

THE FATHERS ON HELL

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St. Anthony

God is good, dispassionate, and immutable. Now someone who thinks it reasonable and true to affirm that God does not change, may well ask how, in that case, it is possible to speak of God as rejoicing over those who are good and showing mercy to those who honour Him, while turning away from the wicked and being angry with sinners. To this it must be answered that God neither rejoices nor grows angry, for to rejoice and to be offended are passions; nor is He won over by the gifts of those who honour Him, for that would mean He is swayed by pleasure. It is not right to imagine that God feels pleasure or displeasure in a human way. He is good, and He only bestows blessings and never does harm, remaining always the same. We men, on the other hand, if we remain good through resembling God, are united to Him; but if we become evil through not resembling God, we are separated from Him. By living in holiness we cleave to God; but by becoming wicked we make Him our enemy. It is not that He grows angry with us in an arbitrary way, but it is our sins that prevent God from shining within us, and expose us to the demons who punish us. And if through prayer and acts of compassion we gain release from our sins, this does not mean that we have won God over and made Him change, but that through our actions and our turning to God we have cured our wickedness and so once more have enjoyment of God's goodness. Thus to say that God turns away from the wicked is like saying that the sun hides itself from the blind. [*On the Character of Men* 150; *Philokalia* 1:352]

St. Gregory of Nyssa

For [God], the one goal is this, the perfection of the universe through each man individually, the fulfillment of our nature. Some of us are purged of evil in this life, some are cured of it through fire in the after-life, some have not had the experience of good and evil in life here. God proposes for everyone a participation in the goods in Himself which Scripture says: 'eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the minds of man' [1 Corinthians 2:9]. In my opinion, this is nothing else than existing in God Himself, since the good which is beyond hearing and seeing and the heart would be the very thing which is superior to the universe. The different degrees of virtue or vice in our life will be revealed in our participating more quickly or more slowly in the blessedness we hope for. The extent of the healing will depend on the amount of evil present in each person. The healing of the soul will be purification from evil and this cannot be accomplished without suffering... (*On the Soul and the Resurrection*)

St. Basil the Great

'The voice of the Lord divides the flame of fire.' [David] says that this miracle happened to the Three Children in the fiery furnace. The fire in this case was divided into two, so that while it was burning those outside it, it was cooling the Children, as if they were under the shadow of a tree. I believe that the fire prepared in punishment for the devil and his angels is divided by the voice of the Lord. Thus, since there are two capacities in fire, one of burning and the other of illuminating, the fierce and punitive property of the fire may await those who deserve to burn, while its illuminating and radiant part may be reserved for the enjoyment of those who are rejoicing. [*On Psalm 28:6*, PG 29:297A]

St. John Chrysostom

We know very well that the revelation and manifestation of God can be Paradise for those who are fit for the vision of God and Hell for those who are unclean, or at least for those who are not prepared. [...] So it seems that the three

Disciples were most suited for receiving this revelation of God. To others He had to remain hidden and be revealed after His Resurrection. The three disciples had some qualification which made them fit to share this vision of God. All three were superior to the other disciples.

St. Gregory Nazianzen

Whoever has been permitted to escape by reason and contemplation from matter and this fleshly cloud or veil (whichever it should be called) and to hold communion with God, and be associated, as far as man's nature can attain, with the purest Light, blessed is he, both from his ascent from hence, and for his deification there, which is conferred by true philosophy, and by rising superior to the dualism of matter, through the unity which is perceived in the Trinity. And whosoever has been depraved by being knit to the flesh, and so far oppressed by the clay that he cannot look at the rays of truth, nor rise above things below, though he is born from above, and called to things above, I hold him to be miserable in his blindness, even though he may abound in things of this world; and all the more, because he is the sport of his abundance, and is persuaded by it that something else is beautiful instead of that which is really beautiful, reaping, as the poor fruit of his poor opinion, the sentence of darkness, or the seeing Him to be fire, Whom he did not recognize as light. [*Oration 21 on the Great Athanasius 2; NPNF II 7:270*]

For I know a cleansing fire which Christ came to send upon the earth, and He Himself is anagogically called a Fire. This Fire takes away whatsoever is material and of evil habit; and this He desires to kindle with all speed, for He longs for speed in doing us good, since He gives us even coals of fire to help us. I know also a fire which is not cleansing, but avenging; either that fire of Sodom which He pours down on all sinners, mingled with brimstone and storms, or that which is prepared for the Devil and his Angels or that which proceeds from the face of the Lord, and shall burn up his enemies round about; and one even more fearful still than these, the unquenchable fire which is ranged with the worm that dies not but is eternal for the wicked. For all these belong to the destroying power; though some may prefer even in this place to take a more merciful view of this fire, worthily of Him That chastises. [*Oration 40 on Holy Baptism 36; NPNF II 7:373*]

Receive besides this the Resurrection, the Judgment and the Reward according to the righteous scales of God; and believe that this will be Light to those whose mind is purified (that is, God — seen and known) proportionate to their degree of purity, which we call the Kingdom of heaven; but to those who suffer from blindness of their ruling faculty, darkness, that is estrangement from God, proportionate to their blindness here. [*Oration 40 on Holy Baptism 45, NPNF II 7:377*]

Wherefore we must purify ourselves first, and then approach this converse with the Pure; unless we would have the same experience as Israel, who could not endure the glory of the face of Moses, and therefore asked for a veil; or else would feel and say with Manoah "We are undone O wife, we have seen God," although it was God only in his fancy; or like Peter would send Jesus out of the boat, as being ourselves unworthy of such a visit; and when I say Peter, I am speaking of the man who walked upon the waves; or like Paul would be stricken in eyes, as he was before he was cleansed from the guilt of his persecution, when he conversed with Him Whom he was persecuting—rather with a short flash of That great Light; or like the Centurion would seek for healing, but would not, through a praiseworthy fear, receive the Healer into his house. Let each one of us also speak so, as long as he is still uncleansed, and is a Centurion still, commanding many in wickedness, and serving in the army of Caesar, the World-ruler of those who are being dragged down; "I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof." But when he shall have looked upon Jesus, though he be little of stature like Zaccheus of old, and climb up on the top of the sycamore tree by mortifying his members which are upon the earth, and having risen above the body of humiliation, then he shall receive the Word, and it shall be said to him, This day is salvation come to this house. Then let him lay hold on the salvation, and bring forth fruit more perfectly, scattering and pouring forth rightly that which as a publican he wrongly gathered. For the same Word is on the one hand terrible through its nature to those who are unworthy, and on the other through its loving kindness can be received by those who are thus prepared, who have driven out the unclean and worldly spirit from their souls, and have swept and adorned their own souls by self-examination, and

have not left them idle or without employment, so as again to be occupied with greater armament by the seven spirits of wickedness..." [Oration 39 on the Holy Lights 9-10, NPNF II 354-355]

O Trinity, Whom I have been granted to worship and proclaim, Who will someday be known to all, to some through illumination, to others through punishment!" [On Peace 3, PG 35:1165B]

St. Ephrem

Perhaps, for the wicked, that which they see is Gehenna, and their separation is what burns them with their mind as the flame. That hidden judge who dwells in the discerning mind has spoken and there has become for them the judge of righteousness and he scourges them without mercy with torments for the compunction of their soul. Perhaps, it is this that separates them and sends each of them to the place suitable for him. Perhaps, it is this that lays hold of the good with its extended right hand and sends them to the Exalted Right Hand. It also takes hold of the wicked in its left hand, equal in power, and casts them into the place which is called "the left." And perhaps, it is this that silently accuses them and quietly pronounces judgment upon them. [Letter to Publios para. 21-23]

St. Cyril of Alexandria

But perhaps some one will say, "Dost thou not see, O fellow, to what a perilous hazard thy argument is leading thee? For if in so far as He became Man we shall think that He knows His own, that is, comes into friendly relationship with His sheep; who remains outside the fold? For they will be all together in friendly relationship, because they are men just as He is Man. Why then does He any longer use the superfluous word 'Mine?' And what is the peculiar mark of those that are really His? For if all are in friendly relationship from the above-mentioned cause, what greater advantage will those who know Him intimately have?" We say in reply, that the manner of the friendly relationship is common to all, both to those who have known Him and to those who have not known Him; for He became Man, not showing favour to some and not to others, out of partiality, but pitying our fallen nature in its entirety. Yet the manner of the friendly relationship will avail nothing for those who are insolent through unbelief, but rather will be allotted as a distinguishing reward to those who love Him. For just as the doctrine of the resurrection extends to all men, through the Resurrection of the Saviour, Who causes to rise with Himself the nature of man in its entirety, yet it will profit nothing those who love sin, (for they will go down into Hades, receiving restoration to life only that they may be punished as they deserve); nevertheless it will be of great profit to those who have practised the more excellent way of life, (for they will receive the resurrection to the participation of the good things which pass understanding): in just the same way I think the doctrine of the friendly relationship applies to all men, both bad and good, yet is not the same thing to all; but while to those who believe on Him it is the means of true kinship and of the blessings consequent upon that, to those who are not such it is an aggravation of their ingratitude and un-holiness. Such is our opinion on this subject, but let any one who can do so think out the more perfect meaning. Now however we must notice at the same time how true and carefully accurate the language is, for Christ is not found to treat subjects in inconsistent and varying ways, but to put every separate thing in its own and most suitable place. For He did not say: "Mine know Me and I know Mine," but He introduces in the first place Himself as knowing His own sheep, then afterwards He says that He shall be known by them. And if knowledge be taken in the sense of acquaintance, as we were saying at the beginning it might be, thou wilt understand something like this: "We did not first know Him, but He first knew us." [Commentary on John at John 10:14-15; Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on John, (2 vols.; LFC 43, 48; trans. P. E. Pusey and T. Randell; London: Smith, 1874, 1885), 2:84-85]

St. Maximos the Confessor

'God , it is said, is the Sun of righteousness (cf. Mal. 4:2), and the rays of His supernal goodness shine down on all men alike. The soul is wax if it cleaves to God, but clay if it cleaves to matter. Which it does depends upon its own will and purpose. Clay hardens in the sun, while wax grows soft. Similarly, every soul that, despite God's admonitions, deliberately cleaves to the material world, hardens like clay and drives itself to destruction, just as

Pharaoh did (cf. Exod. 7:13). But every soul that cleaves to God is softened like wax and, receiving the impress and stamp of divine realities, it becomes “in spirit the dwelling-place of God” (Eph. 2:22). [First Century on Theology]

St. Makarios of Egypt

And just as the kingdom of darkness and sin are hidden in the soul until the day of resurrection when the very body of sinners will be covered over with the darkness that is now hidden in the soul, so also the kingdom of light and the heavenly Image, Jesus Christ, now mystically illumines the soul and holds dominion in the souls of the saints. Indeed, Christ is hidden from the eyes of men. Only with the eyes of the soul is he truly seen, until the day of resurrection, when even the body itself will reign with the soul, which now, having attained the Kingdom of Christ, rests and is illumined by the divine life. Glory to his compassion and mercy because he shows pity on his servants, illumines and frees them from the kingdom of darkness. And he bestows on them light and his kingdom. To him be glory and power forever and ever. Amen. [*Fifty Spiritual Homilies* 2.5; Pseudo-Macarius, *The Fifth Spiritual Homilies* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 46-47]

The heavenly fire of the divine nature, which Christians receive in this world, where it works within their hearts, this fire will work from outside, when the body is destroyed; it will restore again the disjointed limbs, and will bring to life the bodies which have decayed... [*Fifty Spiritual Homilies* 11:1]

Imitate her, O child, imitate her, I say, who saw nothing but Him alone who said: “I have come to cast fire on the earth and how I desire but that it be already kindled” (Lk. 12:49). For there is a burning of the Spirit that puts hearts on fire. For that reason the immaterial and divine fire enlightens souls and tests them as pure gold is tested in the furnace. But it burns out any evil, as if it were thorns and stubble. For “our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:29), “taking revenge on those who do not know him in flaming fire and who do not obey His Gospel” (2 Thess. 1:8). This fire surrounded Paul in the voice that enlightened his mind while blinding his sense of sight (Acts 9:3). For it was not in the flesh that he saw the power of that light. This fire appeared to Moses in the bush (Ex. 3:2). This fire, in the form of a chariot, caught up Elijah from the earth (2 Kgs. 4:11). The blessed David, while seeking out the power of this fire, said: “Search me, Lord, and try me. Burn out my reins and my heart” (Ps. 26:2). This fire inflamed Cleopas and his companion when the Saviour spoke to them after the resurrection. From the same source also angles and the ministering spirits partake of the shining fire according to what has been said: “Who makes his angels spirits and his ministers a flaming fire” (Heb. 1:7). This fire burns up the beam in the interior eye; it renders the mind pure so that recovering its natural power of seeing, it may constantly gaze on the wonderful works of God according to him who says: “Open my eyes and I will ponder the wonders of thy Law (Ps. 119:18). This fire also drives out demons, takes away sins, and has the power of resurrection. It develops immortality, the illumination of holy souls, and the strengthening of the rational powers. Let us beg that this fire come to also to us so that, constantly walking in the light, we may never for even a moment “dash our feet against the stone” (Ps. 91:12)... [*Fifty Spiritual Homilies* 25.6]

St. Theognostos

‘Only through repentance shall we receive God’s mercy, and not its opposite, His passionate anger. Not that God is angry with us: He is angry with evil. Indeed, the divine is beyond passion and vengefulness, though we speak of it as reflecting, like a mirror, our actions and dispositions, giving to each of us whatever we deserve.’ [*On the Practice of the Virtues* II.47; *Philokalia* 2:370]

St. Peter Damaskinos

We do not all receive blessings in the same way. Some, on receiving the fire of the Lord, that is, His word, put it into practice and so become softer of heart, like wax, while others through laziness become harder than clay and altogether stone-like. And no one compels us to receive these blessings in different ways. It is as with the sun whose rays illumine all the world: the person who wants to see it can do so, while the person who does not want to see it is not forced to, so that he alone is to blame for his lightless condition. For God made both the sun and man’s eyes, but

how man uses them depends on himself. Similarly, then, God irradiates knowledge to all and at the same time He gives us faith as an eye through which we can perceive it. [*A Treasury of Divine Knowledge* 1; Philokalia 3:78]

St. John of the Ladder

To keep a regular watch over the heart is one thing; to guard the heart by means of the mind is another for the mind is the ruler and high priest offering spiritual sacrifices to Christ. When heaven's holy fire lays hold of the former, it burns them because they still lack purification. This is what one of those endowed with the title of Theologian tells us. (Gregory of Nanzianzus, cf. Or. 21, 2 (PG 35, 1084D) But as for the latter, it enlightens them in proportion to the perfection they have achieved. It is one and the same fire that is called that which consumes (cf. Heb. 12:29) and that which illuminates (cf. John 1:9)." [*The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Step 28; John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 280]

St. Andrew of Caesarea

The heavens opening signifies the appearance of the visible judge to come, just as here, when the curtains of the judges on the earth are drawn back the judgment and sentence come down upon those who are guilty. And the white horse is the future joy of the saints, upon which he is carried to judge the nations impartially, I think by His watchful, providential power throwing out flames of fire, which the righteous illuminate but do not burn, but the sinners burn and do not illumine. [Commentary on the Apocalypse at Rev. 19:11-12; Eugenia S. Constantinou, *Andrew of Caesarea and the Apocalypse in the Ancient Church of the East: Studies and Translation* (Ph.D. diss.; Université Laval, 2008), 192-193]

St. Isaac of Syria

Sin, Gehenna, and Death do not exist at all with God, for they are effects, not substances. Sin is the fruit of free will. There was a time when sin did not exist, and there will be a time when it will not exist. Gehenna is the fruit of sin... [*Ascetical Homilies* 27, Page 133]

I also maintain that those who are punished in Gehenna, are scourged by the scourge of love. Nay, what is so bitter and vehement as the torment of love? ...It would be improper for a man to think that sinners in Gehenna are deprived of the love of God... The power of love works in two ways: it torments sinners... Thus I say that this is the torment of Gehenna: bitter regret. But love inebriates the souls of the sons of Heaven by its delectability. [*Ascetical Homilies* 28, Page 141]

This is the aim of Love. Love's chastisement is for correction, but it does not aim at retribution...But the man who considers God an avenger, presuming that he bears witness to His justice, the same accuses Him of being bereft of goodness. Far be it, that vengeance could ever be found in that Fountain of love and Ocean brimming with goodness! The aim of His design is the correction of men." [*Ascetical Homilies* 48, Page 230]

Do not call God just, for His justice is not manifest in the things concerning you. And if David calls Him just and upright, His Son revealed to us that He is good and kind. 'He is good', He says 'to the evil and to the impious.' How can you call God just when you come across the Scriptural passage on the wage given to the workers?...How can a man call God just when he comes across the passage on the prodigal son who wasted his wealth with riotous living, how for the compunction alone which he showed, the father ran and fell upon his neck and gave him authority over all his wealth?...Where, then, is God's justice, for while we are sinners Christ died for us! When we say that God is just, we do not mean that He is a good judge Who knows how to punish men equitably (emphasis supplied) according to the gravity of their crimes, but on the contrary, we mean that He is kind and loving, forgiving all transgressions and disobediences, and that He wants to save us by all means, and never requites evil for evil." [*Ascetical Homilies* 51, Page 251]

The watchfulness of discernment is superior to every discipline of men accomplished in any way to any degree. Do not hate the sinner. For we are all laden with guilt. If for the sake of God you are moved to oppose him, weep over him. Why do you hate him? Hate his sins and pray for him, that you may imitate Christ Who was not wroth with sinners, but interceded for them. Do you not see how He wept over Jerusalem? We are mocked by the devil in many instances, so why should we hate the man who is mocked by him who mocks us also? Why, O man, do you hate the sinner? Could it be because he is not so righteous as you? But where is your righteousness when you have no love? Why do you not shed tears over him? But you persecute him. In ignorance some are moved with anger, presuming themselves to be discerners of the works of sinners.

Be a herald of God's goodness, for God rules over you, unworthy though you are; for although your debt to Him is so great, yet He is not seen exacting payment from you, and from the small works you do, He bestows great rewards upon you. Do not call God just, for His justice is not manifest in the things concerning you. And if David calls Him just and upright (cf. Ps. 24:8, 144:17), His Son revealed to us that He is good and kind. 'He is good,' He says, 'to the evil and to the impious' (cf. Luke 6:35). How can you call God just when you come across the Scriptural passage on the wage given to the workers? 'Friend, I do thee no wrong: I will give unto this last even as unto thee. Is thine eye evil because I am good?' (Matt. 20:12-15). How can a man call God just when he comes across the passage on the prodigal son who wasted his wealth with riotous living, how for the compunction alone which he showed, the father ran and fell upon his neck and gave him authority over all his wealth? (Luke 15:11 ff.). None other but His very Son said these things concerning Him, lest we doubt it; and thus He bare witness concerning Him. Where, then, is God's justice, for whilst we are sinners Christ died for us! (cf. Rom. 5:8). But if here He is merciful, we may believe that He will not change.

Far be it that we should ever think such an iniquity that God could become unmerciful! For the property of Divinity does not change as do mortals. God does not acquire something which He does not have, nor lose what He has, nor supplement what He does have, as do created beings. But what God has from the beginning, He will have and has until the end, as the blest Cyril wrote in his commentary on Genesis. Fear God, he says, out of love for Him, and not for the austere name that He has been given. Love Him as you ought to love Him; not for what He will give you in the future, but for what we have received, and for this world alone which He has created for us. Who is the man that can repay Him? Where is His repayment to be found in our works? Who persuaded Him in the beginning to bring us into being Who intercedes for us before Him, when we shall possess no memory, as though we never existed? Who will awake this our body for that life? Again, whence descends the notion of knowledge into dust? O the wondrous mercy of God! O the astonishment at the bounty of our God and Creator! O might for which all is possible! O the immeasurable goodness that brings our nature again, sinners though we be, to His regeneration and rest! Who is sufficient to glorify Him? He raises up the transgressor and blasphemer, he renews dust unendowed with reason, making it rational and comprehending and the scattered and insensible dust and the scattered senses He makes a rational nature worthy of thought. The sinner is unable to comprehend the grace of His resurrection. Where is gehenna, that can afflict us? Where is perdition, that terrifies us in many ways and quenches the joy of His love? And what is gehenna as compared with the grace of His resurrection, when He will raise us from Hades and cause our corruptible nature to be clad in incorruption, and raise up in glory him that has fallen into Hades?

Come, men of discernment, and be filled with wonder! Whose mind is sufficiently wise and marvelous to wonder worthily at the bounty of our Creator? His recompense of sinners is, that instead of a just recompense, He rewards them with resurrection, and instead of those bodies with which they trampled upon His law, He enrobes them with perfect glory and incorruption. That grace whereby we are resurrected after we have sinned is greater than the grace which brought us into being when we were not. Glory be to Thine immeasurable grace, O Lord! Behold, Lord, the waves of Thy grace close my mouth with silence, and there is not a thought left in me before the face of Thy thanksgiving. What mouths can confess Thy praise, O good King, Thou Who lovest our life? Glory be to Thee for the two worlds which Thou hast created for our growth and delight, leading us by all things which Thou didst fashion to the knowledge of Thy glory, from now and unto the ages. Amen.

St. Symeon Metaphrastes

O Thou who willingly dost give thy flesh to me as food, Thou who art a Fire, consuming the unworthy, consume me not, O my Creator; but rather pass through all my body parts, into all my joints, my reins, my heart. Burn thou the

thorns of all my transgressions, cleanse my soul, and hallow thou my thoughts. Make firm my knees, and my bones likewise; enlighten as one my five senses, establish me wholly in thy fear; ever shelter me, and guard and keep me from every soul-corrupting deed and word, chasten me, purify me, and control me; adorn me, teach me, and enlighten me. Show me to be a Tabernacle of thy Spirit only, and in no wise the dwelling-place of sin, that from me, thy habitation, through the entrance of thy Communion, every evil deed and every passion may flee as from fire. [Prayer of thanksgiving after Communion]

St. Mark of Ephesus

Since the saints do not bring with them any evil work or evil mark, this fire manifests them as brighter, as gold tried in the fire, or as the stone amianthus, which, as it is related, when placed in fire it appears as charred, but when taken out of the fire become even cleaner, as if washed with water, as were also the bodies of the Three Youths in the Babylonian furnace. Sinners, however, who bring evil with themselves, are seized as a suitable material for this fire and are immediately ignited by it, and their “work,” that is, their evil disposition or activity, is burned and utterly destroyed and they are deprived of what they brought with them, that is, deprived of their burden of evil, while they themselves are “saved” — that is, will be preserved and kept forever, so that they might not be subjected to destruction together with their evil. [Refutation of the Latin Chapters Concerning Purgatorial Fire, First Homily]

St. Gregory Palamas

He says: ‘He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire’, that is to say, with illumination and punishment, according to the disposition of each. [Homily 59, EPE 11, Page 498]

St. Ambrose

St. John Cassian

St. Symeon the New Theologian

See references in Alexander Golitzin, St. Symeon the New Theologian. On the Mystical Life (3 vols.;), 3:155-156.

“Hell is ignorance, for both are dark; and perdition is forgetfulness, for both involve extinction.” ([St. Mark the Ascetic](#), [The Philokalia](#), Kindle Loc. 3069-70)

“For estrangement and turning away from God are more unbearable than the punishments expected in hell, and more oppressive to the one suffering than the deprivation of light is to the eye, even if no pain is added to it, or than the deprivation of life is to a living creature.” ([St. Basil the Great](#), d. 379AD)

“We surely ought not to think that what is referred to as ‘hell’ is a place, but a state of life, invisible and incorporeal, to which Scripture teaches us that souls lead.” ([St. Gregory of Nyssa](#), d.384AD)

“You see, true kingship is this, being in a position to win the Lord’s benevolence and clemency through the excellence of one’s lifestyle. After all, the reason we ought to be in fear and dread of hell is not the undying fire, the terrible punishments, the unremitting retribution, but rather offending such a good Lord and finding ourselves outside his benevolence.” ([St. John Chrysostom](#), d. 407AD)

“Now, if in the case of friends and children we think distressing them is far worse than being punished, much more should this be our attitude in the case of God, and we should think that doing anything not pleasing to him is worse than any hell.” ([St. John Chrysostom](#))

“Let no one fear death, for the Death of our Savior has set us free. He has destroyed it by enduring it. He destroyed Hades when He descended into it. He put it into an uproar even as it tasted of His flesh. Isaiah foretold this when he said, ‘You, O Hell, have been troubled by encountering Him below.’ Hell was in an uproar because it was done away with. It was in an uproar because it is mocked. It was in an uproar, for it is destroyed. It is in an uproar, for it is annihilated. It is in an uproar, for it is now made captive. Hell took a body, and discovered God. It took earth, and encountered Heaven. It took what it saw, and was overcome by what it did not see. O death, where is thy sting? O Hades, where is thy victory? Christ is Risen, and you, o death, are annihilated! Christ is Risen, and the evil ones are cast down! Christ is Risen, and the angels rejoice! Christ is Risen, and life is liberated! Christ is Risen, and not a single corpse remains in the grave!” (St. John Chrysostom, Paschal Sermon)

Chrysostom says in his “Address on Vainglory and the Right Way for Parents to Bring Up their Children” that the age at which to teach a child about hell is “*when he has grown older, tell him also more fearful tales; for you should not impose so great a burden on his understanding while he is still tender, lest you dismay him. But when he is fifteen years old or more, let him hear of hell.*”

“...He (God) threatened us with hell, not to inflict it on us but so as not to inflict it, while he prepared it for the devil - ‘go into the fire prepared for the devil’ (Matt 25:41), he says, remember – he prepared the kingdom for human beings, showing that he did not wish to cast a human being into hell.” (St. John Chrysostom)

“Sin, Gehenna, and death do not exist at all with God, for they are effects, not substances. Sin is the fruit of free will. There was a time when sin did not exist, and there will be a time when it will not exist. I also maintain that those who are punished in Gehenna are scourged by the scourge of love. ... For the sorrow caused in the heart by sin against love is more poignant than any torment. It would be improper for a man to think that sinners in Gehenna are deprived of the love of God. ... Thus I say that this is the torment of Gehenna: bitter regret.” (St. Isaac the Syrian, 7th Century)

“One day I was in Crete. The holy man Carpus welcomed me to his home. ... he told me that one day he was exasperated by the infidelity of a man ... (which)... had turned away from faith in God one of the members of his church... Carpus in his goodness should have been duty bound to pray for both of them. ... Instead, Carpus for the first time in his life felt grieved and indignant. It was in this state of mind that he went to bed and fell asleep. In the middle of the night, at the hour when he was in the habit of waking of his own accord to sing the praises of God, he arose, still prey to unspiritual irritation, saying to himself that it was not right to let someone live . . . and he begged God to hurl his inexorable thunderbolt to put an end at a single stroke to the life of two unbelievers. At that moment, he said, the house where he was suddenly seemed to rock this way and that, then to split in two from the roof down the middle. A vivid flame appeared which came down on him; the sky was rent; Jesus revealed himself in the midst of a multitude of angels... Carpus lifted his eyes and stood astonished at what he saw. Looking down, he told me, he watched the ground itself opening to make a black yawning abyss, and in front of him on the edge of the abyss the two men he had cursed, trembling and gradually losing their foothold. From the bottom of the abyss he saw snakes crawling up and wrapping themselves round the men’s feet trying their utmost to drag them down. The men seemed to be on the point of succumbing, partly despite

themselves, partly quite willingly, since there were being assaulted and at the same time seduced by the Evil One. Carpus was overjoyed, he told me, as he contemplated the spectacle beneath him. Forgetting the vision above (Jesus), he was growing impatient and indignant that the unbelievers had not yet succumbed. Several times he joined his efforts to those of the snakes... In the end he lifted his eyes and saw again in the sky the same vision as shortly before. But this time Jesus, moving with compassion, came down to the unbelievers and stretched out a hand to help them... then he said to Carpus, 'Your hand is already raised. It is I whom you should strike, for here I am to suffer again for the salvation of humanity...moreover you should consider whether you yourself should not stay in the abyss with the snakes, rather than live with God... ([Dionysius the Areopagite...](#))' Olivier Clement comments: "Carpus's vision convinces him that to wish to damn anyone is to attack Christ himself, to annul his Passion and so to compel him to undergo it again; similarly it is to throw oneself, by one's own actions, in the abyss." ([The Roots of Christian Mysticism](#) by Oliver Clement, pp 300-301)

“... of hell itself. This idea, designed to terrorize souls, does not attain its goal, because it is abstract and therefore powerless. But, at the same time, striking sensitive hearts with horror, paralyzing filial love and the childlike trust in the Heavenly Father, this idea makes Christianity resemble Islam, replacing love with fear.” ([Fr. Sergius Bulgakov](#))

“For [St. Isaac](#), hell did not exist prior to sin and its ultimate end is unknown. Hell is not a place of punishment created by God, but a spiritual mode of anguished suffering created by sinful creatures willfully separated from God. According to Isaac, sinners in this hell are not deprived of the love of God; only they suffer in the profound realization of having offended against love and of being unable to participate in it. Hell is none other than this bitter awareness of separation and regret...” ([Fr. Theodore Stylianopoulos](#))

“Those who proclaim the infinity of torments also necessarily affirm the eternity of evil and its coeternity with good, as well as the invincible fury of the hatred that sinners direct toward God.” (Fr. Sergius Bulgakov)

“But it is even more difficult to admit the eternity of evil, attributing to an inexhaustible creative activity, at least without a clear acceptance of Manichaean dualism. Evil is a negative; it is the minus of being. Evil has a bottom; and if it appears bottomless or poses as bottomless, this is only a deception or a self-deception. ... Inasmuch as hell is not a creation of God but a product of the self-determination of the prince of this world and of those enslaved by him, it does not have being in itself, nor, therefore, its proper eternity; its ‘eternity’ is only a temporary state of life. These ontological arguments oblige us to deny the infinity of hell; in the ages, hell dissolves into nothing, which is its genuine foundation.” (Fr. *Sergius Bulgakov*)

“Over many centuries, the conception of the eternity of torments as unchangeable and infinite in duration appeared to offer the most appropriate and effective means to strike the souls of sinners with the fear of God, to conquer their wickedness and spiritual laziness. But at the present time, this pedagogy does not attain its goal. Not terrorization but God’s love, manifested even toward those in hell, most effectively touches the soul and awakens it from spiritual sleep. ... it is a question of the impossibility of recognizing ‘eternal torments’ as compatible with God’s justice and love, of the inability of the human consciousness even to entertain this notion. ... the pedagogy of [St. Gregory of Nyssa](#) and his followers, which has not been condemned and which, in any case is permitted by the Church, is, even today, more appropriate and more convincing than the pedagogy of terrorization. To be sure, ‘the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom’ (Ps 111:10; Prov 1:7), but not is end, for ‘there is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear’ (1 John 4:18)... It was love, not fear, that engendered the prayer of the early Christians: ‘Even so, come, Lord Jesus.’” (Fr. *Sergius Bulgakov*)

“Hell is nothing else but separation of man from God, his autonomy excluding him from the place where God is present.” ([Paul Evdokimov](#))

“Hell is none other than the state of separation from God, a condition into which humanity was plunged for having preferred the creature to the Creator. It is the human creature, therefore, and not God, who engenders hell. Created free for the sake of love, man possesses the incredible power to reject this love,

to say 'no' to God. By refusing communion with God, he becomes a predator, condemning himself to a spiritual death (hell) more dreadful than the physical death derives from it." ([Michael Quenot](#))

"Hell – that is to say, the place where God is not – can only be created as a result of an estrangement between our world and God." ([Fr. John Chryssavgis](#))

"The last word of Christianity is not hell but victory over hell; God does not promise us universal salvation because he can only offer it to us and wait for our response, our love, to let it happen." ([Olivier Clement](#))

"Hell is not a place created by God for the punishment of sinful people. Indeed, hell is not a place at all, but a state of being. For those who may experience hell after the last judgment, that state or condition will be a product of their own conscience, a result of a free choice which they themselves have made. Hell is an affirmation, not a rejection. No one experiences hell because he has been rejected by God or deprived by God of His love. Hell is an affirmation of our own choices, of the fact that God respects us and respects our choices for all eternity." ([Archbishop Lazar Puhalo](#))

"Hell is the name of that false history against which the true story, in Christ, is told, and it is exposed as the true destination of all our violence, by the light of the resurrection, even as Christ breaks open the gates of hell and death. Hell is with us at all times, a phantom kingdom perpetuating itself in the wastes of sinful hearts, but only becomes visible to us as hell because the true kingdom has shed its light upon history. In theological tradition, most particularly in the East, there is that school of thought that wisely makes no distinction, essentially, between the fire of hell and the light of God's glory, and interprets damnation as the soul's resistance to the beauty of God's glory, its refusal to open itself before the divine love, which causes divine love to seem exterior chastisement (so [St. Maximus the Confessor](#), [Origin](#) and [St. Gregory of Nyssa](#) – my note). Hell is the experience (a possibility in each moment) of divine glory not as beauty, but as a formless sublimity ... The 'fire' of hell is ... the soul's refusal to become (as Gregory says) the expanding vessel into which the beauty of God endlessly flows." ([David Bentley Hart](#))

I'll conclude with an excerpt from [Scott Cairns'](#) poem "Gehenna, Its Duration" from his book [LOVE'S IMMENSITY: MYSTICS ON THE ENDLESS LIFE](#). The poem is based on the writings of [St. Isaac of Nineveh](#).

That we should think that hell

is not also full

of love and mingled with compassion

would be an insult to our God.

By saying He will deliver us

to suffering without purpose, we

most surely sin. We blaspheme also if we say

*that He will act with spite or with a vengeful purpose,
as if He had a need to avenge Himself.*