

On the Eternity of Punishments

And on the Fire of Hell

Commentaries

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Commentaries

On the Eternity of Punishments

And on the Fire of Hell

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On the Eternity of Punishments

First Commentary

The Doctrine of the Scriptures

Preface

I had long since laid aside these little commentaries, composed in a concise and wholly dialectical manner; and I had resolved not to publish them unless they had been more diligently polished, enlarged by a second revision, and perfected according to my ability. Yet certain things, which seemed to me neither slight nor wholly to be neglected, brought it about that I should not adhere too tenaciously to the plan I had undertaken.

For by certain indications I learned that, in more than one place, the question concerning the eternity of punishments and the fire of hell was breaking out afresh, and that this very controversy was being agitated more vehemently especially in England, in France, and in Germany. Wherefore I judged that I ought to yield to the opportunity and seize the occasion of serving the common good.

Let the commentaries, therefore, which have already lain hidden long enough, come forth into the midst; and though they are of small bulk, let them nevertheless be a token of that zeal by which I am borne most earnestly to the defense of Catholic truth.

I wrote this at the Roman College, on the fourth day before the Kalends of February, 1854.

Carlo Passaglia, S.J.

The Eternity of Punishments Vindicated by Biblical Testimonies

Lemma I

1. Duration without succession, and which lacks a beginning and an end, is the description of eternity taken in the proper and strict sense.

Lemma II

2. If a duration indeed lacks an end but not a beginning, and consequently is not wholly simultaneous but successive, there is had eternity not *ἀπλῶς* [simply], but *κατά τι* [in a certain respect], and employed in a broader signification.

Lemma III

3. Duration is of such a kind that it is distinguished only in notion and idea from the existence of the thing which endures and remains. Since, therefore, there is one God, whose existence excludes succession, beginning, and end, while all other things both begin and are subject to time, it follows that eternity properly so called¹ belongs to God alone, but that only eternity taken broadly² ought to be attributed to the rest.

Lemma IV

4. Eternity taken broadly is absolutely finite, and can be called infinite only improperly, since in truth it is indefinite. But only eternity taken broadly belongs to all creatures.³ Nothing, therefore, belongs to them which is not finite or indefinite.

Corollary

5. Hence an answer is given to the difficulty brought forward to assail the eternity of punishments, namely, that, if this were admitted, creatures would be subjected to infinite punishments. Those who dispute in this manner are playing with words and confound eternity called *κρίως* [properly] with eternity taken broadly. Therefore the punishment attributed to the impious is finite or indefinite, not infinite.

Theorem I

The eternity of punishments is asserted by those testimonies which expressly call the punishments of hell eternal.

6. Demonstration. Not in one place or once, but in several places and frequently, the punishments of hell are called eternal.

¹Such as we described in Lemma I.

²Such as we sketched in Lemma II.

³As is gathered from Lemma III.

An *eternal fire* is spoken of in Isaiah⁴ and Matthew;⁵ an *eternal ignominy* is spoken of in Daniel;⁶ an *eternal destruction* is spoken of by Paul the Apostle;⁷ finally, *eternal darkness* and *eternal bonds* are commemorated in the Epistle of Jude.⁸

Now, I. neither syllable nor apex is contained in the Scriptures from which it may lawfully be conjectured that the appended word *eternal* can or ought to be taken broadly in the testimonies adduced. Moreover, II. neither the subject matter of the discourse, nor the nature of the thing, nor the analogy of faith requires that, with the proper and obvious sense neglected, improper, more remotely sought, and metaphorical senses be preferred. Therefore, III. the proper sense of the words must be retained. But the punishments of hell are expressly and explicitly called eternal. Therefore they are eternal and are bounded by no end.

Scholion I

7. In order to detract from the force of this argument, those who have declared war upon the eternity of punishments note that the words עולם, αἰών, and *eternal* do not have a certain and determinate notion underlying them, but that they frequently express not what is eternal, but what is long and lasting. They endeavor to confirm this by examples collected from every quarter.⁹

⁴Isa. 33:14: עִלְמֵי מִקְרִי לֵב מִיִּגְרֵי עֹלָם, “Who among you shall dwell with everlasting burnings?”

⁵Matt. 18:8: Καλὸν σοὶ ἔστιν εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν ζωὴν χωλὸν ἢ κυλλόν, ἢ δύο χεῖρας ἢ δύο πόδας ἔχοντα βληθῆναι εἰς τὸ πῦρ τὸ αἰώνιον, “It is good for thee to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than, having two hands or two feet, to be cast into eternal fire.” Matt. 25:41: Πορεύεσθε ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ εἰς τὸ πῦρ τὸ αἰώνιον, “Depart from me into eternal fire.”

⁶Dan. 12:2: “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake: some unto eternal life, עֲלֵי עֹלָם, and others unto reproach, that they may see forever.”

⁷2 Thess. 1:9: Οἵτινες δίκην τίσουσιν, ὀλεθρον αἰώνιον, “Who shall suffer punishment, eternal destruction.”

⁸Jude 6: Ἀγγέλους ... δεσμοῖς αἰδίοις ὑπὸ ζόφῳ τετήρηκεν, “The angels ... he hath kept in everlasting bonds under darkness”; and v. 13: Οἷς ὁ ζόφος τοῦ σκότους εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τετήρηται, “For whom the gloom of darkness is reserved forever.”

⁹Concerning the word αἰών, Johannes Vorstius has the following in his commentary *On the Hebraisms of the New Testament*, chapter II, p. 39 ff., Leipzig edition, 1778:

“Αἰών. This word commonly signifies *eternity*. Aristotle wrote somewhere that αἰών is said as though αἰὲν ὢν [always existing]. It also signifies *the life of man, the time of human life*, or simply *time*. Hence there are said αἰῶνα λείπειν, ‘to leave life, the time of life’; likewise ἡδὸν αἰῶνα διάγειν, ‘to live a pleasant life’; likewise τὸν αἰῶνα τελευτᾶν, ‘to end one’s life.’

“Moreover, the same word in the New Testament also signifies, by a novel usage, the *world*, which the Greeks otherwise call κόσμος. An example is 1 Cor. 1:20: ποῦ συζητήτης τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου, ‘where is the investigator, the disputant, of this world?’ In the same place, although σοφία τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου could have been said, σοφία τοῦ κόσμου τούτου was said. The signification of the word is likewise the same where αἰ μέριμνα τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου is said, as in Matt. 13:22 and Mark 4:19.

“Nor is it otherwise when the devil is called ὁ θεὸς τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου, ‘the god of this world,’ as in 2 Cor. 4:4. Elsewhere also the devil is called by a word which is not indeed the same but nevertheless has the same signification. In Eph. 6:12 he is called κοσμοκράτωρ; and in John 12:31 and likewise 14:30 he is called ὁ ἄρχων τοῦ κόσμου τούτου.

“By these latter words are also designated the magnates of the Jews, whom the Jews themselves called עֲלֵי עֹלָם, ‘magnates of the world.’ For in 1 Cor. 2:8 they are called οἱ ἄρχοντες τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου.

“But is not God also called something similar somewhere? Paul indeed says in 1 Tim. 1:17, τῷ βασιλεῖ τῶν αἰώνων ἀφθάρτου, which may it not be lawful to translate, ‘to the incorruptible king of the world?’ The Vulgate interpreter translates it, ‘to the immortal king of the ages.’ But his translation does not stand in our way. For that very interpreter has more than once called the world ‘ages.’

8. We reply that nothing is established by the examples collected, and that nothing is elicited from the fact that the words עולם, αἰών, and *eternal* do not always have the value of that which is eternal.

We prove that nothing is elicited from this latter point chiefly by a twofold reason, the one indirect and the other direct.

And I. the indirect reason is this: one would act absurdly who denied that the words *father, son, bread, body, fire*, and so forth, of themselves and absolutely signify that which we call father, son, bread, body, fire, and so forth. In order that the proper sense be maintained, established usage of speech suffices, nor is there need of arguments; but arguments, and indeed most weighty ones, are needed in order that a metaphorical signification may be substituted for the proper signification. Therefore those act equally absurdly who deny that the words עולם, αἰών, and *eternal*, of themselves and absolutely, express that which has no end and endures perpetually.

If the words עולם, αἰών, and *eternal* are sometimes employed improperly, the names father, son, bread, body, fire, and so forth are also sometimes employed improperly. Therefore, if it is unlawful to infer from the sometimes improper use of these names that they do not of themselves and absolutely express what we ordinarily understand upon hearing the names father, son, and so forth, in the same manner it is unlawful to infer from the sometimes improper use of the words עולם, αἰών, and *eternal* that they are not of themselves and absolutely to be taken in their proper and obvious sense.

In one word, those who pursue improper and far-sought senses must persuade themselves of this: such senses cannot be admitted and proved unless they are confirmed by certain weighty reasons. As long as these are lacking or are not adduced, so long do the canons of legitimate interpretation require that we not depart from the proper and common force of signification.

II. The direct reason follows. I therefore ask whether the words עולם, αἰών, and *eternal* sometimes, or frequently, denote in the Scriptures that which is perpetual and lacks an end. He would be most unskilled who called this most frequent signification into doubt. What rule, therefore, shall we employ in order to establish with certainty when this most frequent signification, and when the other and improper one, ought to be taken? The rule will be this: the most frequent signification is to be taken whenever no trace of limitation occurs in the context, and neither the nature of the thing nor the analogy of the Scriptures and of faith demands a limited sense. But neither the nature of the thing nor the analogy of the Scriptures and of faith requires that the

“The sacred writers are also accustomed to distinguish *this world* and *the future world*. Thus St. Mark has in chapter 10:30: ‘Who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time, *καὶ ἐν τῷ αἰῶνι τῷ ἐρχομένῳ ζωὴν αἰώνιον*, and in the future world eternal life.’ The same words are also read in Luke 18:30. Paul, moreover, writes thus in Eph. 2:7: *ἐν τοῖς αἰῶσι τοῖς ἐπερχομένοις*, ‘in the future world.’ Elsewhere αἶον ὁ μέλλον, ‘the world to come,’ is said, as in Matt. 12:32, Heb. 6:5, and Eph. 1:21.

“But it is time to inquire into the origin of the new signification. The word αἰών therefore began to signify *world* because that word in another signification, namely that of *eternity*, agreed with a certain Hebrew word which signifies not only eternity but also the world, namely with the word עולם. That this Hebrew word signifies *eternity* is commonly known. But an example of its also signifying *the world* is Eccles. 3:11, where the words stand thus: ‘He made all things beautiful in their time.’”

punishments inflicted upon the wicked be believed to cease; and the contexts from which we have taken the testimonies¹⁰ contain not even a shadow of limitation. Therefore it is not the improper and limited, but the proper and absolute signification that ought to be taken.

9. Now, as regards the examples, I observe that each and all of them are beside the point, and indeed for a twofold cause. For either a limited sense is attributed to them through error, or, if deservedly, it is because indications of the limitation are present which are neither obscure nor doubtful.

A limited sense is wrongly affixed to those testimonies which more than once ascribe eternity to legal enactments. For eternity is not asserted of them considered in themselves, but in comparison with the antitype which was to be eternal, and of which they were shadows and images. Hence in passages of this kind there obtains that figure of speech by which those things which are proper to the thing signified are attributed to the sign.

Again, a limited sense is wrongly affixed to those testimonies in which it is foretold that the punitive visitation of God, although temporal, will endure eternally upon the wicked. For eternal duration is attributed to the temporal visitation because this visitation¹¹ is regarded as a certain beginning of the visitation which awaits the wicked in the other life.

Likewise, a limited sense is undeservedly affixed to those testimonies in which the eternity of the earth¹² and of the heavenly bodies¹³ is proclaimed. For nowhere in the Scriptures is the complete destruction of the earth and of the heavenly bodies found to be signified.

Finally, what we read in the Book of Genesis is wrongly restricted to a limited sense: "My covenant shall be in your flesh, לְכִרְיִת עוֹלָם, for an eternal covenant."¹⁴ For the legitimate sense of these words is: "The sign of my covenant shall be in your flesh, for the sign of an eternal covenant," namely, of that covenant by which he had promised him¹⁵ that he would be a God to him. To the same point likewise conduce the words contained in the Book of Numbers: "All the firstfruits of the sanctuary ... I have given to thee and to thy sons and daughters by a perpetual right; it is an everlasting covenant of salt before the Lord, for thee and thy sons."¹⁶

10. Nor do we therefore contend that in absolutely every individual text the word עוֹלָם has underlying it the notion of a duration circumscribed by no limits. Indeed, we freely grant that some texts can be adduced in which עוֹלָם has the same value as *lasting*; but we also add that among these texts there is none in which there is not a wholly undoubted indication of that limitation.

¹⁰See no. 6.

¹¹Jer. 25:9: "I will slay them and make them an astonishment and a hissing and perpetual desolations." Jer. 51:39: "In their heat I will set their drink before them, and I will make them drunk, that they may be stupefied and sleep an everlasting sleep and not rise again, saith the Lord."

¹²Eccles. 1:4: "A generation passeth away and a generation cometh; but the earth standeth forever."

¹³Ps. 148:6: "He hath established them forever and for ages of ages; he hath made a decree, and it shall not pass away."

¹⁴Gen. 17:13.

¹⁵Ibid., v. 7: "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and between thy seed after thee in their generations, by an everlasting covenant, that I may be thy God and the God of thy seed after thee."

¹⁶Num. 18:19.

Such an indication is present when עולם is constructed with דורות, as in the ninth chapter of Genesis,¹⁷ where the rainbow is established as a sign לְדֹרֹת עוֹלָם, “for generations of the age”; and in several places of Exodus,¹⁸ where the priesthood is promised to the sons of Aaron לְדֹרֹתָם עוֹלָם, “for a priesthood of the age throughout their generations.” For since human generations are designated by the word דורות, the limitation according to which the phrase ought to be understood immediately discloses itself.

Such an indication is present when עולם is constructed with the word חק in the certainly not uncommon phrase חֻקַּת עוֹלָם, “an everlasting statute,”¹⁹ by which ceremonial laws are designated. For all Scripture, as widely as it extends, proclaims that these were to be temporary and to cease as soon as the new covenant should be instituted.

11. Moreover, I do not sufficiently grasp what Daniel Huet intended when he wrote in his *Origeniana*:²⁰ “That αἰὼν designates not infinite but indefinite time is clear from the words of Luke:²¹ ‘And he shall reign in the house of Jacob forever, εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας.’ For if it expressed an interminable span of time, to what purpose would there be added: ‘And of his kingdom there shall be no end’? Therefore Luke, or rather Gabriel, intends this: he shall indeed possess in the house of Jacob a lasting kingdom, but one which will not lack an end.” But this interpretation is neither fitting nor necessary.

It is not fitting, since it can scarcely be cleared of the fault of tautology.

It is not necessary, since in the words which immediately follow, καὶ τῆς βασιλείας αὐτοῦ οὐκ ἔσται τέλος [and of his kingdom there shall be no end], the particle καὶ can be regarded as exegetical or causal, so that the reason is given why the kingdom of Christ will endure εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας [forever].

In addition, it may reasonably be supposed that one and the same thing, namely, the perpetual duration of the kingdom of Christ, is expressed by two distinct modes of speech, the one affirming, “He shall reign in the house of Jacob forever,” and the other denying, “His kingdom shall be bounded by no end.”

Finally, it is manifest that the words of the angel refer to several oracles of the prophets which now were to be fulfilled in Christ. It is therefore no wonder if he used a twofold phrase, the one affirming and the other denying, in order to recall more clearly to memory what those oracles had been: that he used the affirmative phrase in order to express the eternal kingdom of the Messiah, which had been foretold in the Psalms²² and by Daniel,²³ and that he used the negative phrase in order likewise to express his kingdom without end, foretold by Isaiah.²⁴ In brief,

¹⁷Gen. 9:12.

¹⁸Ex. 12:14-17; 27:21; 40:13; etc.

¹⁹For example, Exod. 28:43, which passage the Vulgate renders: “It shall be an everlasting ordinance for Aaron and for his seed after him.”

²⁰Book II, question XI, § 26.

²¹Luke 1:33.

²²Ps. 45:7 (according to the Hebrew): “Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever”; Ps. 89 throughout; etc.

²³Dan. 2:44: “The God of heaven shall set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; ... and it shall stand forever.” And 7:14, 27: “Whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom.”

²⁴Isa. 9:7: “His empire shall be multiplied, and of peace there shall be no end; upon the throne of David and upon his kingdom shall he sit, that he may establish it, from henceforth and forever.”

he therefore employed the twofold negative and affirmative form because the perpetual duration of the kingdom of the Messiah had likewise been announced beforehand in the twofold negative and affirmative form.

Wherefore there is no reason why the notion of the word αἰών should be restricted, especially since this limited acceptation is not sufficiently well composed with its etymology: for αἰών is from ἀεὶ ὧν, “that which always is.”

Scholion II

12. Those who belong to the Socinian faction make use, moreover, of another exception, and note with Wolzogen: “That is not called eternal fire in which the thing cast into it is burned forever and is never consumed, but rather that which so burns up and consumes a thing that it is never restored to its integrity, or which burns so long as until that thing is burned plainly and entirely.”²⁵

But this exception is truly Socinian, and nothing is more suited than it to overturn all the rules of speech. In the phrase *πῦρ αἰώνιον* [eternal fire], eternity is an attribute of the fire; but in the Socinian exposition, eternity is an attribute of the effect produced through a fire which is not eternal. What of the fact that *πῦρ*, or fire, which elsewhere is called *αἰώνιον* [eternal], is termed *ἄσβεστον* [inextinguishable] in the same Matthew?²⁶ But concerning this denomination and the argument drawn from it, a little below.

Theorem II

The eternity of punishments is established by those testimonies in which they are said to endure unto ages of ages.

13. Demonstration. The duration of the punishments which await the wicked is described by this circumlocution by John the Apostle in the Apocalypse: “And the smoke of their torments shall ascend unto ages of ages, *εἰς αἰῶνας αἰώνων*.”²⁷ And in the same book: “And her smoke ascendeth unto ages of ages, *εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων*.”²⁸ And again: “They shall be tormented day and night unto ages of ages, *εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων*.”²⁹ But the arguments by which it is proved that the circumlocution *εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων* describes a duration which lacks an end and is bounded by no limit are several in number and most efficacious.

It is proved, I. by the very character of the circumlocution, which excludes every limitation, since the repetition of the same noun of which it consists is the most evident indication of the superlative degree. Hence Glassius³⁰ establishes this canon:³¹ “The superlative is expressed by a substantive in the genitive case governing itself. Exod. 26:33: ‘And the veil shall divide between the holy place,

²⁵ On Matt. 18:8.

²⁶ Matt. 3:12: *Τὸ δὲ ἄχυρον κατακαύσει πυρὶ ἄσβεστον*, “But the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

²⁷ Apoc. 14:11.

²⁸ Apoc. 19:3.

²⁹ Ibid. 20:10.

³⁰ Book I, treatise I.

³¹ Number XVI.

וּבֵּין קֹדֶשׁ הַקִּדְשִׁים, and the holy of holies,’ that is, the most holy place. Num. 3:32: ‘וְנָשִׂיא נְשִׂאֵי הַלֵּוִי, and the prince of the princes of Levi, Eleazar the son of Aaron,’ that is, the highest prince of the Levitical order. In 1 Tim. 6:15 God is called *βασιλεὺς τῶν βασιλευνόντων, καὶ κύριος τῶν κυριευόντων* [King of those who reign and Lord of those who rule]. Apoc. 1:6: ‘To him be glory and dominion, *εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων* [unto ages of ages].’ In chapters 17:14 and 19:16, the Lamb, or Christ, is called *κύριος κυρίων καὶ βασιλεὺς βασιλέων* [Lord of lords and King of kings]. This construction is not so proper to the sacred writers that no examples of it are also found in profane authors.”³²

It is proved, II. by the opposition established between the millennium of the kingdom of the saints and the ages of ages which are attributed equally to rewards and to punishments after the judgment.³³

It is proved, III. if attention is given to the prophecy of Isaiah from which the author of the divine Apocalypse borrows his words. Isaiah foretells the vengeance of God upon all nations, and particularly upon Idumea, and depicts it thus: “And its streams shall be turned into pitch, and its ground into sulphur, and its land shall become burning pitch. Night and day it shall not be quenched; its smoke shall ascend forever; from generation to generation it shall be desolate; unto ages of ages there shall be none passing through it.”³⁴ Now one of two things must be true: either words are lacking by which a desolation destined to endure perpetually may be described, or the words which Isaiah employs and John imitates are altogether of this kind.

It is proved, IV. by an induction from all the passages in which this circumlocution, *εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων*, recurs. It is never read in the Alexandrian version, and in the New Testament it is employed only either of the felicity of the elect,³⁵ and of the glory which they render to God himself and which, in turn, they shall receive from God in heaven,³⁶ or of the immortal life which Christ enjoys after the resurrection;³⁷ or of the perpetual kingdom of Christ,³⁸ or, finally, of the very life of God.³⁹ Therefore this is a circumlocution which, as often as it is employed—excepting the passages concerning whose signification we are inquiring—so often expresses a duration bounded by no limits. Therefore those who restrict the circumlocution *εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων*, when employed of the punishments with which the wicked are chastised, to a certain duration destined to cease, disgracefully serve a hypothesis and fight against a certain and ascertained signification.

³² Compare Vorstius, *Philologia Sacra*, p. 328.

³³ Apoc. 11:15: “The kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign unto ages of ages.” Ibid. 20:10: “The beast and the false prophet shall be tormented unto ages of ages.” Compare Dan. 7:18: “But the saints of the Most High God shall receive the kingdom and shall possess the kingdom unto an age and an age of ages.”

³⁴ Isa. 34:9-11.

³⁵ Apoc. 22:5: “God shall enlighten them, and they shall reign unto ages of ages.”

³⁶ Gal. 1:5: “To whom is glory unto ages of ages.” Compare Phil. 4:20; 1 Tim. 1:17; 2 Tim. 4:18; Heb. 13:21; 1 Pet. 4:11; 5:11; Apoc. 1:6; 5:13; 7:12.

³⁷ Apoc. 1:18: “And I was dead, and behold, I am alive unto ages of ages.”

³⁸ Apoc. 11:15.

³⁹ Apoc. 4:9-10; 5:14; 10:6: “And he swore by him who liveth unto ages of ages, who created heaven and those things which are therein.” Compare 15:7.

It is proved, V. by an accurate consideration of the words of the Apocalypse: *Kai ἐν ἐκ τῶν τεσσάρων ζώων ἔδωκε τοῖς ἑπτὰ ἀγγέλοις ἑπτὰ φιάλας χρυσᾶς, γεμούσας τοῦ θυμοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ζῶντος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων*. “And one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden vials, full of the wrath of God who liveth unto ages of ages.”⁴⁰ But to what purpose is this description of the life of God as destined to endure eternally? In order that it may be understood what and how great is the force of that indignation with which he pursues the wicked. But the image of the life of God destined to endure perpetually would in no way conduce to amplifying and magnifying the greatness of the vengeance to which the wicked are subject, unless this were the sense: the vengeance upon the wicked will endure as long as God lives.

It is proved, VI. by a comparison of the phrase *εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων* with the corresponding Hebrew phrase *וְעוֹלָם וָעוֹלָם*. For it is evident that the latter corresponds to the former, both from the solemn *doxology* of God which we read in the Psalms,⁴¹ and to which John has regard in the Apocalypse, and from the Chaldean paraphrast, who renders the Hebrew phrase *וְעוֹלָם וָעוֹלָם* by *וְעוֹלָם וָעוֹלָם*, which wholly accords with the Greek expression. Now no one who observes, moreover, that the Hebrew phrase *וְעוֹלָם וָעוֹלָם*, “unto an age and yet further,” is equivalent to the other and more frequent phrase *וְעוֹלָם וָעוֹלָם*⁴² will deny that eternity is expressed by it.

Therefore the notion of eternity also underlies the phrase *εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων*.

But by this phrase is expressed the duration of the punishments with which the wicked are chastised. Therefore the punishments by which God punishes the impious are eternal.

Scholion I

14. But there are those who reply that this conclusion is broken by the fact that texts are present in which the phrase *εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων* expresses a duration which will at some time be ended. But I deny that texts of this kind exist; I deny that even one passage can be adduced in which any notion other than that of perpetual duration underlies the phrase *εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων*; and finally I deny that, besides those commemorated by us,⁴³ there are other texts in which the phrase *εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων* occurs. Wherefore this objection is sufficiently answered by denying the supposition. But if these things do not suffice for anyone, let him recall anew what we disputed above.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Apoc. 15:7.

⁴¹ Ps. 114:1-2 [sic; the quoted passage is Ps. 144:1-2]: “I will exalt thee, O God my king, and will bless thy name unto an age and unto an age of ages,” *וְעוֹלָם וָעוֹלָם*.

⁴² 1 Chron. 16:36; 29:10; Neh. 9:5; Ps. 41:14; 106:48: “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from age and unto age.”

⁴³ The preceding no. 13.

⁴⁴ Namely, nos. 7 ff.

Scholion II

15. But, they say, do not the phrases *לְעוֹלָם לְעַד*, *וְעַד־עוֹלָם*, and *בְּדוֹר דּוֹרִים* plainly correspond to the other, *עוֹלָם וָעַד*? Yet the former frequently occur in the Psalms,⁴⁵ and nevertheless do not signify perpetual duration.

I deny that the former phrases correspond to the latter; I deny that they are twins of this phrase. In the former, *עַד* precedes; in the latter it follows.

Again, I deny that the texts adduced are of such a kind that they cannot be understood of eternity, but of an eternity which accords with the subject under discussion. Gussetius subtly observed, under the word *עוֹלָם*, that its native signification is such that everywhere it denotes the duration of a thing, as great as that duration ought to be; or that *עוֹלָם* has the same value as to endure so long as the thing ought to endure. But the souls of the impious are immortal. Therefore, when *עוֹלָם* is referred to them, it expresses a duration lacking an end.

Scholion III

16. But do we not read in the prophecy of Jeremiah: “I shall dwell with you in this land which I gave to your fathers, *לְמִן־עוֹלָם וְעַד־עוֹלָם*, from age unto age?”⁴⁶

We certainly read this; but what follows from it? We have already observed⁴⁷ that by the word *עוֹלָם* perpetuity is indeed signified, but a perpetuity corresponding to the subject to which it is attributed. Therefore the phrase *עַד־עוֹלָם* retains its signification, but one accommodated to the subject of the attribution.

In addition, Noldius abundantly proved that the prefix *ל*, although more than once it is without force, nevertheless sometimes signifies *indeed*, *nay indeed*, or *even unto*. Therefore the words of Jeremiah can be rendered thus: “I shall dwell with you in this land; indeed, I shall dwell with you from age unto age,” so that by one and the same discourse the full and consummate fruit of the covenant entered into with God is explained.

Finally, that which we press most strongly is the usage of speech among the writers of the New Testament. But among the writers of the New Testament the phrase *εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων* does not even once denote anything other than eternity lacking an end.

Scholion IV

17. There remains a final difficulty, which Louis Gerhard and Petersen advance in their *Dialogues*.⁴⁸ They say, therefore, that in order to explain the complete eternity of heavenly felicity, the word *πάντες* [all] is added in the Scriptures, which is in no way done when punishments are under discussion. Hence they bring

⁴⁵Ps. 111:8, 10: “All his commandments are faithful, confirmed unto an age of age,” *לְעוֹלָם לְעַד*. Ps. 148:6: “He hath established them forever and unto an age of age,” *לְעוֹלָם לְעַד*. Ps. 104:6: “Thou hast founded the earth upon its stability; it shall not be moved unto an age of age,” *עוֹלָם וָעַד*. Ps. 102:25: “Call me not back in the midst of my days; unto generation and generation are thy years,” *בְּדוֹר דּוֹרִים*. Compare Ps. 100:5; 145:10; 33:11.

⁴⁶Jer. 7:7; 25:5.

⁴⁷The preceding no. 15.

⁴⁸Vol. I, p. 27.

forward three testimonies, the first from the Epistle to the Ephesians: *εἰς πάσας τὰς γενεὰς τοῦ αἰῶνος τῶν αἰώνων* [unto all the generations of the age of ages];⁴⁹ the second from the Epistle of Jude: *νῦν καὶ εἰς πάντας τοὺς αἰῶνας* [now and unto all the ages];⁵⁰ and the last from the Psalter: *ἡ βασιλεία σου βασιλεία πάντων τῶν αἰώνων*, מְלִכְוֹתָּךְ [thy kingdom is a kingdom of all ages].⁵¹

But, what is astonishing, these examples miss the point entirely. The second and third miss the point, since they do not contain the phrase *εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων*. The first misses the point, in which we read not the abstract phrase *πάντες αἰῶνες* [all ages], but the concrete *πάσας γενεάς* [all generations]. Therefore the true reason for the addition is that the ellipsis is supplied by the word *πάντες*. I shall state this very thing more clearly: since not *αἰῶνες τῶν αἰώνων* [ages of ages], but simply *αἰῶνες* [ages], are commemorated, the elliptical expression is supplied by the addition of the word *πάντες* [all].

Theorem III

The eternity of punishments is established by those testimonies in which their end is expressly and explicitly denied.

18. Demonstration. John the Baptist declares what the future duration of the punishments which await the wicked will be when he testifies that God will burn the chaff with an inextinguishable fire, *πυρὶ ἀσβέστω*.⁵² The same phrase is repeated in Luke,⁵³ when the *κήρυγμα* [proclamation] of John is related. Christ himself, moreover, teaches that it is far better for men to lose any temporal things whatever than *ἀπελθεῖν εἰς τὴν γέενναν*, *εἰς τὸ πῦρ τὸ ἄσβεστον· ὅπου ὁ σκόληξ αὐτῶν οὐ τελευτᾷ, καὶ τὸ πῦρ οὐ σβέννυται*, “to go into Gehenna, into that inextinguishable fire, where their worm does not die and the fire is not extinguished.”⁵⁴

Now several things are worthy of notice here.

- I. If a duration which will never cease were to be described, what words, I ask, could be employed which were either clearer or more efficacious?
- II. There is no one who does not perceive the force of propositions which deny absolutely. They reject limits, extend to infinity, and can be contained within no boundary. But both John and Christ employ propositions which deny absolutely: the former when he calls the penal fire *ἄσβεστον*, unextinguished and inextinguishable; the latter when he repeats the same and, moreover, adds, *τὸ πῦρ οὐ σβέννυται*, “the fire is not extinguished.”
- III. The words of Christ are taken from the oracle of Isaiah.⁵⁵ But what Christ says, *καὶ τὸ πῦρ οὐ σβέννυται*, in the present tense, stands in Isaiah in the future tense, *לֹא תִכָּבֵד*; and by this form of tense eternity is expressed even more vividly.

⁴⁹ Eph. 3:21: “To him be glory in the Church, unto all the generations of the age of ages.”

⁵⁰ Jude 25: “To the only God our Savior ... dominion and power before every age, and now, and unto all ages.”

⁵¹ Ps. 145:13: “Thy kingdom is a kingdom of all ages.”

⁵² Matt. 3:12.

⁵³ Luke 3:17.

⁵⁴ Mark 9:42-43.

⁵⁵ Isa. 66:24: “Their worm shall not die, and their fire shall not be extinguished.”

IV. As Isaiah does, so also Christ joins and associates with the fire which will not be extinguished the worm which will not die. But what is expressed by the name of the worm? That which in Mark is *ὁ σκώληξ* is *תולעת* in Isaiah. But Bochart⁵⁶ and Braun⁵⁷ have demonstrated by certain arguments that by the word *תולעת* there is properly designated the little red or scarlet worm. Again, by comparison with another passage of Isaiah,⁵⁸ it is evident that *תולעת* or *תולע* is a type and image of sin remaining within. Wherefore Christ, who offered himself as a sacrifice to God for sins, just as he is called sin, so is he called *תולע*, “a worm,” in the Psalms.⁵⁹

Thus by a metaphorical manner of speech, but one whose sense is determinate, Christ joins together both the fire which will never be extinguished and the sin by which the wicked will always both be stained and tormented. Namely, he joins together the effect and the cause, as if he were to say: the punishment ought to endure as long as the fault remains which contains the cause of the punishment inflicted. But the sins of the wicked who have departed this life never cease, are never abolished, and always stain them. Therefore neither will the punishment ever cease, but it will endure eternally.

Scholion I

19. “As though,” reply the Socinians, “texts of the Scriptures were lacking in which those things which certainly will cease are said to have no end. Behold, in the prophecies of Isaiah⁶⁰ and Nahum,⁶¹ their treasures are said to have no end; and in Job,⁶² ‘there is no end of thy iniquities.’ The same is repeated of labor,⁶³ of books,⁶⁴ and in the First Epistle to Timothy⁶⁵ genealogies having no end are commemorated.”

But what is this except to make a false show and to compare as similar and twin things which are utterly disjoined?

For, I. do these texts present the emphasis which we noted above?⁶⁶ Do the same adjuncts accompany both these and the preceding texts?

Moreover, II. who does not immediately perceive that these two things differ from one another by the whole heaven: that something is said, with respect to us, to lack an end because we do not reach its end by counting; and that something is presented by God himself as though it will never cease?

⁵⁶ *Hieroicoicon*, Part II, book IV, chapter XXVII.

⁵⁷ *On Sacred Vestments*, book I, chapter XV.

⁵⁸ Isa. 1:18: “If your sins be red as the scarlet worm, they shall be as white as wool.”

⁵⁹ Ps. 22:7: “But I am a worm and no man.”

⁶⁰ Isa. 2:7: “The land is filled with silver and gold, and there is no end of its treasures.”

⁶¹ Nah. 2:9: “And there is no end of the riches from all its desirable vessels.”

⁶² Job 22:4-5: “Will he reprove thee because thou fearest ... and not because of ... thine infinite iniquities?”

⁶³ Eccles. 4:8: “He ceaseth not to labor.”

⁶⁴ Ibid. 12:12: “Of making many books there is no end.”

⁶⁵ 1 Tim. 1:4: “Nor should they give heed to fables and endless genealogies,” *καὶ γενεαλογίας ἀπεράντοις*.

⁶⁶ Above, no. 18.

Finally, III. the expressions employed in the present case, by which treasures, sins, books, and labors are said to have no end, are most correct, since they both continue actually and have not yet reached an end. But what does the divine sanction, by which the punishments destined for the wicked are declared never to cease and to endure continually, have in common with these?

Scholion II

20. Petersen, in his *Colloquy on the Restoration of All Things*,⁶⁷ renews the difficulty from those very words which we alleged from Mark.⁶⁸ For, he says, the particle *ὅπου*, “where,” is therefore employed by the Savior because neither the worm of the damned will die nor the fire be extinguished for as long as they remain in Gehenna. But who would gather from this that they will remain in Gehenna forever? Indeed, he continues, the words which follow a little afterward⁶⁹ demonstrate that some end has been appointed beforehand for Gehenna; for it is Christ who adds: “For everyone shall be salted with fire, and every victim shall be salted with salt.”

But both the reason sought from the particle *ὅπου* is futile, and no strength accrues to it from the confirmation.

Thus the fire is called *ἄσβεστος* [inextinguishable] absolutely, and it is pronounced absolutely of the worm that it will never die. The particle *ὅπου*, moreover, has regard to the place in which neither the fire is extinguished nor the worm dies. It follows, therefore, that the place of Gehenna is everlasting, because everlasting is the fire which must burn in Gehenna, and everlasting is the worm which torments and consumes those detained in Gehenna. What of the fact that in Isaiah no particle of this kind occurs, but it is said absolutely that their worm will not die?

Now a few words concerning the confirmation. That the salt in verse forty-eight is regarded as a type of fraternal charity which men owe mutually to one another is shown by Christ’s own exposition contained in verse forty-nine. What, therefore, does this have to do with the matter? Can an example perhaps be produced by which it is even most slightly intimated that the reprobate condemned to the torments of hell are considered as sacrifices offered to God and antitypes of the victims of the Old Testament? We have therefore dissipated the difficulties objected, and the argument which we established remains ratified and fixed.

Theorem IV

The eternity of punishments is established by those testimonies in which the duration of the reward divinely appointed is compared with the duration of punishment.

21. Demonstration. This comparison shines forth most splendidly from the words of Christ:⁷⁰ *Καὶ ἀπελεύσονται οὗτοι, εἰς κόλασιν αἰώνιον· οἱ δὲ δίκαιοι*

⁶⁷ Vol. I, p. 246.

⁶⁸ Mark 9:42-43.

⁶⁹ Ibid., v. 48. The Vulgate: “For everyone shall be salted with fire, and every victim shall be salted with salt.”

⁷⁰ Matt. 25:46.

εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον. “And these shall go into eternal punishment,⁷¹ but the just into eternal life.”

With these must altogether be compared the following words in Daniel:⁷² “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake: some unto eternal life, and others unto reproach, that they may see⁷³ forever.” The Alexandrian interpreters render it: *Καὶ πολλοὶ τῶν καθευδόντων ἐν τῷ πλάτει τῆς γῆς ἀναστήσονται, οἱ μὲν εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον, οἱ δὲ εἰς ὀνειδισμόν, οἱ δὲ εἰς διασπορὰν καὶ αἰσχύνην αἰώνιον*. “And many of those sleeping upon the breadth of the earth shall rise, some indeed unto eternal life, but others unto reproach, and others unto dispersion and everlasting confusion.” Theodotion, however, renders it: *Καὶ πολλοὶ τῶν καθευδόντων ἐν γῆς χώματι ἐξεγερθήσονται, οὗτοι εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον, καὶ οὗτοι εἰς ὀνειδισμόν καὶ εἰς αἰσχύνην αἰώνιον*. “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake: some unto eternal life, and others unto reproach and everlasting confusion.”

22. Thus what in the Vulgate and Theodotion is “in the dust of the earth,” ἐν γῆς χώματι, the Alexandrians interpret as ἐν τῷ πλάτει τῆς γῆς, “upon the surface of the earth.” But the text has אֶרֶץ, that is, as it is commonly explained, “the earth of dust.” Yet nothing prevents אֶרֶץ from being rendered ἐν τῷ πλάτει τῆς γῆς, “upon the surface of the earth.” For the four roots דָּמָה, דָּמָה, דָּמָה, and דָּמָה, when their origin is considered, agree in one and the same notion of smearing, from which, afterward, most diverse secondary significations blossomed through the living use of the language. By smearing, a surface is formed; hence אֶרֶץ properly signifies a surface, and, κατ’ ἐξοχήν [preeminently], the surface of the earth, and thence the earth itself. Wherefore the Alexandrian interpretation can in no way be judged foreign to the truth of the text.

The repeated distribution οἱ δέ, οἱ δέ [but some, but others] departs rather from the text, for both the text itself and the versions lack it.

Finally, it can be asked whence the Alexandrians took the expression εἰς διασπορὰν [unto dispersion], which is lacking both in the text and in the versions. Thus the text reads וְאַחֵר יִתְרָפוּ לְדָרְאוֹן עוֹלָם, “and others shall awake unto reproaches, unto everlasting loathing.” But דָּרְאוֹן, whence it comes, is a word which among the Arabs signifies not only to suffer from a pestilential plague, but also to scatter. Therefore the Alexandrians joined together εἰς διασπορὰν καὶ εἰς αἰσχύνην αἰώνιον [unto dispersion and unto everlasting confusion] because they wished to express both notions of דָּרָה.

But more than enough concerning these matters; let us return to the argument itself.

23. Christ declares that the punishment of the reprobate will be eternal, just as the life of the just will be eternal. Admirably; but what will be the eternity of the life of the just? Will it be improper, and one which will at length have an end? Let no one dare to affirm it. Therefore the just shall live perpetually, and their felicity shall be bounded by no end. But the same duration is ascribed both to the life and

⁷¹ Just as the sentence had been delivered shortly before by the supreme Judge, v. 41: *Πορεύεσθε ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ, οἱ καταραμένοι, εἰς τὸ πῦρ τὸ αἰώνιον*. “Depart from me, accursed, into eternal fire.”

⁷² Dan. 12:2.

⁷³ Perhaps, “that they may be vile,” which is the conjecture of the learned.

felicity of the just and to the punishment of the reprobate. Therefore the punitive visitation by which God will chastise the reprobate will be everlasting and lacking an end.

If any dissent, they must maintain that, in one and the same very brief context in which the sentence of the supreme Judge is contained, one and the same word is taken equivocally. They must maintain that the sentence itself is equivocal, and that uncertain and doubtful words are employed there where certainty and determination are most of all demanded. He who pursued improper senses and metaphors in the sentence of a human judge would be received with common ridicule. Shall we therefore suffer with an untroubled mind that the words of the divine Judge be twisted into improper senses and metaphors?

Wherefore the argument which Augustine forms from the words of Christ is plainly decisive: “Christ said in one and the same place, in one and the same sentence: ‘These shall go into eternal punishment, but the just into eternal life.’ If both are eternal, assuredly either both must be understood to be lasting with an end, or both perpetual without an end. For like things are placed in relation to like: on the one side eternal punishment, on the other eternal life. But to say, in this one and the same sense, ‘eternal life will be without end, eternal punishment will have an end,’ is very absurd.”⁷⁴

24. Another testimony of Christ related by John looks to the same point: *Ὁ πιστεύων εἰς τὸν υἱὸν ἔχει ζωὴν αἰώνιον· ὁ δὲ ἀπειθῶν τῷ υἱῷ οὐκ ὄψεται τὴν ζωὴν, ἀλλ’ ἡ ὀργὴ τοῦ θεοῦ μένει ἐπ’ αὐτόν.* “He who believeth in the Son hath eternal life; but he who is unbelieving toward the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth upon him.”⁷⁵

Two things must be considered here: both the phrase in itself and the opposition. The phrase in itself is that the impious shall not see life and that the wrath of God shall abide upon them. But how long shall they not see life? How long shall they bear the weight of divine wrath? The expression is unlimited, and no hope is afforded them of seeing life at some time. Indeed, every hope is cut off. Whence would they conceive this hope? From the fact that God would be merciful toward them? But it is pronounced absolutely that the wrath of God abides upon them—not that it touches them and passes away, but that it endures stably upon them.

There is added the opposition which is established between believers and unbelievers, the reward of the former and the punishment of the latter. Of the former it is affirmed that they shall have eternal life, but to the latter life is denied. But what life is denied? Evidently, that which is eternal. Therefore they are condemned to everlasting death.

This, unless I am utterly mistaken, is sufficiently declared by that addition, *ἡ ὀργὴ τοῦ θεοῦ μένει ἐπ’ αὐτόν* [the wrath of God abideth upon him]. By this circumlocution the omission of the word *τοῦ αἰωνίου* [eternal] is supplied when it is said *οὐκ ὄψεται τὴν ζωὴν* [he shall not see life], and not *οὐκ ὄψεται τὴν ζωὴν αἰώνιον* [he shall not see eternal life], as the opposition established seemed to require. But if by the circumlocution *ἡ ὀργὴ τοῦ θεοῦ μένει ἐπ’ αὐτόν* the omission of the word *τοῦ αἰωνίου* is supplied, what sense will underlie the words of Christ? This,

⁷⁴ *The City of God*, book XXI, chapter XXIII.

⁷⁵ John 3:36.

and no other: unbelievers shall not see life, but shall be chastised with eternal punishments, because the divine indignation will never depart from them, and because the wrath of God will always pursue them. Hence it is written concerning the impious: עַד-נֶצַח לֹא יֵרְאוּ אֹרֶךְ, “Forever they shall not see light.”⁷⁶

Theorem V

The eternity of punishments is established by those testimonies in which every hope of some future redemption or liberation is taken away from the damned.

25. Demonstration. There can be no liberation from a punishment which the judge has willed to be bound and associated with a condition which cannot possibly be fulfilled. But God has willed the liberation of the damned from the punishments of hell to be bound and joined with a condition which cannot possibly be fulfilled.

What the condition is is described in more than one place. It is described in Matthew: *Ἀμὴν λέγω σοι, οὐ μὴ ἐξέλθῃς ἐκεῖθεν, ἕως ἂν ἀποδῶς τὸν ἔσχατον κοδράντην.* “Amen I say to thee, thou shalt not go out from thence until thou repay the last farthing.”⁷⁷

It is described in the same Evangelist: *Καὶ ὀργισθεὶς ὁ κύριος αὐτοῦ παρέδωκεν αὐτὸν τοῖς βασανισταῖς, ἕως οὗ ἀποδῶ πᾶν τὸ ὀφειλόμενον αὐτῷ.* “And his lord, being angry, delivered him to the torturers until he should repay the whole debt.”⁷⁸

It is described in Luke: *Λέγω σοι, οὐ μὴ ἐξέλθῃς ἐκεῖθεν, ἕως οὗ καὶ τὸ ἔσχατον λεπτὸν ἀποδῶς.* “I say to thee, thou shalt not go out from thence until thou repay even the last mite.”⁷⁹

Therefore the condition attached to liberation is this: that those who are punished with the punishments of hell perfectly discharge the debt which subjects them to punishment and by which they are bound before God. But this is a condition which the reprobate cannot fulfill.

That they are unequal to fulfilling this condition is taught us by the analogy of faith, and is taught us by the words of Christ, in which it is expressly said that the wicked do not possess that from which they might pay the debt contracted.⁸⁰ Therefore there can be no liberation of the reprobate. Therefore the punishments with which they are chastised are eternal.

26. Jerome both perceived and explained excellently the force of this argument: “He who once enters there will not be permitted to go out thereafter. Truth itself shows this in the Gospel, saying: ‘Be at agreement ... thou shalt not go out from thence until thou pay the last farthing.’ Just as, where it is said, ‘He must reign until he put his enemies beneath his feet,’ it is understood that he will reign forever, because his enemies will always be beneath his feet; so also here the saying, ‘Thou shalt not go out until thou pay,’ can be understood to mean that he will never

⁷⁶Ps. 49:20.

⁷⁷Matt. 5:26.

⁷⁸Ibid. 18:34.

⁷⁹Luke 12:59.

⁸⁰Matt. 18:25: “But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold.”

go out, because he will always be paying the last farthing while he suffers the everlasting punishments of earthly sins.”⁸¹

Jerome has regard, namely, to that force of the participle *until*, ἕως, ἕ, by which not the terminus of time but its duration is signified, as in the Psalm: “The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand, יְשִׁי-יְדָיָה, while I subject thine enemies to thee.”⁸² And in Genesis: “I will not forsake thee, רַחֲמֵי-יְהוָה, until I shall have accomplished that which I have spoken to thee,” that is, “I will never forsake thee”,⁸³ for the promises of God are eternal in Christ.⁸⁴ Similarly in Matthew: “Joseph did not know Mary, ἕως οὗ, until she brought forth her firstborn son.”⁸⁵ When Helvidius abused this testimony, he fell under the most grave censures of Jerome.

27. An argument not greatly different from that which we proposed can be gathered from what Christ says in the twelfth chapter of Matthew:⁸⁶ that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit οὐκ ἀφεθήσεται αὐτῷ, οὔτε ἐν τῷ νῦν αἰῶνι⁸⁷, οὔτε ἐν τῷ μέλλοντι, “shall not be forgiven him, neither in this age nor in the future.”

But to what purpose is there mention of the future age? In order that it may be demonstrated that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is never forgiven, as if it were said that this crime is no more forgiven in this age than in the future age. This form of speech assumes as something ascertained that in the future age there remains no remission of sins.

These things can be illustrated from the parallel passage in Mark: Ὅς δ’ ἂν βλασφημήσῃ εἰς τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, οὐκ ἔχει ἄφεσιν εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, ἀλλ’ ἐνοχός ἐστιν αἰωνίου κρίσεως. “But he who shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit hath no forgiveness forever, but is guilty of an eternal offense.”⁸⁸ Therefore the phrase “neither in this age nor in the future” is equivalent to the other, “never, forever”; and when it is employed concerning the remission of sins, it is taken as known and ascertained that there is no place for remission in the other life.

But if the time of remission is bounded by this life, then the reprobate can promise themselves no remission of sins in the other life, and consequently no end of punishments.

28. Certainly no greater hope of remission can shine upon the damned than a hope of renewal and conversion. For while they persist in iniquity, no remission of sins is granted.

But the Scriptures do not allow any hope of repentance and renewal to be afforded to the damned. You ask whence this is evident. I answer that it is evident from several considerations.

It is evident, I. because every opportunity of effecting salvation is comprehended within the compass of this life, as Ecclesiastes testifies: “Whatsoever thy hand

⁸¹ In the commentary on Lam. 1.

⁸² Ps. 110:1.

⁸³ Gen. 28:15.

⁸⁴ 1 Tim. 4:8.

⁸⁵ Matt. 1:25.

⁸⁶ Ibid. 12:32.

⁸⁷ Griesbach: ἐν τούτῳ τῷ αἰῶνι [in this age].

⁸⁸ Mark 3:29.

is able to do, do it earnestly, because neither work, nor reason, nor wisdom, nor knowledge shall be in the underworld, whither thou hastenest.”⁸⁹

29. It is evident, II. because by several and various forms of speech the Scriptures exhibit the damned as those who remain obstinate in sin and do not put on a better mind.

And indeed, with what colors do they depict the condition of the reprobate? With colors altogether black and terrifying. They call it the second death,⁹⁰ opposed to life; they say that the reprobate dwell now in the exterior darkness,⁹¹ now in the gloom of darkness,⁹² and consequently lack light and lie beneath the dominion of sin, which is explained either through the power of death⁹³ or through the power of darkness.⁹⁴

They represent the damned as those who, by *βρυγμῶ ὀδόντων*, the gnashing of teeth,⁹⁵ manifest a mind impatient under torment and an impotent anger against God.⁹⁶

In addition, the damned are those who are called by the Apostle *σκεύη ὀργῆς*, vessels of wrath, and *σκεύη εἰς ἀτιμίαν*, vessels unto dishonor,⁹⁷ namely, unclean vessels, vessels useless to the Lord and fit for no good work, as is elicited from the description of the vessels unto honor which is contained in the Second Epistle to Timothy.⁹⁸ Come now, who would combine repentance and renewal of mind with this state of death, darkness, gloom, desperation, divinely inflicted wrath, and dishonor?

If a conjecture can be made concerning the entire class of the damned from the devil and his angels, nothing is more certain than that all the damned, to the last one, have a most firmly fixed will in sin. The devil sins from the beginning; from the beginning he is a murderer, the father of lies, the accuser of the brethren, intent upon every occasion of destroying men, the ancient serpent, and one who employs no measure in laying snares.⁹⁹ Hence he is emphatically called *ὁ πονηρός*, the evil one.¹⁰⁰ This is the character of the father, and from it may be judged what is the character of his children, that is, of all the reprobate who have the devil as father and imitate the works of their father.¹⁰¹

30. Finally, III. it is evident that no hope of repentance and renewal on the part of the damned can be conceived, because either the causes or the conditions necessary for renewal cannot be combined with the state of the damned.

⁸⁹ Eccles. 9:10.

⁹⁰ Apoc. 2:11; 20:6; 21:8.

⁹¹ Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30.

⁹² 2 Pet. 2:17; Jude 13.

⁹³ Heb. 2:15.

⁹⁴ Luke 22:53; Col. 1:13.

⁹⁵ Matt. 8:12; 13:42; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28.

⁹⁶ Compare Suicer under the word *βρυγμός*.

⁹⁷ Rom. 9:21-22.

⁹⁸ 2 Tim. 2:21: “If anyone therefore shall cleanse himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified and useful to the Lord, prepared for every good work.”

⁹⁹ Gen. 3:15; John 8:44; 1 John 3:8; Apoc. 12:7-17; 2 Cor. 4:4; etc.

¹⁰⁰ Matt. 13:19, 38; 1 John 2:13-14.

¹⁰¹ John 8:41, 44; 1 John 3:8, 10.

The principal and more powerful cause of renewal is the love of God and the mercy with which he pursues men. But no place remains either for love or for mercy after divine long-suffering has been despised for so long,¹⁰² after the door has been shut,¹⁰³ and after those whom the Son of God himself addresses as accursed¹⁰⁴ have been cast out and entirely excluded from the fellowship of God. There follows the meritorious cause, which is contained in the sufferings and satisfaction of Christ. But the blood of the Lamb who was slain from the foundation of the world does not wash those who, by that same Lamb, on his day, the day of judgment and wrath, are struck by the sentence of malediction.

Finally, in order that God, moved by his goodness and in consideration of the merits of Christ, may justify the impious, it is necessary that the impious man believe, hope, love, and, returning to his heart, be converted from his most evil ways. But thus far we have established that the reprobate are those who, even if they believe and tremble, do not on that account either love God or detest sin as would be fitting.

They are the reprobate concerning whom the Savior pronounced: "It would have been good for him if that man had not been born."¹⁰⁵ Namely, they shall always remain vessels unto dishonor; for if they could be converted into vessels unto honor, it would have been worthwhile for them to have existed among men. For so great is the excellence of vessels unto honor, by whom the name of God is celebrated, that if anyone, after countless thousands of ages passed amid the most atrocious torments, were to be transferred to that dignity, it would certainly have been good for such a man to be born.

Theorem VI

The eternity of punishments is established by those testimonies in which every hope of liberation is denied to the evil angels.

31. Demonstration. That no creature is reconciled to God and delivered from the dominion of sin and damnation except through Christ is a dogma which is repeated and inculcated on every page in the Scriptures. Therefore, if it is established by an express testimony that Christ did not will to liberate the evil angels, their cause must be held to be desperate. But such a testimony exists, and it is said expressly enough that Christ did not will to bring salvation to the evil angels.

Let Paul be heard asserting concerning Christ:¹⁰⁶ *Οὐ γὰρ δήπου ἀγγέλων ἐπιλαμβάνεται, ἀλλὰ σπέρματος Ἀβραάμ ἐπιλαμβάνεται.* The Vulgate renders this: "For nowhere doth he take hold of the angels, but of the seed of Abraham he taketh hold." But what is meant by *ἐπιλαμβάνεσθαι ἀγγέλων*, to take hold of angels, and *ἐπιλαμβάνεσθαι σπέρματος Ἀβραάμ*, to take hold of the seed of Abraham? There are many who interpret it thus: to receive, to assume angels; to receive, to assume

¹⁰²Rom. 2:4-5.

¹⁰³Matt. 25:10 ff.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., v. 41.

¹⁰⁵Matt. 26:24.

¹⁰⁶Heb. 2:16.

the seed of Abraham. Yet this notion of receiving and assuming neither accords with the context nor satisfies the purpose of the Apostle.

Therefore *ἐπιλαμβάνεσθαι* here is equivalent to the Hebrew *לְחַלּוֹת*, “he set free, he vindicated,” as Braunius and d’Outrein have already confirmed by many considerations in their commentaries, and Cramerus in his book *On the Goel*.¹⁰⁷ The causal particle *γάρ* shows that the Apostle here adduces the reason why it came about that the devil was destroyed through the Incarnation, and believing Israelites were freed from the fear of death by which they were grievously distressed under the old economy. The reason given for so dissimilar an outcome is this: that Christ was to be the *ἐπιλήπτορ*, *לְחַלּוֹת*, protector and redeemer, not of angels, but of the seed of Abraham. And thus the angels are excluded from every hope of obtaining salvation through Christ. This is signified most effectively by the particles *οὐ δήπου*: “not at all,” “in no respect,” so that the sense is: “For he does not at all vindicate angels, but he sets the seed of Abraham at liberty.”

But it is evident from the sentence of Christ that the condition of reprobate men and of the angels is one and the same:¹⁰⁸ *Πορεύεσθε ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ, οἱ κατηραμένοι, εἰς τὸ πῦρ τὸ αἰώνιον τὸ ἡτοιμασμένον τῷ διαβόλῳ καὶ τοῖς ἀγγέλοις αὐτοῦ*. “Depart from me, accursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels.” Therefore, just as the evil angels, so reprobate men can promise themselves no liberation through Christ; and consequently the cause both of the former and of the latter is desperate, and their destruction everlasting.

Theorem VII

The eternity of punishments is established by those testimonies which demonstrate that a ransom of infinite price was necessary, so that men might be delivered from sins and from the punishment due to sins.

32. Demonstration. The price of payment ought to correspond to the burden contracted, so that a proportion is preserved between the debt and the price. Therefore, if a price of infinite value was paid so that men might be liberated from sins and their punishments, there can be no doubt that there inheres in sins a desert which must be expiated by none but eternal punishments. But it is established that a price of infinite value truly was paid, and that a price of such dignity was necessary in order that the deserts of sins might be expiated.

This is established first, negatively, from those testimonies by which we are taught that all creatures, to the last one, were unequal to paying this price.¹⁰⁹

The same is confirmed positively by those testimonies in which the fruit of the price paid is extended unto eternity. Such are those in which it is said that eternal justice was acquired by Christ,¹¹⁰ eternal redemption was found,¹¹¹ those

¹⁰⁷Book II of the work cited.

¹⁰⁸Matt. 25:41.

¹⁰⁹Ps. 49:8-9: “Brother doth not redeem; shall man redeem? He shall not give to God his propitiation, and the price of the redemption of his soul; and he shall labor forever.” Jer. 30:21: “For who is this who applieth his heart that he may draw near to me? saith the Lord.”

¹¹⁰Dan. 9:24.

¹¹¹Heb. 9:12.

who are sanctified were perfected forever,¹¹² and by which the dignity of Christ's priesthood is made to consist in this: that he exercises an eternal priesthood,¹¹³ by virtue of which σώζειν εἰς τὸ παντελὲς δύναται τοὺς προσερχομένους δι' αὐτοῦ τῷ θεῷ, "he is able to save perpetually those who approach God through him." Such, therefore, is the guilt of sin, for which satisfaction is made only by an infinite price. But the reprobate are strangers to the price paid through Christ;¹¹⁴ therefore they remain subject to a guilt which is never to be blotted out and for which they must pay everlasting punishments.

Corollary

33. Of the three hypotheses—concerning the absolute eternity of punishments, the absolute future restoration of all, and a conditioned restoration which depends upon the free determination of creatures¹¹⁵—the second and third are refuted by the authority of the Scriptures; but the first is so established that it must be numbered among the ascertained truths contained in the Scriptures.

¹¹²Ibid. 10:12.

¹¹³Ibid. 7:16-17, 24-25.

¹¹⁴Compare no. 30.

¹¹⁵Compare Antoine Lauzerand, *Essay on the Doctrine of Final Restoration*, 1853; Dietelmair, *On Scriptural and Fanatical Restoration*, 1746; Winzer, *On Restoration Proposed in the Passages of the New Testament*, 1821; A. Freundier, *Refutation of the Doctrine of Final Restoration*, Geneva, 1850; and J. L. Durand, *Progress in the Future Life*, 1851. To these may be added Eduard Reuss, in his work *History of Christian Theology in the Apostolic Age*, book IV, p. 257 ff.; and P. Goy, in his work *Review of Christian Theology and Philosophy*, vol. VII, issue VI, p. 370 ff., Paris, 1853.

On the Eternity of Punishments

Second Commentary

The Judgment of Reason

On the Eternity of Punishments

The Judgment of Reason

Lemma I

1. By reason we understand that a twofold kind of punishment must be distinguished: privative and positive. The former consists in the deprivation of a good which would be due to the person, to the state, or to the condition, if nothing stood in the way. The latter includes a punition by which action is taken against the guilty person, by which the guilty person is punished and dealt with harshly. You have an example of privative punishment in exile, by which a citizen is deprived of the goods of his fatherland; but of positive punishment, in the blows which are inflicted upon one guilty of crimes.

Lemma II

2. Reason perceives that God can, and indeed ought, to sanction his law with punishments both privative and positive. Lest I heap up more considerations in a matter already ascertained, I shall note this one thing: those things which are attributed to human legislators cannot be denied to God. But there is no one who does not attribute to human legislators that they both can and ought to provide for the observance of their laws by adjoining punishments both privative and positive. Indeed, that which is asserted of human legislators must by a stronger right be asserted of God; and this is evident even from the fact that human sanction presupposes divine sanction, and not conversely.

Lemma III

3. Reason teaches that it pertains much more to legislators to take punitive action against the guilty and to protect their laws than it pertains to them to distribute rewards and, by rewards, to incite men to observe the laws.

Nor does reason teach this solely, or principally, on the ground that, whereas it belongs to the legislator alone to punish, the faculty of bestowing rewards belongs also to others; but especially on these grounds: I. that the injury inflicted upon the majesty of the ruler through violation of the law is greater than the obedience rendered to him when the law is observed; II. that the harm which threatens society from violated laws is graver than the benefit which comes to it from laws observed;

III. that it is of greater importance that citizens not be wicked than that they be excellent.

These and other considerations persuade us that it belongs more to the legislator to avert crimes by threatened punishments than to exhort men to distinguished works of virtue by the promise of rewards.

Lemma IV

4. Not all the crimes perpetrated by men are of the same gravity or nature. Some crimes are lesser, some greater, some greatest. But the penal sanction ought to correspond to the gravity and nature of the crimes. Unless this were so—if all crimes were punished by the same kind of penalty—the legislator could neither be judged equitable, nor would justice be observed in the distribution of punishments. Reason therefore demands that there be certain degrees in punishments, just as the gravity and nature of crimes is manifold and various.

Lemma V

5. There are two things especially which are considered in punishments: their force and intensity, and also their duration and extension. Therefore the proportion which must be observed between crime and punishment¹ regards at once both the force and intensity of the punishment and its duration and extension, so that, according to the variety of the crime, the intensity and extension of the punishment inflicted must likewise be various.

Lemma VI

6. They are greatly mistaken who think that the measure of the duration of a punishment must be sought from the more or less prolonged time which the guilty person spent in perpetrating the crime, or during which he persisted in the crime committed. This norm is inequitable and altogether absurd, as experience teaches and reason confirms. Experience teaches that a crime perpetrated in a very brief time is punished now by perpetual exile, now by perpetual imprisonment, and now by more prolonged torments.

Nor is this indeed surprising, since the norm according to which the intensity and extension of a punishment ought to be determined is not the mere lapse of time, but the gravity of the crime. This gravity arises: I. from the matter and object of the crime itself; II. from the tenor and form of the law by which the crime is forbidden; III. from the circumstances of the person who committed the crime; IV. from all the circumstances which accompany and, as it were, clothe the act round about.

Lemma VII

7. Nor must it be passed over that the dignity of the person who is injured contributes very greatly to increasing and amplifying the gravity of the crime. This is a persuasion of the whole human race, which has always both judged and declared by words and deeds the opinion preconceived in its mind: that one and the same injury assumes, according to the dignity of the person upon whom it is inflicted, certain degrees, as it were, of turpitude and malice, to which as many corresponding degrees of punishment ought in turn to answer. And manifest reason supports this persuasion. For the more dignified a person is, the more

¹What we expounded in Lemma IV.

perfect a right he has to obedience; whence he cannot be injured without a more atrocious injury.

Lemma VIII

8. Hence it follows that an injury inflicted upon God is the greatest of all, since by it the most perfect right and the most perfect duty are violated. The most perfect right is violated because God, on account of the infinite excellence of his nature, has, so to speak, an infinite right to obedience.

The most perfect duty is violated because there is no creature which is not bound by the greatest obligation of all to render to God the supreme honor of which it is capable.

Theorem I

Well-considered reason finds no contradiction in the fact that God has appointed a certain time after which there remains to sinners no hope of obtaining pardon.

9. Demonstration. The annals of history bear witness that human princes have more than once adopted this course: that they willed every hope of pardon to be taken away either from rebellious provinces or from certain citizens unless they returned to their duty within an appointed and definite time. But well-considered reason neither disapproves nor condemns those things which the annals of history relate, but approves and commends them. Therefore it will also approve and commend it if God, who is the Prince of princes and the Lord of those who rule,² employs the same right which human princes claim for themselves. Namely, reason will approve that a definite time be appointed by God, beyond which no hope of obtaining pardon remains to men who do not return to their duty.

10. And why would reason not approve this? By what title would it disapprove? Must the door of pardon always remain open with God so that the door of sinning may never be closed to men? By what right can men exact from God that God never, at any time, deny pardon to them when they sin? By what duty is God bound toward men to bestow pardon upon them at every time?

I shall add another consideration: Does reason possess some clear and indubitable argument by which it might confirm that God is bound even once to grant pardon to sinners? I shall not altogether deny that some conjectures are available; but I would not dare to affirm that a clear and indubitable argument is available.

For whence would this argument be sought? Perhaps from the divine goodness toward men? But this is a goodness which is not separated from justice, which is free in its external communication of itself, and which manifested itself sufficiently by creating man and adorning him with safeguards by the use of which, if he had so willed, he would have observed the law and would not have offended the divine majesty.

Perhaps from the weakness of the creature? But this weakness was divinely strengthened; and although the creature could fall by its nature, it did not therefore

²Apoc. 19:16.

actually fall by sinning except because it freely willed to do so and freely chose to prefer the creature to the Creator.

Let it therefore remain fixed that from no principle of reason is it gathered that God could not confine within certain limits the time in which pardon might be hoped for.

Theorem II

Well-considered reason finds no contradiction in the fact that the time appointed by God for obtaining pardon is confined within the bounds of mortal life.

11. Demonstration. It was declared above,³ and is understood from an inspection of the nature of the matter, that a supreme prince can, with the rights of justice and equity preserved, define by an enacted law that the faculty of obtaining pardon be granted only within a certain time. Therefore God also will be able, with the rights of justice and equity preserved, to sanction by an enacted law that the time for obtaining pardon be circumscribed by the limits of the present life.

12. And why could he not? Perhaps because man has a right to obtain a longer time? But such a right can be imagined; it cannot be proved.

Moreover, if man had a right to obtain a longer time, I ask: who will appoint the limits of this time? Man himself? But it does not belong to man, who is subject to the law, to prescribe to the legislator the time during which it is lawful to hope for pardon.

Perhaps the very nature of things will appoint limits of this kind? Yet from the nature of things this one thing is had: once a violation of the law has been posited, the legislator is at liberty to execute in deed the sanction threatened and to take punitive action against the guilty according to the norm of the law. God alone therefore remains, who, according to the supreme right which he possesses, may define the limits within which pardon for the crime contracted can be obtained.

Rightly, therefore, did we say that nothing discordant, nothing which is disproved by well-considered reason, is found in the fact that God willed the limits of the present life to be likewise the limits for obtaining pardon.

Theorem III

It is most fully consonant with the principles of reason that the limits of the present life should likewise be judged the limits for obtaining pardon.

13. Demonstration. It must frankly be admitted that there is no principle known by reason alone from which, by a consequence both legitimate and necessary, it is inferred that the hope of pardon cannot be extended beyond the limits of the present life.

For what principle of this kind would there be? Whence would it be derived? From the divine attributes? But among the divine attributes there stands forth and is eminent the fact that God is the Lord of his own gifts, that he can always raise up fallen man and save him once raised up by imparting pardon.

³Namely, nos. 9-10.

From the nature of things? Certainly the nature of things could be urged if the whole man, all that he is, perished with the present life. But his better part remains surviving: the natural liberty of the will, which, at least if it is divinely assisted, can repent and at length make satisfaction to God in some manner for the injury inflicted.

Nor should you infer from this that even probable reasons are lacking which persuade us that it is most fitting for the hope of pardon to be confined within the compass of the present life. Reasons of this kind are present, some of which I shall indicate.

14. The first is sought from a certain anticipation by which the human race seems always to have been persuaded that the time for meriting and demeriting is restricted to this life, and that after this life there is no place except either for reward for deeds well done or for punishment for deeds wickedly done.

There is added the fact that, although the soul remains surviving after death, nevertheless man, who consists of soul and body, ceases to be. But the law was given to man, the duty of obeying was enjoined upon man, and the sanction was proposed to man. Therefore it belongs to man to make satisfaction for the faults contracted; and when man ceases to be, there seems able to remain no place for satisfaction and pardon.

Furthermore, suppose that God had willed the hope of pardon and condonation to remain even after the final day. Do you think that sufficient provision would have been made for the good

and order of human society? The good and order of human society depend chiefly upon men holding it as certain that after death they must render an account of the things they have done, and that they will receive reward or punishment according to the nature of their acts. Therefore whatever hinders this persuasion, whatever enervates it, is exceedingly hostile to the good and order of society. But the knowledge, or even a not improbable conjecture, that after death every faculty of escaping divine vengeance is not taken away greatly hinders that persuasion and enervates its efficacy; and, by furnishing men with the hope of reparation after death, gives them courage to indulge themselves in the present life and to contemn the observance of their duties for the sake of present advantage and delight. Since, therefore, God is the author and defender of the good and order of human society, he must be judged to speak truly who contends that God willed every hope of pardon and reparation to cease together with the present life.

Theorem IV

Well-considered reason finds nothing absurd in the fact that one who dies subject to sin should pay punishment for as long as he exists.

15. Demonstration. Suppose that in human society a certain time has been appointed, after the lapse of which a prince has declared by an enacted law that no pardon is granted for crimes contracted, but that punitive action is to be taken against each and every person according to the norm of justice. Certainly, if those guilty of crimes do not use the opportunity granted and permit the appointed time for attaining pardon to pass by, no one would reproach the prince if he took

punitive action against them according to the norm of justice and chastised them even with a perpetual punishment in proportion to the gravity of the crime.

Who, therefore, would dare to reproach God if in the other life he punishes, according to the tenor of the law, wicked men who have contemned in the present life the opportunity of obtaining pardon, and exacts from them punishments which will last as long as they themselves remain? This manner of acting fittingly agrees with the natures of things: that those who have been unwilling to make use of the indulgence of the prince should experience his vengeance.

16. Furthermore, human reason perceives nothing discordant, repugnant, or unjust in the fact that the duration of the punishment and of the fault for which the punishment is inflicted should be one and the same. For someone is worthy of being punished for as long as he remains bound by the guilt of the fault. But the guilt of a fault which is not forgiven continually remains. Therefore, if it is never forgiven after death, it will continually remain; and one who continually remains bound by the guilt of the fault will continually be worthy of being punished. Therefore a punishment which after the present life lasts as long as the sinner exists can be disapproved only on the condition

that the time of condonation and pardon is restricted to this mortal life unjustly.

But three things have been demonstrated by us: I. that it is in no way contrary to reason that the time of pardon be defined by certain limits;⁴ II. that it is likewise not contrary to reason that these limits be contained within the compass of the present life;⁵ III. that it accords beautifully with reason that the hope of condonation and pardon not be prolonged beyond the time of the present life.⁶ Therefore, far from being contrary to reason, it rather accords most beautifully with reason that those who die their final day bound by the guilt of a fault should pay punishments for as long as they exist.

Theorem V

Well-considered reason finds nothing absurd in the fact that those who die bound by fault should pay punishments which will endure perpetually.

17. Demonstration. We concluded in the preceding discussion⁷ that it is not contrary to reason, but rather consonant with reason, that those who depart from life bound by the guilt of a fault should be punished for as long as they exist. But the condition of the human soul is such that it never perishes and always exists and lives. Therefore it is impossible for it to be contrary to reason that those who complete the course of the present life as enemies of God and subject to the penal sanction should be punished with punishments which will endure perpetually.

18. And why, I ask, would this be contrary to reason? Because they would be punished undeservedly? But guilt itself is a sufficient desert; therefore, while the guilt always remains, the worthiness of punishment likewise always remains.

⁴Compare nos. 9-10.

⁵Compare nos. 11-12.

⁶Compare nos. 13-14.

⁷The preceding theorem.

But what if sinners repent, retract their deed, and flee to the divine mercy? I hear the objection, but at the same time I see that these things are objected in vain. Let it be granted that sinners both can and will do all these things in the other age. What has been done is not thereby rendered undone; nor does it thereby cease to be true that, for as long as they lived, the divine goodness was contemned by them; nor is it thereby false that God could circumscribe the time of pardon and condonation by the limits of mortal life.

Wherefore, if anything follows from the objection proposed, it is this: that God is at liberty to have mercy also upon those who have died as sinners. But it in no way follows either that God ought to have mercy upon them, or that God could not have chosen beforehand an order of providence of this kind, by the establishment of which neither remission nor pardon ought to be granted to those who have put off this mortality bound by sin.

Scholion

19. This truth is of such great moment, and human sentiment resists it so greatly, that it is worthwhile to establish belief in it also by another path and in another manner. This we now undertake.

Theorem VI

Well-considered reason finds nothing absurd in the fact that God sanctions his laws with privative punishments of such a kind that they endure perpetually.

20. Demonstration. There is no commonwealth which does not possess the right of taking punitive action against certain crimes of citizens by perpetual deprivation of a common good. Hence, in every commonwealth, there is the right of inflicting death and of imposing perpetual exile. But one who denies to God that which all concede to the supreme human magistrates must necessarily be foolish. Therefore there inheres in God the right to sanction his laws with punishments of such a kind that they are perpetual.

21. And indeed, why would this right not inhere in him? Is God's dominion over men not supreme? Indeed it is supremely so, since he himself is both the creator and preserver of men, and all human things depend upon his command.

But perhaps man is unequal to bearing perpetual punishment? Certainly, if the whole man should perish together with the body and no immortal soul should survive; certainly, if that which is and is called perpetual, because it is bounded by no limit, were not finite.

But is that proportion which justice demands in the distribution of punishments lacking between perpetual punishment and a crime committed by man? By no means—whether you inspect the nature of the right which belongs to God over men, or regard the duties by which men are obliged to render every manner of obedience to God.

The right of God over men is altogether supreme: it is the right of the Creator, of the Lord, and of the supreme Legislator. Therefore it is a right which can be sanctioned by the greatest punishments of all, lest it be violated.

But the duties by which men are bound to obey God correspond to God's right over men: namely, they are most perfect, they are absolute, they are supreme. Therefore their violation is that which can be prevented by the supreme punishments.

Wherefore we have shown that no contradiction appears in the fact that God sanctions his laws with privative punishments which will endure perpetually.

Theorem VII

Well-considered reason finds nothing absurd in the fact that the divine laws are sanctioned by positive punishments which are likewise perpetual.

22. Demonstration. Most of those considerations by which we confirmed the preceding theorem also look to this point and are fittingly employed to prove that which we now defend. Fittingly employed is the argument sought from God's supreme dominion over men, and fittingly employed likewise is that which we drew either from the nature of the divine right or from the nature of the duties by which men are obliged.

To these is added the fact that, if it is not subject to reproach in civil society that the guilty are punished by positive penalties which will not cease before death, neither can it be subject to reproach that punitive action is taken against violators of the divine laws by positive punishments of such a kind that they last for as long as the guilty themselves exist.

Moreover, nothing inheres in positive and perpetual punishments which does not correspond to sin: not perpetuity, since guilt itself can be perpetual; not the fact that they inflict pain and create distress, since it is equitable that the illicit delight of sin be punished by pains and distresses. Therefore punishments which are positive and perpetual do not exceed the desert of sin; consequently they can be inflicted, and if they are in fact inflicted, there is available to the sinner no cause for a just complaint which is approved by reason.

This is all the more so because the use of that means by which men are most greatly deterred and are more effectively contained within the limits of their duties would perversely be denied to God. But a means of this kind does not differ from positive and perpetual punishments; for since man is led especially by the senses, he is moved more vehemently by those punishments which fall under the apprehension of the senses and the severity of which is established by experience.

Theorem VIII

Well-considered reason approves that the divine laws are sanctioned by perpetual punishments both privative and positive.

23. Demonstration. It accords most excellently with reason that God be, and be judged to be, the author of a moral order of such a kind that those who observe it attain the end of the order, which is comprised in perpetual felicity, while those who transgress and violate it fall away from the end of the order and incur perpetual misery.

For such an order both corresponds to the natures of things and appears expressed in material nature itself.

But the perpetuity of punishments is connected and coheres with an order of this kind once it has been appointed. Therefore well-considered reason approves that the moral order be fortified by perpetual punishments.

24. Again, that form of sanction cannot fail to accord with reason by which the divine honor is more fittingly provided for and human actions are regarded according to their dignity. But the divine honor is injured almost infinitely by sin, and the sins of men contract an almost infinite malice.

The divine honor is injured almost infinitely. This is understood if there be regarded, on the one side, the infinite dignity of God and the most perfect right by which he exacts honor from creatures, and, on the other, the infinite vileness of man and the most perfect duty by which he is obliged to honor God. Moreover, the malice of sin flows from the same causes from which the injury to God arises, and corresponds proportionately to the injury to God.

Since, therefore, the injury to God is almost infinite, the malice of sin also seems to touch the limits of the infinite. Therefore a sanction which makes satisfaction to the divine honor and by which the sins of men are regarded according to their dignity must approach the limits of the infinite, insofar as this can be done, and must express the infinite itself in some manner.

But it cannot approach the limits of the intensive infinite, nor in any way express the intensive infinite. Therefore it is exceedingly fitting that it approach the limits of the extensive infinite and in some measure depict the extensive infinite.

But it is that which is indefinite that depicts the extensive infinite and touches the limits of the extensive infinite. Therefore it is exceedingly fitting that violation of the divine law be sanctioned by indefinite and perpetual punishments.

25. Furthermore, a sanction of such a kind as a man might scorn not altogether without cause, and by the establishment of which it would be perpetually true that sin had not harmed the sinner, is altogether unworthy of God.

Come now, and suppose that punitive action is taken by God against sins only by punishments finite in duration. What will follow? This will follow first: that divine punishment would be scorned by man not altogether without cause.

For if it is finite, in comparison with the indefinite duration which remains it can be held as a point in comparison with a line extending indefinitely. Namely, it can be neglected not absurdly.

By a comparison I shall make what I think more evident. The ratio of any finite time to indefinite duration is less than that of one instant of the present life to the sum of the moments in which the duration of an entire life consists. Certainly, the latter ratio is between finite and finite, but the former is established between finite and indefinite. But it would belong to an altogether delicate and almost effeminate spirit to be greatly moved by a punishment which, destined to last for only a single instant of the present life, would have no force for the remaining course of life. Therefore

it would belong much more to a delicate and effeminate spirit to be greatly moved by a punishment which, comprised within a finite circuit, would produce no effect throughout an indefinite duration.

But a second thing also would follow: that it would be perpetually true that sin had not harmed those who sinned. For when the appointed time of punishment

had elapsed, an indefinite time free of punishment would remain, during which indefinite time sinners would be at liberty to say: “We indeed sinned; but perpetually we shall experience no detriment from the sins by which we offended God and trampled upon the divine laws.”

Therefore, lest we fall into these and other absurdities of this kind, we must conclude that it was exceedingly fitting for perpetual punishments to be adjoined to the divine laws.

26. This is evident also from the fact that otherwise neither the observance of the moral order nor the good of human society would seem to have been provided for according to what was fitting.

Let histories be unrolled, let the annals of nations be consulted, and let daily experience be questioned. What do we learn? These are the things which we learn. We learn, I. that the path of virtue is arduous and that human nature shrinks from it. We learn, II. that human minds are very prone to vices, are vehemently enticed by the sweetness of the senses, and are not greatly moved by the bare appearance of rectitude. We learn, III. that there is need of continual exertion of the mind lest duties be violated and justice be injured. And finally we learn, IV. that without great virtues societies either are overthrown or so gradually rush toward worse things that at length they perish.

But what follows from this? That it is altogether necessary that men not lack motives by which they may be effectively deterred from transgression of their duties. But how are you to deter them effectively? By the threat of an evil of such a kind that they shudder at it and, in order to avoid it, forcefully repress and constantly restrain the incentives of sin, although most vehement.

But will so great a force inhere in the threat of an evil which will cease, which is finite, and from which men have nothing to fear perpetually? That which ceases and which you will at length avoid either does not deter or does not deter to such a degree that it can appear adequate for containing men in their duty.

Therefore the love by which God pursues the observance of order, and the providence by which he governs human society, seem to demand that the punishments by which the divine laws are sanctioned be eternal.

27. In order that these considerations may strike minds even more effectively, we propose some arguments employed by the ancients.

I. Accordingly, Augustine, in the work *The City of God*,⁸ asks: “Why is it unjust that, whereas the judges of this world, punishing many sins by the sword, exclude men forever from the society of human life, the Lord of the eternal city should cast out forever from his city the impious and his enemies, who sin unceasingly, and cause those who are impure and unjust toward God and neighbor, perpetually malevolent, to remain under his wrath and the curse of him and of the law?”

Theodore, bishop of Abucara, agrees, writing in his disputation against Origen:⁹ “We know all justice either from the law of God, or from laws which men have enacted, or from natural things. But none of these kinds of justice inflicts a temporal punishment. A man commits fornication, theft, or murder in the space

⁸Book XXI, chapter XI.

⁹Disputation XIV, in *Library of the Ancient Fathers*, vol. IV.

of one hour; but the law of God and the laws of men, by condemning a murderer to capital punishment and visiting an extreme penalty upon some criminal, do not take punitive action against him for the space of one hour. Rather, if they punish him by death, they visit him with an eternal punishment; or if they flog him, they thereby inflict upon him prolonged pain. Indeed, if you also caught an adulterer with your wife or daughter, you would judge that he should not be punished for the space of one hour, but slain—which is indeed the eternal punishment of men. But the very natures of things also conduct themselves in the same manner. For when we have been forbidden, for example, to drink cold water or to use any harmful kind of food, and nevertheless strive after what is forbidden, we assuredly pay prolonged punishments. Thus it very often happens that from drinking cold water, contact with fire, or the use of vinegar, we incur a continual disease; but nature is most just.”

II. Basil has these most excellent words:¹⁰ “This is one of the devices of the devil: that men, as though forgetful of these and like things which are set down in very many places of the sacred writings, may fashion for themselves an end of punishments, so that they might sin with greater audacity.”

Jerome also presses this argument, gravely warning:¹¹ “This perverse dogma utterly overturns the fear of God, while men easily lapse into vices, thinking that even the devil, who is the author and fountain of all sins, can be saved once he has done penance.”

III. There is also another argument which Basil urges in the passage cited: “If there will at some time be an end of eternal punishment, without controversy there will also be an end of eternal life. But if we can in no way understand this concerning eternal life, what reason can be brought forward why eternal punishment is said to have an end? For the addition of eternity is adjoined equally to both the one and the other.”

IV. Jerome, however, assails the opinion of those who did not fear to teach that there would one day be a restoration of the damned as a plainly unworthy invention, when he proceeds in the same passage which we cited a little before: “For if all rational creatures are equal, and by their own choice are either raised upward by virtues or plunged into the depths by vices, and if after a long circuit and infinite ages there will be a restoration of all things and one dignity of those who serve, what distinction will there be

between a virgin and a prostitute? What difference will there be between the Mother of the Lord and, what it is a crime even to say, the victims of public lusts? Will the devil and Gabriel be the same? The Apostles and the demons the same? The Prophets and the false prophets the same? The Martyrs and the persecutors the same? Imagine whatever you please: double the years and times, and heap infinite ages upon the torments; if the end of all is alike, all the past is as nothing, because we do not ask what we once were, but what we shall always be.”

V. Wherefore, lest anyone, led by a fallacious persuasion, become estranged from right reason, he adds:¹² “We know that God is merciful, nor do we who are sinners

¹⁰In the *Shorter Rules*, interpretation CCLXVII.

¹¹Commentary on Jonah 3.

¹²Commentary on Jonah 3.

delight in his cruelty; but we read:¹³ ‘The Lord is merciful and just, and our God hath mercy.’ The justice of God is encompassed by mercy, and it proceeds to judgment with such an escort: he so spares that he judges, he so judges that he has mercy. ‘Mercy and truth have met each other; justice and peace have kissed each other.’”¹⁴

Theorem IX

Well-considered reason, far from condemning it, approves that men who depart from life bound by sin immediately incur perpetual punishments.

28. Demonstration. We have shown, I. that reason finds nothing absurd in the fact that God sanctions the laws enacted by him with perpetual punishments both privative and positive.¹⁵ We have shown, II. that it accords beautifully with reason that God has sanctioned the laws enacted by him with punishments of this kind.¹⁶ But in addition we have shown, I. that reason finds nothing absurd in the fact that God has appointed a certain time after whose lapse no hope of condonation and pardon would remain;¹⁷ II. that it likewise finds nothing absurd in the fact that this time predetermined by God is contained within the limits of mortal life;¹⁸ and finally, III. that it accords with the principles of reason that the limits of the present life be judged also the limits for obtaining pardon.¹⁹

It therefore remains demonstrated, I. that reason finds nothing absurd in the fact that immediately after death men bound by sin incur perpetual punishments; II. that it accords well with reason that those who depart from life subject to sin be punished by perpetual punishments.

Theorem X

A revelation which teaches that those who depart from life subject to sin are to be punished by perpetual punishments contains nothing which is contrary to reason—indeed, nothing which does not accord well with reason.

29. Demonstration. Just as it is not contrary to reason that those who die their final day bound by sin should immediately incur perpetual punishments, so reason most greatly approves this order of providence.²⁰ Therefore a revelation which teaches that this order of providence was in fact appointed by God is not contrary to reason, but rather fittingly accords with the principles of reason.

¹³Ps. 114:5.

¹⁴Ps. 84:11.

¹⁵Nos. 20-22.

¹⁶Nos. 23 ff.

¹⁷Nos. 9-10.

¹⁸Nos. 11-12.

¹⁹Nos. 13-14.

²⁰What we demonstrated in the preceding theorem.

Theorem XI

The Christian revelation, which teaches that men who die unexpiated are immediately to be punished by perpetual punishments, far from being contrary to reason, harmonizes amicably with reason.

30. Demonstration. A revelation which numbers among the heads of its doctrine this one also—that those who die infected by sin are condemned to perpetual punishments—is not contrary to reason, but harmonizes with reason.²¹ Therefore the Christian revelation, which in fact embraces this head of doctrine, far from conflicting with reason, accords with reason.

²¹ What we showed in no. 29.

On the Fire of Hell

Not Metaphorical

Biblical Commentary

On the Fire of Hell

Not Metaphorical

Biblical Dissertation

Lemma I

1. Unless some limit is placed upon metaphorical interpretations, nothing certain will remain in the Bible, nothing ratified and fixed, nothing which can legitimately be inferred from it either for asserting the articles of faith or for convicting errors opposed to the faith. That which we understand by reason we see confirmed by experience, especially in the commentaries of those who take their name from Socinus or are called rationalists.

Lemma II

2. The limit to be placed upon metaphorical interpretations is this: they ought not to be presumed, but must be confirmed by evident arguments; and unless this is done, they are to be rejected at once, without any examination being undertaken.

Lemma III

3. Moreover, metaphorical interpretations, which must never be admitted unless they are proved, are especially to be kept away from those passages which contain either a first institution, or a precept, or a law, or a sentence. For arguments beyond every exception are necessary in order that we may believe that, in passages of this kind, a transferred, metaphorical, and more remotely sought sense is to be preferred to the proper and obvious sense.

Lemma IV

4. In the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew there is set forth both the supreme sentence¹ which Christ the Judge will pronounce against the reprobate, and the execution of that same sentence is declared.² Therefore, unless altogether decisive arguments stand in the way, the obvious and proper sense of the words must be retained in both passages.

Lemma V

5. Such an argument, moreover, is not one which someone might perhaps seek from those things contained in the same chapter from verse one through verse thirty-one. Namely, from verse one to verse fourteen the parable of the virgins is related, and from verse fourteen to verse thirty-one the parable of the talents distributed is related. Will the discourse which extends from verse thirty-one to the end of the chapter therefore also be parabolic? One who concluded thus would seem to be playing in a grave matter.

That the discourse is parabolic through verse thirty-one is declared both by its subject matter and circumstances and by the words themselves. Thus verse one begins, *τότε ὁμοιωθήσεται ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν*, “then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened ...”; and verse fourteen, *ὥσπερ γὰρ ἄνθρωπος*, “for even as a man....” But none of these things occurs which pertains to those matters read from verse thirty-one to verse forty-six. Indeed, each and every thing bears the

¹Matt. 25:41.

²Matt. 25:46.

appearance of historical narration and must be understood as historical narration requires: namely, properly and literally.

Theorem I

The sentence of Christ against the reprobate is explained.

6. Since each of the words of which it consists is of the gravest moment, we shall illustrate them with a brief commentary.

Thus, therefore, Christ, clothed with the person of the supreme Judge, says to the reprobate:³ *πορεύεσθε ἀπ' ἐμοῦ*, “depart from me,” and, as can not undeservedly be supplied,⁴ *go εἰς τόπον τὸν ἴδιον*, “into the place worthy of you and which is due to you.”

In the eighteenth chapter of Matthew⁵ the verb *βάλλεσθαι* is employed, which is to be cast with the greatest violence; and in the seventh chapter of Matthew⁶ these words are attributed to Christ: *ἀποχωρεῖτε ἀπ' ἐμοῦ*, “withdraw from me.” More vehemently in the parallel passage in Luke:⁷ *ἀπόστητε ἀπ' ἐμοῦ*, words which are taken from the Alexandrian interpreters at the sixth Psalm⁸ and correspond to the Hebrew phrase *יָמָּוּרָהּ*.

7. There follows the designation of those whom Christ repels not without execration: *οἱ καταραμένοι*, “the accursed,” whom elsewhere one may see called *ἀδοκίμους*, “little approved”;⁹ *ἤδη κεκριμένους*, “already judged”;¹⁰ *εἰς ὀργὴν τεθέντας*, “appointed unto wrath”;¹¹ or *εἰς τοῦτο τὸ κρίμα προγεγραμμένους*, “written beforehand unto this judgment of condemnation”;¹² *σκεύη εἰς ἀτιμίαν*, “vessels unto dishonor”;¹³ and *σκεύη ὀργῆς, καταρτισμένα εἰς ἀπώλειαν*, “vessels of wrath, prepared for destruction”;¹⁴ whom *ὁ θεὸς ἀπόσατο*, “God has cast off.”¹⁵

8. But whither shall they go? What things await them? They shall go *εἰς τὸ πῦρ τὸ αἰώνιον*, “into eternal fire.” Eternal fire is their proper place, which elsewhere the Scriptures call either *ἄδην*, hell;¹⁶ or *τόπον βασάνου*, a place of torments;¹⁷ or *τὸ σκότος τὸ ἐξώτερον*, the exterior darkness;¹⁸ or *σειράς ζόφου*, the ropes of hell;¹⁹

³Ibid., v. 41.

⁴From Acts 1:25.

⁵Matt. 18:8: *Καλὸν σοὶ ἐστὶν εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν ζωὴν χωλὸν ἢ κυλλόν, ἢ δύο χεῖρας ἢ δύο πόδας ἔχοντα βληθῆναι εἰς τὸ πῦρ τὸ αἰώνιον*. “It is good for thee to enter into life disabled or lame, rather than, having two hands or two feet, to be cast into eternal fire.”

⁶Matt. 7:23.

⁷Luke 13:27. The Vulgate: “Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity.”

⁸Ps. 6:9: “Depart from me, all ye who work iniquity.”

⁹1 Cor. 9:27: “Lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become a reprobate.”

¹⁰John 3:18.

¹¹1 Thess. 5:9.

¹²Jude 4: “Who long ago were prescribed unto this judgment.”

¹³Rom. 9:21: “Hath not the potter power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel indeed unto honor, but another unto dishonor?”

¹⁴Ibid., v. 22: “Vessels of wrath, fitted for destruction.”

¹⁵Rom. 11:2.

¹⁶Luke 16:23.

¹⁷Luke 16:23-28; compare Matt. 18:34.

¹⁸Matt. 8:12.

or φυλακὴν, a prison;²⁰ or ἄβυσσον, the abyss;²¹ or ζῶφον τοῦ σκοτούς, the tempest of darkness;²² or δέσμους αἰδίου, eternal bonds;²³ or δλεθρον αἰώνιον, eternal destruction;²⁴ or τὸν θάνατον τὸν δεῦτερον, the second death;²⁵ or κλαυθμόν καὶ φρυγμόν ὀδόντων, weeping and gnashing of teeth;²⁶ or ἀπόλειαν, destruction,²⁷ by which not only the body but also the soul is destroyed;²⁸ or σκώληκα οὐ τελευτῶντα, the worm that does not die.²⁹

9. This is the condition of the punishment which awaits the reprobate, and Christ immediately explains its origin. For after the words εἰς τὸ πῦρ τὸ αἰώνιον, he adds τὸ ἡτοιμασμένον, “prepared.” The same verb *to prepare* is employed a little above concerning the kingdom of heaven, when the Evangelist relates the sentence of the supreme Judge calling the pious to heaven;³⁰ and the divine joys of heaven are said by the Apostle to be those ἃ ἡτοίμασεν ὁ θεός, “which God prepared for those who love him.”³¹ Therefore that same God who prepared heaven for the pious from eternity and chose them unto salvation before the foundations of the earth were laid reprobated the impious and destined for them the place due to them.

Whence it is said concerning the prison of hell in Isaiah:³² כִּי־עָרוֹךְ מֵאֲתֵמוֹל תִּפְתָּהּ. “For Topheth has been prepared since yesterday; this place also has been fitted for the king. The Lord rendered it most deep and made it most broad; the multitude of its pyre,³³ the breath of the Lord like a torrent of burning sulfur, shall be.”

In these words, which deserve to be compared with not a few passages bearing the same sense,³⁴ there is contained a most grave description of infernal damnation; indeed, the eternal destination of hell for the reprobate is also explained. For this is the force of the expression עָרוֹךְ מֵאֲתֵמוֹל, “prepared since yesterday,” because *yesterday* expresses all the time which precedes, and eternity itself, since it is proper to eternity that any order of ages whatsoever be reckoned as yesterday.³⁵

¹⁹ 2 Pet. 2:4.

²⁰ Matt. 5:26.

²¹ Luke 8:31.

²² Jude 13.

²³ Ibid., v. 6.

²⁴ 2 Thess. 1:9.

²⁵ Apoc. 20:6; 21:8.

²⁶ Matt. 22:13.

²⁷ Phil. 3:19: “Whose end is destruction.”

²⁸ Matt. 10:28: “Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”

²⁹ Mark 9:45.

³⁰ Matt. 25:34: “Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world,” κληρονομήσατε τὴν ἡτοιμασμένην ὑμῖν βασιλείαν ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου.

³¹ 1 Cor. 2:9.

³² Isa. 30:33. The Vulgate has: “For Topheth has been prepared since yesterday, prepared by the king, deep and broad. Its nourishment is fire and much wood; the breath of the Lord, like a torrent of sulfur, kindling it.”

³³ Or, as regards its pyre: קְדוֹרָה, “pyre, funeral pile.”

³⁴ 2 Thess. 2:8; Ps. 5:7; 68:22; Isa. 11:4; Hab. 2:16; Mic. 7:10; Zeph. 3:8; Apoc. 17:1; 19:20.

³⁵ Heb. 13:8: “Jesus Christ, yesterday and today; and the same forever.” Ps. 110:4 [sic; the quoted passage is Ps. 89:4]: “For a thousand years before thy eyes are as yesterday, which is past.”

10. But for whom was so great a destruction divinely prepared? *τῷ διαβόλῳ καὶ τοῖς ἀγγέλοις αὐτοῦ*, “for the devil and his angels.” Here it is worthy of notice that the name *τοῦ διαβόλου*, expressed in the singular number, is never employed in the Bible except concerning one definite transgressing angel, so that it seems to be the name of *τοῦ ἄρχοντος τῶν δαιμονίων*, “the prince of the demons,” who in the Apocalypse³⁶ is called *ὄφης ἀρχαῖος καὶ σατανᾶς*, “the ancient serpent and Satan,” and to whom his own angels are attributed, who are everywhere signified by the name *δαιμονίων*, “demons.”³⁷

Is the fire of hell therefore destined only for the transgressing angels? Nothing is more foreign to the truth, since according to the sentence of Christ all those who are of their father the devil and imitate the works of the devil must be condemned to the fire of hell.³⁸

Why, therefore, is it said to have been prepared for the devil and his angels? Because the devil and his angels sinned first; because the devil and his angels were the first of all to be cast into the fire of hell; and because, although God willed in no way to have mercy upon the angels who sinned, he had mercy upon men, who, provided that they make use of redemption through Christ, will most certainly avoid the fire of hell and will reign in heaven as coheirs of Christ.

Theorem II

By arguments sought from the sentence of Christ it is shown that the fire of hell is not metaphorical.

11. Demonstration. If at any time it is necessary to retain the proper sense of words and to abstain from metaphorical and more remotely sought interpretations, then this must especially be done when texts are being explained which contain precepts, sentences, and so forth.³⁹ But in the words of Christ which we have explained is contained the sentence which he himself, as supreme Judge of the living and the dead, will pronounce on the day of vengeance. Therefore one must adhere especially to the proper sense of the words.

But it is said: *πορεύσθε ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ ... εἰς τὸ πῦρ τὸ αἰώνιον*. Therefore, for as long as the words *τὸ πῦρ τὸ αἰώνιον*, according to the letter, express not metaphorical fire but true fire, for so long shall we understand them not of metaphorical fire but of true and real fire.

12. Nor indeed do I see why, with the proper sense neglected, recourse should be had to the metaphorical. Do the words themselves express metaphorical rather than real fire? Indeed, unless the circumstances show this, *τὸ πῦρ* will never be explained of metaphorical fire, but always of real fire. But does the nature of the matter not permit the proper sense to be maintained? Why indeed? Because neither the devil and his angels nor the souls of the reprobate can be burned by real fire. Subtly argued; but why can they not be burned? Because, since they are spirits, they cannot undergo the action of matter, which can be accomplished

³⁶ Apoc. 12:9.

³⁷ Matt. 12:24; 13:10; etc.

³⁸ John 8:44; compare 1 John 3:8.

³⁹ Compare no. 3.

only by motion. Yet souls nevertheless undergo it for as long as they inform the body. Do they cease to be spirits when they are tormented by the affection of more vehement heat? The relations between matter and spirit are not so well known to us that we can affirm indubitably what can be done and what is repugnant.

We understand that spirits are not capable of material commotion, since they are neither extended nor resistant; but we do not equally understand whether another mode is not available by which it may come about that, in consequence of a certain and definite motion of matter, spirits are affected by certain sensations. We are taught by experience that affections of the mind, now pleasant, now distressing, correspond to certain commotions of the organic body. We know for certain that it happens thus; how it happens, we do not know.

Therefore the contradiction which is objected in order that the proper sense of the words may be excluded is nonexistent. We shall consequently retain the proper sense of the words.

13. This is all the more so because the metaphorical sense is refuted by altogether weighty arguments.

It is refuted by verse forty-six, in which the execution of the sentence is described. For after the sentence of Christ has been pronounced, *πορεύεσθε εἰς τὸ πῦρ τὸ αἰώνιον*, “depart into eternal fire,” it is added that *οἱ κατηραμένοι ἀπελεύσονται*, “the accursed shall go”—whither, I ask? Evidently into metaphorical fire. Ineptly and absurdly.

It is refuted by the comparison established between the elect and the reprobate. Concerning the elect it is said that they will possess the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world,⁴⁰ and that they will go *εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον*, “into eternal life.”⁴¹ But, I think, the kingdom which the just will possess will be real, and the life which they will enjoy real. Who, therefore, could doubt whether the fire by which the reprobate will be tormented will also be real, and the punishment by which they will be punished real?

It is refuted from the verb *to prepare*, which Christ employs.⁴² Addressing the elect, he says: “Possess the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”; and to the reprobate: “Depart into eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.” Come now, of what kind must the kingdom prepared for the elect from the origin of the world be judged? Metaphorical? But who would invent fables to that point? Therefore the fire prepared for the devil and his angels will likewise be real and not metaphorical.

Finally, what will follow as a consequence from departure *εἰς τὸ πῦρ τὸ αἰώνιον*, “into eternal fire,” is explained in verse forty-six by these words: “And the accursed shall go *εἰς κόλασιν αἰώνιον*, into eternal punishment.” Therefore the effect proceeding from eternal fire will be the eternal punishment of the accursed. But it belongs to real and not metaphorical fire to torture, afflict, and torment. Therefore the eternal fire into which the accursed shall depart is real, not metaphorical.

⁴⁰Matt. 25:34.

⁴¹Ibid., v. 46.

⁴²Matt. 25:34, 41.

Theorem III

The real fire of hell is proved from those things which are attributed to it in the New Testament.

14. Demonstration. Properties and attributes are those things which declare the natures of things, and from which it is known certainly what things are like. But those things are said concerning the fire of hell in the New Testament, and those things are ascribed to it, which demonstrate real fire and do not accord with metaphorical fire. Here you would fittingly refer *τὴν κάμινον τοῦ πυρός*, “the furnace of fire,” where the tares, that is, the reprobate, will be burned;⁴³ here *τὴν λίμνην τὴν καιομένην πυρὶ καὶ θείῳ*, “the lake burning with fire and sulfur,”⁴⁴ into which all who do not belong to the heavenly Jerusalem will be cast; here *τὸν καπνὸν τοῦ βασανισμοῦ*, “the smoke of torments,”⁴⁵ which ascends unto ages of ages; here *φλόγα, ἐν ᾗ ὀδυνῶνται*, “the flame in which those who are damned are tormented”;⁴⁶ here *πυρὸς ζήλον*, “the zeal of fire,”⁴⁷ by which zeal of fire the adversaries will be consumed; here *πῦρ τὸ ἄσβεστον*, “the unquenchable fire,”⁴⁸ by which the wicked will be punished; and here *πυρὸς φλόγα, διδόντα ἐκδίκησιν τοῖς μὴ εἰδόσι θεόν*, “the flame of fire taking vengeance upon those who have not known God.”⁴⁹

But who does not understand that these things are of such a kind as accord with real fire and all but conflict with metaphorical fire? Who, when speaking of metaphorical fire, would make mention of a furnace, smoke, a lake, a flame, and burning? If these things do not suffice for demonstrating real fire, what things, I ask, will suffice? The word *fire* is repeated, is redoubled; those things which are proper to real fire and which accompany it are repeated and redoubled. Who, therefore, would continue to doubt whether the fire of which the Scriptures speak, and by which the reprobate are said to be tormented, is real?

Theorem IV

The real fire of hell is proved from those things which are attributed to it in the Old Testament.

15. Demonstration. If it were my intention to relate each and every thing which occurs in the Old Testament pertaining to this matter, I would undertake a lengthy, yet unnecessary, labor. I shall be content to have related a few testimonies. In the Psalms we read:⁵⁰ “He shall rain snares upon sinners; fire and sulfur and the spirit of storms shall be the portion of their cup.” And again:⁵¹ “Thou shalt make them as a furnace of fire.... The Lord in his wrath shall trouble them, and fire

⁴³ Ibid. 13:42.

⁴⁴ Apoc. 21:8.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 14:11.

⁴⁶ Luke 16:24.

⁴⁷ Heb. 10:27.

⁴⁸ Mark 9:44.

⁴⁹ 2 Thess. 1:8: “In a flame of fire taking vengeance upon those who have not known God.”

⁵⁰ Ps. 10:7.

⁵¹ Ps. 20:10.

shall devour them.” In Job:⁵² “All darkness is hidden in his secret places; a fire which is not kindled shall devour him.” In Isaiah:⁵³ “Behold, the Lord will come in fire, and his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his fury in indignation and his rebuke in a flame of fire; for the Lord shall judge in fire and with his sword unto all flesh.” And again:⁵⁴ “Their worm shall not die, and their fire shall not be extinguished.” In the prophecy of Malachi:⁵⁵ “For behold, the day shall come, kindled as a furnace; and all the proud and all who work impiety shall be stubble, and the coming day shall set them aflame.”

Now who would judge that by these colors not real but metaphorical fire is depicted? The discussion concerns a fire which burns, which grows into a flame, which devours, which is not extinguished, and before which the reprobate are like stubble to be set alight. But these things demonstrate real fire and cannot be twisted toward metaphorical fire without violence.

Theorem V

The real fire of hell is proved by other passages of the Scriptures.

16. Demonstration. It is established by more than one example that the sins of men have been punished by God with fire. God exercised his vengeance upon the Sodomites with fire:⁵⁶ “Therefore the Lord rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the Lord out of heaven.” Nadab and Abihu, offering incense with profane fire, were consumed by heavenly fire:⁵⁷ “And fire coming forth from the Lord devoured them, and they died before the Lord.” Two captains of fifty sent to Elijah are burned with their soldiers by fire sent down from heaven:⁵⁸ “Behold, fire came down from heaven and devoured the two captains of fifty ... and the fifty men who were with them.” Peter, however, testifies⁵⁹ that “the day of the Lord shall come as a thief, in which the heavens shall pass away with great violence, but the elements shall be dissolved with heat, and the earth and the works which are in it shall be burned up.”

Nothing, therefore, is more evident from the analogy of the Scriptures than that God has been accustomed to take punitive action against the impious by fire and to employ fire as an instrument by which he exercises his justice. Since, therefore, it is repeated so often and in such various manners that the reprobate are punished by fire, thrust into a furnace of fire, and burned by flames, who would tolerate metaphorical interpretations being obtruded after the proper sense has been neglected? Those who act thus conflict with the analogy of the Scriptures and must be called not interpreters but corrupters.

⁵² Job 20:26.

⁵³ Isa. 66:15-16.

⁵⁴ Ibid., v. 24.

⁵⁵ Mal. 4:1.

⁵⁶ Gen. 19:24.

⁵⁷ Lev. 10:2.

⁵⁸ 4 Kings 1:14.

⁵⁹ 2 Pet. 3:10.

Theorem VI

The real fire of hell is proved from the name Gehenna.

17. Demonstration. Just as several other words occurring in the books of the New Testament are Hebrew or Syriac, not Greek—such as *ἄββᾶ*,⁶⁰ *ἀλληλούϊα*,⁶¹ and *ἀμήν* everywhere; *βελίαλ*,⁶² *μαμωνᾶ*,⁶³ *μεσσίας*,⁶⁴ *πάσχα*,⁶⁵ *ῥαββί*,⁶⁶ *ῥαββονί*,⁶⁷ or also *ῥαββουνί*,⁶⁸ *ῥακά*,⁶⁹ *σαβαώθ*,⁷⁰ *σάββατον*,⁷¹ *σαββατισμός*,⁷² *σατανᾶς*,⁷³ *σίκερα*,⁷⁴ *ὠσαννά*,⁷⁵—so, by the Hebrew name *γέεννα*, employed either absolutely or with an explanation added, the infernal abodes of the reprobate are explained: *ἐνοχος ἔσται τὴν γέενναν τοῦ πυρός*, “he shall be guilty of the Gehenna of fire”,⁷⁶ *εἰς γέενναν*, “into Gehenna”,⁷⁷ *ἐν γέεννῃ*,⁷⁸ *εἰς τὴν γέενναν τοῦ πυρός*, “into the Gehenna of fire”,⁷⁹ *υἱὸν γέεννης*, “a son of Gehenna”,⁸⁰ *πῶς φύγητε ἀπὸ τῆς κρίσεως τῆς γέεννης*, “how shall you flee from the judgment of Gehenna?”,⁸¹ *εἰς τὴν γέενναν*, *εἰς τὸ πῦρ τὸ ἄσβεστον*, “into Gehenna, into unquenchable fire”,⁸² *εἰς τὴν γέενναν τοῦ πυρός*, “into the Gehenna of fire”,⁸³ *ἐμβαλεῖν εἰς τὴν γέενναν*, “to cast into Gehenna”,⁸⁴ and *γλῶσσα ... φλογιζομένη ὑπὸ τῆς γέεννης*, “the tongue set on fire by Gehenna.”⁸⁵

But what do we gather from this observation which bears upon our matter? That the reprobate are tormented by real fire in the lowest abodes of hell. Certainly this is shown both by the circumlocution added more than once to the word *Gehenna* and by the derivation of the name *Gehenna* itself.

18. The circumlocution added is twofold: either simply *τὸ πῦρ*, “the fire,” or *τὸ πῦρ τὸ ἄσβεστον*, “the unquenchable fire.” But by each circumlocution real fire is

⁶⁰ Mark 14:36; Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6.

⁶¹ Apoc. 19:1, 3-4, 6.

⁶² 2 Cor. 6:15.

⁶³ Matt. 6:24.

⁶⁴ John 1:41; 4:25.

⁶⁵ Matt. 26:2, 18, and elsewhere.

⁶⁶ Matt. 23:7-8; 26:25, 49; Mark 9:5; 11:21; and frequently in John.

⁶⁷ Mark 10:51.

⁶⁸ John 20:16.

⁶⁹ Matt. 5:22.

⁷⁰ Rom. 9:29; James 5:4.

⁷¹ John 5:9, and frequently elsewhere.

⁷² Heb. 4:9.

⁷³ 2 Cor. 12:7; Matt. 4:10; and elsewhere.

⁷⁴ Luke 1:15.

⁷⁵ Matt. 21:9, 15; Mark 11:9-10.

⁷⁶ Matt. 5:22.

⁷⁷ Ibid., vv. 29-30.

⁷⁸ Ibid. 10:28.

⁷⁹ Ibid. 18:9.

⁸⁰ Ibid. 23:15.

⁸¹ Ibid., v. 33.

⁸² Mark 9:42, 45.

⁸³ Ibid., v. 47.

⁸⁴ Luke 12:5.

⁸⁵ James 3:6.

expressed. Therefore the reprobate are tormented by real fire in the lowest abodes of hell.

Now concerning the derivation of the name *Gehenna*. Solomon Glassius, in the *Appendix to the Sacred Grammar*,⁸⁶ praises as subtly devised this etymology of Bartholomaeus Westhemerus:⁸⁷ “Jerome thinks that Gehenna is named from the valley of the son of Hinnom, concerning which in Jer. 7.⁸⁸ But by what rationale or what consequence, whether of the thing or of the word, I do not see. Hence I indeed think that the Lord said ‘Gehenna of fire,’ the name being derived from the Hebrew verb *innah*, עָנָה, which signifies ‘he afflicted,’ whence *inian*, עֲנִיָּן, which signifies affliction and distress. Now it is very frequent among Greeks and Latins to prefix the letter γ or g to Hebrew words beginning with ע, as is evident even in the name *γομόρρα*. For the Hebrews pronounce *amorah*, עֲמֹרָה. Whence the Greeks, according to their custom, said *γέενναν* for *inian*, that is, ‘torment.’” Thus far he; but, if I see anything, in vain.

For, I. he indeed appeals to Greek and Latin writers in order to demonstrate that they were accustomed to prefix γ or g to Hebrew words beginning with ע; but he brings forward no examples by which he might establish that this usage was very frequent. Indeed, he cannot bring any forward if profane writers are under discussion.

But, II. if the question is restricted to the authors of the Scriptures, the affirmation of Westhemerus is not easier to prove. Certainly the example of the word עֲמֹרָה is not an indication of frequent usage. But if you seek other examples of ע changed into γ, you will scarcely find any besides עָנָה, γάζα, and עֲמָרָה, γόμορ. Therefore a most frequent usage of either this change or this addition is invented.

Indeed, III., and this is the chief point, if this occurs at times, it occurs only in proper names, such as Gomorrah and Gaza, or in one or another technical name whose signification cannot be rendered by one word, such as γόμορ. The interpreters do this because they are concerned not to explain the words themselves, but, insofar as it can be done, to express them more elegantly. But it could in no way have come about that they fashioned *γέεννα* from the word עֲנִיָּן, because עֲנִיָּן, “affliction,” is an appellative noun of a thing and is easily expressed by a Greek word. If the Evangelists and James had had this intention, they would have said *θλίψιν*, *ταλαιπωρίαν*, or *βάσανον*, not *γέενναν*.

There was therefore no reason for Westhemerus to censure Jerome’s etymology, which the more learned interpreters commonly embrace. Lightfoot, in his *Hebrew Hours*, writes:⁸⁹ “The Jews most commonly express the underworld, or the place of the damned, by the word גֵּהֲנוֹם, *gehinnom*, as could be demonstrated by infinite examples. This manner of speech was taken from the valley of Hinnom, a place infamous for foul idolatry, the howling of infants roasted for Molech, the refuse carried out, and perpetual fire, and most apt for representing the horror of the

⁸⁶Treatise III, *On the Proper Name*.

⁸⁷In the book *On the Tropes of Sacred Scripture*, p. 78.

⁸⁸Jer. 7:32.

⁸⁹At Matt. 5:22.

infernal regions.... The Chaldean paraphrast at Isa. 33:14:⁹⁰ גהנום יקידות עלם, 'Gehenna of eternal fire,' γέεννα πρὸς αἰωνίου.

19. In brief, γέεννα is the Hebrew גיהנום, *gehinnom*, or the valley of Hinnom,⁹¹ which was also called גִּיְי־בֶן־הַנֶּחֱם, "the valley of the son of Hinnom."⁹² In it a horrible τεκνοφονία, slaughter of children, was carried out by fire for the worship of the idol Molech.⁹³

In the same valley there was a higher place called *Topheth*, in which that savage immolation of children was carried out. Buxtorf, in his *Lexicon*,⁹⁴ reports from the rabbis that הנום is said from גהם, from the roaring or cry of the children who were sacrificed; but תפת from תפים, the drums which were beaten lest the parents hear the wailing of the children.

Since, therefore, both *gehinnom* and *Topheth* had this signification, and since, upon hearing these names, unheard-of torments which were inflicted especially by fire at once came to mind, it came about that the infernal abodes were called γέεννα, and γέεννα was represented as a type of the punishments of hell. Therefore, with the derivation of the name considered, it is evident that the reprobate are tormented by fire as the principal instrument, and that the fire by which they are burned is real.

Theorem VII

The real fire of hell is proved from the usage of speech in the Scriptures.

20. Demonstration. Chrysostom excellently observes⁹⁵ that in the Gospels Gehenna is threatened more often than heaven is promised. But although mention of Gehenna is so frequent, and the description of the punishments which await the reprobate so various and manifold, nevertheless it is never indicated, either expressly and explicitly or implicitly and somewhat obscurely, that those things which are predicated of fire, flames, and everlasting burnings are to be understood metaphorically. What, therefore, shall we determine? That a matter of the greatest gravity and so greatly inculcated was always expressed metaphorically, never properly, and yet no indication of metaphorical speech was exhibited? But this is abhorrent to every appearance of truth.

There is added the fact that human usage and human custom do not permit us always to speak metaphorically. Common discourse must be proper; metaphorical discourse must be rarer and such that it can be detected easily.

Moreover, you will scarcely find any head of doctrine in the Scriptures which, if it is sometimes handed down metaphorically, is not expressed more frequently, or at least sometimes, in proper terms. How, therefore, could it have come about that the punishments of the reprobate were never, even once, explained in proper terms?

⁹⁰The Vulgate interpreter: "Who among you will be able to dwell with devouring fire? Who among you will dwell with everlasting burnings?"

⁹¹Josh. 15:8.

⁹²Jer. 7:32.

⁹³4 Kings 21:6; 23:10; 2 Chron. 28:3; Jer. 7:31; 19:3-4, 6; 32:35.

⁹⁴Work cited, p. 108.

⁹⁵Homily on Psalm VII.

Finally, let all the things which are read in the Scriptures concerning the punishments of hell be joined together and considered almost in one view of the mind: “Coals shall fall upon them; thou shalt cast them down into fire; in miseries they shall not stand”;⁹⁶ “A fire is kindled in my fury; it shall burn upon you”;⁹⁷ “The vengeance of the flesh of the impious is fire and the worm”;⁹⁸ “Thou shalt make them as a furnace of fire in the time of thy countenance; the Lord in his wrath shall trouble them, and fire shall devour them”;⁹⁹ “They shall go into the Gehenna of fire”;¹⁰⁰ “into the furnace of fire”;¹⁰¹ “into the lake of fire burning with sulfur”;¹⁰² “into the lake of fire and sulfur”;¹⁰³ “into eternal fire.”¹⁰⁴ ... What, I ask, do these things demonstrate? Metaphorical fire, or real? I would dare to say that real fire cannot be expressed in human idiom if it is not expressed by forms of speech so evident and manifest as these.

Theorem VIII

The real fire of hell differs in more than one respect from that of which we have daily experience.

21. Demonstration. The principal efficient cause of the fire of the present life is God, the author and governor of nature; but of the fire of hell, it is God, the judge and avenger of sins and sinners.

The present fire is both kindled and nourished by chemical operations; but the fire of hell is stirred and preserved by the breath of the Lord.

The present fire acts upon souls only through bodies as intermediaries; but the fire of hell torments and tortures them immediately.

The present fire will at length be extinguished; but the fire of hell will endure perpetually.

The former gives light; the latter produces exterior darkness. The former, by setting aflame, dissolves and consumes; the latter afflicts and burns, and nevertheless does not destroy. The former can both be diminished and extinguished by human art; the latter eludes all efforts and is sustained by the power of God.

Corollary I

22. Therefore, to the question whether the fire of hell is the same as that which we use in the present life, it must be answered that it is indeed the same if the principal effect of tormenting and burning is regarded, but that it differs greatly from the present fire if the other effects¹⁰⁵ and the manner of acting are considered.

⁹⁶Ps. 139:11.

⁹⁷Jer. 15:14.

⁹⁸Ecclus. 7:19.

⁹⁹Ps. 20:10.

¹⁰⁰Mark 9:44, 46.

¹⁰¹Matt. 13:42.

¹⁰²Apoc. 19:20.

¹⁰³Ibid. 20:9.

¹⁰⁴Matt. 25:41.

¹⁰⁵Those which we enumerated in no. 21.

Corollary II

23. Hence the difficulties which are moved against the real fire of hell from the effects and properties of the fire customary to us must be judged of plainly no moment: that the latter burns but consumes, sets aflame but gives light, and so forth.

For when we call the fire of hell real, we do not affirm that it is the same as this fire of ours.

We call it real in order to deny that it is metaphorical; we call it real on account of the real effects of burning and scorching; we call it real because it exists not only in apprehension but in reality, and is the instrumental cause by which God punishes the reprobate and afflicts the damned.

For the rest, we freely grant—indeed, we teach—that it differs in more than one respect from the present fire.

Yet because it differs in more than one respect from the present fire, it does not follow either that it is metaphorical or that it is not real. It will be called and will be real fire for as long as it produces in the reprobate that kind of affections which is proper to customary fire, and for as long as God uses it as a means and instrument by which he takes punitive action against the reprobate.

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