

Concordia Seminary - Saint Louis

Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary

Bachelor of Divinity

Concordia Seminary Scholarship

4-30-1943

The History and Scriptural Basis of the Doctrine of Christ's Descent into Hell (Descuses ad Inferos)

Conrad Coyner

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, ir_coynerc@csl.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/bdiv>



Part of the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Coyner, Conrad, "The History and Scriptural Basis of the Doctrine of Christ's Descent into Hell (Descuses ad Inferos)" (1943). *Bachelor of Divinity*. 88.

<https://scholar.csl.edu/bdiv/88>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Concordia Seminary Scholarship at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Bachelor of Divinity by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.

THE HISTORY AND SCRIPTURAL BASIS
OF THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST'S DESCENT INTO HELL
(DESCENSUS AD INFEROS)

A Thesis presented to the Faculty of
Concordia Theological Seminary
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Bachelor of Divinity

by

Conrad Coyner

St. Louis, Missouri

April 30, 1943

Approved by:

Theron Parkhurst
W. Arndt

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
CHAPTER I. Introduction	1
A. HISTORICAL SECTION	
CHAPTER II. Ante-Nicene Fathers	4
CHAPTER III. Confessional Positions of Christian Church ..	13
B. EXEGETICAL SECTION	
CHAPTER IV. Eschatology	24
CHAPTER V. Meaning of <u>Sheol</u> and <u>Hades</u>	30
CHAPTER VI. Exegesis of I Peter 3: 18-20	36
CHAPTER VII. Exegesis of Other Supporting Passages	48
CHAPTER VIII. Conclusion	53
BIBLIOGRAPHY	55

THE HISTORY AND SCRIPTURAL BASIS
OF THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST'S DESCENT INTO HELL

It has been remarked by one of our pastors that little is known about the doctrine of Christ's descent into hell, even by ministers, and much that is taught by them on this subject is wrong.¹ We have little doubt that this is a valid appraisal of the situation, for it seems that because of its relative unimportance this doctrine has been shunted to the rear of theological discourse, and as a consequence has often been neglected entirely. However, the pastor, as a diligent student of Scripture, should become familiar with the historical, and particularly, with the Scriptural background of this, as well as other doctrines, and he should not be unduly disturbed by Luther's scowl upon the quaking soul when he says:

"Also hie, wenn sie hört, dass Christus zur Hölle gefahren ist, fährt sie zu und will's sobald ausspekulieren, wie es zugegangen sei, und macht viel weitläufiger, unnützer Fragen: Ob die Seele allein hinuntergefahren sei, oder ob die Gottheit bei ihr gewesen sei; item, was er daselbst getan habe, und wie er mit den Teufeln umgegangen sei; und dergleichen viel, davon sie doch nichts wissen kann."²

especially when Luther himself admits of the eodem doctrinae,

1. P. L. Bornhoeft, Lutheran Witness, vol. 46, p. 134.
2. Martin Luther, Sermon at Torgau, Von der Hellenfahrt Christi, quoted in Concordia Triglotta, p. 1050.

I Pet. 3:19-21: "This is a strange text, and a more obscure passage, perhaps, than any other in the New Testament, for I do not certainly know what St. Peter means."³ Nor is he to be cowed by the judgment of Augustine who says: "Wer anders also, als ein Ungläubiger, könnte ableugnen, dass Christus in der Unterwelt gewesen sei?"⁴ For surely there are many like ourselves, who, upon confessing in the Apostles' Creed, "He descended into hell," have wondered whether Christ descended figuratively or literally, and if the latter, where hell is located, what Christ did there and what purpose he accomplished, and above all, have wondered where all this is taught in Scripture?

Surely the only way to "grow in knowledge" (II Pet. 3:18) and "be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you, a reason of the hope that is in you" (I Pet. 3:15) is to adopt a scholarly "show me" attitude toward Scripture, and by "sola Scriptura" determine for oneself that knowledge of God and His way of salvation. A thorough exegetical study, therefore, of the sedes doctrinae, I Pet. 3:18-20, and other passages proposed in support of this doctrine, will constitute the major portion of this paper. Inasmuch, however, as it often is helpful in determining the meaning of Scripture passages, to see how the fathers of the early Church interpreted them, a very brief presentation of the opinions of the fathers of the first three centuries is offered. In order to complete the historical background of this doctrine, a necessarily brief over-view of the con-

3. Martin Luther, Commentary on the First Epistle General of St. Peter, Gillett translation, p. 188.

4. St. Augustine, Ninety-Nine Letters to Euodius, from letter 57, as quoted by J. L. König, Die Lehre von Christi Höllenfahrt, p. 119.

essional positions of the Catholic, Reformed and Lutheran denomi-
tions is also presented. Moreover, to establish a clear basis for
some of the issues discussed, it was felt advisable to add the chapters
on eschatology and on Sheol and Hades.

The purpose of this monograph is to present a study of The doctrine
of Christ's descent into hell both historically and exegetically.

It may appear to the reader that this paper has been written from
a prejudiced viewpoint. But the writer maintains that a stout and
honest effort was made to study this subject with as open and unbiased
a mind as possible. But the conscientious student can only be as
unprejudiced as truth itself is prejudiced, and with Daniel Defoe we
say, "He that hath truth on his side is a fool as well as a coward if
he is afraid to own it because of other men's opinions."

CHAPTER II

In presenting the position of the early Christian Church of the first three centuries on this doctrine of Christ's descent into hell, it will be possible within the small compass of this paper to cite only a few representative fathers, and for the rest the reader must rely upon the analyses and conclusions of such students of the subject as Huidekoper, König, Plumtree and Knox. Moreover, there are two vital observations to be made at the outset. The first is stated by Huidekoper:

"On leaving the Apostolic age we almost lose sight of the Christians in an historical chasm of sixty or eighty years. When they reappear on the other side of it, we find, so far as their records enable us to judge, that, among all the parties into which they are divided, though with one modification... a belief has become firmly established that Christ performed a mission in the Underworld. The variety of discussions as to its nature prove the universality of belief in the supposed fact of the mission itself."¹

The other observation is made by Knox:

"The 'myth' of a divine being who descends into hell and returns in triumph appears to go back to Babylonian religion; possibly it is derived from the character of Marduk (originally Tammuz) as a vegetation god (Kroll, Gott und Hölle, p. 239). The same motif appears in Egypt as a descent of the sun-god into the darkness of the underworld (ib. 182ff.) The dualistic world-view characteristic of Iranian-Chaldean religion, which influenced the general Hellenistic outlook in which Christianity grew up, substituted for the descent of the savior-god into the lower world his descent through the spheres of the planets into the material cosmos."²

"1 Cor. 2:8 That the 'rulers' crucified Jesus because they did not know who He was suggests the motive of the redeemer who passes through the various doors of the planetary spheres unrecognized. This is very commonly found in the Mandaean and Gnostic literature."³

-
1. Frederic Huidekoper, Christ's Mission to the Underworld, pp. 3-4.
 2. Wilfred L. Knox, St. Paul and the Church of the Gentiles, Note IV, "The Descent of the Redeemer," p. 220.
 3. Ibid. p. 220.

"The development of the myth is traced by Kroll. It is clear that it appears in a fully developed form in the Apostolic Canons, but it does not appear in the credal form of exorcism in Justin Martyr ... One is tempted to suspect that the story made its way from popular religion into liturgical Christianity with the help of the isolated allusions in Scripture which sanctioned or seemed to sanction it."⁴

Taking cognizance, then, of the "chasm" in New Testament history and of the ancient and Hellenistic background of religion and philosophy of the early fathers, we shall review the statements of writers representative of the various schools of religious thought which developed in the first centuries.

One of the first "sects" to develop was that of the Gnostics, and the Marcionites constituted a prominent branch. Marcion, though leaving no extant works, is reported upon by Irenaeus and Theodoret to this effect:

"Besides (Marcion's) blasphemy against /the Jewish/ God, he added this, receiving indeed a mouth from the Devil, and speaking all things contrary to the truth, that Cain and those who were like him, and the Sodomites and Egyptians, and those who were like them, and in fact all the Gentiles who had walked in thorough wickedness, were saved by the Lord when he descended into the Underworld, and that they had hastened to him, and that he took them into his kingdom. But Abel and Enoch and Noah and the other Just Men, and those who belonged to the Patriarch Abraham, with all the Prophets and such as had pleased God, did not, according to the preaching of the serpent in Marcion, participate in the salvation. For since, he said, they knew that their God was always trying them, and suspected that he was trying them then, they did not hasten to Jesus nor believe what he announced; and therefore (Marcion) said, their souls remained in the Underworld."⁵

And Irenaeus himself as one of the Catholic fathers and an "ultra anti-Gnostic" presents his opposing views:

4. Ibid. p. 223, note 1.

5. Irenaeus, Contra Haereses, I, 27, 3 (I, 29) quoted by Huidekoper, op. cit., pp. 5-6.

"Therefore the Lord descended to the regions under the earth, preaching to them also his advent, the sins of such as believed on him being remitted. But all believed on him who were hoping for him, that is, who had foretold his coming and obeyed his statutes, the Just Men, and Prophets, and Patriarchs, to whom he remitted their sins in like manner as to us."⁶

Representative of the liberalists among the Catholic fathers is Clement of Alexandria, who attempted to defend the good name of the Gentiles in the Underworld:

"To those who were just according to the law, faith was wanting. ... To the just according to Philosophy, not only faith in the Lord, but abstinence from Idolatry was needful. Wherefore the Lord preached to those in the Underworld; for according to the Scripture, 'The Underworld says to Destruction, We have not indeed seen his form, but we have heard his voice.' (Job.28:22?). It was not the place which, after listening to his voice, spoke the foregoing, but those /without distinction of race/ who were in the Underworld. ... These are they who attended to the Divine voice and /manifestation of/ power. For what reasonable man would brand Providence with injustice, by deeming the souls of Just Men /from among the Gentiles/ and sinners /of all nations/ under one condemnation? What! Do not the Scriptures manifest that the Lord preached the Gospel to those who perished in the deluge,--or rather to such as had been bound, and to those in prison and custody? It has been shown /by me/ in the second book of Stromata, that the Apostles, in imitation of the Lord, preached the Gospel to those in the Underworld. For there also, as here, I think that it behooved the best of the disciples to be imitators of their teachers, that the one should lead to conversion of the Hebrews, and the other the Gentiles; that is, such of both as had lived according to the justice of the Law or of Philosophy, not perfectly indeed, but imperfectly. ... If then the sole cause of the Lord's descent to the Underworld was to preach the Gospel, --as descend he certainly did,-- it was either that he might preach it to all, or to the Hebrews alone. <But if to all, then all who believed will be saved, even if they should be from among the Gentiles, seeing that they have already heartily confessed him there.>⁸

A sample of the exalted metaphysical speculation of that group of

6. Ibid. IV, 27, 2 (IV, 45) quoted by Huidekoper, op. cit., p. 9.

7. Huidekoper notes here: "A self-correction. Clement intended to appeal, not to Peter, but to Is. 49:8,9."

8. Clement, Stromata, VI, 6, pp.762-3, quoted by Huidekoper, op. cit., pp. 13-14.

the Gnostics known as Valentinians is taken from a collection of writings known as Doctrina Orientalis:

"The Savior as he descended was seen by the angels /of the Middle Space through which he passed/; on which account they proclaimed the glad tidings of him (Lk.2:13,14). But he was also seen by Abraham and the other Just Men who were at rest in the right hand /i.e., in the heavens of the Jewish God/, for Christ said (Jn.8:56) 'he rejoiced when he saw my day,' that is, the day ~~of~~ my advent in the flesh. Whence the Lord on rising again preached the Gospel to the Just who were at rest, and removed and transferred them. For the Savior's presence there is the shadow of his glory with his Father. And the shadow cast by light is not darkness, but an enlightenment."⁹

For the sake of completeness we should also include the views of the Manichaeans, a sect which arose in the latter half of the third century. Faustus, an opponent of Augustine, writes on Mt.8:11:

"Grant that they (Abraham and the Patriarchs) are now in the kingdom of the heavens,-- that they are in that place in which they had no belief and for which they never hoped, as is evident from their books. Yet what is written concerning them is confirmed even by your confession, that, liberated after a long interval by Christ our Lord--namely by his mystical suffering,-- from the dark and penal custody of the Lower Regions, whither the deserts of their life coerced them, they attained to this place, if indeed they have attained to it."¹⁰

These quotations should suffice to give at least a general impression of the views held in the early centuries of the Christian era. <It is evident that a doctrine of belief in Christ's descent to hell was universally accepted, but many details of this belief were as divergent as the imaginations of the leaders in thought could make them.> "Quot homines, tot sententiae" is very aptly applied here. True, the universal idea prevailed that Christ preached the Gospel, but as we have seen,

9. Doctrina Orientalis, c.18 cited by Potter in his edition of Clement, p. 973, and quoted by Huidekoper, op. cit., pp.22-23.

10. Faustus, quoted by Augustine in Augustine contra Faustus, XXXIII, 1,2,3, vol.VI, p.106, EHK., as quoted by Huidekoper, op. cit., p. 28.

some maintained that He preached to the Patriarchs alone, while others just as vigorously contested that the Gentiles also heard the Gospel and were saved. This belief in the liberation of those in the Underworld was particularly affirmed by Origen, Clement, Tertullian, Marcion and Gyprian, while the Shepherd of Hermas adds that Christ first had to baptize those confined in the Underworld before they could be released. Huidekoper says of the liberation:

"Loose methods of interpretation rendered it easy to infer from passages of the Old and New Testaments (Hosea 6:2; 13:14; Ps. 68:18; Mt. 27:52,53; Eph. 4:7-11; I pet. 4:5-7, etc) that such a Liberation had actually accompanied the Savior's resurrection, and there was the greater inducement to this use of the Old Testament as the Christians thereby found their storehouse of arguments against the Jews much better filled."¹¹

Origen, the only writer of this early period to leave any extensive commentaries on Scripture, adduces in support of this doctrine a number of passages from Psalms and Old Testament apocryphal writings. He is also the only writer of this period to refer to I Pet. 3:18-20 in support of his views, since, according to Huidekoper, "its appearance of favoring heresy must have precluded it from being much used."¹²

Plumptre also concurs in this evaluation: "It has already been shown that the traditional form of the Descent into Hades seems to have had its origin and growth entirely independent of this memorable passage, and that there is no exegetical notice of it in the earlier fathers."¹³

Origen also seems to have been alone in entertaining the theory that Christ needed such precursors as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and Samuel to prepare the way for him in the Underworld.

11. F. Huidekoper, op. cit., p. 57.

12. Ibid. p. 135.

13. E. H. Plumptre, The Spirits in Prison, p. 115.

Most of the early fathers regarded Satan or the Devil as the Ruler of the Underworld, as well as the Prince of the Powers of the Air and God of this World, (14), although some found difficulty in reconciling the necessity of Christ's descent in order to conquer Satan, with the opinion that Satan was right here on earth. All were apparently agreed that Christ was victorious in the conflict with Satan, and emerged victorious and unscathed from hell, but according to some, Christ only achieved victory by the deception of concealing His identity from His opponent, (15). Nor did Christ rise from the struggle without paying a ransom of His blood to the Devil, according to Origen (16), or to God, according to others.

Many and varied were the conceptions and confusions of the Underworld, of Tartarus, Hades, Elysian fields, Paradise and Heaven. (Most of the Christian writers accepted the Greek and Roman conception of the Underworld or Hades as the abode of the dead ~~and~~ which was divided into two compartments,--Tartarus, a place of torment for those who had lived evil lives, and the Elysian Fields, a place of blessedness for the good. But most people went to neither, going rather to Hades as a third or intermediate place where there was neither excessive torture nor continual joy, but rather a vague nebulous existence with little activity. Representative of one trend of thought are the views of Tertullian. When his opponents asked what difference is there then between Heathens and Christians if the same prison awaits both, he does not attempt to discriminate between their respective abodes, but argues

14. F. Huidkoper, op. cit., p. 62.

15. Ibid. p. 92.

16. Ibid. p. 96.

that martyrs only enter Paradise, and concludes: "Recognize, therefore, a difference in death between the heathen and believer in case you lay down your life for God ... not in gentle fevers and in bed, but in tortures." 17 Tertullian further lays down:

"that every soul is sequestrated in the Underworld until the day of the Lord. But martyrs go to Paradise in heaven immediately." 18 He fails to state ^{specifically} who utilizes his Paradise on earth which he places south of the torrid zone, and regards as "a place of divine pleasantness destined for receiving the spirits of the saints." 19

On the location of Paradise, Huidekoper makes these observations:

"Paradise in heaven is at the present day regarded as the intermediate abode of the righteous until the resurrection. If any trace of this view can be found in the second and third centuries, it must be by inference, and that a very uncertain one, from the writings either of Tertullian or Cyprian. The Gnostics and such of the Catholic Christians as agreed with them in sending departed souls immediately to heaven, had no idea of ever bringing them down again to be united to their bodies. (They denied the general resurrection). ... Tertullian would almost appear to have gone a step further, and to have concluded that, if people were hereafter to be raised out of the earth, the only method of securing this desirable end was by keeping them under it until the appointed time." 20

It was the common opinion that before the descent of Christ everyone good and bad, went to the Underworld, but subsequent to the descent all Christians are exempt from that place, and only the bad go there. Now where do the Christians go? "Perplexity or uncertainty as to whither souls should go at death is apparent in their language; nor does one of them state a distinct locality as an intermediate abode for the righteous." 21 Justin Martyr says: "The souls of the pious abide somewhere in a better country, and the unjust and wicked in a

17. F. Huidekoper, op. cit., p. 116, quotes Tertullian, De Anima.

18. Ibid. p. 117.

19. Ibid. p. 117.

20. F. Huidekoper, op. cit., pp. 114-115.

21. Ibid. p. 121.

worse, awaiting the time of judgment."²² Irenaeus writes of an "invisible place,"²¹ Barnabas of the "allotted place,"²² and Polycarp of "the place which was due them /the Apostles/ with the Lord."²³

⟨The fathers were not only indefinite as to the location of heaven or Paradise, but it seems few were agreed as to the exact number of heavens.⟩ Some maintained there is only one heaven, others that there are two, and they were opposed by yet others who contested for the existence of three heavens, or seven heavens (24), or even eight places for God and His elect.²⁵

At the risk of further taxing the patience of the reader and extending this treatise beyond a reasonable limit, much more evidence could be cited in illustration of the divergent opinions, and of the inconsistent and inferential reasoning (26) based on the tenets of traditional and contemporary philosophical and religious thought which gave them birth. ⟨Imagination also plays a significant role in the development of the dogmas of Christ's descent as is evident from its fantastic elaboration in the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus (Part II) which Plumptre calls "the play of an over-luxuriant imagination seeking to penetrate into the things behind the veil."²⁷⟩

Finally, as to the reasons which originated this doctrine and caused it to take such deep root in Christian theology, Huidekoper

22. Justin Martyr, Dialogues, c.5, p.107, D, quoted by Huidekoper op. cit., p. 122.

23. Epistles of Barnabas, ch. 18,19 (XIV,3,5,6,) quoted in Huidekoper, op. cit., p. 123.

24. F. Huidekoper, op. cit., Note C, pp.158-159.

25. Ibid. p. 130

26. Of the development of the doctrine Farrar writes in Mercy and Judgment, p.89, "most rests solely on inference--equally true of no small part of the details of scholastic theology."

27. E. H. Plumptre, op. cit., pp.78-81.

Proposes this analysis:

" 1) A wish to solve the question of what Christ did in the interval between his death and resurrection. 2) The need of accounting for the life-giving power of Christianity, or of explaining the victory which Christ had won for his followers over Death. 3) The effort to discover a dignified object for his sufferings. 4) The desire of finding in the Old Testament proof-texts against the Jews, which should imply his death. 5) The benevolent purpose of saving the departed without endangering a doctrine on which the Early Christians found it convenient to lay great stress namely, that no one could be saved without becoming a Christian."²⁸

Of this last mentioned "benevolent universalism" we shall have more to say later. Such then, is the background, taken from the initial and most significant era of New Testament Church history, of the doctrine of Christ's mission to the Underworld. One has but to superficially compare the product of the patristic minds with the present orthodox Lutheran statement of this doctrine to be convinced of the impossibility of substantiating the validity of the latter upon the basis of the former. We hold with Prof. Fox that:

"No article is to be accepted or rejected because it was held or not by the Church of the first three centuries after the apostles, but alone because it is taught or not in the Word of God."²⁹

²⁸. F. Huidekoper, op. cit., p.136.

²⁹. L. A. Fox, "Descensus ad Inferos," Lutheran Quarterly, vol.14, p. 305.

CHAPTER III

No particular attempt will be made in this chapter to establish any premises for the thesis under discussion. It is included rather for the sake of providing a somewhat more complete view of the historical development or treatment of the doctrine of Christ's descent into hell. Although the Ante-Nicene fathers, as we have seen (1), were fairly agreed upon the general tradition of this teaching, it remains for the great teacher Augustine to start the revolt and seek in Scripture the basis for the descent. He encountered the passage of I Pet. 3:18-20, and according to Plumptre:

"He expounds the theory that the words of St. Peter had nothing to do with the descent of Christ into Hades, but referred to His preaching in the spirit in the days of Noah as He preached afterwards in the flesh in Galilee. ... To him the Article itself, and the thoughts which it suggested, were manifestly distasteful. Once more only does he refer to it, and then it is to place the opinion that those believed through the preaching of Christ then, who had not believed before, in his list of heresies."²

Jerome, Cyril of Alexandria and most others of later centuries continued after the old tradition, however. In the creeds of the fourth century and later we find an indication of the reception accorded this teaching.] Pastor Burfeind notes that the Article of the descent to hell was not found in many of these creeds, for example:

" 1) In der römischen Form des Symbols nach Rufinus; 2) in der griechischen Form des Glaubensbekenntnisses des Marcellus von Ancyra (337); 3) in einem griechischen Formular aus einer Handschrift des achter Jahrhunderts nach Jacob Usher; 4) in einem lateinischen Formular aus einer Handschrift des siebenten oder

1. R. B. Welch, "The History of the Doctrine of the Intermediate State," Presbyterian Review, vol. 8, p. 511, says: "By a large generalization, reaching into the fifth century, we find one view may be styled the prevalent, though scarcely the uniform, certainly not the universal view of the Christian Fathers."

2. E. H. Plumptre, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

achten Jahrhunderts nach demselben."³

Fox states that the Article:

"Makes its first appearance in history in Arian creeds,—in those of Arminia, and Sirmium (359). It appears first in the orthodox Church in the creed as used at Aquileia in 390. When, by whom, or why introduced, is unknown. It was there previous to that time, for Rufinus says he found it there, and states further that it was neither in Roman nor Oriental creeds."⁴

And Dr. Kretzmann observes that there is no mention of Christ's descent in our oldest creed, the Nicene. Even old confessions of the Church Fathers have no mention of it. Not until the final form of the Apostles' Creed (adopted 460) are the words, "He descended into hell" found.⁵

A partial explanation of this situation in regard to the creeds is found in the observation that the creeds developed through the centuries, and not in any one generation. / Moreover, Huidekoper says:

"The evidence of its /the Article's/ general reception is far stronger than if it were a mere doctrine of the creed, for articles of the creed have in nearly every instance been opinions which were not generally received, and to which the stronger party therefore gave a place in their confessions of faith as a means of defining their position."⁶

This last may explain the inclusion of the article in some of the creeds, for we know that at least Rufinus held the heretical view that Christ's descent and His burial were identical.⁷ This same opinion was echoed by Duns Scotus and his pupils of the scholastic period, Pikus, Durandus, and Kusanus.⁸ However, since the time of the Reformation the Thomists have evidently prevailed in Roman Catholic theology, and thus we find the patristic view accepted today by Pohle-Preuss:

3. Burfeind, "Die Höllenfahrt Christi," Lehre u. Wehre, vol. 20, p. 15.

4. L. A. Fox, op. cit., pp. 394-395.

5. P. E. Kretzmann, Note in Concordia Theological Monthly, vol. 7, pp. 51-52.

6. F. Huidekoper, op. cit., pp. 137-138.

7. Burfeind, op. cit., p. 16.

8. J. L. König, op. cit., p. 151.

"The Fourth Lateran Council (1215) teaches ... explicitly: 'He descended into hell, ... but He descended in soul and arose in flesh, and ascended equally in both.' P.91 (from Denzinger--Bannwart, Enchiridion, n.429). ... The dogma of Christ's descent into hell is clearly contained both in Sacred Scripture and Tradition. (Ps.16:10; Acts 2:31; 13:35; Eph.4:9f; I Pet.3:18ff. Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Augustine.) ... The only place to which the soul of Christ can have descended during the triduum is the limbus Patrum, sometimes also called "bosom of Abraham." ... We know no more about the whereabouts of hell than we know about the location of what was once the limbo of the Fathers. ... Christologically our Lord's descent into hell must be conceived as an intermediary stage between glorification and abasement. ... We may safely assume that His descent stood in some sort of relation to the redemption of the human race which He had just accomplished. It must have aimed at their beatification, for the limbo contained no reprobates. ... /referring to Paul's reference to Ps.67:19/ Ascending into heaven Christ leads away with Him those who had been imprisoned in the limbo. /Cites the Catechism of the Council of Trent, Part I, ch.6. Ques.6."9

✓ The Lutheran Church also adopted essentially the patristic view, although in recoiling from the Roman Catholic teaching of purgatory it changed the article in respect to the locus and purpose of Christ's descent. The confessional basis of the Lutheran belief is found in Art. IX of the Thorough Declaration of the Formula of Concord:

"And since even in the ancient Christian teachers of the Church, as well as in some among our teachers, dissimilar explanations of the article concerning the descent of Christ to hell are found, we abide in like manner by the simplicity of our Christian faith /comprised in the Creed/, to which Dr. Luther in his sermon, which was delivered in the castle at Torgau in the year 1523, concerning the descent of Christ to hell, has pointed us, where we confess: I believe in the Lord Christ, God's Son, our Lord, dead buried, and descended into hell. For in this /Confession/ the burial and descent of Christ to hell are distinguished as different articles; and we simply believe that the entire person, God and man, after the burial descended into hell, conquered the devil, destroyed the power of hell, and took from the devil all his might. We should not, however, trouble ourselves with high and acute thoughts as to how this occurred; for with our reason and our five senses this article can be comprehended as little as the preceding one, how Christ is placed at the right hand of the almighty power and majesty of God; but we are simply to believe it and adhere to the

Word /in such mysteries of faith/. Thus we retain the substance /sound doctrine) and /true/ consolation that neither hell nor the devil can take captive or injure us and all who believe in Christ." 10

In basing this article entirely upon the sermon of Luther delivered at Torgau, little recognition is made either of Luther's unequivocal attitude in his writings, or the varied opinions expressed by his Lutheran contemporaries such as Aepinus, Flaccius, Agricola, Hunnius, Brentz, Casander, Gartz, and Parsomonius. True, the Epitome seems to make some provision for those who cannot see eye to eye with Luther in this matter. Fox says:

"Christ, after his body had been reanimated in the grave, went in his entire person into the place of torments, not for the purpose of suffering but of showing himself victor over death and Satan. It is to be observed that a distinction is made between his re- vivification and his resurrection. By the latter is understood his reappearance among men. This has been called the Lutheran interpretation, yet it is to be remembered that it has never been made a confessional principle. The epitome mentions without any expression of condemnation these questions: 'Whether in soul only or in the divine nature only or in body and soul Christ descended, whether it was done spiritually or corporeally, whether this article must be referred to his passion or to his glorious victory and triumph.' It is not Lutheran in the sense that one must believe it before he can be an accredited Lutheran. It must be remembered also, that there has never been perfect agreement among Lutheran theologians in this interpretation." 11

Among the Lutheran theologians since the time of Luther who have not agreed with this "Lutheran interpretation" are Mosheim, Hoffmann, Nitsch, Martensen, Dorner, Brentz, Scholz, Delitsch and Julius Müller. And even Luther did not agree with himself on this subject! In 1523 in his exposition of Genesis 7:1, Luther refers thus to I Pet. 3:19, 20:

"Eine solche schreckliche Strafe hat St. Petrum auch bewegt und verursacht, dass er wie ein wahnsinniger oder besessener /König says here: "man traut seinen Augen kaum."/ Mensch mit solchem Worten herausfähret, die wir noch auf diesen Tag nicht verstehen können; denn so sagt er: (I Pet. 3:19, 20). Dieses ist

10. Concordia Triglotta, pp. 1049-1053.

11. L. A. Fox, op. Cit., p. 313.

gewisslich ein wunderlich Urtheil und schier eine thörichte Rede, damit der Apostel dieses schreckliche Spektakel dargethan hat, wie es sich ansehen lässt. Denn Petrus zeigt eben mit diesen Worten an, dass etwas eine ungläubige Welt gewest sei, welcher nach seinem Tode der verstorbene Christus geprediget habe. So das also wahr ist, können wir nicht zweifeln, Christus wird zu denselben Gefangenen im Gefängnis auch gebracht haben Mosen und die Propheten, dass er aus der ungläubigen Welt eine neue und gläubige machte; auf diese Meinung lauten eigentlich St. Petri Worte, wiewohl ich davon Nichts Beschlüssliches reden will. Dennoch ist's auch kein Zweifel, dass die, welche er eine ungläubige Welt nennet, nicht gottlose Verächter und Tyrannen sind, von denen man gewiss sagen kann, dass sie verdammet sind, so sie in ihren Sünden unkommen sind. Es lässt sich aber ansehen, dass er die jungen Kinder und andere, welche ihre Einfältigkeit zu glauben verhindert hat, eine ungläubige Welt nennt ... und preiset doch daneben die Geduld Gottes, dass er die des selig machenden Worte nicht beraubt hat, die zur selben Zeit nicht geglaubt haben oder nicht haben können glauben ... Eine solche Offenbarung ist dieses auch von Christo, dass er die Seelen gelehret hat derer, die zur Zeit der Sündfluth unkommen sind. Darauf nicht übel kann gezogen werden der Artikel im Glauben, dass Christus zur Hölle gefahren sei." 12

In the same year Luther also wrote his exposition of the Petrine epistles in which he has this to say on I Pet. 3:19-21:

"This is a strange text, and a more obscure passage, perhaps, than any other in the New Testament, for I do not certainly know what St. Peter means. At first sight, the words import as though Christ had preached to the spirits,—that is, the souls which were formerly unbelieving at the time Noah was building the Ark; but that I cannot understand, I cannot even explain it. There has been no one hitherto who has explained it. Yet if any one is disposed to maintain that Christ, after that He had suffered on the Cross, descended to these souls and preached to them, I will not dispute it. It might bear such a rendering. But I am not confident that St. Peter would say this. Yet the words may well be understood in this sense,—that our Lord, after His ascension into heaven, came and preached in spirit, yet so that His preaching was not in the body. For He speaks not with bodily voice; He does no more what pertains to the natural functions of the body. Whence it must also follow, as it seems, that inasmuch as He preached to the spirits in that same spiritual body, such preaching must also be a spiritual preaching, so that He did not go there in body and with oral preaching. The text does not require us to understand that He went down to the

12. Martin Luther, Samtliche Schriften, Walch ed., 1739, vol. 1, pp. 809-810.

spirits and preached to them at the time of His death. ... Now He certainly could not have gone to hell, after He had taken to Himself such a new existence; wherefore we must understand that He has done it after His resurrection. ... But with the word preached He comes Himself, and is spiritually present there, and speaks and preaches to the people in their hearts; just as the Apostles speak the word orally and in body to the ears, so He preached to the spirits that lie captive in the prison-house of the devil. So that this also should be understood spiritually, like the preaching. But here the expression follows, 'to the spirits which aforetime were unbelieving, etc.' We should observe in accordance with the divine account, that in that state of existence in which Christ is at present, those who have lived aforetime and those that are living now, are alike to Him, for His control extends itself alike over dead and living: and in that life, the beginning, middle and end of the world are all in one. But here on earth it has properly a measure, so that one age passes on after another. ... But as to God, it all stands in a moment. For with Him a thousand years are as one day, as St. Peter says, in the next Epistle. Thus the first man is just as near to Him as the last that shall be born, and He sees all at once, just as the human eye can bring together two things widely separated at a single glance. So the sense here is this, that Christ preaches no more in person, but is present with the word and preaches to spirits, spiritually, in the heart. ... This at least I can scarcely believe, that Christ descended to those souls and preached to them; while the Scripture is against it, and declares that every one, when he arrives there, must receive according as he has believed and lived. Besides, while it is uncertain what is the state of the dead, we cannot easily explain this passage as one that refers to it. But this is certain, that Christ is present and preaches in the heart, wherever a preacher of God's word speaks to the ear. Therefore may we safely draw to this conclusion: let him to whom a better understanding is manifest, follow the same. This is the summary of the sense which I have exhibited: Christ has ascended to heaven and preached to the spirits,--that is, to human souls; among which human souls have been the unbelieving, as in the times of Noah.¹²

It is interesting to observe that in a general way Luther's ✓ thinking on this subject at various periods in his life follows the historical periods of this article's development. In the early period ✓ around 1523 Luther seems inclined to accept the traditional view, and

13. M. Luther, Commentary on the First Epistle General of St. Peter, E. H. Gillett translation, pp. 188-192.

like the fathers, shies from seeking Scriptural support. In the next period, identified with the sermon at Torgau in 1533⁽²⁾, Luther becomes more certain of his position and attempts to base it more securely upon Scripture. This is comparable to the period of the 17th and 18th century dogmaticians who attempted to place patristic theology upon a more Biblical foundation. The third period comes at the close of Luther's life and, as is maintained by some scholars, exhibits the tendency of some 19th century Lutheran and Reformed theologians toward a modified universalism based on this article of faith. In 1545 Luther wrote in his exposition to Hosea 6:2, with reference to I Pet. 3:18ff: ✓

"Here Peter clearly teaches not only that Christ appeared to the departed fathers and patriarchs, some of whom, without doubt, Christ, when He rose, raised with Him to eternal life, but also preached to some who in the time of Noah had not believed, and who waited for the long-suffering of God, that is, who hoped that God would not enter into so strict a judgment with all flesh, to the intent that they might acknowledge that their sins were forgiven through the sacrifice of Christ. Therefore the prophet in this place has in mind the Christian Church of all times, that is, not only that which was under the Law and after the Law, but also that which existed before the Deluge." 14 ✓

It may well be that this noteworthy passage from Luther is simply a result of a slip of the pen, and in the light of its use by such universalists as König and Plumptre, we might well remark that there is also here the possibility of a slip in interpretation of Luther. As far as we know, Luther nowhere else gives definite expression to any belief in universalism. Be that as it may, however, our purpose in citing these passages was simply to indicate the indefiniteness of Luther's own position on this article. A study of some of the "dogmatic" assertions of later theologians will enable the reader to ✓

14. M. Luther, "Auslegung des Prophet Hosea," Walch ed. vol.6, pp.1797-1798, as translated by Plumptre, op. cit., p.116.

appreciate a comparison with Luther.

What, now, is there to be said for the recent history of the article of Christ's descent? As already noted, those who have been chiefly interested in this doctrine are some Reformed theologians who support it as a basis for their modified universalism. It has been observed in the second chapter that universalism has been associated with this doctrine from the very beginning. Among the most outstanding of the early universalists were Origen and Gregory of Nyssa. From their time through the entire history of the Christian Church there have been proponents of this heresy, and never more so than in the past century. Plumptre cites Bishops Newton, Ken, Butler, Cardinal Manning, Jeremy Taylor, Farrar, F. D. Maurice and many other churchmen inclined to universalism. He even goes afield to bring in Virgil, Dante, Milton, Dryden, Pope, the Kaddish of the Jews, etc., in support of his views, and to establish the prevalence of the idea of universalism. A statement chosen at random from Plumptre will suffice to indicate his own attitude. It is taken from the first paragraph of his chapter entitled, "The Salvation of the Heathen:"

"The thought that the heathen as such are under a Divine education, and are not excluded, if they have been seekers after God and have followed after righteousness, from the blessedness of His kingdom, has become so much the dominant thought of the time in which we live, that we scarcely recognise, for the most part, the slowness with which that victory over the traditions of mediaevalism and dark thoughts of God has been won, how those who fought for the truth which is now acknowledged by well-nigh all men have had their name cast out as evil and borne the reproach of heresy or unbelief."¹⁵

A contemporary of Plumptre, Dr. J. S. Kedney, writes in the same vein on I Pet. 3:18-20:

15. E. H. Plumptre, op. cit., p. 161.

"The pneumatic ones are they in whom the inherited disorder of humanity has begun to be cured, who have borne rightly their earthly probation, and commenced their upward career, though they be at different points on the way, and though there be only one at the summit, Jesus Christ himself. ... Let none think that they know of all who will share it /the upward career or movement/, or even that all the faithless ones in the time of Noah were hopelessly disobedient. Jesus made himself and his loving work known to those of them who were pneumatical, not to condemn them, but to supply what was needful for their inward symmetrization and their resultant perfection." 16

Not only the English divines, however, but even our German scholar, J. L. König, who establishes the orthodox Lutheran view of Christ's descent upon the combined testimonies of Scripture, the ancient Church and the Lutheran Symbols, is thoroughly won over to the side of universalism. The fourth section of his work on this doctrine treats of its "infinite importance and manifold meaning." He then proceeds to offer fifty-two pages of universalist implications, and then, almost as an after-thought, just four pages on the doctrine's significance in showing the destruction of the power of the Devil, the victory over hell, etc.! Just one passage will suffice to present his position:

"Dass nun aber die Heiden und die nichtchristlichen Völker, denen Christus noch nicht auf der Erde oder in diesem Leben war geprediget worden, keinesweges schon deshalb als ewig verloren oder ewig verdammt zu denken seien, scheint sich mir mit Nothwendigkeit aus der Lehre der heiligen Schrift zu ergeben. Nicht, dass es möglich wäre, ausser Christo selig zu werden; nimmermehr! Das ist das ewig Wahre in dem Satze: ausserhalb der Kirche ist kein Heil. Aber Christus wird jenseits denen noch geprediget, die hier auf Erden nicht Gelegenheit gehabt haben, ihn kennen und lieben zu lernen; und das ist gerade die Hauptbedeutung oder der Hauptzweck seiner Höllefahrt: auch ihnen ist damit die Möglichkeit gewährt worden, sich für oder gegen Christum, für oder gegen die Wahrheit zu entscheiden, sich erlösen zu lassen oder in der Sünde zu beharren." 17

16. J. S. Kedney, Christian Doctrine Harmonized, p. 408.
17. J. L. König, op. cit., pp. 213-214.

And why should not König take this stand when he has such outstanding "Lutheran," or at least conservative theologians behind him as Bengel, Mosheim, Meyer, Hahn, Julius Müller, Weizel, Lange, Ols-
hausen, Steffens, and Nitzsch? No wonder that Pott calls this doctrine a "mere ecclesiasticum" (18), and that it is freely asserted that this doctrine has resulted from an apotheosis of human speculation.

Appended here for the sake of a more complete historical survey are the confessional statements of a few Protestant Churches.

German and Dutch Reformed:

✓ Heidelberg Catechism (1563), Question 44: "Why is there added, He descended into Hell?" Answer: "That I may be assured and wholly comfort myself in this, that my Lord Jesus Christ, by his inexpressible anguish, pains, terrors, and hellish agonies, in which he was plunged during all his sufferings, but especially on the cross, hath delivered me from the anguish and torments of Hell."

✓ A Compendium of the Christian Religion, Question 32: "What then hath Jesus Christ done to save us?" Answer: "He has suffered for us, was crucified, and died, was buried, and descended into Hell; that is, he suffered the torments of Hell, and thus became obedient to his Father, that he might deliver us from the temporal and eternal punishment due to sin."

French Calvinists:

✓ John Calvin, Institutes, Book II, ch. 16, sec. 8: "But it is not right to omit his 'descent into Hell,' which is of no small importance towards the accomplishment of Redemption. ... It was necessary for him to contend with the powers of Hell and the horrors of eternal death; ... he was made a substitute and surety for transgressors, and even treated as a criminal himself, to sustain all the punishments which would have been inflicted on them, only with this exception, that 'it was not possible that he should be holden of the pains of death.' Therefore it is no wonder if he be said to have descended into hell, since he suffered that death which the wrath of God inflicts on transgressors."

Episcopal or Anglican:

The Third Article of The Thirty-Nine Articles: "As Christ died for us and was buried, so also it is to be believed that he went

18. Pott, Catholic Epistles, on I Pet. 3:19, p. 282, quoted by König, op. cit., p. 19.

down to Hell." In the first edition of the Articles in 1552 this explanatory clause was added: "For his body lay in the sepulchre until his resurrection; the Spirit which he gave up was with the spirits who were detained in prison, or the lower regions, and preached to them, as the passage of Peter testifies, etc." In the days of Queen Elizabeth this explanation was deleted. Also under Article III, over the Apostles' Creed stands the direction, "Any churches may omit the words, 'He descended into Hell.'"

Presbyterian:

In explanation of the clause, "He descended into Hell", which appears with the Apostles' Creed at the end of the Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Confession, is found this note: "That is, continued in the state of the dead, and under the power of death, until the third day." 19

19. All of these confessional statements are taken from F. Huidekoper, op. cit., pp. 173-175.

J. H. Ford in the Lutheran Companion, April 2, 1922, pp. 250 says: "In our Swedish translation of the Apostles' Creed we confess that 'He descended into Hades (dödsriket). ... We hope to see this inconsistency corrected in our ritual /in English/'"

World Herald of Omaha, Neb., June 16, 1924, reports on the Augustana Synod convention in De Kalb, Ill. : "The word "hell" in the second article of the Apostles' Creed was dropped and the word "hades" substituted in its stead by the Augustana Synod meeting here in its 65th annual convention. ... It was made clear that action of the synod does not imply repudiation of the existence of hell, but relates only to the state of Christ following his crucifixion and death. The change in confession of faith was made during consideration of the revised liturgy of the Church. The report of the liturgy committee was presented by Dr. Ernest Hohlbad, president of Bethany college, Lindsborg, Kan., and substitution of the word "hades" was advocated by Dr. C. E. Lindberg, dean of Augustana Theological Seminary, Rock Island, Ill. "We should not confess in our churches every Sunday that Christ descended into hell when he didn't," declared the Augustana dean. "The word hades means realm of the dead, while hell implies a place of punishment. We know that Christ did not descend to such a place."

(The last two notes were taken from the files of Dr. Th. Graebner of Concordia Seminary.)

CHAPTER IV

A view deserving examination is based chiefly on the Bachelor of Divinity Thesis of Dean R. Jesse, The Trichotomy According to Scripture. One difficulty confronting us in our endeavor to achieve a thoroughly Scriptural and logical view of the doctrine of Christ's descent into hell is found in the relationship of time to eternity. Augustine was perhaps the first to observe that time is totally dissimilar to eternity.¹ Eternity is "an ever-present now" with which we cannot associate the idea of duration. <It seems that most dogmaticians have confessed to a limitation of mental powers in this respect and have not considered the implications of the "timelessness" of eternity.>² Dean Jesse states: "A sequence of events is an impossibility in a timeless world."³ The full significance of this apothem leads to a position different from that of the Ante-Nicene fathers and all dogmaticians to this day. We are here merely stating it, hoping to give it more complete examination and study at some later date.

1. St. Augustine, as summarized from his writings by Plumtre, op. cit., pp.370-371: "The distinction between past, present, and future was one of the conditions of human thought, but was not to be transferred to our conception of the Divine eternity. That was to be thought of as an everlasting present, in which there is no succession and nothing transitory, the "today" of the eternal Father and of the Co-eternal Son, begotten, not in time, but before all time. In that fixed and stable eternity, which was thus one with the light, truth, love of the Divine Nature, men might find a refuge from the mutability of time. Compared with it all the ages in their limitless succession are as nought."

2. E. H. Plumtre, op. cit., p.368, says: "I find it impossible to conceive of life, either human or divine, apart from the idea of duration. This may, of course, be a personal infirmity of brain-power."

3. R. Jesse, op. cit., p.16.

Before proceeding further with the concept of eternity, we shall first approach an application of this concept and clear the ground for a detail of exegesis in Chapter VI. The writer concurs in the conclusion established by ^{Rev.} Dean Jesse, that dichotomy offers the only Scriptural view of the nature of man. He says that man is a material-immaterial creature composed of body and spirit.⁴ His composition can be stated in a simple formula: body plus spirit equals soul, or man. With reference to Gen. 2:7 ^{Rev.} Dean Jesse writes:

"The motionless hulk that had stretched its lifeless length upon the parent earth, became now instinct with the thrill of life, and man, the union of two essential parts, assumed his rightful place in the creative scheme as the first living soul belonging to the genus homo."⁵

In defining the pertinent terms, ^{Rev.} Dean Jesse says that "Psyche is the New Testament equivalent of Nepheesh, and both are used of man as a complete living being,—an individual. Pneuma is the New Testament equivalent of Ruach, and means the vital principle by which the body is animated." He further says: "Both words refer to life within the body, but Nepheesh means properly the life which one is, while Ruach designates the life which one has."⁶ This distinction is important in solving some of the apparent exegetical difficulties involved in applying dichotomy to some Scripture passages.⁷

4. Ibid. p.4.

5. Ibid. p. 4-5.

6. Ibid. p. 3

7. Ibid. p. 5ff. Difficult passages explained in this work are: Lk. 1:46,47; Is. 26:9; Heb. 4:12; I Thess. 5:23. Passages in which dichotomy is particularly evident: Gen. 1:20; 2:7; Eccl. 12:7; Job 34:14, 15; Ps. 73:26; 84:5; 104:29. Mt. 10:28; Lk. 8:55; 23:46; Jn. 19:30; I Cor. 7:34; II Cor. 4:16; 7:1; Eph. 4:4; Jam. 2:26.

Further, on the immaterial part of man he writes:

"The original and the highest conception of the immaterial is that of the life-principle. This conception is termed the spirit, the Ruach, the Pneuma. It is that without which the body is dead (cf. Jam.3:26). It is the absolute conception of the immaterial, the animating agency considered apart from the body which it vivifies. There is no other being with which it has to do, save God, its Maker. It is that aspect of the incorporeal which exists in solitary state, turned ever from the world of physical things, and forever toward its God." 8 9

On the relationship of consciousness to the spirit, Dean Jesse elucidates:

"Consciousness itself depends upon the close relation of the animating principle and the physical organism. Disturb this delicate relation and consciousness suffers an eclipse. ... Consciousness is itself, then, dependent on the life-principle, and is surpassed by the same. The former we can but vaguely conceive of; the latter escapes us entirely; exploring introspection itself returns empty-handed, as from a Thule inaccessible. This spirit is as inconceivable as the timeless, spaceless world, which is its proper home. We can but affirm the existence of this impalpability." 10

What happens, then, when death enters upon the scene? The deaths of Christ (Jn. 19:30; Lk. 23:46) and Stephen (Acts 7:59) beautifully illustrate the separation of body and spirit, the latter returning to God who gave it. [After three days God restored that spirit of Christ. Likewise at the resurrection God will restore that spirit to the material bodies and men will again be living souls. The theory assumes that at death, then, all consciousness, and in fact all existence ceases for the soul,--for man. < There is therefore an interval between death and the Resurrection during which the deceased is non-existent. Most theologians, so it is charged, have consequently attempted to fill this interval with an intermediate state and with "souls" in a semi-conscious and nebulous existence. But here, according to this

8. Ibid. p.8.

9. Concordia Cyclopaedia under "Soul," p.716, says: "Spirit, when considered separately, may signify the principle of life. ... Soul always refers to the essential nature, the essence of man's being."

10. R. Jesse, op. cit., p.9.

theory, is the fallacy, for all statements in this paragraph have been written from the view-point of time.

Suppose that we regard man at death from the view-point of God in eternity. ~~Dean~~ Jesse has this to say:

"If we speak from the viewpoint of the spirit, existing in a world both spaceless and timeless, we must grant that intervening time cannot exist for it. A sequence of events is an impossibility in a timeless world. It (the spirit) is therefore already joined again to its body, for Resurrection Day is already upon it at the instant of its departure from the world of time to that which is timeless. More properly, and strictly, speaking, there is, from the timeless point of view of the spirit, no separation of itself from the body at all, for the sequence of events represented by disjunction and reunion cannot exist simultaneously, and if not simultaneously, then not at all. This being true, there is no necessity for the cessation of the spirit's manifestation through the body, and the soul enjoys, therefore, uninterrupted tenure of office in its capacity as the manifestation of the spirit."¹¹ 12

Of the paradox which this view introduces, Dean Jesse writes:

"We labor under the insuperable handicap of being forced to deal with the infinite by means of a finite brain. We are forced to conceive of timeless and spaceless concepts in terms of concepts cast in molds of both time and space. We are then consequently forced to a choice--either madness, or a recognition of the futility of the attempt. If we are wise, we choose the latter, which choice does not, however, invalidate our maintenance of the fact, despite our admitted failure to understand it."¹³

By way of reiteration upon the time concept, we return to our authority:

11. Ibid. p.16.

12. The Concordia CycloPedia confirms this concept: "Since with death all experiences of time and space come to an end, the interval between death and the resurrection does not exist for the soul." Under "Soul-Sleep," p.716.

13. R. Jesse, op. cit., p.17.

"As far as the world of time is concerned, the body is still in the grave and in that world of time, and will so remain until that world of time comes to an end. Even when the body is raised, it will still require, from the temporal viewpoint, God's great power to reunite it to the spirit, for while laws of time endure, the body can not make the necessary transition from the temporal to the timeless world. Time intervenes an insurmountable barrier, the leveling of which will require its Creator's own omnipotence."¹⁴
15

Our Savior while on earth gave expression to both terms of this paradox.¹⁶ <From the human, time-limited viewpoint Christ called death a "sleep."> In human sleep, as far as the sleeper's consciousness of self is concerned, the sleeper no longer exists. Moreover, the moment the sleeper is removed from the presence and sense perception of observers, he no longer exists for them either. Thus in employing the term "sleep" Christ attempted, so this theory holds, to put over the idea that from the human view there is no consciousness, not even existence, after death and before the Resurrection. Yet remarkably enough, in this same term of "sleep" is embodied the viewpoint of immortality and eternity, for in human sleep, despite the temporary loss of consciousness, the sleeper is obviously alive, although God may be the only one conscious of that sleeper's existence. Therefore Christ said of Jairus' daughter; "The maid is not dead, but sleepeth," assuring her parents of the immortality of the individual. Thus in the designation of the state of death as "sleep" Christ affirmed both the apparent non-existence and the actual existence of man after death.¹⁷ (Cf. I Thess. 4:13-18).

14. Ibid. p.17.

15. Constable: "In death, the spirit is withdrawn, the soul vanishes, and man becomes non-existent." quoted by R. B. Welch, Presbyterian Review, vol.8, p.516.

16. Mt.9:24; 27:52; Jn.11:11. Cf. also Acts 13:36; I Cor.15:20,51; Eph.5:14; I Thess.4:14.

17. Cf. concordance for numerous examples in the O. T. of the phrase: "slept with his fathers."

But exclusively from the viewpoint of timelessness, the Savior, so it is viewed in this theory, has given us the best synonym we possess for eternity--"Today" (Lk.23:43). He gave the malefactor on the cross an eternal promise of eternal life to be carried out in eternity, and thus He "dated" it "eternity." The malefactor had little time and no desire to speculate on the time-eternity concept, but without a doubt he understood Christ correctly. He knew that he would be with Christ that very day in Paradise, and if death, several millennia, the Resurrection and the Judgment had to intervene, then as far as he and his consciousness were concerned, they would all transpire in that one fraction of a day.¹⁸

Beyond this teaching of Christ we know nothing of eternity, and with our finite minds we could comprehend no more even had Christ made the attempt to teach us. Moreover, as ~~Ben~~ Jesse remarked in an interview upon this subject, all the conclusions in this chapter are necessarily inferences from Scripture, but they are the only inferences upon this subject which are logically permissible and Scripturally acceptable.

18. R. Jesse, op. cit., p.15: "Scripture teaches that eternal punishment or reward is received by the lost or redeemed sinner as a man, as an individual, as a soul, and at the instant of death (Lk.23:43, "thou," as an individual, not "as to thy spirit;" "today," i.e., manifestly, immediately after death.)"

CHAPTER V

This second chapter in our exegetical study carries us into a brief analysis of the terms Sheol (O.T.) and Hades (N.T.) as prerequisite for a proper understanding of subsequent argument in the following chapters of this paper. [It is maintained by many exegetes that Sheol and its New Testament synonym, Hades, are employed in Scripture in either of two meanings: 1) to figuratively designate the abode of the dead (both good and evil dead), or 2) to literally designate a place of torment or everlasting punishment (exclusively for the evil dead).¹]

On the contrary, however, we maintain that in no instance does the context of Scripture even suggest, much less definitely indicate, a dual meaning for these terms. Rather are they used only in the one sense,— as a figurative or metaphorical designation of the state or abode of the dead, and therefore, actually as a synonym for death (Maveth, Thanatos, etc.). Dr. Pearson says:

"To the Hebrew mind Sheol was simply the state or abode of the dead. It was /probably reference to A.V., of. footnote 2/ not the same as the grave, though it was so translated in some of the older versions. The grave was the resting place of the body from which the spirit had departed, while Sheol was the resting place of departed spirits, or personalities."³

1. H. E. Temme, in "Sheol--Hades--Hell--What?", Queensland Messenger, vol. 8, p. 98, says: "Sheol sometimes means simply the grave, or the state of death without regard to the goodness or badness of the persons (Gen. 37:35; Job 14:13, etc.). It has also various other meanings. But for the purpose of this doctrinal article, we are concerned only with those passages in which sheol does not and cannot mean anything else than the place and condition of suffering of the wicked after death."

2. In the A.V. Sheol is translated 31 times with "grave," 31 times with "hell," and three times with "pit."

3. F. B. Pearson, "Sheol and Hades in Old and New Testament," Review and Expositor, vol. 35, p. 304.

Particularly in the light of the eschatology of our foregoing chapter, and in agreement with Gesenius⁴, we affirm that there is no essential distinction (though admitting a possible literary distinction) between Mayoth ("death") and Sheol ("place of death"). One of the most important arguments for the essential synonymy of Sheol and Mayeth is the parallelismus membrorum in which they occur. No statistical survey of all occurrences has been attempted, but we believe that the instances are sufficiently numerous to adequately support our contention.⁵ It is our conviction that most interpreters of this term Sheol have been misled through their disregard of this, to the writer, most evident parallelism. We agree with them that the context is the only indication of the meaning, but we do wish that they would restudy that context!

Moreover, as we also have noted in the preceding chapter, the Jews of the Old Testament had the same conception of death as that taught by Christ in the New Testament, (cf. the expression "slept with his fathers," which occurs 49 times in the O.T.). This conception of death or Sheol as a ^{place of} sleep or place of rest is also presented in Job.3:13,17; 14:12,13. That Sheol was regarded as a place of "cessation" (Ps.39:13; Is.38:11) and absence of consciousness (Job 10:21f; Ps.6:5; 88:10-12; Eccl.9:5,6; Prov.21:16) is definitely established.

The only apparently important argument which Pastor Temme can advance for his dual interpretation of Sheol is the following:

4. Wm. Gesenius, Lexicon, Hebrew and English, p.1022, says: "As to etymology, Sheol comes from Shaal, and is "a cavity, a hollow subterranean place," cf. German Hölle, Greek Koilos." What better synonym for "grave" could one desire?

5. Cf. II Sam.22:6; Ps.16:4; 116:3; Prov.5:5; 7:27; 23:12,14; Is.28:15,18, etc.

"Job 24:19. 'So doth the grave (sheol) consume those which have sinned.' The previous verses speak of thieves, rebels, murderers, adulterers, etc. This text could have no meaning if sheol meant simply the grave, because those who are not wicked, unbelievers, go into it too. ... (Similarly on Prov. 5:5; Ps. 9:17; Is. 5:8-14) ... These and other threats of curse and condemnation and punishment for the wicked mean nothing, if hell is only the grave. What force or deterrent effect has a threat, if all people, good and bad alike, must experience it? The very idea of a threat is to warn people against that punishment."⁶

It evidently did not occur to Pastor Temme that capital punishment (simply death without a threat of punishment hereafter) is the severest threat and deterrent that the civil state can wield against the erring. (Moreover, is it supposed that the unbeliever would fear hell when he does not believe in the existence of the same?) But let us hear what one of these unbelievers has to say for himself and his brethren regarding death alone. Aristotle says: "Death is the most terrible of all things, for it is a limit, and it is thought that there is nothing good or bad beyond to the dead."⁷ And Dean Jesse eloquently states: "Man must suffer the supreme mortal punishment -- total disintegration of individuality, the dread of which forever stands like a hooded spectre at the fringe of unregenerated consciousness."⁸

(It seems that Pastor Temme overlooked the real difference between death for the wicked and death for the Christian.) Pearson says: "The Israelite's faith found the solution of the problem, not in the hope of separation from the wicked in Sheol, but in the hope of deliverance from Sheol (immortality.)"⁹

6. H. E. Temme, op. cit., p. 98.

7. Aristotle, quoted by Wm. W. McLane in Homiletic Review, vol. 24, p. 206.

8. R. Jesse, op. cit., p. 19.

9. F. B. Pearson, op. cit., p. 308.

In entering upon a study of the term Hades in the New Testament, it is well to recall that fact which we have noted in the first chapter, and of which McLane and Pearson remind us:

"The Platonic doctrine of the soul's immortality, and the Greek names and conceptions of Hades, Tartarus, and Elysium have exerted a considerable influence upon Christian thought."¹⁰

"Was Hades considered a place of two compartments, one for the righteous and one for the wicked? ... In the early Hebrew period Sheol was not thus divided, but in later times both Jews and Greeks believed in a two-compartment Hades. It can hardly be questioned that this idea was almost universal in the time of Jesus. It is exceedingly doubtful, however, that such a view is taught in the New Testament. ... The New Testament Scriptures cannot be shown to teach a local Hades where dead believers abide until the Resurrection."¹¹

We must therefore carefully divorce Hades from its classical heritage (from which it was evidently taken by the Apostles) and determine its usage and meaning in the New Testament according to Scripture itself--according to context. But if we have established our case in regard to Sheol, we would be justified in resting our case also in regard to Hades, for Pastor Temme and others of his party are agreed that Hades is the New Testament synonym of the Old Testament Sheol. This synonymy is further verified by the fact that the Septuagint invariably translates Sheol with Hades.

⟨However, for the sake of thoroughness in securing our proposition we shall briefly demonstrate the fact that in all eleven instances of the occurrence of Hades in the New Testament the context supports the definition of Hades as the abode of the dead and its use as a synonym for death.⟩ We first of all observe in every instance the use

¹⁰. W. W. McLane, op. cit., p.207.

¹¹. F. B. Pearson, op. cit., p.311.

of the parallelismus membrorum. This literary parallelism is most strikingly evident in six of the passages: Lk. 16:22,23, "died and was buried, and in hell" (Apothnesko -- Hades); I Cor. 15:55, "death ...grave" (Thanatos -- Hades); Rev. 1:18 "death ^{and of} hell" (Thanatos -- Hades); Rev. 6:8; 20:13,14 "death and hell" (Thanatos -- Hades).

In Acts 2:27,31 "hell ... corruption" (Hades -- Diaphthora) simply a common synonym of "death" is used as a parallel with Hades (cf. Ps. 16:8-11; Job 26:6; Prov. 15:11, etc.) In Mt. 11:23 and Lk. 10:13 Capernaum, which is to be brought down to hell (Hades) is compared with Sodom which had already been destroyed. Here Pearson says, "the use is metaphorical, simply indicating the coming humiliation or destruction of Capernaum."¹² In Mt. 16:18 the parallelism is not as clearly stated as in the other passages, but it assails our intellect with full force when we grasp the significance of the Rock, --of the eternal character of Christ and His Church which neither death, nor the elements, nor time can destroy. Christ is Victor over death. (Of. "Gates of death" /Mayeth/, Job 38:17; Ps. 9:13; 107:18; "Gates of the grave" /Sheol/, Is. 38:10).¹³

We suspect that most of the fallacious exegesis in regard to Hades is attributable to hermeneutically unjustifiable inferences drawn from the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk. 16:19-31). In this extended metaphor of Jesus, the present life is compared with

12. F. B. Pearson, op. cit., p. 309.

13. Ibid. pp. 309-310: "The gates of Hades," found in Mt. 16:18, is a proverbial expression, used frequently in Greek literature, also in the Old Testament and in the Apocrypha."

the next life, and the tertium comparationis simply presents the impossibility of conversion after death. Any doctrinal inferences beyond this tertium are drawn in defiance of accepted rules of interpretation. As far as we can determine, Christ figuratively portrays life after the Resurrection (from the time-conscious view), although we must ignore the detail of the brothers still living on earth.¹⁴ But we reiterate that no doctrine beyond the tertium can be validly supported by this passage.

It must not be inferred from the presentation thus far that we reject the doctrine of hell (a place of eternal punishment). This doctrine is clearly taught in Scripture in the word Gehenna and many other expressions like: "Everlasting fire ... everlasting punishment" Mt. 25:41,46; "furnace of fire" Mt. 13:42; "eternal damnation" Mt. 9:29; "shame and everlasting contempt" Dan. 12:2; etc. Here we are concerned with the significance of the words Sheol and Hades.

We trust that we have successfully shown, upon a Scriptural basis, that Sheol and Hades are practically synonymous with "death," their consistent use in Scripture being that of terms denoting "the abode of the dead."

14. This is the view of Dean R. Jesse in his B. D. Thesis.

15. For a more extended treatment of the subject of this chapter the reader is referred to the B. D. Thesis, vol. 4, 1, of Louis C. Meyer, "The Use of Hades in the New Testament."

CHAPTER VI

For some theologians the article of the Apostles' Creed, "He descended into hell (Hades)," simply expresses the belief that Christ died and in so doing removed the permanence of death for all mankind (definitely taught in I Cor. 15:54-57, etc.). Thus this statement of the Apostles' Creed causes them no difficulty. But what of the view of those who teach a literal descent of Christ to a literal place of torment (a "descensio vera et realis"¹), and that upon an interpretation of the *sedes doctrinae*, I Pet. 3:18-20, of which Luther, Stöckhardt and others say with Pearson, "The passage is one of the most obscure in all the New Testament and I have found no reputable scholar who dares to interpret it with certainty"² | There we are challenged to continue our exegetical study to determine the validity of a "doctrine" which in its very basis has one count against it. To some observers it may appear that if Peter in this "crux theologorum" intended to present a doctrine taught nowhere else in Scripture, then he certainly did his utmost to obscure it in cryptic language. To begin the discussion, let us note the comment of the great contemporary of Luther, Johann Brentz, who represents the view of a number of theologians:

-
1. P. König, "Christ's Descent into Hell," G. T. M. vol. 3, p. 831.
 2. F. B. Pearson, op. cit., p. 307.

"Denn dass Petrus spricht, dass Christus, da er getödtet sei gewesen nach dem Fleisch, sei hingegangen und hab den Geistern im Gefängniss gepredigt, redet er daselbst nicht von Christi Abfahren zur Höllen, sondern thut eine Predigt daselbst aus dem 6. Cap. des 1. B. Mosi... und Petrus vergleicht die öffentliche Predigt von der Buss, die da zur Zeit Noah geschahe, mit der öffentlichen Busspredigt, die in der Welt geschahe zur Zeit Christi des Sohnes Gottes, nachdem er von den Todten auferstanden war. Denn wie der Sohn Gottes vor Zeiten, zu der Zeit Noah, nach dem Geist, d. i. durch seine geistliche Predigt von der Buss, und die Geister, die im Gefängniss waren, d. i. gottlose Leute, die im Gefängniss ihres gottlosen Wesens und um ihrer Sünden willen dem Tod und der Höllen unterworfen waren, zur Buss berufen hatte. Denn Petrus eine eben solche Weis zu reden brauchet, wie Esaias 6. 42, welcher die Gottlosen nennt gefangen und im Kerker der Finsterniss sitzend."³

With but slight changes which we shall note as they are encountered in our exposition, the Authorized Version gives us an excellent literal translation of I Pet. 3:18-20:

18. "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit;
 19. By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison;
 20. Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water."

The first serious exegetical difficulty we encounter, and one upon the interpretation of which depends the remainder of our study, is the meaning of "Thanatotheis men sarki, zocpoiethis de pneumati" (v. 18b). There are many interpretations of these participial clauses, but we shall limit ourselves to presenting the only grammatically and Scripturally acceptable exegesis. Of the two modal datives, Sarki and Pneumati, Dr. Dau says: "We must know that the datives are the same, have the same force in both cases; again, that they are not datives

3. J. Brentz, Catechismus, Beyer's German translation, p.93, quoted by F. H. R. Frank, Die Theologie der Concordienformel, pp. 448-449.

of instrument, but of reference."⁴ The parallelism of construction here indicates the datives to be the same. The context rules out the possibility of their being datives of instrument, for Christ's flesh could hardly have been responsible for its own demise. We observe here immediately, moreover, the occurrence of the two constituent parts of man, body and spirit (cf. chapter IV), which are as much the constituent parts of Christ, the God-Man, as they are of any human being. What then does "being put to death in the flesh" mean? Of Thanatos, Thayer says: "it means properly 'the death of the body,' i.e., that separation (whether natural or violent) of the soul from the body by which the life on earth is ended."⁵ The act of "putting to death" therefore involves a separation of spirit from body, both of these constituents thereby being affected. It was Christ, the entire God-Man, who was put to death; and on this point most of the later commentators agree. Wiesinger says:

"Subjekt zu Thanatotheis wie Zoopotheis ist Christus, der Ganze Christus nach Seele und Leib... Dem Fleische nach, fleischlich ist er getödtet, aber dem Geiste nach, geistlich wieder lebendig gemacht. Nämlich "Fleisch" und "Geist" sind hier, wie Rom. 1:3; I Tim. 3:16, nach Huther's richtiger Bemerkung, nicht als Christo persönlich zukommende Bestimmungen, sondern also "allgemeine Begriffe" wie 4:6 gebraucht."⁶

And Schott also says:

"Christus, der eine, untheilbare, gottmenschliche Christus ist ebenso getödtet, wie lebendig gemacht worden, das sagt hier Petrus, mit ihm das ganze N. T. und mit diesem unsere lutherische Kirchenlehre." ... "Insofern scheint mir selbst die Fassung nicht ganz genügend, dass mit Thanatotheis der ganze Mensch Jesus gemeint sei: der ganze Christus, oder wenn man ein Attribut hinzusetzen will, der ganze Gottmensch Jesus Christus ist getödtet worden ..(Theotokos)."⁷

7

4. W. H. T. Dau, "Lectures on Graebner's Outline of Doctrinal Theology," quoted by P. König, op. cit., p.828.

5. Thayer, Greek--English Lexicon, p.282.

6. J. G. A. Wiesinger, Der Erste Brief des Apostels Petrus, p.234.

7. Theodor Schott, Der Erste Brief Petri, p.217.

Then why does Peter say that Christ was put to death "in the flesh," if both flesh and spirit were affected by death? Evidently the Apostle here simply uses the trope of synecdoche, and for the sake of contrast writes of the flesh as that part of the whole Christ which was most evidently affected by death. <Those who crucified Him were apparently able to destroy His body, but they could not destroy His spirit or the life-principle which returned to God. Actually, of course, they permanently destroyed nothing.> Pastor König says: "In His fleshly form of existence He lived a number of years; in that way He was put to death."⁸ Dean Jesse expresses this view as to the significance of death for Christ:

On Jn. 10:11 "As far as the world was concerned, and as far as His own human relation to the world went, all that was to represent Christ, His individuality, all that was peculiarly His own as a man, He gave up, suffered its vanishing. His spirit was in the Father's hands; His body a corpse within the tomb; His soul had vanished from the world, had ceased as far as men were concerned; and all this was done as a voluntary sacrifice that the souls of men might continue forever above, and not below."⁹

Christ was not left in the state of death, however, for He was "quickened in the spirit." It is to be observed that both participles involved here, Thanatotheis and Zoopoietheis, are in the passive mood. Christ received the action of both verbs. It was God who quickened Christ, the entire God-man (I Pet. 1:21; Rom. 4:17; 8:11; I Tim. 6:13), but this "making alive" was particularly evident in respect to the

8. P. König, op. cit., p. 828.

9. R. Jesse, op. cit., p. 20.

spirit, the life-principle, which has its source in God and who alone can bestow or restore it. It is the spirit and life which Peter here vividly contrasts with flesh and death. Dr. Stöckhardt says:

"Zoöpoiesis, Lebendigmachung ist, wie I Cor. 15:22-36; Jn. 5:21. Ist der Tod Trennung Leibes und der Seele, so die Lebendigmachung Wiedervereinigung der Seele mit dem Leibe. Gott hat Christum lebendig gemacht, vom Tode auferweckt."¹⁰

The relative pronoun in verse 19, "en ho," is the next term at which many exegetes have met their Nemesis.¹¹ Prof. Fox offers us a worthy suggestion as to the antecedent of the relative "ho." He says:

"One finds the antecedent of "ho," not in any particular word, but in the preceding circumstances, and would render it: 'By which revivification He (Christ in His complete humanity) went and preached.' Buttman lays down this principle, and furnishes examples: 'The relative sometimes refers to an antecedent which is only implied in the sense of the main sentence.' Kuhner says, 'The relative is put in the neuter when it is referred not so much to the substantive alone as to the whole sentence.'"¹²

Brentz and others say that the dead and resurrected Christ, the God-man of the completed atonement, but evident particularly in the spirit, i.e., without a visible body, but living and able to spiritually "quicken whom He will" (Jn. 5:21), "went and preached to the spirits in prison." This was the Pre-existent Christ who preached through Noah, the "Preacher of Righteousness" (II Pet. 2:5) and the other prophets of the Old Testament in whom dwelt "the Spirit of Christ" (I Pet. 1:10, 11). Lightfoot says: "Manifestum est, Petrum hic loqui de Christi praedicatione per Spiritum suum, ore et ministerio Noe agentem, ut alicubi locum hunc exposui."¹³

10. G. Stöckhardt, Kommentar über den Ersten Brief Petri, p. 145.

11. We shall ignore any textual criticism in this paper, for the only significant change in the Nestle text that has been suggested is the inclusion here of "Enoch" by Schulz and Rendel Harris, and adopted by Goodspeed in his American Translation. The adoption of this change is not essential to our thesis.

12. L. A. Fox, op. cit., pp. 518-519. Cites Robinson's Buttman's Greek Grammar, p. 393, and Kuhner's Greek Grammar, p. 529.

13. J. Lightfoot, Opera Omnia, p. 760.

The teaching of the pre-existence of Christ is briefly presented in a recent article by Pastor Temme.¹⁴ He points out that particularly John is eager to instruct us in this matter from the first verses of his gospel (Jn. 1:1-2) "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, the same was in the beginning with God." (Jn. 1:14, 15, 30; 6:62; 8:38, 56, 58; 16:28; 17:5). But the other Apostles (Mt. 12:8; Lk. 4:34; Acts 2:27; 3:14; I Cor. 10:4; Heb. 1:12; 13:8) and the prophets likewise testify of the existence of Christ before the incarnation (Is. 9:6; 43). Specifically of the preaching of the God-man through Noah to the Ante-deluvians, Dr. Stöckhardt says:

"Dies sind an sich ganz richtige Gedanken. Der ewige Logos ist schon durch die alttestamentliche Heiligeschichte hindurchgegangen, hat durch die Propheten, auch durch Noah geredet. Und das Verhalten der Menschen gegen diese Predigt Christi, Gehorsam oder Ungehorsam, Glaube oder Unglaube, war entscheidend für ihr ewiges Geschick."¹⁵

We encounter another fork in the road of interpretation when we attempt to determine the identity of the "spirits in prison." Some interpreters maintain that they are the disembodied spirits of the Ante-deluvians in the place of torment to whom Christ proclaimed His victory over sin and death. Apart from the apparent or alleged incongruity of a victorious Lord making a special descent to His conquered foe's realm to there celebrate His triumph (16), other arguments are advanced against this interpretation.

¹⁴ H. E. Temme, "The Pre-existence of Christ," in Queensland Messenger, vol. 10, pp. 122-124.

¹⁵ G. Stöckhardt, op. cit., p. 150.

¹⁶ Christ's ultimate triumph over Satan and his evil forces will come at Judgment, but this triumph of Christ at His death, to which Paul refers in Col. 2:5 was enacted in Christ's own kingdom, the kingdom of grace, and not in hell, His enemies' country. Cf. the description of a Roman triumph by P. L. Bornhoeft, op. cit., p. 154.

The first argument deals with the meaning of the word "prison" (Phulake). According to Thayer, it is derived from the verb Phulaego which means "to guard, to watch, to keep watch." The noun then means "a watching, a keeping watch, a guard," and then by development "a place of confinement, a prison."¹⁷ We observe that of the forty-six occurrences of this word in the New Testament there are none which cannot be correctly translated by one of the foregoing expressions. That fact, it is ~~hsh~~, quite effectively eliminates the translation of Phulake with "hell" or "a place of torment." True, one passage, Rev.20:7, says that "Satan shall be loosed out of his prison" where he had been confined for a thousand years, but it is designated as his prison with no other occupants implied, and by contrast with his later punishment in "the lake of fire and brimstone" (v.10), no torment of any kind is indicated in his prison. Moreover, there are no synonyms of Phulake in the Old Testament which can be translated "a place of torment." There are at least four passages in the Old Testament, however, which do employ synonyms of Phulake for the human body with its sinful inclinations as a place in which the spirits of men are confined. Is.61:1 "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; He hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound." (cf. Is.42:7,22; Ps.102:20). Dr. Stöckhardt concedes the possibility of that interpretation in this passage:

17. Thayer, op. cit., p.659.

"Wir geben zu, dass der Satz ("preached to the spirits in prison") nicht notwendig in sich schlieszt, dass diejenigen, welche die Predigt Christi hörten, zur Zeit dieser Predigt sich schon als Geistern in der Haft befanden, dass sie auch nach ihrem gegenwärtigen, durch den Ungehorsam gegen die Predigt veranlassten Zustand benannt werden konnten." 18

But the exegetes sponsoring Brenz' view are positive that this is the only view to be taken here, and in proof one or the other probably would be willing to go back to the account of the creation of man (Gen. 2:7) and there observe that God placed the spirit within the confines (prison) of the body of man. 19 Of the relationship of body and spirit in sinful man Dean Jesse says:

"Man, the composite of these two parts (body and spirit), sins, for the body, created originally sinless as an essential part, has become tainted with sin, and by inheritance all flesh today is corrupted. Since this corrupted body of his is vivified, every manifestation of man's vivifying spirit through the body must be a corrupted manifestation." 20

That is the tragic picture of all mankind, but it is, so it can be argued, particularly a picture of the Ante-deluvians, the classic example cited here by Peter of the spirits of men held in such close confinement by the sinful flesh that even the salvation preached by Christ failed to free any but a small remnant.

18. G. Stöckhardt, op. cit., p. 150.

19. Examples of the prevalence of this figure of expression in Peter's own epistles are: I Pet. 2:9, 11; 3:4; II Pet. 1:4, 19; 2:18, 19; and gleaned in casual reading as evidence of the universal use of this figure throughout literature are the following:

"Speaking of Orphic doctrine: 'These reincarnations of the soul were regarded as an evil, because the body was thought of as a prison-house of the soul.'"... "Redemption in Pagan Religion:" 'According to Plato, the body is evil because it is material; it is the prison-house of the soul.'" J. G. Machen, The Origin of Paul's Religion, pp. 217, 275.

"It was an easy matter to equate the light of the knowledge of God as revealed in Jesus, or the Spirit, with that divine element which in accordance with the tradition of popular philosophy, was imprisoned in the worthless and burdensome vessel of the material body." ... "The only real reason why the soul was an exile in this life was that it, or the highest part of it, was of divine origin and, altho a celestial being, imprisoned in the material world." W. L. Knox, op. cit., pp. 135 & 140.

20. R. Jesse, op. cit., p. 18.

The question is whether that view holds. One other argument remains based on the view of man's status between death and resurrection pointed to in Chapter IV, that no ^{human} spirits, possessing consciousness and individuality, can exist without bodies in which to manifest themselves. Therefore these spirits must have been in bodies and formed living human beings at the time they received Christ's preaching. Moreover, it is contended that there is no intermediate state at all, either from the time or time-less viewpoint! Besides, what are those dogmaticians, who insist that Christ went to a literal hell, going to do with a hell defined by some of their own number like Prof. F. E. Mayer as "the conscious experience of God's just and holy anger over sin" (21), and by Frank as a "sensus irae Dei" (22), a hell which Christ surely experienced for us on the cross? (Of. Mt.27:46)./ This ends our presentation of the view holding that the preaching of Christ spoken of occurred before the flood.

The question will be asked: "Is this view consistent with the context?" This feature is called into question by Fox:

"The other interpretations suddenly arrest the discourse and instead of telling what he did after his restoration to life point to what he did through Noah thousands of years before, and then after this long excursus brings us back to the ascension. Does any good writer, any sound thinker make such digressions?"²³

It is answered by advocates of the theory under consideration that the Apostle Peter is both a good writer and a sound thinker and does not bring in here any sort of a digression from his train of thought. Dr.

Kedney says:

-
- 21. F. E. Mayer, "Atonement Notes" p.10.
 - 22. F. H. Frank, op. cit., p.421.
 - 23. L. A. Fox, op. cit., p.319.

"Now the power of the preaching of Christ crucified can be felt. St. Peter had had experience of the power of this preaching on the day of Pentecost, when thousands confessed Christ before men. That he should have mentally contrasted this preaching of the gospel with all former preaching of righteousness was natural and inevitable, and it was neither unnatural nor unlikely that there should have come into his mind the preaching done by Noah, rather almost unavoidable. The situations were not dissimilar, but in St. Peter's thought greatly alike. Evidently he was accustomed to dwell much upon this crisis in the ancient history. He alludes to it again in his second epistle, and dwells upon the resemblances. That was a very remarkable emergency. The world, so far as St. Peter knew of it, was threatened with overflow, and those of its inhabitants, of whom he had heard, with destruction, yet when a righteous man like Noah endeavored to warn men to avoid a danger that did not to them seem, phenomenally judging, probable, on the ground of their religious faith alone, he was met by incredulity, and found but eight believing souls, and then his own family. St. Peter thinks that a similar emergency has arrived now, that the final day is or may be near at hand. While mistaken in this respect, it is true still that such an event is to occur, and should be kept in mind. In the second epistle he notes the physical resemblances that are to be, the overflow by fire, instead of water,—the suddenness of the tempest in either case. In view of such an event he thinks that the men of his time should hasten their repentance. He warns them more than once to live in expectation of its possible arrival, and in view of that, advises them not to mind the deprivations and sufferings that might come to them in the intervening time, and that not only for this prudential reason, but for the higher one, in order to imitate Christ, whose example he adduces. There springs up in his mind the contrast between Noah's preaching, and the preaching which now may be. He emphasises the fewness of the saved in the former case, and the multitude saved in the latter."²⁴

The Apostle is writing in this passage of the suffering Christ, who suffered not only for the sins of Peter's generation, but also for the sins of all mankind, even the worst of them,— the Ante-deluvians. This same Christ suffered, died and rose again not only for Peter's contemporaries (cf. "that He might bring us to God" v. 18), but for all

24. J. S. Kedney, op. cit., pp. 403-404.

men of all time, even those Ante-deluvians away back in history (cf. kai v.19), who would be least regarded as objects of Christ's atonement. The universality of the Gospel is thus emphasized (I Pet. 1:25; 4:6; II Pet. 2:8). Moreover, observe the parallelisms with which this passage is replete. Peter says that as God raised Christ from death at Easter and saved Noah from death in the Deluge, so He would have saved the Ante-deluvian spirits in bondage to the flesh, and still offers to save men today from eternal death by His Word and Sacraments. The Apostle is her^e exhorting his readers to a stronger faith, as he does throughout his epistles (I Pet. 1:7,9,13,21,23 etc.) and here (v.21) to a faith designated as "the answer of a good conscience toward God." He particularly desires their "obedience," and as "obedient children" (I Pet. 1:14) he compares them with the "disobedient" of Noah's time (v.20) and of their own time (I Pet. 2:7,8). Peter further urges them to meekness and patience in the face of persecution (vv.12-17), even as Christ patiently bore the cross of His enemies (v.18; 1:11), and as God patiently endured the wickedness of His maligners at the time of Noah (v.29).

Furthermore, Peter leaves little room in this passage or the rest of his epistles for speculation on an intermediate state, for he rather points to the climax of all Christian teaching, the resurrection of Christ and the consequent resurrection of all believers in Him. (Here is his succinct chronology of Christological events: suffering -- death -- quickening -- resurrection -- ascension -- reign at the right hand of God.) According to the view which we now discuss he mentions no descent into hell any more than do the Evangelists or any of the other writers of Scripture. As far as the work of atonement is concerned,

there is no essential difference between Christ's quickening and resurrection (25), and therefore no plausible interim during which Christ might have visited hell. Moreover, it is urged, Peter makes no mention of Christ's descent after His resurrection and before His ascension, according to the theory of Professor Fox.²⁶ Rather Peter continually directed his readers forward to the hope of resurrection, not to a vague intermediate state; and such expressions as: "in the last time" (I Pet. 1:5), "at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1:7), "at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1:13), "end of all things is at hand" (4:7), "when His glory shall be revealed" (4:13), "when the chief Shepherd shall appear" (5:4), "looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God" (II Pet. 3:12), occur in his epistles with almost redundant frequency. In view of the remarkable manner in which this interpretation of the passage fits into the context, its proponents take the liberty which Professor Fox and other exegetes assume, and claim that theirs is the only valid interpretation in the light of the rest of Scripture. The writer is aware that most exegetes prefer a different interpretation. The view of exegetes not referred to here like Huther and Kuehl in Meyer's Commentary and Wohlenberg in Zahn's Commentary, not to mention Weiss, Bigg and Mayor, will have to be given special study, which, God willing, can take place at some later time.

25. G. Stöckhardt, op. cit., p.150 says: "Zoopoleis ist von Anastasia ebenso zu unterscheiden wie beim Schlaf das Erwachen vom Aufstehen."

26. L. A. Fox, op. cit., p.319.

CHAPTER VII

In this last chapter in our exegetical survey of the doctrine of Christ's descent into hell we shall take a comparatively brief, but ^{the} for purpose of our thesis, adequate view of the other passages of Scripture adduced in support of this doctrine. Of their relative unimportance Prof. Fox writes: "The sedes doctrinae, as they called it, is I Pet. 3:19, 20. They interpreted other passages in the light of this. The other passages were used as in some degree confirmatory and elucidative, and not as primary sources."¹ Since König appears to line up the most imposing array of passages in the first part of his work (2), we shall assume that he has discovered them all and set our course according to his chart.

In our Chapter V under the discussion of Hades we have already regarded Ps. 16:10; Mt. 16:18; Acts 2:27, 31; I Cor. 15:55, 57 and Rev. 1:17, 18 as referring to Christ in the state of death, and not to His descent. Lk. 23:43 we have fully discussed in Chapter IV. Moreover, the conservative Prof. Schaller effectively eliminates I Pet. 4:6 and Eph. 4:9 in this note:

"I Pet. 4:6 is often quoted as referring to the same event as I Pet. 3:19, and is even given as a parallel passage in many German and English Bibles. But the only similarity between the two texts is in the verb, "preach"; in all other respects the two passages differ. In 3:18 Christ is the preacher, the spirits of those who believed not in the days of Noah are the hearers; the contents of the proclamation are not mentioned, nor is the purpose defined, or its effect noted. In 4:6 however, no preacher is named; the hearers are the dead, not of a special period, but of all past time; the contents of the preaching is the Gospel, and its purpose is salvation. Being engaged in an exhortation to holiness of life,

1. L. A. Fox, op. cit., p. 315.
2. J. L. König, op. cit., pp. 10-63.

Peter here had just declared that those who reject the Gospel, must once give an account to the Judge on the Last Day. Then he adds v.6, to emphasize the fact that all who ever heard the Gospel on earth, had full opportunity to escape condemnation in the final judgment. Eph.4:9f does not refer to the descent into hell; the words plainly contrast earth and heaven."³

Mt.12:40 "For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." The expression "heart of the earth" surely means nothing more than the grave, and only a stretch of the imagination can comprehend in it the connotation of hell. We agree with Lightfoot who says: "Ubi erit Infernus? non possumus quidem scire ubi sit, sed absurdum certe est, et rationi contrarium, censere, id esse sub terra hac."⁴

Acts 13:36,37 "For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption; but he whom God raised again, saw no corruption." This passage is adduced to prove that David went to an intermediate abode of the blessed which Christ also visited after His death. But that "falling on sleep and being laid unto the fathers" was simply a euphemistic expression for death we have already demonstrated in Chapters IV and V.

Rom. 10:6-8 "But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above;) or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart; that is, the word of faith, which we preach." The key word

3. J. Schaller, Biblical Christology, Note p.71.

4. J. Lightfoot, op. cit., p.760.

here is "deep" or Abussos, which is supposed to be another term to designate hell. In the seven occurrences of this word in Revelation it might possibly ^{be} conceded, as a figurative term for hell. Evidently that, too, is the meaning of this word in Lk. 8:31. In this Romans passage, then, it may also mean hell. But the context, it will be noted, speaks of demons, not human beings, as possibly being assigned to the abyss.

Rom. 14:9 "For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living." It is maintained on the basis of this passage that the dead must be in some intermediate state in which they are conscious of the sovereignty of their Lord. We agree that these "dead" are conscious, and in fact, fully alive, and able to respond to the will of their Lord, but the question is whether they are in an intermediate state, for this is a view of mankind from the timeless prospective of God with particular emphasis on the Resurrection and Judgment. (cf. v. 10ff). "The dead and living" (cf. I pet. 4:5 "quick and the dead") may possibly be regarded as simply an all-inclusive expression for mankind of all ages, and in that case it does not imply an intermediate state. (This same argument can be advanced for II Tim. 4:1).

Phil. 2:10,11 "That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the Glory ~~of~~ of God the Father." The center of interest in this passage is the hapaxlegomenon, "things under the earth" (Katachthonios), which

according to Thayer means: "subterranean" and synonymous with the Latin "infernus"⁵ This term would therefore be synonymous also with Hades, and we could settle the issue by referring the reader again to Chapter V. But the view has to be examined whether or not the term is simply part of an expression by which the whole of God's Creation is designated in one all-inclusive gesture without any reference to a place of departed spirits. (Cf. Rev. 5:3, 13).

Col. 2:15 "And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it." This passage, aside from I Pet. 3:18-20, is perhaps the most important which the supporters of the descent have to offer, yet like the rest in this group, we observe no direct or implied reference to Christ's supposed descent. In final rebuttal we ask only this: what did Christ's sacrifice upon the cross of Calvary lack that a descent to hell could make up? If the entire work of our Savior's atonement alone, without the descent, was insufficient to demonstrate His overwhelming victory over "principalities and powers" before all the world for all time, then it was a poor work of redemption indeed. We can only concur in the expressions of Lightfoot, Henkel and Dr. Behnken on this matter:

"Non opus fuit Christum id ad ipsum tantum ferre eumque monere, se ipsum subiecisse. Triumphavit Christus de Diabolo virtute et efficacia mortis suae, non vocali aliqua declaratione, ad Diabolum ab anima Christi, dum a corpore separata fuit, delata."⁶

"I claim that He conquered (hell) when He fell a victim, whether you view Him dying on the cross, or after expiration. It was through death that He destroyed him that had the power of death. ... It was a death which delivers out of death--delivery from bondage."⁷

5. Thayer, op. cit., p. 338.

6. J. Lightfoot, op. cit., p. 765.

7. F. C. Henkel, Christ's Descent into Hell, p. 11.

If you make the descent into hell a "how should it be?" "He had to!" then the descent ceases to be a good news and a gospel statement and is a mere "war on Calvary" but he did not "win" over hell. Christ's victory is the law in his "redemptive work"

"In this conflict, Jesus Christ led captivity captive: 'And delivered them...' And this act of Christ's triumph is also in its consummation, in redemption's scheme, carried out to full manifestation and completion in His resurrection and ascension to heaven."⁸

"Christ's death was a majestic, a lordly, a victorious death. And just think of it, this is our victory over the grimmest foe on earth. By faith in the Redeemer we now challenge death: 'O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory!'"⁹

*Develop
my own
conclusion*

8. P. G. Henkel, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

9. J. W. Behnken, Bought with a Price, p. 58.

CHAPTER VIII

In bringing this paper to a close we observe in retrospect and by way of recapitulation that the doctrine of Christ's descent into hell as taught by the Ante-Nicene Fathers showed strange, untenable features as adapted to their theological systems and embellished by their imaginative thinking. The later exegesis of Scripture often was fanciful. In the confessions of the various denominations many different views are presented. And our examination is not yet completed.

The implications of our paper (unfinished as it is) in the field of Christian dogmatics we prefer to leave to the judgment of the reader. However, we shall reveal this conviction, that, although the article in the Apostles' and Athanasian Creeds and the Ninth Article of the Apology are innocuous enough as far as their impression upon the major part of Protestant Christendom is concerned, in view of the offense caused by the abuse of these articles by Roman Catholics, universalists and synergists, and as a testimony to the unity and purity of Scripture doctrine as taught in our Lutheran Church, they should receive most careful study. *we should remove these articles from our Confessional symbols.* Dr. Pearson maintains that if this doctrine is to be taken literally, it is not true, and if it is to be taken allegorically, it is irrelevant.¹⁰ That is a challenge to engage in further investigation. *In short, we maintain* Huidekoper concludes:

10. J. Pearson, Exposition of the Creed, quoted by R. J. A. Doerr, The Presbyterian, Sept. 14, 1916, p.8.

"Would it not be more to the credit of Christians, if, instead of retaining as a part of their creed, and endeavoring to explain the above clause/Article of the Creed/, they were candidly to admit, that it originated in the now untenable idea of an Underworld; and that, so far from being a necessary article of faith, it is a tenet which every intelligent Christian, who does not wish to make a mockery of Christianity or to trifle with his own candor, ought to recoil from subscribing or uttering?":

Let that view be carefully pondered by all who love the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions!

SOLI DEO GLORIA!

11. F. Huidekoper, op. cit., p.177

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS

- CONCORDIA TRIGLOTTA, St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1921
- FARRAR, E. W., Mercy and Judgment, New York, Dutton & Co., 1881
- FRANK, F.H.R., Die Theologie der Concordienformel, Erlangen, Theodor Blaessing, 1865.
- X HENKEL, P. G., A Sermon on Immortality and A Sermon on Christ's Descent into Hell, New Market, Va., Henkel & Co., 1888.
- X HUIDEKOPER, FREDERIC, The Belief of the First Three Centuries Concerning Christ's Mission to the Underworld, Boston, Crosby, Nichols, & Co., 1854.
- KEDNEY, JOHN STEINFORT, Christian Doctrine Harmonized, New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1889.
- KNOX, WILFRED L., St. Paul and the Church of the Gentiles, Cambridge, England, University Press, 1939.
- KÖNIG, JOHN LUDWIG, Die Lehre von Christi Höllenfahrt, Frankfurt a. M., Heinrich Zimmer, 1842.
- LIGHTFOOT, JOHN, Opera Omnia, London, 1699.
- X LUTHER, MARTIN, Commentary on the First Epistle General of St. Peter, translation by E. H. Gillett, Harlem, 1859.
- LUTHER, MARTIN, Samtliche Schriften, J. G. Walch ed. Magdeburg, J. J. Gebauer, 1741.
- MACHEN, J. GRESHAM, The Origin of Paul's Religion, New York, Macmillan Co., 1925.
- X PLUMPTRE, E. H., The Spirits in Prison and Other Studies on the Life After Death, New York, Thomas Whittaker, 1884.
- POHLE-PREUSS, Soteriology, St. Louis, B. Herder Book Co., 1935.
- X SCHALLER, JOHN, Biblical Christology, Milwaukee, Northwestern Pub. House, 1919.
- SCHOTT, THEODOR, Der Erste Brief Petri, Erlangen, 1861.
- STÖCKHARDT, G., Kommentar über den Ersten Brief Petri, St. Louis, Concordia Pub. House, 1912.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

WIESINGER, J. O. AUGUST, Der Erste Brief des Apostle Petrus,
Konigsberg, 1856.

ARTICLES, NOTES, PAMPHLETS, THESES, ETC.

WORLD HERALD, Omaha, Neb., June 16, 1924, report on Augustana Synod
Convention in DeKalb, Ill.

✓ BORNHOEFF, P. L., "Christ's Descent into Hell," Lutheran Witness,
vol. 46, 1927, p. 154.

BURFEIND, "Die Höllenfahrt Christi," Lehre und Wehre, vol. 29, 1874, p. 15

✓ DOERR, J. A., "Christ's Descent into Hell," The Presbyterian, Sept. 14,
1916.

FORD, J. H., "The Use of Hell in the Creed," Lutheran Companion,
April 22, 1922 p. 250.

FOX, L. A., "Descensus ad Inferos," Lutheran Quarterly, vol. 14, pp. 303-22.

JESSE, R., "The Trichotomy According to Scripture," Bachelor of
Divinity Theses, Old Series, vol. 5, in Pritzlaff Memorial
Library, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo.

✓ -KÖNIG, P., "Christ's Descent into Hell," Concordia Theological
Monthly, vol. 3, pp. 826-837.

✓ -KRETZMANN, P. E., Note in Concordia Theological Monthly, vol. 7, pp. 51-52.

MAYER, F. E., "The Atonement of Christ," mimeographed notes in elective
class, 1943, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

✓ McLANE, W. W., "Historical Introduction to Christ's Descent into Hell,"
Homiletic Review, vol. 24, pp. 200-208.

MEYER, LOUIS G., "The Use of Hades in the New Testament," Bachelor of
Divinity Theses, New Series, vol. 4.1.

PEARSON, FRED B., "Sheol and Hades in Old and New Testament," Review
and Expositor, vol. 33, pp. 304-313.

TEMME, H. E., "Sheol--Hades--Hell--What?," Queensland Messenger, vol. 8,
pp. 98-100.

TEMME, H. E., "The Pre-existence of Christ," Queensland Messenger,
vol. 10, pp. 122-124.

WELCH, E. B., "The History of the Doctrine of the Intermediate State,"
Presbyterian Review, vol. 8, p. 511ff.

BIBLES

AUTHORIZED VERSION, Holy Bible.

GOODSPEED, EDGAR J., The New Testament, An American Translation,
Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1935.

HOOGHT, E., Biblia Hebraica, Leipzig, Ernest Bredt, 1893.

NESTLE, D. EBERHARD, Novum Testamentum Graece, Stuttgart, Wurttembergische
Bibelanstalt, 1926.

LEXICONS AND REFERENCES

CONCORDIA CYCLOPEDIA, St. Louis, Concordia Pub. House, 1927.

GESENIUS, WILLIAM, Hebrew and English Lexicon, Boston, Houghton Mifflin
Co., 1854.

THAYER, JOSEPH HENRY, Greek--English Lexicon of the New Testament,
New York, American Book Co., 1889.

IGLES, ROBERT, Analytical Concordance to the Bible, New York, Funk &
Wagnalls Co., cir. 1910.