationism, the Adventist millennial doctrine also makes clear that while the wicked freely admit this with the evidence in front of them, it is only temporary. The insanity of rebellion returns and, despite having acknowledged God's justice, they still violently revolt against Him and attack the Holy City (Rev 20:7–9). God then eliminates sinners as it is apparent to all that there is now no other option. The justness of execution is a universally acknowledged truth, appreciated by the righteous as righteous.[49] This is a biblical version of reconciliationism and universalism.

Creaturely Psychology and Sociology

The final point to note about the investigative judgment is that it is empirically in harmony with the psychological and sociological understanding of human and corporate nature. People and communities need time to make decisions, and to learn about and come to terms with difficult issues such as theodicy. The pre-advent and millennial judgments are all about giving angels and the redeemed time to talk, reflect, and learn. People also need evidence, data, and the opportunity to ask questions and study answers. In response to these, the investigative judgments are

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[48] Reconciliationism does not avoid this criticism. In this view the minds of reprobates are reconciled with their fate, but their bodies remain in punishment forever. The reconciliation of the mind here is perpetually negated by the ongoing punishment of the body. This is a very strange dualism. Why would God keep this up? God appears to be unjust and eternally punitive.

[49] The righteous will praise God for His annihilating judgment because they see there is no other option and they see God's longsuffering justice and mercy on behalf of even the wicked. They will take no delight in the wicked's destruction, but only in God's justness. Compare this to the traditional view expressed by Trevor C. Johnson, "Seeing Hell: Do the Saints in Heaven Behold the Sufferings of the Damned (and How Do They Respond)," (M.A. Thesis, Reformed Theological Seminary, 2004), 113, that the righteous will delight and "look into hell, see its ferocity and rejoice over it as an immensely glorifying spectacle to the glory of God given to them for their eternal benefit." Johnson quotes Jonathan Edwards, who says that when the saints in heaven see and "hear their [the lost] dolorous shrieks and cries, and consider that they in the meantime are in the most blissful state, and shall surely be in it to all eternity; how will they rejoice!" This is a disturbing eschatological view of God and the righteous.

communal events with books or records, as well as participants and eyewitnesses, available as evidence. Their availability and freedom to talk indicates openness and transparency on God's part. With this kind of open judgment, truth is not locked away in the inaccessible reaches of God's mind, nor are people's final fate a result of some hidden, inscrutable divine decree. The millennium is thus a truly biblical purgatory. It is not the purifying of the redeemed from sinfulness but rather it is a period of one thousand years that allows the collective universe to purify their minds from any ignorance, doubts, and previously fallen ideologies or patterns of thought that could provide a platform for future falling away or potential misunderstanding of God.

There are additional reasons why dualistic afterlife states seem psychologically problematic. How could any being or soul psychologically and mentally survive eternal suffering and torment? In this life human beings eventually break down physically and psychologically when subject to extreme mental distress or torture.[50] Hell's horrors infinitely exceed anything that happens in this life. In an eternal hell (and reconciliationism) the created mind would surely break down, becoming psychologically incapacitated and mad. What, then, would be the point of tormenting the incapacitated? The alternative is that God endlessly sustains the reprobates' mental faculties so they might suffer. But what kind of God would do such a thing?[51]

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study argues that the Adventist eschatological vision of investigative judgment, based in a wholistic anthropology, offers a singular, unified response to theodicy issues that reveals a biblical version of second chances, purgatory, hell, eschatological reconciliation, and universalism. Present probationary existence is the time for first, second,

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[50] It could be argued that the occupants of hell are eternally capable and conscious because immortal souls are naturally and eternally resilient. Then why do the psychological faculties of immortal souls break down in this life? Is it due to sin? Then won't "sinners" in hell psychologically break down and go mad? What, then, would be the point of hell? Sheer retribution on a mentally incapacitated, embodied person? Is it due to the soul having a body? If so, this means the immortal soul is never truly mad or incapacitated, but only appears so because the body is not functioning properly. Hell conflicts with everything we know empirically about human psychology (anthropology).

[51] Universalism has its own problems with human psychology in the realm of freedom, will, and character. In universalism humans are free enough to choose sin but never free enough to reject righteousness. All will be saved. God's love functions like a coercive, irresistible force. Universalism conflicts with everything we know empirically about human psychology (anthropology).

third, fourth, and last chances. If someone can be saved, God is capable of saving them in this life by the extensive work of Christ and the Spirit. This life is also the purgatorial time for a sanctification model of suffering and spiritual growth. The investigative judgments (pre- and post-advent/millennial) offer a broader, more biblical doctrine of purgatory.[52] Here God does not work to remove the penalty, power, or presence of sin. This is accomplished in the cross, new birth, sanctification, and resurrection. Instead, God removes the very potential for sin. In particular, the millennial investigative judgment is where the corporate mind of the created community is fully informed and purified of any area of ignorance or misunderstanding that may be due to past sin or the previous perverse accusations of Satan against God.[53] Creaturely appreciation of God is eternally and infinitely deepened.[54] Additionally, the last act of God at the end of this judgment process reveals a truly biblical doctrine of reconciliation and universalism. The cosmos is reconciled to the truth about God and freely acknowledges His righteousness. This then leads to the biblical doctrine of hell as an event of annihilation, rather than an eternal place of suffering, sin, and rebellion.

This view of eschatology has a number of theodicy-resolving advantages over dualistic eschatologies. Due to the process God undertakes (and especially its open, investigative, evidential, revealing nature) the entire universe answers the theodicy question in God's favor! All are reconciled to the truthfulness of the truth by a free, universal confession.

The Adventist view of wholistic anthropology aligns with what is known about the psychology of human beings. We see this in the need for time, evidence, and conversation to learn, heal, and affirm. This view also avoids the incoherence of eternal suffering without psychological breakdown. The suspect psychology of universalism regarding freedom, character, will, and love is also avoided.

This eschatological vision is less speculative. It follows the biblical pattern of investigation and execution. Individualistic eschatology is avoided.

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[52] The idea of the millennium as a kind of biblical purgatory is indebted to conversations with the author's friend Christopher Stanley.

[53] It is possible on an individual level that during the millennium the redeemed will unlearn many things (doctrinally and ethically) and grow and heal from the effects of sin. However, given the humble teachableness that arises due to their forgiven, redeemed, and resurrected state, this will hardly take long. The long length of one thousand years is to deal with the vastness and complexity of cosmic history in all its dimensions and the issues raised in the great controversy.

[54] Instead of a satisfaction or sanctification model of purgatory for individual souls, this is a sealing/security model for God's cosmos. The work that God has accomplished is eternally sealed and secured and the potential for rebellion is eternally gone.

It does not multiply existent states and cosmic places in order to cater to individual immortal souls. There is one God, dealing with one creation, by one process. The individual is dealt with within the corporate. It does not divide the possibility of salvation between vastly different premortem and postmortem worlds. Above all, the universe is not left in a divided, unhealed condition. God completely resolves the issue of sin and eliminates evil. The universe is not eternally fragmented, marred, or polluted by perpetual suffering and sin. There is no cosmic dualism. In this eschatology, theodicy becomes final reality.