

A PERENNIALIST UNIVERSALISM: ENDLESS HELL
SUBSUMED INTO ETERNAL HEAVEN

By

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INTRODUCTION

Considering the popularity of the topic these days, I have decided to pen down my understanding of Universalism. The details may change over time beyond what is written here, but the general outline and idea remains the same. I will not argue here the validity of universalism, as I believe there are enough books on the validity of the thesis already, most notably David Bentley Hart's *That All Shall Be Saved*. Others include *Grace Saves All* by David Artman, *The Inescapable Love Of God* by Thomas Talbott, the *A Larger Hope?* Volumes by Ilaria Ramelli, and a few more I have not even read yet. These are all Christian books, but I believe there is at least one approving Muslim book on the thesis. I have no knowledge of any other books beyond that but it would be an interesting adventure to find out. What I want to do here is to give a sketch of my understanding of the “metaphysics of eschatology” based on the work of, most notably, Frithjof Schuon, whose essay on Eschatology I routinely go back to for guidance ¹. Of course, as this essay is based on the perennialist understanding, it is also influenced by Rene Guenon and Ananda Coomaraswamy, whose work has been invaluable in helping to understand Schuon, and vice versa; not to mention David Bentley Hart, whose work bears the unmistakable imprint of Vedantic and Neoplatonic metaphysics, something common to him and the perennialists, which so far many of the critics have either missed or wrongly condemned as pagan or “heresy”. But, before I sketch this “system” out, I want to make some clarifications concerning it.

A seductive critique of Schuon and the perennialist (or Traditionalist) school is that although it claims to be universal, it is one of the most “tribalist” (for lack of a better word). Perennialists often say the perennial wisdom is for a few, and not for the many, which seems to contradict the perennial thesis in the first place. Some seem to think that Schuon and others treat their work as the only “complete thesis”, while others are “incomplete”. This critique misses the point, and more or less misrepresents the traditionalist school. Guenon, for example, disliked calling his work “philosophy”. My reservations aside, I do think he had a very good reason for this. People hear “philosophy” and think in self-enclosed systems of thoughts or theories in a more or less modern “scientific” sense. When the word is uttered, someone somewhere is trying to “classify” it into one system or the other, like “determinism”, “monism”, “Hegelianism”,

¹ Frithjof Schuon, ‘Universal Eschatology’, 6–14.

“Platonism”, etc, with the assumption that these systems are exclusive with almost no hope of reconciliation. One is assumed to either be a Unitarian or a Trinitarian, a classical theist or a panentheist. I must either accept determinism or accept the fact of free will. These kinds of oppositions are not in the spirit of perennialist thought, one only has to read Ananda Coomaraswamy to see this. For example, during a discussion concerning the Doctrine of Divine Simplicity (DDS), my interlocutor said it had “problems” and they needed to be “solved”. These “problems” were more or less the inability to put the doctrine in words that would completely describe it. My own “problem” with his “problems” is that such a thing is impossible, since we are talking about God and the argument from composition is as much a mystical prayer as it is a logical argument. There are presuppositions and visions of the cosmos that underlie it that are pretty much lost for most modern people. The argument itself is meant to lead one to a vision of the Simple God, and not to describe God exhaustively, as then it wouldn’t be God it was pointing to. As Schuon would say, *it is not a matter of drawing “conclusions” from given “proofs,” but on the contrary, of “perceiving” the transcendent Real through its “signs” or “traces”*. Similarly, for the perennialist, we do not construct “systems” as such, which are by definition exclusive. Even Schuon would say that anything put in words and concepts is a “form” and “forms” exclude one another. Reading Schuon or Guenon to find a universal “system” is to contradict their words and to miss the spirit of the work, because they admitted that their words are simply guides to the perennial truth, and not the perennial truth itself, which is inexpressible. Similarly, “God” is the “name” of the unnameable, yet there are levels to reach to attain knowledge of this unnameable, up to the point of “extinction”. Their words, which can constitute a “system” of some sort, is meant to lead beyond systems, to the inexpressible, and they encourage us to understand the traditional religions accordingly, not simply as self-enclosed organisms – although that they are *as forms* – but also as living signs that point to the primordial religion which is itself inexpressible in the limitations of the dogmas that signify it. Such a view is not common today, and has not been common for most of known history. That is the reason it is considered “for” a particular set of people. It is not necessary for most people to know or believe perennialists to be saved in this life, nevertheless such knowledge will ultimately reach all people in the universal salvation, even if such “knowledge”, as I explained earlier, is inexpressible – as it is God Himself – and is ultimately the end goal of every valid religion. So in essence, because every religion is a form of the perennial religion, all the validly religious do believe in the perennial philosophy. However, since most do not know of it *as* perennial philosophy, most do not know that they do subscribe to the perennial philosophy, and it is not necessary they do so, since the goal is theosis, not

discursive knowledge you can read, as valid as the latter is as a means to salvation for people like me.

In the realm of Eschatology, Schuon puts together a beautiful unity of views from Christian, Islamic, and Hindu (Particularly Vedantic) cosmologies, showing how they inform one another and ultimately speak of one apokatastasis. I don't want to repeat his work, you can read his words yourself. All I want to do is distil the principles underlying his account, the principles of the perennial philosophy, and construct my understanding of his account and the accounts of others, like Coomaraswamy and Guenon. We will start with the principle of "emanation" and "immanation", then we will see how this works into the principle of manifestation and time, and then how this reveals the finitude of hell and the infinitude of theosis. Concerning the inherent Christian nature of this account – because this may not be immediately obvious since I'm using Neoplatonism as my model of the metaphysical cosmos – I have another essay explaining why Plotinus' vision is not in conflict with the Christian vision ². You can read through that for clarifications I cannot repeat here.

² Oluwaseyi O. Bello, *Christ: The Only Begotten Cosmos*, 2020
<<https://theosymmetry.wordpress.com/2020/09/22/essay-christ-the-only-begotten-cosmos/>>.

I

“EMANATION” AND “IMMANATION”

*“But for the central Spectator there is no succession of events. He is always awake and always asleep; unlike the sailor who sometimes sits and thinks and sometimes does not think, our Spectator sits and thinks, and does not think, nowever.”*³

*“Christianity possesses the same key in this saying of Jesus 'There is none good but one, that is, God' (Nemo bonus nisi unus Deus) (St Mark 10: 18). This sentence contains the whole doctrine of the relationship of the contingent to the Absolute and consequently expresses the non-eternity of created states: Heaven, not being God, could not be 'good', it is thus of necessity ephemeral when considered on the scale of the 'Lives of Brahma! and in relation to 'existence'.”*⁴

The Divine first principle, what we may call the “first cause” of existence, or “unmoved mover”, etc. has two “modes” or “directions” of act: *emanation* and *immanation*. The first is what we call “creation”, “manifestation”, and by implication, “alienation”, “death” or “fall”. The second is what we can call “salvation”, “resurrection”, “theosis”, etc. Emanation is also the principle of “dispersion”. The unified divine principle gives way to the minimally complex *Nous*, which corresponds to the “highest heaven”, which then gives way to the more complex “Soul”, which can be called “lower heaven”, culminating in the “coagulated” physical realm we inhabit. While in heaven things “interpenetrate” one another in their unbreakable link with the Godhead, all while remaining distinct, on earth we exclude one another and fragment into extension and division of innumerable types, whether of time or of space or of psyche. The hierarchy of being is also a hierarchy of unity, our bodies are unified by soul, our soul by nous, and nous by God. If the hierarchy can be represented by a triangle, every existent thing is a smaller triangle in the whole triangle with the same apex and height. Every point in the base is connected to the apex. That is the only way it exists *as that object*. A particular stone exists because soul mediates the particular possibility of that stone’s existence

³ Harry Oldmeadow, *Light from the East: Eastern Wisdom for the Modern West*, 2007.

⁴ Frithjof Schuon and Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Essential Frithjof Schuon, The Library of Perennial Philosophy*, 2005 <<http://www.loc.gov/catdir/toc/ecip0513/2005014071.html>>.

from the Nous that contains, and is cognitively identical with, the possibility of stones as such. That Nous, which can be called the essence of possibilities, only exists because of *possibility as such*, which on further investigation, can be said to contain all possibilities indistinctly, in contrast to the Nous which possesses them distinctly. This is so because all effects are contained in the cause, but not *as effects*. The possibility of man contains all men, yet not as they are in physical manifestation. This should be obvious, but it is hard for many people to think this way. The “abstract” seems for many of us “not real” and just “useful fiction”. But if the metaphysical structure of the cosmos is analogous to the structure of human rationality (because otherwise we couldn’t know anything, there must be “compatibility” between knower and known, square peg and square hole), then the structure of the hierarchy of our language of possibility (possibility being one of our ways of describing that which has all the “whatness” of an entity, i.e. essence) should be a way of discerning the structure of being.

An implication of the way this hierarchy works is that the deepest identity of all existent things is found in the apex of the hierarchy, in the divine principle that spawns multiplicity; not by really dividing itself, but by “veiling” its unity. The point doesn’t cease to be a point because lines are drawn from it, yet the lines are from the point, and the point can be said to “contain” the lines. What the line does is reveal the point, while also concealing it, for all we ever see is the “location” of the point as revealed by the line, and not the point as such. The line is not made from points, but points can be found on the line. There is but one point manifest throughout space, for the spatial value of the point is zero, and zero added up indefinitely is still zero.

The stone is a theophany, as the deepest identity of the stone is the also the deepest identity of the man. The “Lord of Breaths” is our deepest person, and that alone is a sufficient argument for universal salvation.

As the metaphysical cosmos “emanates” from the God like the line from a point or the triangle from its apex, so it also “recedes” to the God that gave it. It is important to understand that although we are talking in temporal terms (ordinary human existence is temporal), the realities we speak of are NOT temporal. An analogy is also an inversion. The square hole is an inverted square peg. Dr David Bentley Hart, putting this in a different key, says:

...in the ordo essendi, obviously, all causes are logically prior to their effects. But in the ordo cognoscendi just the reverse is true: all causes are posterior discoveries, preceded by a sheer event that is a phenomenal experience before it is an intelligible truth; the event comes first

*for us, while its causes lie only at the end of the wakened intellect's journey toward a reality that the event has already made manifest but has not yet rendered wholly intelligible.*⁵

We reason from possibilities to possibility as such, but we realise that the causal chain is reverse: There are no particular possibilities without possibility as such. We reason like the causal chain is temporal, but we should know that it is not. "Possibility" is not something beholden to temporal factors. Although possibilities manifest in time, in their deepest essence as possibilities, they are not beholden to time. Manifestation is simply a "revealing" of a possibility that has always been and will always be:

The question of "annihilation," so solemnly discussed by Western scholars, does not arise.

The word has no meaning in metaphysics, which knows only of the non-duality of permutation and sameness, multiplicity and unity. Whatever has been an eternal reason or idea or name of an individual manifestation can never cease to be such; the content of eternity cannot be changed. Therefore, as the Bhagavad Gita expresses it, "Never have I not been, and never hast thou not been." ⁶

This revealing is also a receding. Because emanation is a "veiling" and an **apparent** fragmentation that gets more pronounced as we get "lower" – for example possibility as such reveals itself as the possibility of man as such, then as the *possibilities of the possibilities* of humankind, all the while not **really** fragmenting because we still know of the existence of possibility as such even as it reveals itself in multiple possibilities – it is also true to say that the metaphysical cosmos never really *existed*:

The point of importance is that the Vedantic position is in perfect agreement with the Platonic, which is that things are "false" in the sense that an imitation, though it exists, is not "the real thing" of which it is an imitation; and with the Christian doctrine as formulated by St. Augustine in Conf. 7. 11 and 11.4: "I beheld these others beneath Thee, and saw that they neither altogether are, nor altogether are not. An existence (esse) they have, because they are from Thee; and yet no existence, because they are not what Thou art. For only that really is, that remains unchangeably; Heaven and Earth are beautiful and good, and are (sunt), since

⁵ David Bentley Hart, *Theological Territories: A David Bentley Hart Digest* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2020).

⁶ Oldmeadow.

God made them", but when "compared to Thee, they are neither beautiful, nor good, nor are at all" (nec sunt).⁷

All that really exists is the possibility of existence as such, which is actually possibility as such seen from the lens of existence ("Possibility = Existence" is true at the apex of reality). All that exists is Possibility showing itself as possibilities, or Existence showing itself as existences. This realization is the human experience of the "immanation". The Cosmos simultaneously exists and doesn't exist, from different points of view, united in the "divine point" where the two perspectives unify without contradiction. All the arguments "via negativa" are this "immanation" in the form of a proof of God. A profound meaning of these arguments is that only God really exists in the most primal sense, while also admitting that we all exist. Meaning, all that exists is itself God in that form of existence: "*Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.*"

This is the metaphysical basis of the incarnation of Christ, and the Theosis he brings for us. We have fallen, we do not know "Christ in us": "*But when Boethius confesses that he is just this animal, Wisdom replies that this man, So-and-so, has forgotten who he is.*"⁸

⁷ Ananda K Coomaraswamy, *Time and Eternity* (Select Books, 1989).

⁸ Oldmeadow.

II MANIFESTATION AND TIME

“Time is the moving image of eternity”

Plato

“...it is "we" who move, while the Now is un-moved, and only seems to move,-much as the sun only seems to rise and set because the earth revolves.”

*Ananda Coomaraswamy*⁹

The “timelessness” of metaphysical principles and the great chain of being as discussed in the previous section leads us to an inevitable conclusion about time. In reasoning about the metaphysical structure of the cosmos, we realize that what we are reasoning about is “sudden” and timeless. Our understanding of anything is always “immediate”, a “synthesis” or a sort of “apocalypse” of irreducible meaning beyond the “parts” or “arguments” used to get there. For example, to understand natural counting numbers, you do not have to know or write out all the natural counting numbers. All you need to know is its “principle”, which can be explained to you by means of a handy mathematical expression. Symbols communicate what they symbolize, and in that sense they are what they symbolize, but they also *are not* what they symbolize. Symbols, like theophanies, reveal what they hide and hide what they reveal. A manifestation is a symbol, it is never the full thing. The reality of natural counting numbers is only communicable in symbols (or language, the same thing in different words), but *my* understanding and apprehension can never be communicated. It is first person and “vertical”, not “horizontal”. I can only point you to the Sun, I cannot give you the Sun or my sight of it. Using the example of mathematical theorems, particularly Gödel’s, Professor Wolfgang Smith gives this explanation:

The question, now, is whether this theorem has been proved by way of an algorithm or not. It is always possible, of course, to claim that an algorithm of some kind has unwittingly played out in the process of arriving at a given conclusion; but as Roger Penrose observes, the algorithms used in mathematics are well known and communicable, and it is evident in the case of Gödel’s theorem that no such has come into play. In a word, the intelligence which

⁹ Coomaraswamy.

*enabled us to understand the proof in question is manifestly non-algorithmic. "When we convince ourselves of the validity of Gödel's theorem;" Penrose goes on to say, "we not only 'see' it, but in so doing we reveal the very non-algorithmic nature of the 'seeing' process itself:" Now, we concur with this statement wholeheartedly-except for one word: we must insist that this "seeing" is not in fact a "process;" but a vertical and therefore instantaneous act. As the expression goes, it is manifestly a question of "seeing the point"-and a "point" is to be seen "all at once" or not at all. One should add that precisely the same actually holds true when a theorem is supposedly proved by an algorithm: for it is actually not the algorithm that proves the theorem, but the person who "sees" that it does. Strictly speaking, a formal proof of a mathematical theorem can do no more than elicit, in those who are qualified, a perception of its validity. The fact that an argument or chain of reasoning constitutes a proof by virtue of meeting appropriate criteria of validity is of course undeniable-but that does not obviate the necessity of "seeing the point:" Thus, in the final count, science is indeed "nothing but perception;" as Plato noted long ago. In the end-when the work has been accomplished and the quest attained its goal-that's what it reduces to. And that consummation, let us add, is achieved-not by the rational faculty, which is discursive and operates in time-but by the intellect, properly so called, which does not operate in time, but in what has been termed the *Nunc stans*. For the intellect is indeed the "eye of the soul" by which we see: the "part;" as Plato says, which "pertains to eternity." ¹⁰*

If the most complete knowledge is “eternal” and can only be known in the “instant” of eternity, then all “knowledge” that is temporal is imperfect, and therefore not “true knowledge”. As St. Paul said, we “see in part”. The experience of time is a manifestation of ignorance, an ignorance all humans are born with. What discursive logic does is that it prepares the mind living in time for the irruption of eternity. Logic, used correctly, is “an aid to intellection”. The mind is a mirror to be polished, a lens to be made defect free. This intellection is a glimpse of the unity of knower and known in eternity. We at once disappear and appear. The former is the realisation of our individual unreality and our true self in God, the second is the realisation that this true self is reflected in our individual persons. Suddenly the mirror of our mind is filled with light, and disappears into the image of eternity. The arguments suddenly disappear and what they argue for appear, until the image subsides and we see the arguments once more, only this time as what they truly are: broken reflections of a partless whole.

¹⁰ Wolfgang Smith, *Physics and Vertical Causation: The End of Quantum Reality* (Angelico Press, 2019).

In that whole act of understanding is a microcosm of the mystery of manifestation and time. Manifestation is the descent, the emanation, of the possibilities of being, ever fragmenting as it descends, until the descent itself becomes temporal. Using the case of humanity, the descent separates its possibilities, whether of society or religion, bodily features, etc. until the possibilities of individuality itself becomes fragmented by emanation into temporality. That individuality is stretched over the length of the temporal life (and this convince us of the unreality of the atomic individual). Here is a great way of understanding the simultaneity of emanation and immanation, by using its temporal manifestation.

The conception or birth of a human child (take your pick as to where personhood begins, let's use a girl) is the initial manifestation of that individual's possibility in the spatio-temporal world. As the girl grows, more of this possibility manifests. There are two concurrent, *opposite*, "movements" going on here. The first is that as the girl grows, she is (or should be) "more of herself" than she was in the past, this is technically a "fall" of that possibility into our world of manifestation, and is an effect of "emanation". But, something else is going on. Looked at as a whole, the beginning and end of a life is the same: *non-manifestation*. She is to return to her starting point. This is the effect of *immanation*. Her life is a journey back to her origin, while also being a journey away from it. As you can see, you cannot totally separate the two principles. A fall is a redemption looked at inversely, Christ had to descend to ascend, "the first shall be the last, and the last shall be the first"; the wages of sin is death, yet one must die to self in order to resurrect as Self. The ancient way this was understood involved viewing time as a cycle, without absolute beginning or absolute end, at least in itself. But it can also be viewed as a spiral, or an orbit whose perihelion coincides with the point it is supposed to revolve around.

Considering that the reality of time is the reality of ignorance, and that the nature of things in time is to come in and out of manifestation, we can understand the truth behind endless cyclical time as articulated in several religious and philosophical traditions in millennia past, an apt symbol for this being a spoked wheel:

In 422C he (Plutarch) speaks also of eternity" "whence time, like an ever-flowing stream, is conveyed to the worlds as being "round about" all things, i.e. all-pervading. In another sense, of course, all things are "round about" eternity, as the circumference surrounds the centre. ¹¹

¹¹ Coomaraswamy.

A mistake would be to think that endless time has no absolute “beginning”. It definitely does, but it does not have a *temporally* absolute beginning:

*From what may be called the fundamentalist or literalist point of view, time in the first sense is thought of as having had a beginning and as proceeding towards an end, and so contrasted with eternity as everlasting duration without beginning or end. The absurdity of these positions is made apparent if we ask with St. Augustine, "What was God [the Eternal] doing before he made the world?" the answer being, of course, that inasmuch as time and the world presuppose each other and in terms of "creation" are "concreated", the word "before" in such a question has no meaning whatever. Hence it is commonly argued in Christian exegesis that **in principio** (In the beginning, Gen. 1:1), does not imply a "beginning in time" but an origin in the First Principle; and from this the logical deduction follows that God [the Eternal] is creating the world now, as much as he ever was. ¹²*

God is himself the “beginning and end” of time, and as God is His own eternity, one could say eternity, understood as *Nunc Stans*, the “eternal now” or “eternal present”, is the beginning and end of time. The wheel is supported by the centre hub *through* the wheel spokes. The centre represents God, the spokes represent the principle and “directions” of emanation and immanation and the wheel represents the cosmos. The cycle is only possible because of the centre’s action through the spokes, which both pushes out (emanation, centrifugal) and pulls in (immanation, centripetal) the wheel at once; hence why another way of viewing time that combines the rotation of the wheel with the perpendicularity of the spokes is to view it as a spiral. This shows the cosmos as everlasting and cyclical while also showing it as ephemeral and fleeting:

I will only observe that the Christian "world without end" seems to refer to the world in one sense (that in which time can be called "interminable"), and to this world in another sense (that in which a given time has a beginning and end). Just as in tradition, there are cycles that begin and end, but the series of cycles has neither beginning nor end. ¹³

¹² Coomaraswamy.

¹³ Coomaraswamy.

This also has another implication. Eternity being the unspeakable unity of all manifestation in the simplicity of eternity, there is no succession for God. The ideal centre of a circle has no dimensions, and therefore does not, and cannot spin. God “sees” all at once, without succession; this does not happen in the sense of having all the reels of a movie – since you still have to see though that reel successively, not to mention that time *is not* made up of “moments” – it means God knows and contains all time in a similar sense to which the centre contains everything about the circle in principle. As Wolfgang Smith explains using Euclidean geometry:

It needs however to be understood that this centered circle constitutes but “the bare bones” of the cosmic icon: what renders the figure effectively iconic, as we have noted, is in principle the construction itself. It is the application of the compass, in particular, that brings into play the two cosmic bounds: of time by its single act — the sweeping out of the circle— and of space by its effect, which is to terminate the radii OP. It is thus by way of this seemingly innocuous instrument that one is enabled to accomplish the unlikely feat of “bringing time into the picture”: all that is required, perhaps, to initiate this realization is a single clue, a single “Hint” —which in fact the Master of the Academy himself provides: for instance in the Timaeus, when he refers to “time” as “the moving image of eternity.” Think of that compass with one point fixed at the center of the circle, while the other — its “moving image” —sweeps out the circumference; and behold: what presents itself to the qualified disciple is the nunc stans —the timeless “now that stands” —along with its “moving picture.”

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It is then the case that for God, there are no cycles. All worlds are present to him, whether they are connected sequentially through a cyclical cosmos or as a “multiverse”. Indeed, there is no essential difference between these two points of view, as the end of every cosmos is for it to return to its source, just as its beginning is to come from it. As this source is eternity, where there is no succession, one can choose a temporal point of view and see the cosmos as like the movement about the edges of a clover, coming from and returning to the centre in order to move from one clover to another, or even just truncating the temporal trip to one cycle (and this is the Christian perspective of the cosmos); one can also choose another perspective, and view the clovers simultaneously, in their emanation and immanation. The former perspective

¹⁴ Smith.

is contained in the latter. It is in the latter that universal salvation is found, and it is also present in Christianity, as well as in other traditions.

III

EVERLASTING HELL AND ETERNAL HEAVEN

Even the fallen angels could not have fallen for so long as they subsisted in the uncreated life; apart from a "creation", which necessarily involves some degree of "separation" from the centre, neither a Fall nor a Redemption are conceivable. These are the two "halves" of the cycle of existence; but in eternity extroversion and introversion coincide; and this actually guarantees the final apokatastasis of every "fallen spark".¹⁵

God alone could go to hell eternally- if He could sin.¹⁶

It is not therefore Hell which comes to an end, but the end which does away with Hell.¹⁷

What then is hell in this formulation? Well, it is no different than the Universalist orthodox understanding:

*“...I learned at some point to take comfort from an idea that one finds liberally scattered throughout Eastern Christian contemplative tradition, from late antiquity to the present, and expressed with particular force by such saints of the East as Isaac of Nineveh (c. 613 - c. 700) and Silouan of Athos (1866 -1938): the fires of hell are nothing but **the glory of God**, which must at the last, when God brings about the final restoration of all things, pervade the whole of creation; for, although that glory will transfigure the whole cosmos, it will inevitably be experienced as torment by any soul that willfully seals itself against love of God and neighbor; to such a perverse and obstinate nature, the divine light that should enter the soul and transform it from within must seem instead like the flames of an exterior chastisement... A hardened heart is already its own punishment; the refusal to love or be loved makes the love of others—or even just their presence—a source of suffering and a goad to wrath. At the very least, this is a psychological fact that just about any of us can confirm from experience.*

¹⁵ Coomaraswamy.

¹⁶ Schuon and Nasr.

¹⁷ Schuon and Nasr.

And, surely, if the soul does live on past the grave, as faith claims it does, it must carry the hell that it has nurtured within itself into the next world."¹⁸

Or, in Schuon's words:

*...it (hell) imprisons it "perpetually", but not "eternally"; eternity pertains to God alone, and in a certain manner also to Paradise in virtue of a mystery of participation in the divine Immutability. Hell crystallizes a vertical fall; it is "invincible" because it lasts until the exhaustion of a certain cycle whose duration God alone knows. Those who enter hell are not those who have sinned accidentally, with their "husk" so to speak, but those who have sinned substantially or with their "kernel", and this is a distinction that may not be perceptible from without; they are in any case the proud, the wicked, the hypocrites, hence all those who are the opposite of the saints and the sanctified. Exoterically speaking, man is damned because he does not accept a given Revelation, a given Truth, and does not obey a given law; esoterically, he damns himself because he does not accept his own fundamental and primordial Nature which dictates a given knowledge and a given comportment. Revelation is none other than the objective and symbolic manifestation of the Light which man carries in himself, in the depths of his being; it reminds him of what he is, and of what he should be since he has forgotten what he is. If all human souls, before their creation, must attest that God is their Lord — according to the Koran — it is because they know "preexistentially" what Being, the Truth, and the Law are; to exist is, for the human creature, to know "viscerally" what Being, Truth, and the Law are; fundamental sin is a suicide of the soul.*¹⁹

We can state this understanding of hell – in what is perhaps a more “drab” metaphysical way – as the act of identifying oneself with the manifested, and forgetting that which is the source of manifestation. In a phrase, “forgetting God”, or to be lost in “samsara”, to be deceived by maya, by the “vanities”; in platonic terms, to be lost in the sensible, or to forget the intelligible. Or, if we want to connect this to the beginning of our journey in this essay so far, we can say it is to forget immanation and be lost in emanation; to be dispersed in the latter and to lose hold of the former. To identify “I” as the ephemeral body and individual while forgetting the “I” in the heavens that is the ground of your identity, “Christ in you”; to be thrown out by the wheel while losing hold of the spokes.

¹⁸ David Bentley Hart, *That All Shall Be Saved*, Yale University Press, 2019
<<https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvnwbzd4>>.

¹⁹ Schuon, ‘Universal Eschatology’.

How can one be saved from this? Well, as Paul says, not by works. By this I don't mean works are irrelevant, I mean that we should not reverse the cause and effect. Salvation produces works, works prove salvation. Salvation is the cause, works are the effects; but even then, in eternity, God has mercy on us all, for works can never save, just as the effects can never have the potency of the cause:

*...the story of creation and redemption is told not as a narrative of the rational meaning of the whole, nor as a grand epic whose dénouement somehow depends upon a tragic drama of eternal loss, but rather as the tale of the rescue of all creatures from nonbeing, and then also from sin and ignorance, and finally even from themselves and their illusory "freedom," so that they may be drawn on to **the God who will not abandon even those who abandon him.***²⁰

So, because of this, I will not dwell on the torments of hells and purgatories for specific sins or the minutiae of the requirements for heaven. Indeed that is ultimately irrelevant to the main point of universal salvation from which such a consideration proceeds. The truth is that no one can separate the unity of emanation and immanation. One may be ignorant of one or both of the sides of the principle, or one may be selectively ignorant, and this dictates their experience of it – for example, ignorance of immanation is hell. Partial knowledge of immanation is purgatory and heaven. Full knowledge is apokatastasis (and keep in mind that I'm using the understanding of knowledge as "union"²¹) – but ultimately they are different experiences of God's manifestation (or glory) as the begetting (emanation) and return (immanation) of the Son in the unity of the Spirit, and the end result is the same: The participation of creatures in the divine life. Coomaraswamy describes death as thus:

*The composite being is unmade into the cosmos; there is nothing whatever that can survive as a consciousness of being So-and-so.*²²

²⁰ Hart, *Theological Territories: A David Bentley Hart Digest*.

²¹ Lloyd P. Gerson, *Plotinus (The Arguments of the Philosophers)*, 1999; David Bentley Hart, *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss, The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss*, 2013 <<https://doi.org/10.5860/choice.51-3784>>; David Bentley Hart, *The Hidden and the Manifest Essays in Theology and Metaphysics* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2017).

²² Oldmeadow.

This is the principle of all “death”, whether the death of time’s succession, where the man of yesterday “dies into” the man of today ²³, or his last breath, or his “death to self” that is the path to salvation. The “terrestrial man” cannot inherit the kingdom. It must die for the “celestial man” to be born ²⁴. As the ancients who spoke of this did not think the earthly man in terms of autonomous individuals ²⁵, it would be foolish to think of this “celestial man” as an “individual”, when in fact it is Being itself in the fullness of a particular possibility of itself. In time, Being is fragmented and ephemeral, in eternity it is unified and real. We must let go of all that seeks to define us in this life in order to gain it in its fullness, and without sorrow, in the higher life. “He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it” are Christ’s words.

This loss of self is inevitable. We have no say in the matter, just as we have no say in our growing up. Christ’s words are circular. If you want to find your life, you have to lose it. If you refuse to lose it, you’ll lose it anyway, and the end of that loss is gain. To accept the loss is heaven, to reject it is hell, which is the long way round to the same salvation you are avoiding. In the symbolism of Janus, which is somewhat found in the Sephiroth, the right hand or side can represent “mercy” and the left can represent “rigour” or “justice” ²⁶. Naturally, the way of “mercy” is naturally the submission to “death to self”, the way of “rigour” is the rejection of this submission, and hence their journey is “rigorous”, and if you’re perceptive you can see this same symbolism in Jesus’ parable of the sheep and goats. But, both journeys are one, since they have the same destination. The end of “death” to self is the shedding of the “flesh” and (re)birth of spirit. This is true both for those who accept salvation and those who reject it. As the orthodox say, it is one glory experienced in diametrically opposed ways, the end of which is the same. For already repentant, it is bliss; for the obstinate, it is, as St. Paul says, “To deliver such a one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Corinthians 5:5).

²³ Coomaraswamy.

²⁴ David Bentley Hart, ‘The Spiritual Was More Substantial Than the Material for the Ancients’, *Church Life Journal*, 2018 <<https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/the-spiritual-was-more-substantial-than-the-material-for-the-ancients/>> [accessed 20 July 2020].

²⁵ Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (Yale University Press, 1999).

²⁶ Rene Guenon, *Lord of the World* (Coombe Springs Press Ltd, 2020); Rene Guenon, *Fundamental Symbols The Universal Language of Sacred Science*, ed. by Martin Lings (Quinta Essentia, 1995).

IV

CONCLUSION

Naturally, if we were to consider hell principally, it is “perpetual”. If we wanted to take the perspectives of the temporal cycles, then Hell never ends. It may wane and extinguish at the point where the cycles meet, but it always returns in the next cycle. However, if we were to look at it from a higher perspective, the “multiversal perspective”, hell does end, precisely at the point where the worlds or cycles meet in God. This point is eternal, and is above all the cycles it spawns and extinguishes. From that view, hell must end, and this is precisely the perspective of the second coming:

The appearance of Christ in the parousia does not know any limits. It is universal, omnipresent, and omnitemporal. He is seen by those who rejoice in Him and by those who tremble in fear of Him, by those who love Him and by those who hate Him. This universality has an absolutely compelling evidentness, analogous to that of the existence of God and of the whole spiritual world in the afterlife. This appearance of Christ is described, in anthropomorphic symbols, as His coming on the clouds of heaven. All of these expressions that link His appearance with a definite place and time are obviously inadequate, since this temporality and this spatiality are other than our own, if indeed it is at all appropriate to speak of temporality and spatiality here. Christ's appearance in the parousia takes us, in general, beyond the limits of this world: it is metaphysical or metacosmic. This "meta" eliminates the threshold between the two states of the world's being. In the parousia, Christ will not appear within the limits of this world; He will not appear beneath this sky and upon this earth and before this humankind. Humankind will see Him in a new world, and this appearance will already constitute a radical change in the relation between God and the world.²⁷

The understanding of these two perspectives is key to understanding scriptures that seem to contradict on this issue, particularly that of the book of revelation. “Its gates shall never be shut” is to be contrasted with “but outside are the dogs” and “the smoke of their torment shall rise forever and ever”. The “samsaric” nature of the lake of fire should be evident to anyone

²⁷ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb* (Wm. B. Eerdmans-Lightning Source, 2001)

و ت لوی زید ون ر سازه سرا سری اندید شی هم دومین مقالات جمعیم <http://www.ghbook.ir/index.php?name=جموعه&option=com_dbook&task=readonline&book_id=13629&page=108&chckhashk=03C706812F&itemid=218&lang=fa&tmpl=component>.

who knows of the concept of samsara, but then, I will simply use Coomaraswamy's description of the final salvation to show the similarities:

Let us enunciate the Christian doctrine first in order the better to understand the Indian. The words of Christ are these: that "I am the door; by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall pass in and out." It is not enough to have reached the door; we must be admitted. But there is a price of admission. "He that would save his soul, let him lose it." Of man's two selves, the two Atmans of our Indian texts, the self that was known by name as So-and-so must have put itself to death if the other is to be freed of all encumbrances—is to be "free as the Godhead in its nonexistence."

*In the Vedantic texts it is likewise the Sun of men and Light of lights that is called the doorway of the worlds and the keeper of the gate. Whoever has come thus far is put to the test. He is told in the first place that he may enter **according to the balance of good or evil he may have done**. If he understands he will answer, "Thou canst not ask me that; thou knowest that whatever 'I' may have done was not of 'my' doing, but of thine." This is the Truth; and it is beyond the power of the Guardian of the Gate, who is himself the Truth, to deny himself. Or he may be asked the question, "Who art thou?" If he answers by his own or by a family name he is literally dragged away by the factors of time; but if he answers, "I am the Light, thyself, and come to thee as such," the Keeper responds with the words of welcome, "Who thou art, that am I; and who I am, thou art; come in." It should be clear, indeed, that there can be no return to God of anyone who still is anyone, for as our texts express it, "He has not come from anywhere or become anyone."*

In the same way, Eckhart, basing his words on the logos, "If any man hate not father and mother, . . . yea and his own soul also, he cannot be my disciple," says that "so long as thou knowest who thy father and thy mother have been in time, thou art not dead with the real death"; and in the same way, Rumi, Eckhart's peer in Islam, attributes to the Keeper of the Gate the words, "Whoever enters saying 'I am so and so,' I smite in the face." We cannot, in fact, offer any better definition of the Vedic scriptures than St. Paul's "The word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, extending even unto the sundering of soul from spirit": "Quid est ergo, quod debet homo inquirere in hac vita? Hoc est ut sciat ipsum." "Si ignoras te, egredere!"²⁸

²⁸ Oldmeadow.

He who knows the greater “I” is in the “book of life” which is Christ himself, the Logos, on which God writes²⁹, and is therefore liberated. He who doesn’t know this “I” is still under the influence of samsara, of wandering, of illusion, and an apt symbol of time is the fire that consumes all mutable things. The cosmos of time shall never end in time, and therefore must “burn” forever and ever. But this cosmos is also a temple, and a sacrifice. The “smoke” of this sacrifice, must rise, and this smoke is the liberated soul, free from the fire of time, after taking the road of rigour. Therefore the cosmos must end in eternity. It must rise “forever and ever”. It is then so that the road of mercy and rigour is one path, viewed differently. The obstinate see a fire, the repentant see a river, yet the obstinate will become repentant, their liberated spirits shall rise, and the God who accepts the sacrifice shall be all in all though His Son the Priest and His Spirit the raging flame of glorious salvation.

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²⁹ Frithjof Schuon, *Dimensions of Islam*, 1985.

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